Jumping Through Spinning Hoops, Chance or a Carefully Constructed Learning Journey?

A critical view of learning in the secondary practicum

Doreen Dawne Rorrison

Master of Teaching (Flinders University of South Australia)
Graduate Certificate of Teaching (University of South Australia)
Bachelor of Education (Adelaide College of Advanced Education)
Advanced Diploma Teaching (Adelaide College of Advanced Education)
Diploma of Teaching (Adelaide College of Advanced Education)

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Education, Health and Science
School of Education
Charles Darwin University

Submitted November 2006
"I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree."

Signed .........................................................................................

Date ............................................................
Acknowledgements

Thank you to my primary supervisor Professor John Smyth for his wise counsel, Professor Ian Falk who helped me navigate the doctoral terrain in the early stages, Geoff Phillips who prevented me being complacent or arrogant, Dr Diane Szarkowicz for her support, colleagues at Charles Darwin University, particularly Iolanthe, Lorraine and Margot, Dr Suzanne Parry, my previous Head of School, who encouraged me to make a start and Pauline Dodd for listening to me during our long walks.

I am indebted to the preservice teachers at Charles Darwin University and University of South Australia and the classroom students I have observed and worked with in many schools throughout Australia.

To the teachers who participated in the study, or have been my peers and mentors for over 35 years, and the teacher educators, mentors, preservice teachers and neophyte teachers worldwide who read and commented on my stories, this research is dedicated to you and I hope it will make a difference.
## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ 3

Table of Contents ......................................................................................................... 4

Table of Tables ............................................................................................................... 11

- Abstract ....................................................................................................................... 12
- Thesis statement ......................................................................................................... 13
- Glossary of terms for participants ............................................................................. 15

Chapter 1 Jumping Through Spinning Hoops .............................................................. 16

- Introduction ................................................................................................................ 16
- Introducing the hoops ................................................................................................ 17
- Positioning the hoops ................................................................................................ 18
- Suspect hoops ............................................................................................................. 19
- All hoops are not equal .............................................................................................. 20
- Alternative hoops ....................................................................................................... 21
- What colour are the hoops? ....................................................................................... 22
- Hoops with back spin. Views of preservice teacher education ................................ 23
- Moving the hoops. Delivering a blow for preservice teacher practicum reform .... 26
- Blazing hoops. Lighting the fire of practicum research .......................................... 27
- Smaller hoops. Striking voices. ............................................................................... 28
- Hoops of learning ....................................................................................................... 31
- Looping the hoops ..................................................................................................... 32
- Research problem ..................................................................................................... 33
- Summary ..................................................................................................................... 33

Chapter 2 Looking Through the Hoops ....................................................................... 35

- Reaching into the practicum process ....................................................................... 35
- Introduction ................................................................................................................ 35
- Finding a research cannon ....................................................................................... 36
- Planning for complexity ......................................................................................... 38
- Positioning ............................................................................................................... 39
Chapter 3 Checking the Hoops ................................................................. 51

Speaking, hearing, writing, reading, watching and thinking text (stories) into existence . 51
Introduction ......................................................................................... 51
Placement for the practicum ................................................................. 53
The research ...................................................................................... 54
Rollo’s story Year 8 Lakeside Secondary .............................................. 59
Story analysis .................................................................................... 63
Stories co-constructed during the pilot .............................................. 63
Summary ............................................................................................. 64

Chapter 4 Collecting the Hoops ............................................................. 66

What the pilot uncovered ................................................................. 66
Reading the practicum as text ............................................................ 66
What are the classroom students telling us? ...................................... 66
For students the classroom activities are ‘a moment in time’ not necessarily connected with the rest of their lives .......................................................... 67
Crisis of engagement, mis-communication at a cultural level and lack of freedom .......... 67
Identity of the classroom student in our schools ................................ 69
Young people do not want to be categorized or stereotyped ............. 70
Students prefer to do their learning away from the classroom, frequently at home .... 71
Students voice fear of being wrong .................................................... 72
What are the preservice teachers telling us? ...................................... 73
The role of the practicum in preservice teacher learning .................. 73
Limited feedback from mentor teacher ............................................. 74
Feedback to students by the preservice teachers was also limited ....... 75
Processes are assessment driven rather than theory driven ........................................ 75
The battle of ownership ......................................................................................... 77
Planning for student learning .............................................................................. 78
What the mentors were and were not saying ................................................... 79
Summary .............................................................................................................. 79

Chapter 5 Laying Out The Hoops Again ............................................................. 81
Revised design ..................................................................................................... 81
A second and third layer of research ................................................................ 81
Revised research design ..................................................................................... 83
Changed processes ............................................................................................ 83
Booklets of stories .............................................................................................. 86
The stories ........................................................................................................... 88
Synopsis of the stories ......................................................................................... 89
Perspectives written into existence ................................................................... 90
Distribution of booklets ..................................................................................... 91
Summary .............................................................................................................. 92

Chapter 6 Spinning the Stories ......................................................................... 93
Contents of the booklet ....................................................................................... 93
Open letter and explanation .............................................................................. 93
T’s Story ............................................................................................................... 95
Part 1 .................................................................................................................. 95
Part 2 .................................................................................................................. 99
R’s story ............................................................................................................... 129
Part 1 .................................................................................................................. 129
Part 2 .................................................................................................................. 134
Part 3 .................................................................................................................. 137
B’s Story .............................................................................................................. 141
Part 1 .................................................................................................................. 141
Part 2 .................................................................................................................. 149
Part 3 .................................................................................................................. 165
Q’s Story .............................................................................................................. 169
Part 1 .................................................................................................................. 169
Part 2 .................................................................................................................. 185
Critical Question 2: Inform - what does this mean? ........................................ 261
(e) Power issues .................................................................................................. 262
Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like? .......... 262
Critical Question 2: Inform - what does this mean? ........................................ 263
(f) How we teach .................................................................................................. 264
Critical Question 2: Inform - what does this mean? ........................................ 265
Orienting Question 2 .............................................................................................. 266
(a) Practising/pedagogy ...................................................................................... 266
Critical Question 1: Describe - what does current practice look like? .......... 266
Critical Question 2: Inform - what does this mean? ........................................ 269
(b) Observing ........................................................................................................ 270
Critical Question 2: Inform - what does this mean? ........................................ 271
(c) Understanding teachers’ work ........................................................................ 272
Critical Question 2: Inform - what does this mean? ........................................ 273
(d) School context ................................................................................................ 274
Critical Question 2: Inform - what does this mean? ........................................ 275
Orienting Question 3 .............................................................................................. 275
(a) School culture of receptivity is important .................................................... 275
Critical Question 2: Inform. What does this mean? ......................................... 277
(b) Quality of the mentoring ................................................................................ 277
Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean? ........................................ 278
(c) Class management issue .............................................................................. 279
Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean? ........................................ 279
(d) Mentor preparation ........................................................................................ 280
Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean? ........................................ 280
(e) Other preservice teachers for support .......................................................... 280
Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean? ........................................ 281
Orienting Question 4 .............................................................................................. 281
Chapter 9 Stepping Back from the Hoops ................................................................. 286

Introduction .............................................................................................................. 286
Orienting Question 1 ................................................................................................. 286
  Critical Question 3: Confront how did the practicum come to be like this? 286
  Critical Question 4: Reconstruct what could be done differently? ................... 291
Orienting Question 2 ................................................................................................. 293
  Critical Question 3: Confront how did the practicum come to be like this? 293
  Critical Question 4: Reconstruct what could be done differently? ................... 295
Orienting Question 3 ................................................................................................. 297
  Critical Question 3: Confront how did the practicum come to be like this? 297
  Critical Question 4: Reconstruct what could be done differently? ................... 298
Orienting Question 4 ................................................................................................. 299
  Critical Question 3: Confront how did the practicum come to be like this? 299
  Critical Question 4: Reconstruct what could be done differently? ................... 300
Summary .................................................................................................................. 302

Chapter 10 Spinning the Hoops Anew ................................................................. 304

Back to the beginning............................................................................................... 304
Developing a resource for teacher education ......................................................... 304
A story of workshops and learning circles ............................................................ 306
  What does it look like? ......................................................................................... 307
  Week 1 .................................................................................................................. 307
A story of teaching teachers .................................................................................... 308
  Following weeks ................................................................................................ 314
  Reflection ............................................................................................................ 315
Using the Practicum Learning Principles to build a better understanding ... 316
After the practicum ............................................................................................... 316
Is it a journey, spinning hoop or chance? ................................................................. 318
Spinning the hoops anew .............................................................................................. 320
Mentor workshops ........................................................................................................ 321
Can this theory of practicum learning be abstracted beyond the Australian secondary
classroom? .................................................................................................................. 322
Unexpected turns of the hoop ....................................................................................... 322
Appendices .................................................................................................................. 324

Appendix 1 Letter to Preservice Teachers ................................................................. 324
Appendix 1b Letter to Preservice Teachers ............................................................... 325
Appendix 2 Letter of Explanation to Principals ....................................................... 326
Appendix 2b Letter of Explanation to Principals ...................................................... 328
Appendix 3 Letter to Mentor Teachers ...................................................................... 330
Appendix 3b Letter to Mentor Teachers .................................................................... 332
Appendix 4 Consent Form by Adult ......................................................................... 334
Appendix 4b Consent form by adult ........................................................................... 335
Appendix 5 Cover letter to students ........................................................................ 336
Appendix 6 Letter of explanation to parent ............................................................. 337
Appendix 7 Consent form on behalf of minor ............................................................ 338
Appendix 8 Plain Language Statement ................................................................. 339
Appendix 8b Plain Language Statement ................................................................. 340
Appendix 9 Analysis Results .................................................................................... 341
Appendix 10 Synopsis of 6 stories .......................................................................... 351
Appendix 11 Pedagogies (and learning activities) ................................................... 352
Appendix 12 Building Positive Relationships (or Conflict Resolution) .................. 357
Bibliography ................................................................................................................. 360
**Table of Tables**

Table 1 Layered Analysis.................................................................................................................. 236
Table 2 Meaning Concepts from researcher’s reading of the Stories........................................ 239
Table 3 Larger Meaning Units ........................................................................................................ 240
Table 4 Reader/Respondents .......................................................................................................... 244
Table 5 Analysis of Reader Response............................................................................................ 251
**Abstract**

The stories of the practicum experiences of the fictional yet authentic preservice teachers provide honest and trustworthy examples of the confusing and unpredictable nature of everyday teaching practice. There is no certainty in a democratic learning environment, but what is exposed is the need for teacher education to reflect on, harness and learn from the complexities of the practicum. With little evidence in the literature that supported the secondary practicum and much anecdote that doubted its effectiveness, I was tempted before this study to suggest that we replace the directionless and time consuming ‘institution’ with more worthwhile culminating experiences. I realise now that I too missed the point. The practicum sits within a very full and demanding teacher education course structure and on the periphery of a complex and only partially understood education system. What are needed are changes in attitudes and ways of conducting the practicum relationships that are possible through agreed and explicit practicum learning principles. By probing and interrogating the stories based on these new tentative theories of the practicum process, teacher educators and preservice teachers can together uncover the issues, interruptions and inconsistencies that have previously worked to disempower the neophyte teachers. With a refined sense of teacher identity and an awareness of the role of context, culture and the socio-political dimensions of learning to teach during the practicum, the preservice teachers, supported by their teacher educators and enabled by their school based mentors, will begin to understand why the hoops spin as they do and take pleasure in spinning them anew.
**Thesis statement**

Few would deny the critical role of learning in transforming society and the influential role of teachers in enabling and supporting this process. Learning to be a teacher is a great deal more than learning to teach, it involves immense personal investment and unexpected complexity. The ‘practicum’ as a professional experience placement has traditionally offered novice teachers opportunities to put into practice what they have learned at university and gain experience in schools. Yet it could be much more than this. There is little agreement about the learning experiences that the practicum should deliver and how this can best be achieved, and it is frequently reported as a time to endure or acquiesce rather than engage and develop valuable understandings about ‘becoming’ a teacher. This research study asks if a better understanding or theory of practicum learning can be constructed to inform those who are entrusted to enable, guide and support preservice teachers and to ensure that practicum experiences are worthwhile, empowering and transformative.

Many voices are silenced in preservice teacher education and this study addresses the complex problem of vested interests and policy constraints. When the practicum experiences are interrogated critically, the gap between possible outcomes and the reported ‘reality’ of an education process hijacked by those looking backwards, is highlighted. This research advances the intellectual, reflective and moral work of teachers by developing clearly articulated ‘principles of practicum learning’ that promote preservice teacher knowledge construction in critical ways.

Six stories of the practicum, created from over two hundred hours of observation of secondary preservice classrooms and supported by preservice teacher, teacher and teacher educator reflections, have been re-viewed to uncover new understandings and build a theory of practicum learning that does not essentialise the complex and multi-layered reality of this process. Instead the narrative acknowledges that practicum learning outcomes are a product of the human social and political constructions that underscore the relationships in schools. These understandings are imbued with a politics of possibility that provides a new view of teacher education. By discussing ways to continue the conversation begun at university that constructs practicum learning in critical ways, evidence is provided to demonstrate that narrative offers an accessible window into the practicum experience for preservice teachers, their mentors and teacher educators. What teachers really do and a sense of ‘becoming’ a teacher are written into existence and interrogated. The resultant reflective conversation provides evidence that teachers are more capable of engaging young people in the quality
learning that will prepare them for a future of change, challenge and authentic learning, if they can construct their learning in critical ways.

These findings are counter to the politically expedient ‘apprenticeship’ and ‘bag of tricks’ discourse that is about linear and standardised approaches to teaching that do not acknowledge the space that preservice teachers need to act out their own learning theories. When prospective teachers are helped to understand how practicum learning is constructed, how teacher identity and learning are inter-related and how this fits within the complex and poorly understood school learning environment, they can better understand how teaching is a moral and political act and thus ‘make meaning’ about their teaching. Anything less than a carefully constructed, learner focused, authentic practicum experience supported by quality mentoring and explicit practicum learning principles would be leaving teacher preparation to chance.
Glossary of terms for participants

Pilot Study

Participants in the field
Teachers, school students, mentor teachers, preservice teachers, teacher educators

Players in the setting
Teachers, school students, mentor teachers, preservice teachers, teacher educators who were involved in the pilot study classrooms

Preservice teacher volunteers
University students in university school of education practicum units who responded to the request for practicum classrooms that could be observed for the purpose of co-constructing stories of classroom learning

Mentor teachers
Classroom teachers working with the preservice teachers

School student volunteer
Classroom students who volunteered to read and comment on stories of their classroom

Researcher/teacher educator
Myself, as doctorate candidate, research, teacher educator, practicum liaison lecturer, practicum coordinator, course coordinator

Research Study

Preservice teacher volunteers
University students in practicum units who responded to the request for practicum classrooms that could be observed so that the researcher/teacher educator could write fictional composite stories of the classroom to be later checked by a wider audience.

Mentor teachers
Classroom teachers working with the preservice teachers

Volunteer readers or readers
Teachers, mentor teachers, preservice teachers, teacher educators and others who responded to the request at conferences, from email or word of mouth to read (and possibly comment on) the stories of the practicum

Reader/respondent
Teachers, mentor teachers, preservice teachers, teacher educators and others who responded to the request at conferences, from email or word of mouth to read (and possibly comment on) the stories and who read, annotated or commented on the stories and returned them to the researcher.

Author/researcher
Myself, as author of the stories and researcher of the effect of the narrative and the difference it can make to understanding of the practicum
Chapter 1 Jumping Through Spinning Hoops

Introduction

“It is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it.” (A quotation from Lawrence Stenhouse on a memorial plaque, University of East Anglia)

Very early in my time as a teacher educator I became aware of the tensions surrounding the practicum. It was apparent that as an educational community we did not understand the practicum well, nor did we prepare preservice teachers for their practicum experiences in schools. The confusion, uncertainty, miscommunication, struggles and inconsistencies in practicum outcomes highlight the problematic nature of teaching and learning and the competing agendas of what to teach, how to teach and why we teach what and how we do. There is a huge gap between the expectations of the preservice teacher and the varied experiences and receptions they received in the schools. Teaching someone else’s class, someone else’s knowledge often leads to an initial acquiescence to prescribed lesson content and classroom management techniques that are counter to the theories and understandings discussed at university. This is when preservice teachers report that they feel they have been misled by the university and suggest they have a sense of ‘jumping through hoops’. The practicum does not fulfil their expectation that they will put into practice their developing understandings of teaching and learning.

This work is the result of a relationship with education systems and the structures surrounding them that spans nearly half a century. During this time there has been much Change and little change. As Woodrow Wilson so aptly put it, ‘It is easier to change the position of a cemetery than to change our schools’ (Seaton, 2002: 9). Seaton also cites Glatthon & Jailall (2000: 97) who suggest that ‘the history of curriculum change is a history of little change’ as equally true of other aspects of schooling. The practicum for secondary preservice teachers (previously known as ‘prac teaching’, ‘student teaching’, ‘field experience’ and ‘clinical supervision for student teachers’) is one of the features that has changed very little over the years in terms of structure and process. Society’s expectation of education has changed, school climates have changed, classroom relationships have changed, curriculum documents have changed and the students in our schools have changed in terms of what they bring, and don’t bring, with them into the classroom. Yet the secondary preservice practicum remains a seldom-researched yet constant feature of all secondary teacher education programs. Shorter and longer blocks of time have been piloted, as have microteaching, internships and weekly visits. There has also been considerable discussion concerning methods of assessing ‘teacher readiness’ and there continues to be
national interest (in Australia) in ensuring sufficient classroom contact for preservice teachers. Despite these initiatives little has been done to look at the quality of the practicum classroom experience, the consistency of the mentoring or whether or not the secondary practicum delivers the transformative learning experiences it promises.

In this first chapter I will introduce my own struggles with the dominant views of education, schooling, preservice teacher education and research directions in teacher education. This will act to highlight the gap in understanding about what learning happens during the secondary preservice practicum. I will then introduce the research problem and orienting questions.

**Introducing the hoops**

The institutionalisation and narrow definition of education thrust upon us by classed, gendered, cultured, political, economic and now ‘global’ interests, is a cause for major concern. Arguments for corporate ideology and the systematic pillage of the world’s resources are increasingly having holes poked in them, yet the wave of conservative modernisation, fired by arguments of personal choices for personal gain, continue to compete with (and frequently overpower) fledgling emancipatory moves that focus on equity and justice and care for community, humanity and environment.

This was the climate when I moved from secondary education to preservice teacher education. I had just completed my Master of Teaching where I embraced the socially critical transformative paradigm and developed a philosophy of teaching based on the works of Michel Foucault (1980, 1984, 1992), Donald Schön (1987, 1983), Henry Giroux (1992), Joe Kincheloe (1993), Paulo Freire (1970, 1998) and, ably guided by Professor John Smyth and Dr Rob Hattam at the Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching.

My self-study narrative inquiry helped me make sense of myself as a teacher and what a teacher really does. I deconstructed my teaching life and looked at it with a new lens, rubbing the stories that emerged against the extant postmodern critical education literature. I found that narrative inquiry with fictional dimensions (to protect the innocent and not so innocent) allowed me to deconstruct and then reconstruct my story, to offer a new understanding of teachers’ work and a ‘politics of possibility’, a transformative and emancipatory turn. This project of possibility is an affirmation of the powerful forces in our lives that can both destroy and enhance the potential of teaching and learning. It is a project that guides my own professional decisions and one I seek to apply to the practicum experience of preservice teachers, to help demystify the powerful forces at work within the practicum. Transformatory theories provide a realistic view of the complexities and partiality of our knowledge. Invested in the transformative is the belief that we can stimulate change
by asking the critical questions and that change underpins all learning, while learning drives the possibility of better lives.

I acknowledge that context, history, culture, gender, economics, ethnicity and place define this sort of research and how we make sense of what we come to know. The postmodern view that all participants have the right to be heard supports the need for a research design that reaches deep into the practicum classroom. The perspective of all participant groups should be given voice in new stories of the practicum. These perspectives matter, not because they are right or wrong, but because they exist (Loughran, 2006: 22). By writing the perceptions of participants into existence we can add to the knowledge of the practicum and provide accessible insight and resources for the transformative learning of preservice teachers, mentor teachers and teacher educators.

**Positioning the hoops**

University courses that ‘prepare’ secondary teachers, range from one to four years and attract a wide range of applicants. My own work focuses on the core ‘professional’ units that are informed by postmodern, post structural and critical understandings of the last decade in Education. Issues of critical pedagogy, democratic teaching, authentic curriculum and transformative education are presented to students for interrogation. Concepts that accommodate multiple perspectives of the educational landscape present a view of education rich with beliefs of equity and justice. Tutorials frequently focus on the political nature of teaching and how the classroom can either oppress or develop student knowledge and identity. Curriculum that is reflective, just and engaging is explored and compared with positivist and inflexible transmissive traditions. Lesson and unit planning based on constructivist principles and connected to the lives and interests of young people, is developed and critiqued in a way that supports a fundamental rethinking of the nature of classroom learning.

I participated myself, quite unproblematically, in practicum supervision many times between 1976 and 1998 as a classroom teacher and as a teacher educator during the 1980s and again in the 1990s. It was not until I began to contest the hegemony and ask the critical educational questions during self-study that I became concerned about what was really happening in the practicum classroom. When I first coordinated the practicum experiences of preservice teachers in 2000 as a university lecturer, I began to listen carefully to what the preservice teachers were saying about their school based experience. Terms like ‘endured’, ‘confused’, ‘suffered’, ‘tolerated’ and ‘survived’ were frequently used and they complained that they were ‘vulnerable’ and ‘invisible’ (personal communications with students). They also felt they were under prepared by both their teacher educators and the school based mentors. A
review of the limited literature available on the secondary practicum supported this notion and informed that even in situations where significant funds and effort had been invested in ‘partnerships’ between the academy and the schools, the occurrence of non-productive practicum experiences frequently remained (Campbell, 1998, 2000; Martinez 1998, 2001).

**Suspect hoops**

There are multiple and contested views of the purpose of education, teaching, learning and schooling presented in the literature, the popular media, the community, the schools and the academy. There are also global influences on life and work, complex societal and cultural uncertainties and powerful political and technological pressures that influence the community’s expectations of the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of education. These different conceptions of schooling, teaching and learning have significant implications for the way the questions about the purpose of education are framed, interrogated and answered.

With backgrounds in different traditions and work experiences in complex and varied settings the knowledge of educators is neither consistent nor predictable and this works against a meaningful framework for understanding why teachers do what they do. This can result in conflicting conceptions of education and adds to the tensions within the education community (Gore, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002; Smagorinsky, Lakly & Johnson, 2002; Labaree, 2003; Hall, Smith & Nowinski, 2005). Teachers are progressively being deskilled, disempowered and ‘deprofessionalised’ by pre-packaged and scripted instruction which has led to low morale, and the community is convincingly sold a public discourse of failure, low standards and a marketplace view of an education system that should be, but is not, ‘efficient’, ‘accountable’ and ‘economical’. Concepts like ‘value added’, ‘league tables’, ‘targets’ and ‘performance management’ are being proffered as the new language of education, while policy makers rather than educators are making decisions about pedagogy, curriculum, students learning and procedures that are more sensitive to political ‘spin’ than the reality of life in schools (Fullan, 1993; Smyth, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 2001a; Martinez, Hamlin & Rigano, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Lidstone, 2004; Sawyer, 2004:12).

The sense that young people are human beings and teaching is a moral and ethical act is ignored in such agendas. This is emphasised by Stoll and her associates who comment that it appears that it is ‘far easier politically to get huge amounts of money to finance accountability processes than to support those things that make us more human’ (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003:12). Cochran-Smith (2004:3) suggests that these are ‘dangerous times’ for teacher education and discusses the impoverished view of teaching, learning and education reflected in the plethora of private agency and foundation reports in the United States. The reading of a number of Australian government commissioned inquiries, reports and reviews
leads me to the same conclusion (Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 1994; Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs Higher Education Division, 2000; Ramsey, 2000; Higher Education Review Secretariat, 2002; Reeves, 2002; Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training, 2002; Curriculum Corporation, 2003;) and the composition and aims of the recently created ‘Teaching Australia – Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership’ gives me no joy.

Is the current turn simply another example of the tail wagging the dog? Teacher educators and researchers have been receiving warnings for years from the likes of Apple (1983, 1996, 2001, 2003), Zeichner (1995) and Smyth whose publications in the 1980s and early 1990s already railed against the policy driven direction of education and teacher supervision/appraisal system. Smyth wrote

Trying to kick schools and teachers into shape is not going to come to grips with the fundamental structural inequalities and injustices that are at the root of our economic demise (Smyth, 1989). By proposing educational reforms that focus on teacher appraisal, what our political masters have created is alienation, demoralisation and fragmentation in schools. (Smyth, 1991: xii)

He goes on to suggest that the appraisal and supervision of teachers was based on the false assumptions that the teaching/learning dialectic can be reified and the mistaken belief that bureaucrats or researchers outside of the classroom can adequately understand the social and political relationships that embody the work of teachers. More recently Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy (2002:202) continue this argument. In a wide-ranging American study of research into teacher preparation they claim that the policy makers and critics will hijack the field if we do not ourselves as educators provide ‘sound and robust measures of impact’.

**All hoops are not equal**

By suggesting that schooling as we know it has run its course and proposing that an entirely new construction of schooling within the larger paradigm of resistance to institutional oppression need to occur (Apple, 1983, 2003; Hlebowitsh & Tellez, 1993; Hattam, McInerney, Lawson, & Smyth, 1999a; Page, 2001; Fitzclarence, 2003; Smyth, 2003b; Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003; Vadeboncoeur & Torres, 2003; McWilliam, 2004;) researchers are suggesting that this change is vital and in fact is long overdue. Evidence of high ‘drop out’ rates of students and research that shows that large numbers of students do not find school meaningful suggest a crisis in education that is itself being silenced by a conservative backlash and a plethora of technicist and depoliticised reports, reviews and government funded publications (Fine, 1991; Hattam, 1998; Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson, & Wurst, 2000; Cushman, 2001; Keighley-James, 2002; Thomson, 2002; Wilson, 2002: Lahey, 2003;).
I believe that improving life’s chances for all students through learning that is accessible, meaningful, purposeful and just should be the focus of our education system. Only then is there a possibility of framing a future where citizens are lifelong learners who will contribute to society and cope with the complexities and challenges of both the global and socio-cultural environment. The ‘richest possible conception of teaching, learning and education is important’ (Cochran-Smith, 2002a:380) if what young people learn is going to make a difference. Teachers need to ensure that ideas and knowledge are constructed in accessible ways and meaningful relationships connect students to their learning. They should also enable purposeful and relevant experiences to meet the learning needs of all students and support quality individualised learning opportunities through high expectations. Teachers and those responsible for the education of young people need to intimately understand their practice.

The reality of serious inequalities in educational opportunity is concealed by narrow and separatist interpretations that combine our Judeo-Christian and Anglo Celtic histories. Changes in education are being approached through a

...controlling, rational and technical framework. This framework tends to concentrate on educational content and delivery and ignores the human resource perspective and the complexity of how human beings live, work and interact with one another…Teachers are frequently treated as the problem rather than a part of the solution… (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003: xi)

The purpose of schooling as student learning and the development of ‘citizens who are tolerant, socially trusting and responsible’ (Butcher, Howard, Labone, Bailey, Groundwater Smith, McFadden, McMeniman, Malone & Martinez, 2003:113) is frequently forgotten. We should be wary when

...issues of cultural politics – questions about the deep structure of power in education institutions and their impact upon different identities – are reduced to technical problems demanding formulaic policy interventions. (Slee, 1998: 266-267)

**Alternative hoops**

Added to the competing agendas of who has the right to decide the how and the why of our public education system are alternative views of ‘adolescence’ and ‘cultural difference’ and increasingly louder claims for the right of all groups to be heard in relation to their education. Views on how young people are constructed in Western society are increasingly being questioned (Lesko, 2001: 8; Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003; Thomas, 2002). Current research also challenges our conception of both past interventions and current policy in relation to indigenous people (Gray, 2004) and people of difference (Ford, 2005). The widening gap between those so effectively sifted and sorted out of our education system and powerful dominant groups in our community, is resulting in local expression of divisiveness and unrest. Terrorism, global instability and issues around the unsustainability of our
environmental practices add to concerns about how young people are educated to become our citizens of (what?) future.

There is also a crisis in the professional learning of teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2001b: 263; Cochran-Smith, 2004: 3; Bullough, 2005; Loughran, 2006 ) with educational leadership usurped from the hands of those in the schools who are familiar with local needs. Frequently decisions are made for efficiency and expedience, far from the local context. In this climate teachers’ work has been the focus of many recommendations to revitalise or re-vision teaching and the general consensus focuses strongly on the importance of preparing better quality teachers ( Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 1994; Gore, 1995, 2001; Australian Council of Deans in Education, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs Higher Education Division, 2000; Ramsey, 2000; Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, 2001; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001; Rowe & Rowe, 2002;). The question is, what are the agendas of the different groups – if teachers are considered the most significant influence on student learning then are they also going to be blamed for the current crisis in education? Can we offer more than hollow words like ‘quality’ and add ‘teachers who better understand what they do’ to the research equation?

Teacher education is also being besieged by these top down, reductive approaches where research and planning is tightly controlled and produces depoliticised and codified material, material that has not benefited from peer review or rigorous interrogation from the research community. This has resulted in accountability agendas and imposed standards that are supported by politicians and enacted by educational bureaucracies that are based on underlying assumptions not consistent with the constructivist and equity discourses that should underpin a democratic pedagogy.

What colour are the hoops?

Qualitative educational research informed by socially critical and narrative theory offers an alternative conceptualisation for the education of our young people. This paradigm highlights notions of lived experience, identity, differential power relations and social politics with very strong and well-supported argument for looking with a new lens at the structural inequalities in a system no longer meeting the needs of the society it serves. Valuing contradiction, listening to previously silenced voices, working with multiple perspectives, problematising and situating knowledge become tools with which to interrogate, provoke and ‘poke holes’ in the assumptions of ‘normality’ that organise the frameworks within which we construct our sense of reality and our sense of self (Lather, 1991a; Britzman, 1992; Giroux, 1992; Foucault, 1992; Kincheloe, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln,
1994; Freire, 1998; Smyth, Shacklock, & Hattam, 1999; Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 2000; Apple, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2001a; Cook-Sather, 2001a; Rorrison, 2001; Smyth, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2002a; Cochran-Smith, 2002b; Cook-Sather, 2002; Smyth, 2003a; Smyth, 2003b; Cochran-Smith, 2004;). If we add to this the asking of the ‘critical’ questions of schooling, ‘what is being taught, why is it being taught, who is being taught, and how can it be better taught in subsequent interactions?’ (Hlebowitsh & Tellez, 1993:43), or in Smyth’s words (personal communication, 2001) ‘who benefits, who is disadvantaged, how did it come to be this way and what can we do about it?’ then we can begin to make public, meaningful ideas about contesting the dominant view of the purpose of education and re-constructing the educational landscape.

A range of qualitative methods of inquiry that might ‘reach into the practicum’ are presented in the post structural and school reform literature (Kemmis, 1990; Tripp, 1993; Zeichner, 1995; Carspecken, 1996; Hattam, 1998; Bloomfield, 2000; Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Britzman, 2000; Campbell, 2000; Wood, 2000; Cushman, 2001; Gore, 2001; Klein, 2001; Martinez, Hamlin & Rigano 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002; Roth, 2002; Segall, 2002; Apple, 2003; Labaree, 2003; Ortlipp, 2003; Moss, Dixon, English, Ferguson, Giodinho, Hay, Longaretti, Sanjakdar, & Wilson, 2004; Kincheloe, 2004; McWilliam, 2004; Smyth & Hattam, 2004;). The evidence suggests that it is important to listen un-judgementally, interestedly and responsively and not ‘ask the old questions anymore [but] change the subjects of the conversation completely’ (Flax, 1990:193). Sometimes it is referred to as a ‘critical or purposeful conversation’ and imagination and creative skills are needed to construct rich ‘data’ that might uncover new interpretations of teaching lives. After all, what we remember, what we speak into existence and what we hear, are intimately tied to who we are. Words begin in the mind of the writer (speaker) but get their meaning in the conversation. As Bakhtin says:

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated—over populated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (Bakhtin, 1981:293-4)

**Hoops with back spin. Views of preservice teacher education**

If teaching is indeed a practice as difficult as I portrayed… then there is no form of professional practice that is more demanding except perhaps teacher education. We ask teacher education programs to provide ordinary college students with the imponderable so that they can teach the irrepressible in a manner that pleases the irreconcilable, and all without knowing clearly either the purposes or the consequences of their actions. (Labaree, 2000: 231)

A review of the teacher education literature reveals that there is very little to help the preservice teachers with their ‘spinning practicum hoops’. Many of the teacher education texts fail to frame the educational process in a manner that empowers preservice teachers to
engage with the critical discourse or teach ‘against the grain’ (Simon, 1992; Cochran-Smith, 2001a: 3) and frequently authors compromise a more progressive pedagogy by not modelling the underlying theories of education that they claim. Adding to this preservice teachers often, through an apprenticeship of personal involvement in their own schooling, believe that teaching is unproblematic and relatively easy (Labaree, 2000: 231; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000: 114) thus presenting a mechanistic and technician mentality that they have internalised unconsciously.

Fortunately more recent researchers (Gallego, 2001; Sinclair, Munns & Woodward, 2005; Gannon, 2005; Hall, Smith & Nowinski, 2005; Bullough, 2005; Loughran, 2006) are beginning to investigate how we can provide preservice teachers with a deeper understanding of the transformative nature of education and an understanding of the need to problematise the taken for granted world of classroom learning. These teacher educators are aware that the practicum experience often merely perpetuates tensions caused by the misalignment between the university theory and the school processes and culture. Preservice teacher understanding needs to be constructed from the intersection of the educational, political, cultural and social experiences in both institutions, but exposure alone cannot ensure that connections are made. Interrogation and synthesis during practicum are complex activities that need to be made explicit and supported by a clearly articulated theory of practicum learning.

Progressive teacher education texts like ‘Invitations and Inspirations; pathways to successful teaching’ (Moss, Dixon, English, Ferguson, Giodinho, Hay, Longaretti, Sanjakdar & Wilson, 2004), ‘Critical Politics of Teachers’ Work’ (Smyth, 2001), ‘In our Own Words. Students’ Perspectives on School’ (Shultz and Cook-Sather, 2001), ‘Dropping Out, Drifting Off, Being Excluded. Becoming Somebody Without School’ (Smyth and Hattam, 2004), ‘It's About Learning (and It's About Time): What's in it for schools?’ (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003) and ‘Developing a Pedagogy of Teacher Education’ (Loughran, 2006) embrace the socially critical and transformative discourses, highlighting that teaching is a political and moral activity and teacher education should prepare teachers to deal critically with the social politics of schooling. They attempt to divert or challenge naïve theories of education and focus the blurred perceptions of preservice teachers. Such texts endeavour to redirect the hegemonic tendencies of preservice teachers, encouraging them to understand that teaching is both a moral and political act and teachers can challenge the deep inequities both in the schools and in the community. Cochran-Smith (20001a, 2001b, 20001c) suggests that teachers should have a ability to aspire to preparing young people to become ‘citizens’ of the future and as reflective and critical practitioners appreciate and understand the social capital and potential of their students, while Stoll and associates discuss the need for preservice
teachers to un-learn and re-learn (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003), letting go of the theories that worked in the past and are glorified by the selectivity of memory. Researching in the socially critical paradigm supports a new conception of education and offers a range of insights into ways of challenging the dominant view that supports vested interests in maintaining the status quo.

As teacher educators we must continually search for ways to assist preservice teachers to disrupt the ‘limited and mechanised version of the learn to teach process’ that does not ‘educate teachers to exercise a more critical pedagogy but instead focus on a system of rationality, designed to keep classroom learning ‘on task’ and ‘under procedural control’ (Hlebowitsh & Tellez, 1993: 49). We must interrupt the desire to integrate preservice teachers into a culture and system that accepts mediocrity and inequality. We should instead prepare teachers who can question and challenge their role and recognise the limitations of traditional and conservative views; we are educating young people for the world of the future, not the past.

Significant progress has been made at individual institutions (Bloomfield, 1997, 2000; Wood, 2000; Brandenburg & Ryan, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2001a; Gore, 2001; Klein, 2001; Martinez & Mackay, 2002; Rorrison, 2002) but the control effected by funding cuts, increased cohorts and diminishing value placed on teaching in the community and the academy, coupled with the fore mentioned mandated curriculum outcomes and the deskilling of teachers, has prevented the real issues of understanding their practice and the learning needs of young people in the classroom from gaining the position of prominence they deserve. Labaree (2003: 19) comments that it is immoral to make changes without sufficient justification and understanding, so too is it immoral to ‘act pedagogically’ without thorough understanding.


Ortlipp (2003: 223-4) in her research of ‘voice’ in the practicum assessment process also highlights conflicting subject positions and the importance of the positioning of ‘self’ while Labaree (2003), Roth (2002) and Wood (2000) present case studies that highlight the importance of sustained reflection and the developing sense of self as a learner and a teacher.
Moving the hoops. Delivering a blow for preservice teacher practicum reform.

By questioning more loudly the positioning of preservice teachers, students and mentor teachers during the practicum experience, teacher educators and educational researchers have begun to argue that the preparation of teachers needs to be reconceptualised if we are to meet the needs of young people in the future. Moore (2003) and Campbell and Kane (1998) researched the elementary school practicum and highlight the procedural and management issues that continue to hijack the pedagogy of preservice teachers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that secondary preservice teachers also tend to focus on the practical rather than the socio-cultural and moral aspects of teaching. Gore (2001: 124), in her study of what happens in classrooms, challenges educators based in different educational traditions to recognise the overlap between the traditions, as well as the fierce competition between them, in a move to re-vision the practicum. Even earlier Martinez (1995) highlights the need to offer preservice teachers the opportunity to widen their limited perspectives and Zeichner (1992) indicates a concern that there was too much focus on classroom methodology at the expense of an understanding of the broader context. More recently Cook-Sather (2001a; 2002) positions the perspectives of school students at the centre of critical conversations by introducing a weekly exchange of letters between preservice teachers and secondary school students as a way of increasing understanding and enabling a smoother transition between university student and teacher.

So the call for transformation of the practicum process and procedures is not new but is linked to the new ways of thinking that led to researchers in the late 1980s and early 1990s producing considerable evidence that teacher education and education in general needed a major overhaul (Smyth, 1985, 1987, 1991, 1993, 1995; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990; Liston & Zeichner, 1991; Mac an Ghaill, 1992; McWilliam, 1992, 1994; Pajak, 1993; Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Gore, 1995; Waite, 1995). More recently, however, the research has taken another turn, fuelled by the recognition that the tensions between schools and universities are increasing and the concern that the plethora of ‘Inquiries’ into teacher education are based on fictional and fiscal matters. By finding new ways of looking at old problems current research (Sinclair, Munns & Woodward, 2005; Loughran, 2006; Kincheloe 2004) is beginning to question the non-critical imitation and the lack of a process for relating practice to theory during the practicum. Such research is beginning to focus more consciously on what causes the tensions between the schools and the academy rather than trying to solve the problem with band-aid measures. Finally the views and the voices of preservice teachers as social and political actors are being given an ear, and teachers are being recognised as valued participants in educational research.
Recent studies of the comparative merits of alternative models of teacher education in the United States highlight the current dilemma. No definitive model for either teacher preparation or research into teacher preparation could be recommended by Zeichner and Schulte (2001). Indeed the research questions had such varied answers that they concluded with the simple words ‘it depends’! This sentiment was also strongly supported by Wong and Glass (2005) and Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy (2002) who recognised that research in teacher education is difficult and often too narrow and ‘self-serving’ and thus unable to be generalised. It appears that this is frequently related to the lack of funding for such research and a preference for policy and procedures to be controlled by those far from the issues. The conclusions across these few studies uncover confusion. It appears that teacher education and the practicum are no longer being accepted as beneficial per se and the focus, structure and purpose of both processes are being questioned. To prevent the more common cycle of questioning, blame, massive policy change and ‘sweep with a clean brush’ that follows such revelations and takes social change backwards many years, I am searching for research into the secondary practicum that can help explain how things came to be the way they are and what we can do about it by looking ‘critically’ at the issues. It appears, however that there is limited information around preservice teacher education in the literature, especially in the secondary schools where it is difficult and very time consuming collecting data. It seems that those researching in the area recognise that both the role of the school and the role of the university are vitally important to the learning and development of preservice teachers, yet there is little interrogation on how this partnership can best be cultivated.

In times of reduced funding and jealously guarded agendas processes that rely on partnerships are subject to increasing pressure and conflict. To achieve sustainable reform in the preparation of teachers it is important that these issues are investigated and interrogated in critical ways. It is only when we can lay bare how things are that we can uncover the new information, or new ways of looking at old information, that will result in change. Further research is needed in this area to uncover, critique and unpick the way things are and to problematise the currently untheorised practices. We need to develop a theory of practicum learning embedded in trustworthy and grounded practicum research.

**Blazing hoops. Lighting the fire of practicum research.**

As already mentioned research into the secondary preservice practicum that uncovers understanding about practicum learning is particularly sparse. There is general agreement that experience is a powerful way to develop understanding, but clearly not all experiences are equal, beneficial or educative (Gallego, 2001: 25, 312; Wilson, Floden, Ferrini-Mundy, 2002: 195). Although few are prepared to suggest that the practicum fails to deliver what it
promises, teacher education courses are increasingly looking elsewhere to provide the necessary practical learning experiences for their preservice teachers (Gallego, 2001; Gannon, 2005; Hall, Smith & Nowinski, 2005). Such field placements vary in purpose, timing, structure, and connection with courses, yet make it clear that teacher educators are questioning the role of the practicum as it is currently positioned. The evidence is certainly mounting for the need to answer some of the questions about the role of the practicum (Foucault, 1984; Britzman, 1991; Britzman, 1992; McWilliam, 1992; Gore, 1993; McWilliam, 1994; Gore, 1995; Gore, 2001; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001; Martinez and Mackay, 2001; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2002; Labaree, 2003; Mazzei, 2004; Wong and Glass, 2005).

Again at the forefront of questioning how we look at things differently Smyth reminds us that

> If teachers, and those aspiring to enter teaching, are to experience their life in authentic terms, then they will have to expel the internalised images that researchers, administrators, and policymakers are so deft at perpetuating. (Smyth, 2001:124)

and Roth (2002) touches on this same idea of not focusing on the traditionally conceived model of the teacher. He suggests the perceived need for ‘control’ positions the novice teacher in a particular role with no room to manoeuvre and consequently often results in situations where they feel helpless. Gray (2004) also takes up this idea when focusing on the ‘dysfunctional reality’ of indigenous education, recommending that teachers stand back and really look at how they have constructed themselves and the classroom learning experience. It appears that preservice teachers may need opportunities to ‘take a step back’ and let the classroom unfold, allowing time for discussion, reflection, adjustment and refocusing. It is important that they are able to find their place in the complex dynamic of classroom learning while on practicum; it is how this can be achieved that is not clear.

It is frequently reported in the literature that procedural issues are almost always privileged over process during practicum reflection or mentor feedback (Gallego, 2001; Segall, 2002; Moore, 2003: 38) despite the more recent teacher education focus on teaching as a socially constructed process. It seems that articulating individual views, ideas, ideals and values within a multi-faceted experience like the practicum is fraught with tensions and conflicts.

Finding a way of re-scripting the roles of the actors in the practicum classroom to better meet the needs of novice teachers actually complicates as well as clarifies current practice (Cook-Sather, 2001b: 122; McWilliam, 2004), and there is little clear guidance from the current literature in terms of what the beliefs and understandings around the practicum really are.

**Smaller hoops. Striking voices.**

It becomes important to challenge the lack of theory around practicum learning and this
leads to a more careful look at those involved in the practicum process. A number of recent studies focus more consciously on the young people who are the learners in our classrooms and support the need to consult with students, value their views and establish shared goals for student learning (Lawson, McInerney, Hattam & Smyth, 1999; Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst, 2000; Cook-Sather, 2001a; Cushman, 2001; Lesko, 2001; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001; Keighley-James, 2002; Wilson, 2002). These studies share the conclusion that students want to be listened to and appreciated the opportunity for genuine dialogue. They also highlight student requests that teachers need to pay more attention to their perspectives and diversity in the classroom and voice a genuine desire to make meaningful connections with their teachers. Unfortunately this is not their experience in many of our classrooms, in fact in a recent Australian study of upper secondary students they were identified as the most disenfranchised group in the educational landscape (Keighley-James, 2002: 2).

Great care must be taken when working with young people that inappropriate gathering of material does not influence what gets said and consequently what is written and what is believed (Cook-Sather, 2002: 6; Edwards, 2003; Hattam, 1998:12). We must also remember that young people can have multiple positionings while they grapple with what they believe and who they are. They can also be easily misrepresented through political expediency and can be deeply inculcated into the dominant cultures and as such can be ‘deeply imbued with status quo values’ (Shultz & Cook-Sather 2001: 7). What they say and do needs to be carefully researched in ways that interrogate the dynamics and politics of their social and school lives.

The idea of listening to student voice is relatively new, yet the idea of giving voice to silenced groups in society is as old as the Enlightenment. What is particularly empowering in this more recent twist is that those groups with least power are encouraged to speak for themselves. Research with a critical underpinning finally offers a way for student voices to be heard without being filtered by the dominant view or the ‘expert’ author. Shultz and Cook-Sather (2001) as editors of the book ‘In Our Own Words: Students’ Perspectives on Schooling’, present a detailed review of the current literature that purports to represent student voice but finds on the whole the research is not up to the task. They comment, ‘while the young people’s perspectives are included, it is the authors who provide the interpretive frameworks, and in some cases, the focus of discussion that the students address’ (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001: 8). Their publication goes a long way towards honouring the perspective of young people as authors of their own perceptions. As editors Shultz and Cook-Sather have been supportive and encouraging but never prescriptive or demanding, allowing the voice of the students to come through. The students are also helped by a range of co-authors to
theorise and explain their own voice, though the editors acknowledge that this project proved complex and difficult to complete. On the whole the stories did unmask the secret life of students but what also came through were the difficulties of maintaining student interest. Many students were ready to move on before their ‘research’ was completed and others had to be kidded and cajoled into finishing. Although the resulting chapters resonate with the reader, the difficulties experienced punctuate the ‘messiness’ of embedding student voice and the difficulties of participatory ethnographic study which is, by definition, long term and multi-layered.

To give participant voice optimal chance of revealing their views it is important that the research design clearly establishes how participant perspective will be represented and minimises the power inequalities from the start. Smyth and his co-authors (Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 2000) recommend the concept of a ‘purposful conversation (Burgess, 1988)’ rather than interview, in the hope of opening up the conversation and freeing it from the imposition and restrictions of the interviewer. They admit to a particular power dynamic that needs to be interrupted if the views of the participants are to be rich, not guarded or compromised nor accommodating or sycophantic. This is especially important when working with young people. When interview conversations are transposed and snippets are used in a research report as part of an authoritative text, there is no guarantee that the constructs are those of the interviewee and not those of the researcher. There is also evidence that the perceived power differential in such situations can lead to the researcher being provided with the view or twist that participants think they want to hear. (Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 2000: 60)

The voiced research in ‘Listen to Me I’m Leaving’ (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson, & Wurst, 2000: 2) clearly establishes that the gap between classroom practice and student need has grown into a chasm for some students. This research offers a ‘new’ conception of classroom experience

…[w]e think we have developed a somewhat new reading of what’s happening—a reading that demands careful contemplation by those concerned with what our schools are ‘up to’ and comments on the need to make transparent that ‘teachers, students, parents and the wider community are co-constructors of the way schools are. (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson, & Wurst, 2000: 269) (Emphasis added)

If we stay with this very detailed and critically theorised ‘voiced research’ there are a number of new ideas to work with if we want to learn new ways of listening to student voice. The issue of miss-communication at a cultural level is one of these

…schools are important sites of youth socio-cultural identity, and what we are seeing…is an instance of ‘interactive trouble’ – young people are being prevented from fully participating in the school curriculum because of a failure to understand the cues of the teacher, whilst teachers are seemingly unable to make sense of student talk. It is a classic case of miss-communication at the cultural level of the relationship between the life worlds
of the students and teachers. (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson, & Wurst, 2000: 277)

A second publication (Smyth & Hattam, 2004) reinforces this message. Things are the way they are, not by accident or because it is natural, but because ‘dominant social visions hold sway’. The authors argue for the ‘subjugated knowledges’ of early school leavers as holding the most promise for throwing new light on the question of how our schools are failing an increasing cohort of young people (Smyth & Hattam, 2004: 25).

Such studies that listen to student voice highlight the contradictions and power relations that expose multiple points of tension in the schools and a struggle to come to terms with oppressive pedagogical relationships that have developed in our classrooms. Listening to student voice and silence is integral to co-constructing a new reading of classroom politics and to enable preservice teacher learning during the practicum.

**Hoops of learning**

Theories of learning are continually being refined to reflect changes in society and issues of gender, power, opportunity and justice. Improved knowledge about brain function and development also influences what we understand about how we learn and how we can facilitate or enable the learning of others. Socially critical learning theories suggest that learning is primarily a social activity (though invested with issues of power) and we benefit greatly from sharing our learning, interrogating our learning relationships and negotiating our learning environment. Constructivist learning theory builds on these views suggesting that learning most easily occurs when we can connect new information to old information and quality teaching enables the scaffolding of these learning connections.

There are many theories of learning and one’s paradigmatic positioning is important to help make sense of one’s own beliefs and understandings. Dewey, Freud, Piaget, Vygotsky and Gardner have had considerable influence on learning theory in Australian education and there have been a range of frameworks and taxonomies (i.e. Bloom and Solo) that have influenced how we understand and apply these theories (Bloom, 1956; Biggs & Collis, 1982; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). What becomes clear is that all learning is not equal and different individuals learn in many different ways. This necessitates a range of teaching styles, environments and pedagogies to enable and support learners. Research will continue to uncover new ways to make sense of the human mind and the social dimensions of learning, and these will progress our knowledge about teaching and learning, though it is not clear that we will ever fully understand why the teaching/learning relationship has such varied outcomes. What is clear is that we should continue to interrogate the possibility that learning can occur in a multitude of ways and interrupt processes or systems that claim
authority or definitive rights to make decisions about the ‘how’, ‘when’ or ‘why’ of learning in our schools.

**Looping the hoops**

Pedagogy, like learning, is a contested concept that challenges definition. It is more than teaching or instruction. It is derived from the Greek ‘paidagogos’ meaning the teacher of children (MacNeill, Cavanagh, Dellar, & Silcox, 2004). Current use can be conceptual, practical and/or ideological and it is frequently used when describing learning experiences or as an overarching concept as in ‘middle schooling pedagogies’ or ‘productive pedagogies’. I find the term useful to highlight the intersection of content, process and theories in learning environments. It helps avoid functionalist terms like ‘instruction’, ‘craft’ or even ‘art’ or ‘science’ of teaching. Certainly the cultural, social, emotional, psychological, developmental and metacognitive aspects of the teaching/learning dialectic are central. Any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another (Christie, 2001), while acknowledging the effect of biography, context, theory and culture, could be considered pedagogy. Pedagogy includes both the intrinsic and the extrinsic curriculum, highlighting the full range of experiences and influences on learning.

MacNeill and Associates (2004) performed a literature search and identified five groups of meanings for ‘pedagogy’. Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2003) clarify its use with a refinement and expansion into a mapping instrument for ‘productive pedagogies’ in opposition to a systemic or policy based framing and hijacking of the term. Freire (1970), Smyth (1985), and van Manen (1999) use the term in a socio-ideological context while Britzman (2003) and Gibbs (1995) relate pedagogy more closely to social values. The majority of recent research and teacher education publications align pedagogy to learning activities and student centred learning outcomes. Here classroom learning activities are linked with the needs, abilities, perceived outcomes and metacognitive demands of the learning situation. That is when practice and theory intersect and the concept of ‘pedagogy’ starts to move us closer to an understanding the process of learning to teach or ‘becoming’ a teacher. This ‘becoming’ is a blending of external and internal processes, neither being possible without the other.

Clearly teacher education will be pushed into the shadows and decisions will be made by others if we cannot articulate more explicit theories to explain what is seen as the time when theory and practice inform each other. This study draws on previous research that focuses on schooling, learning, voice, perspective, pedagogy, teachers’ work, power structures in education and preservice teacher education. Although the practicum has traditionally offered novice teachers an opportunity to ‘practise’ what they have learned at university and gain experience in, and of, schools there is limited data and little agreement about the learning
experiences that the practicum should deliver and how this can best be achieved. Can a ‘theory of practicum learning’ be constructed to inform and guide those who teach teachers and ensure that practicum experiences are central, consistent, empowering and valued?

**Research problem**

What are the learning experiences that the practicum should deliver? How can this best be achieved? Can a ‘theory of practicum learning’ be developed that reaches beyond individual schools or university schools of education, to give a voice in education reform, policy and secondary education to those currently silenced?

**Orienting questions**

1. Are the theories and understandings of socially critical constructivist learning and productive pedagogies that underpin and drive teacher education at university, robust enough to support the preservice teachers as they move into the practicum?
2. How can preservice teachers be given the ‘space’ and opportunities to apply their understandings during the practicum?
3. What support and guidance from the school and mentors best leads towards the sense of ‘becoming’ a teacher?
4. Can stories of a ‘sense of’ the practicum build a shared view of the process of practicum learning that resonates with a wide range of those who participate in preservice teacher education? Can the sharing of stories of the practicum re-vision practicum learning in the eyes of preservice teachers, mentors, teachers and teacher educators?

**Summary**

We need to have a deep and sophisticated understanding of issues and context if we are to make sense of the way schools work and the way they don’t. (Labaree, 2003: 17)

To this point I have provided evidence from the education literature that there is a crisis in education and that government policy reifies that crisis. Teachers’ work is being de-skilled by the mandating of scripted curriculum and ideology driven policy agendas. Economic rationalist views, rather than research evidence and critical professional decisions, are guiding policy and funding. Teacher education will remain a casualty of this crisis unless we can clearly demonstrate that the future lies with teachers who are educated to recognize and engage with their role as political agents of change and culture workers who truly understand their students and their practice. Reflective practitioners, who understand the socio-political-cultural context of their engagement with young people, must be given the space to develop, interrogate and synthesise the educational theories that inform the learning
process. The preservice teacher needs timely guidance and support to develop the knowledge, skills and understandings to make sense of themselves ‘becoming’ in the role of the teacher.

Traditionally the practicum plays a central role in secondary preservice teacher preparation but it is increasingly recognised as a site of contestation and tension. I have suggested that the recent education literature is questioning the role of teacher education and the practicum as it is currently conceived and whether the practicum is meeting the needs of the preservice teacher. What is generally missing from the extant research is an interrogation of the practicum that is transparent, addresses the critical questions of who is benefiting and who is disadvantaged and can illuminate the perspectives of each of the participant groups. I believe there is a need to reach into the practicum process with a clearer lens. Can the practicum deliver the quality learning experiences it promises? Can classroom teachers, teacher educators and preservice teachers work together to bring a clear understanding of what teaching and learning in the classroom looks like? Can this shared view re-vision the practicum and enable preservice teacher development of ‘becoming’ a teacher?

I have presented a range of examples of research into preservice education but research that exposes the untold story in a way that represents all participants, one that reaches out to the ‘othered voices’ and considers the historical, social, political, gendered and cultural ‘reality’ of the classroom learning process, is still elusive. A way of listening to the interplay of voices during the practicum needs to be found. Research that honours the voices of the school based mentor, school student, preservice teacher and teacher educator in a way that transcends the belief that the practicum is the ‘natural’ way to prepare teachers and so should remain as an uncontested tradition, needs to be developed. The practicum experience is within all domains of human endeavour and an understanding of the purpose of education related to beliefs located in an emancipatory paradigm is also necessary. This is the project of possibility.

Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. It is hope, above all, that gives us the strength to live and to continually try new things, even in challenging conditions. (Vaclav Havel cited in Hopkins, Teaching Learning—Revolution Required, Keynote address, Curriculum Corporation National Conference, Perth, Australia. 2003)
Chapter 2 Looking Through the Hoops

Reaching into the practicum process

Introduction

We can only make a difference if we really understand what is going on, and at the moment I do not believe we know what is going on in the practicum classroom. We need to examine the lives, perspectives, pedagogies, beliefs and understandings of those involved in the practicum to try to understand what is happening in their professional, public, private, personal and learning lives. In a climate of reification, simplification and de-skilling of teachers’ work, it would be expedient to hand over the preparation of preservice teachers to the schools. But I want to work against the current and actually suggest that the teacher preparation process is being hijacked by those looking backwards. We need to critically interrogate the practicum to expose the inconsistencies and answer the research questions I have presented, if practicum learning is going to claim its rightful place at the forefront of preservice education.

I have previously used ‘story-telling’ as one way of revealing meaning from the multitude of ideas, experiences, impressions, sounds and images that crowd our consciousness. It can make sense of individual lives and can write into existence possible versions of reality so these can be shared, affirmed or contested. Well-designed stories have the appeal of an orchestra playing ‘your tune’, an engaging painting and a golden sunset. The society to which I belong loves a story, whether it is told orally or in written form, it sweeps its audience along so that the engagement does not appear effortful. If the topic is something the listener or reader can relate to, then the new information is easily absorbed as it is linked to current information and new knowledge is constructed. Examination of the basic tenants that make us who we are, or theories that make sense of what we know, can be challenging and effortful and stories ‘lighten’ the load.

It is important that we are continually open to looking closely at our assumptions and perspectives, especially when our work is critical, moral and ethical as is the work of the teacher. Finding ways to help preservice teachers disentangle themselves from the massive array of concepts, theories, strategies, challenges, pedagogies and frameworks that are presented with different spin and intensity in a very limited timeframe is difficult. We cannot leave preservice teacher learning to chance, so I am suggesting that practicum inquiry that has its roots in tacit and situated knowledge that is told by using narrative, might provide evidence and wisdom about these things we don’t understand.
Finding a research cannon

Post-structural and critical perspectives suggest that ‘voice’ is heard and not heard through both deliberate and unintended actions. These actions are related to the social, cultural and political positionings of the research participants. By questioning the role of the practicum as it is currently conceived and reaching into the secondary school practicum classroom to build meaning and new understandings of how the participants are positioned or constructed by current views, a new perspective that makes sense of the complex ways preservice teachers acquiesce, acquire or/and contest the moral, ethical and social practice of schooling might emerge.

I seek to unsettle the veil that has been thrown over the practicum classroom to preserve a view of the practicum that is agreed, consistent and successful. Anecdotal evidence suggests this is not the case; the practicum experience is more likely to be inconsistent, counter to the outcomes presented during the university preparation and disempowering for the preservice teacher. Working within these tensions and contradictions preservice teachers’ acquiesce and focus on successful completion, enduring the attempts at occupational socialization. Frequently they also encounter a culture of diffidence to the progressive theories of learning that are introduced to them at university. This results in confusion and often resentment that the university ‘theory’ has misled them and not prepared them for the realities of teaching. The schools, where comments like ‘forget what you learned at uni’ are frequently proffered, often support this. Schools appear not to be very receptive to preservice teachers’ learning needs or developing sense of ‘becoming’ a teacher. This research is an attempt to be strategic and practice-based yet the outcome should inform future practice as well as add to the knowledge of the practicum and provide a resource to progress new theories of practicum learning.

New models of practice-based research are appearing in the educational research literature. Shultz and Cook-Sather (2001) suggest a method of presenting the views of school students by helping them to read across their own writings and offer their own connections. Smyth and Hattam (2001; 402) call for different ways of interrogating issues ‘that are more informative, more insightful, more compelling, and more epistemologically tuned-in’. Their recent voiced research ‘Listen to me, I’m leaving’ (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson, Wurst; 2000) is undeniably compelling reading for all who work with young people. There has fortunately been a shift in what is considered ‘acceptable’ quality research with broader criteria now reflecting a more flexible view. Furlong and Oancea (2005: 8) in their more recent review of applied and practice-based research introduce a wide range of new models of research and an argument for their acceptance as valid contributions to theoretical knowledge and changed practice. They suggest a view of research that defines quality in
terms of ‘wider social robustness’ and the use of a ‘multi-layered and multi-dimensional’ approach (9-10).

In the current educational research climate it is wise to be both strategic and pragmatic. After extensive review of the literature I was unable to uncover a research model that could incorporate the problem I had identified yet embrace my theoretical understandings and positioning in the context of the problem. It appeared that what was being seen as acceptable research was changing but I was impatient to begin. Gibbons (1994) discusses ‘context-based knowledge production’ and in a more recent paper, published well after my journey began, Furlong and Oancea (2005: 8) add that this involves

…transdisciplinarity, heterogeneity, flexibility, and permeability of institutional boundaries. There is also likely to be a greater emphasis on social accountability, representing ‘a diverse range of intellectual interests, as well as other social, economical and political ones.

I believe this supports my decision to be innovative.

It appeared at the time that qualitative narrative inquiry and participant research could be eclectic and would not commit me to particular processes. It can be modified and moulded to allow projects to be structured to interrogate and challenge in creative ways, issues that have previously been considered too hard. I could use ‘to a large extent whatever is called for during the emergent processes of data collection, data analysis, and the construction of the final document’ (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997: 4). I could also be evocative and grasp the complexity (Richardson; 2000), so that new understandings or novel aspects of old and previously unchallenged issues can be revealed. Clearly, important research needs to forge new ways of understanding and adapt to the complexities and unexpected turns to provide a worthwhile outcome. Smyth (2001: 191) reminds us that having established that there is a problem we are morally obliged to put in the effort to describe the problem, work out what this means and how it happened, then suggest what might be done differently. This ‘critical cycle’ is invaluable to this study.

The critical cycle draws on action research (Kemmis, 1990) yet develops the method to interrogate beyond ‘plan, act, observe, reflect’. It is cyclic and has four steps with probing critical questions that direct each step

1. Describing – What does it look like?
2. Informing – What is the meaning behind (my teaching)
3. Confronting – How did it come to be this way?

It has great promise in progressing the theorising of research where the data is complex and multi-layered. By continually refocussing on the research problem it ensures that the data are allowed to ‘speak’, as new understandings are built from the questioning of the taken for
granted relationships between the structures and policies that exert power on our ability to make decisions about our practice.

**Planning for complexity**

The complexity, richness, intensity and context specific nature of research in classrooms necessitates a design that can accommodate the ‘messiness’ and the contradictions, yet allow the space for unexpected turns. By locating my research in the ‘critical’ or ‘resistance’ qualitative research paradigm I can ‘stand apart from the prevailing [dis]order of the world and ask how that [dis]order came about’ (Cox, 1980: 129). By researching with a critical vein I can challenge the uncontested status of the practicum with a view to deepen understanding and ultimately lead to different practice. While observing, writing, checking and reading across the participants’ perspectives and interrogating what they mean, and how it came to be this way, new meanings will be exposed to develop new theories to explain what is going on and how it can be done differently. Critical theory works within a research paradigm where fresh lenses seek to present new views of previously uncontested or taken for granted situations. By being conscious of specific detail and multiple perspectives, new ideas can emerge to represent the ‘voice’ of those who were previously silenced and the world as they know it is illuminated. In this way all contributors to the conversation are valued and researchers acknowledge their own influence in the conversation. ‘Making the familiar, strange’ (Smyth; personal communication: June, 2000) and ‘rendering the landscape unfamiliar’ (McWilliam, 2004: 122) reflect how detail previously accepted as ‘natural’ can become problematic.

No research design is completely innocent, however. The way we choose to represent either our own understandings or our interpretations of others’ perspectives will always include an element of sifting and sorting of the information by the researcher. The result will be partly due to what we have *consciously* given our attention to as a result of our positioning and partly due to what we have *unconsciously* given attention to due to our past experiences and biography. Indeed even the purpose of the research and audience we write for will affect what will be uncovered. We are never free from the influence and expectations of others. As Bullough and Pinnegar (2001: 13) suggest ‘who a researcher is, is central to what the researcher does’. Researchers working in the critical qualitative paradigm allude frequently to the difficulties, cost and time investment necessary for ethical research in classrooms, and remind us that neither the process nor procedures are benign (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986, 1997: 95-6; Wilson, Floden, Ferrini-Mundy, 2002:194). They also make it clear that we should not shirk from the complexity and the challenges. Qualitative socially critical research allows the space for complex, deep and ethical interactions and connections
that ‘speak’ for themselves. Such revelations may not be quite what we expect (as we will see in this study) and the research design should be flexible enough to accommodate this.

**Positioning**

My own positioning is the result of considerable time in the field, engagement with the literature and critical reflection. As already mentioned, it was not until I deconstructed my own teaching life that I came to terms with what I know ‘I know and understand’ (Rorrison, 2001). My search for self and meaning resulted in a very clear statement about the theories that defined me at various stages of my life and provided a firm foundation for future writing. I quote from the conclusion of my previous research paper.

Once I realised that by situating and problematising my troubles (rather than personalising and blaming), I could confront, resist and contest issues of unequal power relations and reconstruct the ‘projects of possibility’, I lost my anger and need to blame either myself or those whom I allowed to exert power over me. …After [the] critical questions are addressed and after rigorous examination and interrogation of the power relations and dominant cultural fictions that define our teaching are attempted, we can begin to reposition our own sense of reality and start to make a difference. …I am still searching for the project of possibility and at times I catch glimpses of the ‘gentle shine’. (Rorrison, 2001:66-7)

Critical research allows us to take understanding somewhere it hasn’t been before by ‘generat[ing] ways of knowing that might take us beyond ourselves’ (Lather, 1991a) and makes questions of design, context, process and relationships central to the inquiry.

Belenky and her associates (1986, 1997: 117) remind us that ‘trustworthy truths gestate slowly’ and we need patience and a kind of passivity that prevents us from controlling our data. We need to collect data from our research that allows us both a clear and misted vision.¹ It is how we know and how we came to believe what we know, that positions our knowing. For me surveys, questionnaires and even interviews have no attraction as data collection methods. The complexity of the settings I plan to work in and the layers of data I hope to collect do not lend themselves to traditional collection methods. How could the ‘native’, grasping his spear and his child in the painting, marooned on an island at the mercy of the ‘invaders’, possibly communicate his humanity or his sense of truth and right? How can we best tell the views of all the participants?

---

¹ During previous research (Rorrison, 2001) I wrote about a painting in an art gallery in New Zealand. I remember clearly the experience had a huge impact on me. As I viewed the painting, painted in the garish bright colours of the time and depicting a ‘native’ with almost sub-human characteristics, I realised that we could not criticise the painter for expressing him/herself in this way- it was part of the dominant cultural fiction that made meaning in his/her life.
**Authentic design**

Designing a method of coming to know lives and interactions that could later be offered as trustworthy evidence to support a new theory of the practicum was a challenge. I would be the outsider looking in and the insider looking out. I would have much influence on some aspects and no influence on others. How could I penetrate the silences that are set up in the gaps between lifeworlds in the practicum classroom? School students, preservice teachers and secondary school based teachers have lives and motivations of such variety and diversity; would it be possible to reflect their voice clearly? What research tools could allow me to read, think, write and hear their world in a way that makes meaning about their lives? How could my ‘inner’ lens and ‘inner’ ears and tacit knowledge best represent their words and worlds ‘honestly’ and with verity?

At first my idea of co-constructing or co-authoring stories of lives and interactions in the secondary practicum seemed uncomplicated. I felt that my intimate understanding of the practicum, university teacher education, schools and classrooms placed me in a position to give such research integrity. My reading and previous research had allowed me to work with a range of research cannons of the late twentieth century. Action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990; Altrichter, Posch and Somekh, 1993), narrative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), narrative curricula (Conle, 2003), practitioner research (McWilliam, 2004) and voiced research (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon et al 2000; Smyth & Hattam, 2001; Smyth & Hattam, 2004) also influence my research design. Opening up the understanding of what counts as research in this way, allows more novel and creative methods and organising frameworks to emerge.

As Foucault suggests we need to find the new ways of knowing that are afforded to us by the very action of probing the way things appear.

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary, if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. (Foucault, 1992: 8)

Could the richness of narrative provide a robust and authentic reading of the practicum? If a story of the practicum classroom was checked daily and annotated, added to, commented on or overwritten by the participants, would both shared and different perspectives co-construct a story not previously heard? Could the participants in the field, including me as researcher, write into existence an accessible heuristic to make meaning about practicum experiences? Within a framework of critical theory could rigorous, trustworthy and grounded practicum stories that reflected the perspectives of all participant groups be created?

Teaching practice is alive with issues of morality, power, agency, justice, injustice, investment, privilege, advantage, disadvantage and interestedness. The complex worlds of
interactions and interpersonal communications are at its core. Turning a different lens, or differently nuanced lens, on what ‘appears’ normal in these relationships should generate new understandings. A study by Sanderson and Allard (2003) illustrates this point. Students who were being bullied by racist comments did not even voice the racism they felt as a reason for leaving school because they believed that it was ‘the way it is’ and everyone was powerless in the face of this behaviour. In believing it was normal they did not name it. How something is believed, in the sense of constructed as ‘natural’, is all-important to how meaning is made in their lives. Research in the qualitative critical mode, such as this, should help uncover these silences.

**Grasping the complexity**

The responsible university committees accepted my research proposal and methodology, and I proceeded into my pilot study perhaps still a little naïve. It was only as the pilot progressed and the ethical complexities of disclosure impacted on our ability to co-author the stories that I began to look for other ways of presenting our multiple perspectives and novel understandings of the practicum and the practicum classroom. I will discuss these problems in more detail in chapter 3 and present a revised research design in chapter 5. The point to be made here is that for me false starts, changes and new approaches became part of the research experience.

Richardson (2000) suggests we should be evocative and Smyth suggests we be provocative (personal communication, 2003), when conducting research in schools. They also recommend that complexity should be grasped or ‘worried’ rather than explained, and that truth and knowledge claims are a non-sense in the postmodern climate. We live and act in our complex worlds because we ‘believe’ we know, though our knowledge and the associated understandings are only ever partial and our theories are open to contestation and challenge, as illustrated in the racism example above. We also have multiple realities and multiple subjectivities as we “speak and write ourselves into existence” (Smyth, 2004: personal communication). Our reference group, positioning and the competing discourses that shape our views at any one moment influence these, and this is particularly relevant to this narrative study at all levels. The preservice teacher is student and teacher, the school students are students and adolescents, the mentor is teacher and mentor and the researcher is doctoral candidate, researcher and teacher educator. All are also interacting individuals in their communities and families. They are mothers, fathers, grandparents, partners, spouses, parents, children, siblings, employees, professionals, expectant mothers, expectant fathers, athletes, artists and musicians… This is a decidedly interested study.
Interrogation in the critical paradigm allows vested interests and lives to be transparent as new understandings of issues of power, knowledge, understanding, misunderstanding, perspective, naming and positioning in the practicum classroom are uncovered. McWilliam (2004: 121) claims the ‘disinterested-versus-interested debate will not go away’ and supports the possibility that both could be present in the one study. By giving our attention to different aspects of the lifeworlds at different times during a research project McWilliam suggests that there could be advantage in providing the actors in the field ‘with a means to discovering their situation anew while at the same time valuing the tacit knowing that is produced out of their embeddedness in practice’ (McWilliam, 2004: 121). Denzin & Lincoln (1994: 512) also suggests we should ‘work outward from [our] own biographies to the worlds of experience that surround [us]’ as we reflect on the social and physical structures that mould us. When we interrogate the interrelationships, context and ‘official’ knowledge that build meaning for our lives, we can identify completely different stories that are informed by understandings that contest the common sense of our power dynamic. In other words, informed by our experiences, reflections and observations and the contradictions and inconsistencies therein, we can probe the ‘reality’ that we have previously accepted. In doing so we recognise that our social structures are created by us; they are not natural but constructed in human interest (Rorrison, 2001).

The complex differences of the secondary school practicum as compared with the early childhood, primary or elementary school practica is seldom considered in the literature. Much of the previous practicum research has been undertaken in the primary or elementary school. During the early childhood and primary school practica the preservice teacher spends every day with the same group of children. The secondary practicum experience involves teaching in two or three different classes, working with each group of students for only one lesson (about fifty minutes) a day, and being only one of six or seven different teachers the students relate to in a day. This has a range of tensions around the lack of time spent with each group, the number of ‘mentor’ teachers the preservice teacher relates to and the array of students they need to engage. The students can range from twelve to nineteen years old and depending on the structure of the school can be graded from higher-level learners to low literacy or numeracy groups. They can also be grouped vertically in similar ‘bands’ and can be of vastly different age, or they might be mixed ability groups based on choice of electives. Learning and teaching styles can also be vastly different from one lesson to the next, with practical or vocational learning demanding different outcomes to higher-level thinking and problem solving activities.

Furthermore classrooms can also be quite different in terms of both structure and ecology. Some rooms have a traditional layout with thirty paired desks in rows, or the teaching space
can be as diverse as science laboratories, outdoor education in remote settings, middle schooling designs, practical lessons in kitchens, gymnasiums and workshops. Resource centres, media rooms and libraries with both well-resourced and poorly resourced computer hubs are not uncommon. If we add to this variety an absentee level of up to five students every day and an unprecedented rate of staff turnover, we have a range of adjustments and challenges for the secondary preservice teacher that are not adequately considered in the extant literature. The varied experiences they encounter during their practicum, as well as varied receptions from the school staff and students, needs to be addressed as part of this study.

**Narrative as research**


…continue to ask questions about whether the research is adequate to its questions and its purposes, or we are in danger of being seen as having nothing to offer other than our political values.

This project heeds the warnings and collaboratively constructs and reconstructs composite lives from participant perspective, highlighting biography, culture, social interactions, learning relationships and power structures.

Research using narrative moved beyond representation and reflective inquiry (Dewey developed further by Schön, 1983, 1987) in the late twentieth century. By becoming more interpretive and analytical such research gains wider acceptance, possibly due to its more general recognition as valid and authentic research. Clandinin (1992) and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, (1986, 1997) acknowledge the importance of moral responsibility when working with stories of peoples’ lives, especially when working in teacher education. What is particularly important from the work of both Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 1992, 1994, 1998) is the entirely new perspective they take. By story-ing and re-storying they show that lives can be ‘opened up’, and from this, new understandings are written into existence. By recognising that there are multiple stories of lives and teaching lives, those involved in
teacher education can begin to move towards a better understanding of these lives and their intersection with learning and teaching. This has transformative potential.

Hooley (2005) also exposes the current gaps in teacher education that create a space for narrative. He is greatly concerned by the lack of understanding of the nature of teachers’ work in Australia and suggests that a system dominated by the ‘effective schools’ discourse and focused on the examination of transmitted knowledge, is unlikely to offer a true education. Hooley goes on to recommend narrative to ‘order experience and lead to ends of social justice’ (p. 10), and suggests, as I have, that narrative as inquiry can turn a lens on the learning experience and can become a ‘key principle of learning, teaching and curriculum design…’ (p. 11). In other words narrative as research can make a difference. There is a nice link here with the importance of preparing teachers who have a real understanding of the work that they do and how they can best enable the learning of young people.

Carola Conle (2003) also suggests narrative can play both instrumental and inquiry roles in the preservice teacher education curricular practices. She states ‘it is the narrative repertoire of our imagination that helps us distinguish the world we live in from the world we want to live in’ (p. 4), a claim akin to my ‘project of possibility’ introduced earlier. Conle (2003: 3) cites the seminal work of Genette (1980) and Schwab (1973, 1977, 1983) to ground her understanding, though her work could be extended even further if we add ‘perspective’ to the mix. Beattie (2001) suggests that perspective can help forge a more ‘personal vision of reality that takes into account how [the narrative] was constructed in relation to others…’. It is my plan to use narrative and participant perspective to transcend the barriers between experience and understanding to highlight the possibilities of learning through another’s meaning-making accounts. Narrative thus becomes transformational as possible lives are written into being.

In this study the narrative of classroom relationships and practicum learning ‘emerges’ from field notes that become stories that are re-scripted from the perspective of the participants in the setting, then fictionalised to ensure that they have a sense beyond the particular. They are then re-checked by a wide selection of reader/respondents. The focus of the stories is the preservice teacher and although they are narrated, the narrator does not comment except through the eyes, thoughts or dialogue of the characters in the story, or through a dispassionate lens. As in Conle’s (2003) story, the stories may or may not be taken for someone’s actual experience. The intention is that the stories are ‘life-like’, rich, thick and engaging and have an authentic sense of the practicum as they become the centre of the readers’ interest.
Conle (2003) suggests that such stories can be used as curriculum if they illustrate points that are considered important (relevant) by the preservice teachers and can be rendered more valuable with specific questions that lead to particular outcomes for the learners. Beattie (2001) achieves this in part where she presents stories and then comments on them offering probing questions around the preservice teacher narratives. During my project the stories that are developed are much longer and are able to develop more complex plots and deeper characterisation than the short ‘statement’ story and critical incident that have been used previously in teacher education (Tripp, 1993; Beattie, 2001; Conle, 2003). As Conle intimates, the shorter stories have limited application, as some regard them as ‘made up’ or not sufficiently developed to allow deep resonance. Hay and White (2005) add that writing based on understanding is much more authentic than writing based on practice and uses the example of the power of myth and folklore to provide messages beyond the mere recording of experience. This aspect of ‘understanding’ underpins the stories that I have created.

Practitioner (action) research

Groundwater-Smith & Mockler (2005: 4) tell us that practitioner research has been with us for over fifty years but like narrative inquiry has been pushed to the shadows in the early years of the twenty-first century by the return to a more positivist, technical/rational research paradigm interested in solutions rather than the critical questions. They argue, as I have, that such research ignores the research cycle of critical critique that the complex relationships and connections within education necessitate. Drawing on Habermas (1979) Groundwater-Smith & Mockler (2004: 4) highlight the notion that participation by practitioner groups is essential in educational research. They also defend the right of those living the researched lives to ‘assert, defend or raise questions regarding factual or normative claims that are made’ (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2005: 4), and trial case studies in their research design.

Teachers need to see value in classroom research if they are to participate but often the research is ‘indirect and unstructured’ due to the ‘divergent outcomes’, ‘potential for chaos’, ‘logistical challenges’ and ‘messiness and unresolvability’ of the classroom (Cook-Sather, 2001; Labaree, 2003: 14; Raths & Lyman, 2003; McWilliam, 2004). Research is often avoided because of the ‘unforgivingly complex’ nature, lack of consensus about whose knowledge and what counts as evidence (Cochran-Smith, 2003) and ‘consistently conflicting research findings on key educational topics’ (Page, 2001: 19). Issues of ‘the power of contexts’, ‘the ubiquity of interactions’, ‘the short half-life of our findings’ and ‘the divide between research and practice’ (Zeichner, 1995; Berliner, 2000:18-20; Coulter & Wiens, 2002; Labaree, 2003) are frequently offered as reasons why classroom and practicum
research is avoided. Indeed it is ‘messy’. Nor is it enough to theorise and analyse, producing fragmented knowledge as part of an ‘additive process’ or to just provide un-theorised data that cannot be applied to a range of contexts. What counts as research into these practicum experiences is still the subject of considerable debate (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2002b; Labaree, 2003; McWilliam, 2004; Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2005). As Marx put it:

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point, however, is to change it. (Marx, 1978: 145)

**Discordant voices**

Current researchers in the critical paradigm warn that the process can become difficult when discordant voices, voices that were not anticipated, emerge in the research, and that we must be prepared for, and accept, divergent outcomes. They stress that there are a number of questions that will need to be answered to make sense of text evidencing dissenting views, or exposing tensions or inconsistencies (Smyth, 1999a: 29; McWilliam, 2004: 118; Edwards, 2003: 77). It would be poor scholarship if we only uncovered meaning that supports the research question(s) or outcomes that are to our liking, as this would infer that educational ‘problems’ have a solution and we are going after that solution. But we are not looking for solutions in the socially critical paradigm, we are looking to uncover new meanings from old stories and we are looking to throw new light on old issues. We are looking to imagine the story in ways that are free from the hegemonic frameworks that have previously restricted our perception, not introduce a whole new set of frameworks.

**Research design**

My own reaction as a researcher has been to push the boundaries of the accepted research methodologies. To answer the complex and critical questions that interest me – ‘what is going on here?’ and ‘what can we do about it? – I needed to be courageous about research design. The guiding structure would need to be evolving, fluid and flexible enough to go after ideas and themes that were uncovered. Specifying the method to narrowly at the beginning could lead to disregarding some of the turns and wafts that might evolve and thus stultify the ‘projects of possibility’ that interest me most. The very presence of restrictive frameworks tends to undermine the confidence of the novice researcher who may be unwilling to harness their free spirit. While there is no denial of a close association of purpose, method and manageability, Belenky and her co-writers (1986, 1997) cite Mary Daly (1973) and her concern that ‘data’ can so easily be rendered invisible by strict adherence to methodology seeped in the traditions of the research paradigm.
Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul (1997: 5-6) also have some sound advice for the qualitative researcher. They ‘subscribe to the importance of the transactive, emotional, experiential and aesthetic aspects of writing’ and stress that presenting research in the linear fashion demanded by our literacy traditions can distort the whole. Their approach immediately resonated for me – they seemed to care about the participants in the studies they discuss, and locate research within the broader societal perspective. Change is not in itself all that we should strive for, enduring issues are also important, yet without research that illuminates both the enduring issues and the change, we are failing to reach for what is possible. This is how they invite us to ‘enter the dance’.

I searched for a transparent and participatory inquiry method to develop a research conversation that allows for perspectives of all the participants to be heard. In this way the full complexity of the practicum and how the participants are positioned might be uncovered to add to the knowledge of preservice teacher education. As researcher I was also embedded unconditionally and intimately in the research setting, I was an ‘interested’ actor in the setting and, as I discussed previously, so I needed a research design that could both take advantage of and interrogate this. Creswell (1998: 114), supported by Glesne and Peshkin (1992) whom he cites in his work, warns against studying a site where one has a vested interest, cautioning that the ‘negatives outweigh the positives’ and that it is ‘political and risky’. I believe however that I can offer compelling argument and advantage by bringing my intimate knowledge to this study. This is supported by Ely and her co-writers (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997) who encourages writers and researchers to

...work to evoke the complexity of the experiences within their studies...to study, explore, create, and take some leaps of faith, all in the service of writing worthwhile research...[using] thinking, analysing, storytelling, lifting, interpreting... (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997: 2-3)

By also heeding the warning of McWilliam (2004) not to use a research method that has ‘congeal[ed] into formulae’, or work ‘backwards from a method to a do-able problem as defined by that method’ (McWilliam, 2004: 120) I have allowed the research design to emerge and transform as the research questions ‘matured’. I do, however, acknowledge that by being innovative in design I invited unforeseeable problems related to the complexity of both the task and the setting. Drawing on Patti Lather (1997), McWilliam (2004) suggests a ‘double move’ strategy

...that points us to design, not method. It makes trouble for method as any one set of techniques (e.g. ‘plan, act, observe, reflect) because they will not be sufficient for the epistemological demands of such inquiry. (McWilliam, 2004: 121-122)

This gave me confidence to work towards a research design that was an amalgam of methods recently reported in the progressive education literature and discussed above. I believed my involvement in the research, my tacit knowledge, my ‘public-ness’ and my multiple
positionings makes particular demands on any method and subsequent decisions about presentation of the results. Yet I did not believe I should shy away from a research question of major interest to me just because I might have a vested interest.

**Creative design**

What was different about the research I designed was that each of the participant groups was to be represented by their own perspectives as they were added progressively as the story was written. The sense of the reality of the classroom of each of the writers on a particular day would be written alongside mine to produce a multi-layered story. This story was to focus on how the learning of the students and preservice teachers was perceived in the preservice classroom by the students, the preservice teacher, the mentor and the teacher educator.

The story was to be a co-construction of the classroom discourse, written initially by the teacher educator/researcher as observer, but changed daily as the views of the students, mentors and preservice teachers were added during brief focus meetings at the end of each lesson. The ‘story’ would be printed in the left hand column of the page and participants would be encouraged to read and annotate, score out, change and add their own story in the right hand column. Their views would then be woven into the story for the next focus meeting, when the procedure would be repeated. Each day the researcher’s views of the most recent lesson would also be added. Participants would be encouraged to read and annotate or change both the amended section and the new section during each focus session.

The conversation through the created narrative would include both the silences and voices of preservice teachers, students, mentors and teacher education lecturers, though each would have their own ‘interest’ and ‘positioning’ that would influence the conversation in different ways (Mazzei, 2004). As Smyth (2000) suggests, it should be possible to open up the conversation to honour multiple voices where

> The researcher shares his/her views, theories and opinions, and encourages the individuals and groups participating … to ask questions and challenge the assumptions of the researcher as well as providing information. (Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 2000: 61)

Although the initial story was from the teacher educator/researcher’s perspective, the comments, annotations, amendments, affirmations and questions added to the text by the participants would result in a daily ‘re-write’ of the story in the first instance and an investigative probing of the views, attitudes, understandings and constructions at a later date.
Criteria of quality

Although the presentation of research in ‘creative’ form is now accepted as legitimate research it is still important to make explicit the criteria of quality against which the research will be judged. Ascertaining the efficacy of the data will still rely on evaluative criteria that ensure the data collection method, analysis and interpretation are ethical, trustworthy and accurate. Even when the research is non-traditional and creative in design, or imbibed with views of the world that challenge traditional research outcomes, we must still be able to show the veracity of our research. Noreen Garman’s tests of verity, integrity, rigour, utility, vitality, aesthetics, ethics and verisimilitude (Smyth, Hattam, & Shacklock, 1997: 31) provide a range of evaluation cannons that relate well to both narrative and non-traditional design.

By clearly describing the research design, processes, the participants’ role and methods of checking the trustworthiness of the outcomes, creative forms can open up many new possibilities (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001: 13; Louden and Wallace, 2001: 75). McWilliam (2004: 119-122) argues that the design must be rigorously conceived and meticulously followed if we are going to maintain the credibility of ‘local, praxis oriented inquiry through collaboration with those involved’. Ely and her associates (1997) call for a transparent explanation of analytical processes throughout the time when the researcher is tangling with the data. They complain that it is a failing in qualitative research that the specific data handling processes are frequently not clear and cite Scheurich, adding that collaboration between participants is a valuable way to keep the representation of the conversation honest, trustworthy, valid and accurate (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997:88).

Creswell (1998) also discusses ‘verisimilitude’ as definitive, borrowing his understanding of the term from Richardson’s frequently cited paper, Writing: a method of Inquiry, published in The Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In his work Creswell (1998) is very clear about what the five traditions ‘look like’ as qualitative research but does not always heed his own advice. He claims that qualitative design will always be an ‘evolving design’ allowing space for change (p. 21), yet is quite structured in his ways of ‘believing’. He also recommends strongly that we conduct a pilot study to ensure that the qualitative design suits the project and the researcher, and I am thankful that I heeded his advice.
Summary

Intent on better understanding the ‘practicum’ in secondary teacher education, qualitative critical participatory ethnography and narrative inquiry were chosen as the basis for research and reporting methods. Narrative opens up the possibility of inquiry when context, conversation, dialogue and character development allow the lives of the participants to be written into existence. Readers can then be encouraged to add their perspectives to the stories. These stories of the practicum classroom will present a new view of the learning environment; a co-constructed view that would to be later rubbed against the extant literature to help answer the research questions.

Research design must be sympathetic with what we are trying to do. In this research project complexity, the perspectives of others and the insider/outsider positioning of the researcher needed to be accommodated by creative and flexible design. This, however, adds to the complexity, so the criteria against which the project will be judged must be made clear and the research design must remain transparent at all times.
Chapter 3 Checking the Hoops

*Speaking, hearing, writing, reading, watching and thinking text (stories) into existence*

Introduction

In this chapter I will provide some background on the teacher education experiences of preservice teachers and the processes that are followed to organise their practica. This will be followed by a discussion of the pilot research process and resultant stories.

Before their first practicum, preservice teachers are introduced to a wide range of educational issues as well as core professional knowledge. They generally spend some observation time in a range of schools before being introduced to the ‘professional’ units. This provides for a shared understanding of the contemporary classroom and a starting point for discussions. At our university those undertaking a four year undergraduate qualification observe for two weeks in a primary school and two weeks in a secondary school and those enrolled in the post-graduate courses spend three days in three different schools.

It is generally assumed that secondary preservice teachers have already completed undergraduate study in the disciplines or learning areas that they will be qualified to teach. Most preservice teachers have sufficient undergraduate units to teach across two learning areas. Although the names of the learning areas vary slightly between the Australian states there are eight learning areas available; ‘the Arts’, ‘English’, ‘Health and Physical Education’ (HPE), ‘Languages other than English’ (LOTE), ‘Mathematics’ ‘Science’, ‘Studies of Society and Environment’ (SOSE) and ‘Technology and Design’ (T&D). Within each of these learning areas there are a range of ‘subjects’ at both junior and senior secondary levels. For example within the learning areas of ‘Science’ we find biology, chemistry, physics and geology. Music, drama, dance and visual arts are included within ‘The Arts’. Some courses also offer ‘middle schooling’ options where learning areas are integrated. At our university, middle schooling specialists have three undergraduate disciplines, rather than the two expected for the standard secondary courses.

We refer to the knowledge, skills and understandings learned in the undergraduate disciplines as ‘content knowledge’ and we do not structure the professional units to increase content knowledge. It is ‘assumed’ knowledge when preservice teachers enrol in their specialist teaching units, which is where they learn the ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ for each of their learning areas. This structure acknowledges that although teachers teach
students and not subjects, there are different pedagogies that are appropriate for enhancing learning opportunities within the different learning areas.

The conscientious preservice teacher spends the early stages of their course discussing, reading about and coming to terms with appropriate methodology, learning theories and pedagogy in preparation for their first practicum. They are also introduced to more general theories related to the purpose of education, educational law, developmental theory and critical issues around the culture and politics of schooling. Sometimes there is space for a more historical overview of schooling and teachers’ work but often in a very full program, this engagement is rushed and lacks depth. Frequently preservice teachers, especially those returning to study after many years, are unwilling to really engage. As the literature reports (Day, Fernandez, Hauge, & Moller, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 2003a) they think learning to teach is going to be uncomplicated and easy as they have already spent many years in schools and consider that now they are being expected to ‘jump through hoops’.

Generally the first practicum week in schools is for observation and induction but the quality of the experience varies so dramatically from placement to placement that there is no guarantee that by the end of the week the preservice teacher will feel adequately prepared to teach their first lesson. This is reported as an extremely frustrating and difficult time and is one of the aspects of the practicum where studies such as this can make a difference. The preservice teacher is generally allocated a teaching load across both their learning areas and two additional classes for observation. This opportunity to observe other teachers is generally considered an extremely important concurrent activity. Following the practicum preservice teachers are frequently afforded the opportunity to ‘de-brief’ while reflecting on their experiences and demonstrating their development towards the course outcomes by presenting a portfolio, critical incident journal or more recently an e-journal.

Subsequent practica are managed in a similar way with an undertaking that preservice teachers are ideally placed into quite different school environments each time. Generally the number of classes taught and the spread throughout the school is progressively increased and there continues to be classes allocated for observation. In our course preservice teachers are encouraged to negotiate their own pattern depending on their confidence, ability and sense of self as a teacher, aiming to blend seamlessly into the current program or unit of work. The success of this strategy varies and again depends on the preservice teacher, the school, the program of work and the school based mentors. Following all practica there are programmed ‘culminating activities’ to present opportunities for debriefing. By providing the opportunity for self directed and negotiated tasks related to reflection and evaluation of the practicum, preservice teachers are encouraged to share their learning experiences. For some preservice teachers this is a poorly rated aspect of the course while others enjoy the opportunity to share
their knowledge and work collaboratively. Segall’s (2002) study reports a similar range of views voiced by preservice teachers towards the end of their course and Campbell & Kane (1998: 81), in a study focusing on primary schools in the United Kingdom, tell some interesting stories about what they called ‘the Moan Session’ at the end of the final practicum. Like many others working in teacher education, I am aware of the complexity of the practicum evaluation process and the contradictions that are ever apparent when attitudes, behaviours and ways of expressing understanding are the focus of the task. A better understanding of practicum experiences and clearly articulated practicum outcomes statements are necessary to orientate and make explicit this practicum learning process.

Currently the pressure for more time on practicum and a greater influence of school personnel in teacher education courses is being supported by government policy, fanned by a belief that practicum experiences are consistent, worthwhile and unproblematic. Unfortunately this does not always appear to be the case. Instead there seems to be a lack of clarity in desired outcomes coupled with concerns that the quality of mentoring, guidance and support varies considerably. While teachers are already drowning in the intensity and demands of their work there is no evidence that they are either willing or qualified to accept more responsibility for the preparation of teachers. Nor is there evidence in the literature that longer practical or induction/apprenticeship schemes result in quality teachers who understand and can reflect on their practice in ways that benefit student learning.

**Placement for the practicum**

The practicum placement process itself is a complex and difficult procedure. Firstly preservice teachers should not be placed in schools where they might be compromised through association with family or friends and they should be protected from the potential difficulties where their own children are members of the school community. Every effort should be made to provide an opportunity for continuous development and success in the classroom, but the actual dynamic of the placement can seldom be foreseen.

Within the schools the coordinators of practicum (usually the principal, assistant principal or senior teacher allocated the responsibility) react in quite different ways when contacted by the placement officer from the university. Some merely announce that the request has arrived and wait for teachers to offer to work with a preservice teacher. Others actually seek out particular teachers or a commitment for specific faculties. This process of identifying teachers can be long and arduous, particularly in large schools where roles and staff are continually changing. There is no structure in most schools that determines who should be responsible for the mentoring role, so it usually falls back to those who volunteer. There has
been limited research identifying why teachers offer to mentor preservice teachers. They appear to do so for a range of reasons, some more honourable than others.

Reimbursement for mentor teachers is also an emotive and vexed issue. There is certainly significant federal funding available, though the benefactors of this funding are quite unclear despite considerable research and many pointed questions (refer House of Representatives Steering Committee on Education and Vocational Training, Wed. 6 July, 2005). The distribution of funds to teachers or schools, and the subsequent taxation consequences that result in teachers feeling they have not been rewarded sufficiently for their efforts, works against the development of positive and productive relationships between the schools and the university.

It is also important here to refocus on the positioning of the preservice teacher so we can begin to understand the context of their practicum. They are placed in schools primarily because teachers in the schools, for indefinable reasons, have volunteered to mentor in particular learning areas. The teacher educators have agreed that there is no obvious impediment to the preservice teacher meeting with success in this placement and there are no immediate problems identified by the preservice teacher. Unfortunately with no clearly defined theory of the practicum this situation only results in more questions. Is this satisfaction of practical considerations a reasonable method of placing these novice teachers? Should there be more information made available to match preservice teacher and mentor? Are preservice teachers sufficiently prepared for the practicum? What expectations do they take with them into the practicum? Are the mentor teachers sufficiently prepared to support and guide preservice teacher learning during the practicum? What additional support can they be given by the schools or the university? Can we reach into the practicum experience of preservice teachers, students, mentors and university educators and illuminate what is really happening here? And finally, does the practicum deliver the quality learning it promises?

**The research**

The first steps in the process involved gaining ethical clearance from the University Human Ethics Committee and permission to conduct a pilot study in schools from the Northern Territory Government Department of Employment, Research and Training. The first ‘actors from the field’ invited to participate in the study were the preservice teachers enrolled in the practicum units. This was done by letter explaining what would be involved (see appendix 1). There was no shortage of offers to participate so immediately the practicum placements were finalised the support of school principals was sought (appendix 2), then a meeting was set up with the appointed mentors (class teachers) in the schools. Details of the project were
explained and cover letters presented (appendix 3). If the mentors agreed to involvement and completed their consent (appendix 4) then the project was introduced to the class group. The method of doing this was originally to be based on the recommendation of the class teacher who has the most knowledge of the class. The students were given a brief explanation of the project and were offered an envelope that had several documents; a cover letter to the student (appendix 5) a letter of explanation for parents (appendix 6), a parental/caregiver permission form (appendix 7) and a plain language statement (appendix 8). They were asked to return the consent form as soon as possible so they could be involved in the project from the start.

Clearance from the ethics committee was subject to my guarantee that no individual would be identified in the final report. The research outcome of co-constructed stories was designed to ensure that information provided by participants would be anonymous. All names and locations in the final stories were to be pseudonyms. The ‘sense of the practicum classroom’ that would be written into existence as a result of the co-constructed story would be much more valuable than specific context or identity. Individual annotated narrative sheets were identified only by the colour, each site being recorded on different coloured paper. Though the nature of responses frequently identified a student from a teacher it was only important to this study to get a sense of the perspective of the different participant groups.

It was made clear in all communication with participants that they were free to withdraw consent at any time and would be given the opportunity to remove any information they had provided towards the co-constructed story, though the co-authoring nature of the development of the narrative ensured anonymity of the students in the final documents. The withdrawal of any participant (other than the preservice teacher from the classroom) would not necessitate cancelling the research site. If a school student withdrew and the group was still substantial and balanced the project could continue. If a mentor withdrew from direct involvement but was happy for the process to continue then it would affect the results in interesting ways, but the research could never the less continue. If a preservice teacher withdrew from commenting on the story but was happy for the process to continue then it would again affect the results in interesting ways, but the study would still be able to continue. As it turned out no one actually withdrew from the research but there were a number of situations not anticipated that affected the frequency of observations and efficacy of some sites. This will be discussed more fully in the following chapters.

The daily opportunities to annotate the story were afforded by the structure of the timetable in the schools. Most schools divide the day into six lines and the students participate in six learning areas. That equates to one lesson each day within each learning area. Some learning areas benefit from a ‘double lesson’ and where that was timetabled there was one day a week
when I did not meet with the students, as there was no lesson scheduled because of the double lesson timetabled on another day. One school, however, offered only two double lessons a week but this did not affect the process greatly. These were slightly longer than the average lesson. The focus meetings held after most of the lessons ensured continuous updating of the story by the ‘co-authors’.

The intrusion into the actual practicum classroom was little more than during normal practicum observations by the university liaison lecturer. The teacher educator usually observes two or three lessons during the practicum, sometimes sitting up the back, sometimes moving around the room, laboratory, gymnasium or workshop. For the purpose of the pilot study, I tried to attend every lesson. Focus meetings were scheduled only when lessons adjoined a recess, lunch break or the end of the day, mindful of the need to avoid any disruption to other classes. This was the biggest concern of principals when access to their school was sought – the only three enquiries I received were related to disruption to lesson attendance.

Before conducting the pilot I suspected that sometimes the developing story would need to be read aloud to ensure all students had access and that sometimes students’ ideas, views and annotations would need to be written for them. As it turned out the focus meetings at all schools were quiet affairs where the students, teachers and preservice teachers read and annotated the story with the occasional clarifying question, sometimes sharing with each other but generally focused and efficient. Each evening I wove or braided these annotations and other comments into the story, ready for the next focus group.

The practicum was seven weeks long and it was originally intended to observe the classroom for the duration. However it became obvious that when the participants felt the story represented their perspective adequately, they just stopped commenting or making changes and as observer and co-author I found it more and more difficult to provide new views of their classroom culture, interactions, pedagogy or learning to write about. It was also clear that it was not only the daily incidents and experiences in the classroom that made meaning for the story of the practicum, but the lifeworlds behind the story offered rich and varied perspectives. I had a similar revelation during self-study research. The meticulously crafted ‘rememberings’ of the biography ceased to be as important as the deconstructions of the social and political meanings of school life and culture (Rorrison, 2001).

The pilot involved five preservice classrooms in four different schools with between fifteen and twenty-eight students in the classes. I sat in the classroom in much the same manner as I would if I was observing a preservice teacher but made it clear to the preservice teacher and mentor teacher that I was only wearing an observer hat and I would not be guiding or
supporting in the usual manner. Some of the preservice teachers admitted that I made them nervous at first but they soon forgot that I was there.

The selection of the sites was completely random. After collecting the timetables of all eighteen volunteer preservice teachers I worked out a combination that would allow me the greatest possible number of sites with the greatest number of visits to each. I then distributed letters to the principals. When permission was gained from the principal, I sought permission from the mentor teacher. When approval was received I proceeded to ask for student volunteers and distributed letters to their parents (for parental consent for students under the age of 18).

I attended almost every lesson for three to six weeks at the selected sites, and made field notes focussing on the ‘learning’ that was happening in the classroom. I then wrote about that learning in each classroom, from my perspective. From the second visit onwards I presented a developing and unedited ‘story’ of the learning to the focus group after the lesson, so they could comment, annotate, write their perspective or change the story. The focus groups consisted of four or five classroom students, the mentor teacher and the preservice teacher. My story was written in the left hand column of the page with space for them to write their story, variations, perspectives or comments in the right hand column. Again the colour coding was an advantage. Even now eighteen months later I associate a particular site with a particular colour. At the time, with five sites being observed, it was important that I did not confuse them. The final stories were co-constructed over ten to twenty-two visits to the classrooms and all participants were given the opportunity to comment on the final story by mail one week after the final visit.

It was heartening that there was no shortage of volunteer preserve teachers (eighteen volunteers) willing to take part in the pilot research project. Similarly, once ethical clearance and Department of Education approval was achieved, the principals of the local schools (both Department of Education and Independent) demonstrated no hesitation in approving research in their schools. In subsequent interactions with several principals, unsolicited offers of continuing research in their schools have been made, indicating the support for this innovative project.

The selection of research settings depended on what was meaningful in terms of variety, as well as manageable in terms of being physically present every day in each of the classrooms. The plan to conduct daily focus sessions restricted selection to sites where the majority of preservice teacher lessons adjoined recess, lunch or after school breaks. My selection of settings also took into account the year level of the class. I sought a range of age groups for the pilot so that as many problems and complications as possible could be highlighted. I
deliberately did not select the sites in relation to personalities or dispositions of either the preservice teacher or the mentor teacher. The logistics of visiting four or five classes a day dictated which combinations were possible and gave me little opportunity to be selective.

When approached four of the five mentors were immediately encouraging and a fifth was somewhat evasive. This mentor eventually gave approval. Classroom student volunteers were also forthcoming, with over eighty percent of students in each classroom taking a consent letter for their parents. I asked the mentor teacher and preservice teacher to recommend the best way to introduce the project to the students, as they knew the setting and the students well. Two suggested I do it, another did it herself without me present and a third did it while I was present to answer any questions. Coincidentally each of these sites returned only four permission letters. I did not follow up the reasons why consent forms were not returned, concentrating instead on trying to keep a profile as close as possible to the ‘usual’ liaison lecturer/teacher educator role, so as not to affect the classroom dynamic. The fifth site, due to a delay in starting date, was to be introduced by the classroom teacher. Unfortunately this was not done, the explanation was extremely rushed and lacked detail and clarity. Surprisingly there were again four responses. Fortunately the numbers increased in each site as the research progressed. Often friends would stay behind for the focus session and then ask to get involved, usually taking yet another consent package for their parents or caregivers.

Almost immediately the difficulties of conducting research in schools became apparent. One site was cancelled when I needed to intervene due to inappropriate class allocation to the preservice teacher. A second site continued but only after the class group was changed due to politicking within the school. A third site progressed well for four weeks, and then due to illness of the preservice teacher we needed to abandon that site too. The fourth site continued to progress unhindered and I collected data for six weeks. The fifth alternative site, though limited to only a few weeks, developed an interesting and rich story. At the conclusion of the practicum I had four stories that had been co-authored through concurrent focus sessions and one story, written by me from only one visit to the classroom (but many discussions with staff and the preservice teacher).

The problems encountered were symptomatic of the reasons why I had chosen to research in the practicum classroom, but were never the less a surprise. Was I going to find similar complications in most preservice classrooms or was this merely coincidental? Was the uneasiness I had felt about the number of reports of unsatisfactory practicum experiences that had alerted me to the need to research the area, merely the tip of the iceberg?
I have been involved with schools since the late 1950s. Firstly, of course, as a student both overseas and in Australia, then as a teacher in a wide range of schools, roles and responsibilities – teaching in both independent and state schools in two states of Australia. I have also been involved as a parent in two Australian states and a teacher educator in three tertiary institutions in two Australian states. However, nothing prepared me for the insights I was afforded by the opportunity to be a well informed ‘insider’ yet in terms of the classroom and relationship dynamic I was very much the ‘outsider’ looking in. My position as teacher educator also compromised my role as observer and storywriter because my foremost responsibility was to ensure a successful outcome for the preservice teacher. As already mentioned Creswell (2000) warned of the dangers of being a participant in one’s own study and Tickle (2001) and McNamee (2001) discuss the challenge of producing new knowledge and protecting the ‘object’ of inquiry. McWilliam (2004: 113) in her paper aptly named ‘W(h)ither Practitioner Research’ and Groundwater-Smith & Mockler (2005) also warn of the need to carefully consider the role of ethics and morality when engaging in practitioner research while Bruner (1986) suggests that narrative ways of knowing cannot seek ‘truth’ but instead a ring of truth or a ‘truly conceivable’ experience. I found the voice of young people often contained too much ‘truth’ and resulted in the need for much of the information I collected being unable to be ‘scripted’ into the stories.

The four co-constructed stories of the practicum from the pilot study have not been included here but have instead been theorised in chapter 4 where a number of new understandings are highlighted. The story below is a fifth story, the story that was not co-constructed or checked every day by the participants, as the preservice teacher was withdrawn from the classroom after the first lesson that I observed. It is this story from the pilot that alerted me to a solution for my ethical dilemmas of disclosure that had prevented the richness of the data being reflected in the co-constructed stories. Rollo’s story is based on actual experiences but has been fictionalised by the use of pseudonyms. It was checked by the preservice teacher involved, who considered it fair and accurate.

**Rollo’s story Year 8 Lakeside Secondary**

Rollo was a student who had gone direct to university from school, completed his undergraduate degree and applied immediately for entrance to a Graduate Diploma in Secondary Education. His undergraduate degree was fairly general with most of his units falling into the learning area of Society and Environment (SOSE). There were a few history units, some sociology, a smattering of business and economics units, some cultural studies, information technology and several units in feminist/liberal studies. There was no real
pattern, passion or scholarship demonstrated in his pathway or his results, yet he fulfilled the criteria for selection into teacher education.

Rollo had a learning difficulty that he named as dyslexia, though no documentation was provided to support his claim, nor was he willing to disclose it or discuss it until it became obvious that he was unable to work with some of the ‘higher level concepts’ expected in various assignment tasks. He also found it hard to manage the high workload of a fast tracked course. Although identified early in the year as someone who would need a great deal of support, the course committee felt that Rollo would develop sufficiently during the year if he continued to engage with the course work and ideology and collaborated with his peers, lecturers and mentors to extend his learning.

Rollo’s first practicum experience was viewed by his mentor teacher and himself as ‘successful’, though the teacher educator who observed several of his lessons was not convinced that Rollo was reflecting on his lessons in a manner that was beneficial in terms of his overall understanding of his role in student learning. He was unable to demonstrate beyond a fundamental level of understanding how he could use the reflections and feedback from lessons to inform future lessons. He appeared to be coping his mentors teaching style and presenting his mentor’s lessons, with little processing of either the pedagogy or the outcomes.

Although Rollo carefully following the directions he had received from his mentor teacher, and slavishly following the lesson plans, notes and script presented to him, he was unable to demonstrate a range of teaching styles or classroom strategies. His mentor argued that the year 11, Stage 1 students could not afford to lose content learning time if they were going to achieve a good grade for the course. This meant that lessons and units were carefully structured to complete the set curriculum and provide students with the information they needed to meet the outcomes at the end of the semester. As many of the students who chose to attend this school and this class did so with the aim of gaining the necessary grades for their future vocation or study, Rollo had no choice but to teach using traditional transmissive strategies and the students’ self motivation was relied upon to ensure engagement.

Rollo left this practicum with a view about teaching quite contrary to the socially critical constructivist and transformative views presented in both his teacher education course and the documents that underpin the mandated secondary curriculum. He became surly in tutorials and antagonistic when presented with tasks designed to find evidence of how he had used critical reflection to develop his pedagogy and improve his practice. He was unable to present assignments that demonstrated how he sourced resources to extend his knowledge base or related to innovative or meaningful ways to help students construct understanding
about their place in the world. He voiced the opinion frequently that he knew how to teach, he had a successful practicum, and he believed that learning in the real world was about ‘transmission’ of knowledge not ‘construction’ of knowledge. Despite the need to resubmit several assignments, Rollo was able to complete the first semester due to the high weighting of the practicum, a number of group assignments where he benefited from the group assessment outcome and considerable support from his lecturers and peers.

When asked to make recommendations concerning a placement for the second practicum Rollo was unable to suggest a location that would help him develop in the areas that he had identified as needing more development. Clearly he had not engaged with the course outcomes and concepts of learning how to teach and why teach. Rollo was only able to focus on what to teach (the content). Because he did not engage with the process of critical reflection during his first practicum and thus tease out the enlightening and worrisome experiences, Rollo was unable to communicate the guidance or support he needed to develop his pedagogy. He neither applied for a ‘remote’ placement bursary to work in Indigenous Community Schools, nor indicated a school, faculty or teacher that might help progress his knowledge, skills and understandings about teaching and learning.

Consequently Rollo was one of the last to be placed for his final practicum and though the school was very happy to accommodate him, he felt uncomfortable from the start when he realised that he would not have the ‘mothering’ he had experienced during his previous practicum. This time Rollo was mentored by a young and inexperienced teacher who had been allocated classes that were ‘level three’, which meant that no student in the class was identified as achieving at the ‘benchmarked’ level for the learning area. There were a range of reasons for this – behavioural, physical, cognitive, social and cultural disadvantage or difficulties. Frequently poorly developed English literacy skills compounded student access to the curriculum in these classes. The school had provided significant support for the young teacher. There was up to five assistant teachers in the classroom at various times; Indigenous support workers, behavioural support teachers and support for students with disabilities, were all present.

As the students entered the classroom on the day of my first observation there was immediately a range of issues the preservice teacher needed to deal with. One young man was reluctant to be separated from his rugby ball and another had just returned from suspension and wanted everyone to know that he was back. Other class members could not decide where to sit and did not bring paper or pencil to class. Generally class members were more than happy to spectate the increasing cacophony of preservice teacher requests, rugby ball wrestles, demanding questions and complaints, attention seeking tirades, taunts of both other students and the preservice teacher (the ‘pimply faced bastard’), and finally one particularly
noisy student virtually running around the classroom and unable to settle into a seat anywhere (we were advised later that he was bi-polar and was responsible for his medication that he has chosen not to take on this occasion).

While all this was going on four of the support teachers had entered the classroom, sat at the back, folded their arms (or presented similar body language) and observed the fray and the ever-increasing frustration of the preservice teacher who was unable to establish order in the room. That made seven adults in the room (I found out that there is usually another but he was absent that day), but only one attempting to engage the students.

On the previous advice of his mentor the preservice teacher attempted to focus the students and begin his lesson by shouting at the class and issuing a diatribe of threats and provocation; none of which had any affect on the chaos. He had organised a fun activity to introduce the lesson on adjectives, but predictably, when he finally got underway, it lasted less than a minute with several students refusing to play. This led to more threats, and then the preservice teacher resorted to writing notes on the whiteboard for the students to copy. The lack of paper and pens then provided more excuses for noise and moving around the classroom trying to locate writing materials.

While all this was happening, three of the four support teachers and the mentor teacher remaining disengaged, while a fourth, an undergraduate student from one of my classes at the university, tried unsuccessfully to establish dialogue with the student he was employed to support. Copying from the whiteboard eventually settled the noisy students but the quiet ‘spectators’ up the back struggled with the task. Many just sat and looked at the desk trying not to bring attention to the fact they had no pens or paper.

Somehow we got to the end of the lesson and Rollo and I met with the mentor teacher who agreed that Rollo was not having a successful practicum and that the students had such a wide range of challenging disabilities that Rollo could not be expected to possess the knowledge to provide worthwhile classroom experiences. She admitted that it was unfair to expect a preservice teacher to work with this class and that she had failed to explain to Rollo how to involve the support teachers that were vital to the learning dynamic in the room. Nor had she guided and supported Rollo sufficiently concerning developing strategies and agreed procedures for teaching in this challenging classroom. The outcome was a meeting with the preservice teacher coordinator when it was agreed to re-negotiate the practicum so that Rollo would have more chance of success, support and guidance.

Rollo completed his practicum teaching one of the ‘advanced’ level classes, supported by a mentor who remained involved in the teaching dynamic and was prepared to accommodate Rollo’s learning needs. Although I continued to visit I did not attempt to re-establish the site
as part of my research in terms of co-authoring a story checked daily in focus groups. Rollo continued to struggle to provide a range of pedagogies, relying again on the presentation of information, the copying of notes off the whiteboard, a few clarifying questions, individual research projects and visits to the library or computer room that often ended in chaos. There were other tensions too. The original mentor teacher never really came to terms with my intervention. After all, she had offered to have a preservice teacher where others had been too busy or just not interested, and she wondered if she would still receive her payment for the time that she had spent with Rollo.

Rollo continued to feel he had been treated unjustly and when his final report concluded that he was not yet at the necessary level, he blamed the school and lack of support from the university. He was awarded a supplementary practicum and this time his mentor was able to report that he had met the practicum outcomes. Further discussions with Rollo uncovered that he now realised that his first practicum experience with a mentor who directed and prescribed his every move had not allowed him to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and understandings. He stopped blaming everyone but himself and in his culminating assessment tasks he demonstrated that through critically reflecting on the entire experience, he was able to relate to the constructivist and transformative outcomes of the course. Rollo decided not to seek employment as a teacher but to continue studying in other areas related to education while he worked out where his ‘niche’ in education might be.

**Story analysis**

It is clear that stories such as these are rich, thick and resonating. There are many issues, ideas, perspectives and inconsistencies that could be deconstructed. However, as a true story, it cannot be shared with teachers, preservice teachers or teacher educators for fear of identifying either the school or the participants, despite the fictional names. Nor can it be presented as research as it has not been checked sufficiently by the other players in the setting. Is it an authentic and accurate representation of the situation? Is it merely one person’s perception and interpretation? As it stands it has little value as a resource for teacher education, but did instigate the further development of the research design to focus on ‘fictional composite stories’ that would not be identifiable, and thus could remain ethical in terms of research, and transformative in terms of future application.

**Stories co-constructed during the pilot**

As already mentioned, at the end of the practicum I had four co-constructed stories, one from each site. They had been checked and changed many times by the participants and the final documents were sent to participants with return addressed envelopes to be checked again.
after the practicum was completed. These were returned with minimal changes. However these stories failed to have the richness and complexity of ‘Rollo’s story’. They were shallow, bland and invested too strongly with my ‘authoritative’ voice. Although authentic they failed to have the appeal, variety or depth to resonate with the educational community at large and many of the issues that could illuminate the learning experiences of the practicum had been removed to protect the respondents.

The data within the stories, however, contained a richness of lived experiences in the practicum classroom, including continuous written feedback and comment from school students, mentors and preservice teachers. It was still important to analyse and interpret this data to begin to answer the research questions and support the modified research design by informing the subsequent observations and stories. As one of the students wrote ‘teacher/adult meaning can be different from student meaning and if students are going to understand then the meaning has to be translated into their world and their words’ (May, 2004).

**Summary**

As interpretative field notes collected from many hours of observation, the stories provide trustworthy, powerful and authentic evidence for the sorts of things teachers, preservice teachers, teacher educators and students have been saying for some time. Despite the sanitised nature of the final product, there were still a number of themes to work with. It is important to keep in mind that the stories had been given approval by all groups involved as accurate interpretations of classroom interactions, culture, pedagogy and learning. Much of the information in the field notes and annotations by the participants were not included in the stories, yet provided evidence of classroom ecology that would inform future research.

Research with a critical turn does not pre-empt, expect or pre-plan the underlying themes that are tapped by the emergent conversation. The meaning making from such research remains open to the operatic of the voice of the story. This study is not looking for ‘solutions to problems’ but to offer new information to ‘worry’ so we might better understand the way things are. It is only when we have trustworthy evidence about the way things are, that we can begin to change the way things are. What is uncovered by this pilot research was neither intended nor unintended, expected or unexpected. It does, however, begin to answer some of the research questions and does throw light on the question of whether it is possible to reach into the practicum experiences of the participants. In terms of the orienting questions about the quality of learning experiences, continuing the conversations begun at university, whether preservice teachers are given the space to develop their critical educational theories and how much guidance and support preservice teachers receive from their schools and their
mentors, there are authentic, robust and vibrant new understanding of the practicum classroom presented.
Chapter 4 Collecting the Hoops

What the pilot uncovered

In this chapter I will analyse and interpret what was uncovered by the pilot study. This illumination of the practicum classroom will then inform the revised research design (chapter 5) and the new stories of the practicum (chapter 6).

Reading the practicum as text

The narratives co-constructed by the preservice teachers, mentors, students in the classroom and myself as teacher educator/researcher provide complex, rich and accurate field notes. When these are read against the observation notes and the extant literature, fresh ideas about the practicum classroom are uncovered. They also expose some unsettling trends and practices that challenge some of the taken for granted understandings about the learning of both the preservice teachers and the school student in the classroom. By listening reflexively to what the students, mentors and preservice teachers are telling us this pilot study reveals stories not previously told and positionings not previously considered.

Without a clearly defined ‘theory of practicum learning’ teacher education has relied for too long on a structure and framework that supports a past view of schooling, a time of ‘supervisors’, ‘student-teachers’, ‘teacher training’ and ‘practice teaching’, a time not cognisant of current understandings of the social, political and cultural lifeworlds of schools. The recent intensification of teachers’ work and the sense of deskilling that have resulted from a progressively politicised and ‘managed’ profession have made issues around teachers’ work and teacher knowledge even more difficult. The tensions related to ownership and positioning in the practicum lie amidst these complex interactions between the practitioners in the schools and the forces within the learning community that demand an array of (sometimes) contradictory outcomes.

What are the classroom students telling us?

The revelations that are most illuminating when reading across the co-constructed stories, are those related to student perspectives. It became clear that many of the interactions in the classroom were not about young people and their learning but about imposing teacher views, from their sense of the world, onto young people. Teachers claim the authority over what students should do, where they should be, what they should wear, where they should sit, when they should stand, and according to them ‘what they should say’. What became obvious from this opportunity to dispassionately observe classrooms for a sustained period
was the realization that young people are continually contesting the mores imposed upon them.

**For students the classroom activities are ‘a moment in time’ not necessarily connected with the rest of their lives**

When discussing the difficulties of engaging with young people as researchers, Cook-Sather (2001) comments that ‘their lives move on and they lose interest’. One student in our stories comments, ‘I had developed a better understanding but didn’t feel the need to report it to the rest of the class as I was impatient to move on’. There were many instances reported that demonstrated enjoyment of the moment but little connection with the learning that had been planned. Students appear to be continuously looking for distractions to move the moment on; in fact they appear to have an infinite appetite for distractions. Serious engagement was frequently hindered by interruptions and this seemed to be expected by the young people. In the upper year levels there were less interruptions but no less searching for distractions to move the moment on.

**Crisis of engagement, mis-communication at a cultural level and lack of freedom**

A second theme is the sense of ‘different’ understandings. Engaging and productive activities, relevant content, student centred lessons, meeting the varied learning needs of students and making meaningful connections are generally accepted as indicators of progressive and constructivist pedagogy (and that is certainly what we teach and hopefully model at the university). What becomes clear through this study is that no matter how well a lesson adheres to all of these principles it will not resonate with the students if the teacher speaks in ‘foreign tongues’. Students frequently wrote that they did not understand what teachers were saying, that teachers ‘saw things differently’ and that ‘teacher meaning’ was often different from ‘student meaning’. Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst (2000) and Smyth and Hattam (2004) introduce the concept of mis-communication at a cultural level in their study of students who had ‘dropped out, drifted off or been excluded’ from formal schooling.

…schools are important sites of youth socio-cultural identity, and what we are seeing…is an instance of “interactive trouble” – young people are being prevented from fully participating in the school curriculum because of a failure to understand the cues of the teacher, whilst teachers are seemingly unable to make sense of student talk. It is a classic case of mis-communication at the cultural level of the relationship between the lifeworlds of the students and teachers. (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson, & Wurst, 2004: 169)
It is not that students and teachers are not interacting, but their perception of the communication outcome is quite different because they have constructed their positioning quite differently. A teacher may perceive their remarks as relevant and supportive, providing the type of guidance they believe a student needs at a particular time, while a student can hear their comment as negative, disempowering or belittling. There were many instances during my observations of students failing to understand the language, intent or ‘cues’ of the teacher. There are also many examples where the teacher fails to relate to the messages from the students.

Student engagement is the topic of much discussion in the policy literature and media at present and the political view is that teachers have the biggest effect on student success (and by extrapolation must have the biggest influence on student failure) (Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs Higher Education Division, 2000; Ramsey, 2000; Prime Minister’s Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, 2001; Rowe & Rowe, 2002). What comes through very strongly in this study is that student engagement is less a result of the particular teacher or pedagogy and more about how students are constructed as learners in the classroom. Young people have thought through the problem differently from their teachers; they have developed their own ways of surviving in a student unfriendly environment and in a system of schooling that no longer meets the needs of the society it serves. The choices students made in the classroom and the comments they made and failed to make in the story, suggest that the gap in the life worlds of teachers and students is indeed a chasm. The continuous interventions into their lives and decisions being made for them about what is meaningful or worthwhile, is denying students the freedom to make connections in their own way and within cultural constructs that they understand. It is a moral, educational and a political disgrace that is deliberately hidden from public view by a neo-conservative and managerial push bent on discrediting schools and teachers and blaming them for the inadequacies (that are somewhat contrived) of their students. It becomes very clear from sustained observation that it is the systemic and structural restrictions in schools that work against productive and constructivist pedagogies. We need to stop blaming the teacher and teacher education.

Issues previously discussed in the literature as peer pressure or image issues, on deeper and longer observation, appear to be more related to cultural resistance and classroom ecology. Patterns of who mucks up, who answers questions, who appears disengaged and who demands the teacher’s attention seem to be set up in every classroom. Though the pattern can be quite fluid and can change from day to day, the students appear to be protecting each other from the stresses of teacher and schooling demands. When there is no alternative there appears to be an agreement to play the school’s game, the coercive demands of some
teachers (or schools) providing for a culture of mute compliance. Generally, however, the patterns change very little from class to class, or lesson to lesson. The young people in classrooms orchestrate the lesson to their own tune, especially in the preservice teacher classroom.

The preservice classroom (and equally the ‘relief’ teacher classroom) offers students an opportunity to ‘muck up’ as the students put it. With no history of coercion and little fear of retribution, many students see these lessons as times to test the boundaries. They seem to conceive of this opportunity as a relief from the boring patterns of the classroom and enjoy the opportunity to test the water and upset the truce or precarious dynamic of the classroom. The novice teacher who was the subject of research by Smagorinsky, Lakly and Star Johnson (2002) reported a similar observation. She believed it was all part of the game. It is how the game is played by all participants that seems to be of most interest to the students. This is not generally understood by mentor teachers, preservice teachers and teacher educators, and results in a tension created from the change in classroom dynamics when the preservice teacher takes on the role of classroom teacher. A new teacher will always result in a changed classroom synergy, but we have not yet developed a full understanding of how best to manage this to ensure the development of the preservice teacher during the practicum. Teaching ‘someone else’s class’ is imbued with a multitude of questions, inequalities and tensions and when we add this to the angst of the classroom teacher who can have a myriad of issues related to their sense of ownership of the learning culture, we have a Pandora’s box of problems not previously addressed. These issues impinge dramatically on the quality of the practicum experience and need to be interrogated more fully.

Identity of the classroom student in our schools

Smyth and Hattam (2001) propose that there is a ‘crisis of identity’, suggesting that the connections that help develop identity are not achievable for a large number of students, especially those who don’t want to play the game anymore. Although Smyth’s study looks at young people who had dropped out of school or were on the brink of dropping out, the same symptoms of a cultural divide between students, teachers and others who claim the authority to speak on behalf of young people are replicated in the classrooms of this research. This study reveals that the crisis of identity is not ‘lack of’ identity or ‘poor’ identity, merely a different sense of identity. This sense of self is not constructed from a socialised and compromised ‘adult’ view but one that still has a sense of the possibility of ‘who am I?’ I believe this is generally misunderstood. If young people are continually told they cannot be who they want to be, or who they think they are, but need to comply with adult and teacher
views of who they should be, then it is no wonder we have conflicts and malaise in our classrooms.

Generally the students present in the classrooms reported that they were comfortable with the role or ‘identity’ they had etched out for themselves. It made some sense to them in terms of their own understanding of their place in that classroom or in the school. This is not to say that it might not change in the next class. One student in the Shultz and Cook-Sather (2001) study admitted, ‘High school, for me, was all about multiple personalities. I knew how to play the social games of high school’ (Strucker, Moise, Magee, Kreider, 2001: 153). Students are perspicacious and very much aware of what is going on in the classroom, even when they appear to be disengaged. Their attitude, actions and levels of engagement make sense to them and are dependent on how they are positioned or constructing themselves at that point in time. They too have full and complex lives that influence their day-to-day reactions.

The point I am trying to make is that we have misrepresented our students and their malaise. They are actually quite savvy and pay attention to a great deal more than we give them credit for. Reisinger and Cook-Sather in ‘Final Thoughts’ for the chapter co-authored by Dunderdale, Tourscher, Yoo, Reisinger and Cook-Sather (2001) came to a similar conclusion.

They remind us that everything we say and do as teachers – tone of voice, gestures, side comments, references, kinds of questions and responses to student work, unintentional comparisons—sends an array of messages to students that they absorb perhaps even in greater quantities and with greater consequences than the content to which they are exposed. (Dunderdale, Tourscher, Yoo, Reisinger & Cook-Sather, 2001: 72)

**Young people do not want to be categorized or stereotyped**

When commenting on or amending the text of the stories, students were reluctant to name or blame other students using the dominant views or discourse of schooling. Occasionally there would be a perspective added by teachers about students being ‘lazy’, ‘less able’ or ‘not engaged’ and there was always a response by student authors during the next focus group contesting the construction. This also came out strongly in a study by Cook-Sather (2001) that used text co-constructed by a preservice teacher and school student through email communication. Students ‘do not want to be categorized, compared to and judged against one another, treated differently or discriminated against’ (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001: 4). Research that privileges the views of young people seems to paint a picture of young people who are aware of the differences within the group but are more accepting of these as artefacts of background and differences in engagement with the norms of schooling. They are unlikely to name or blame, they prefer to construct it ‘as just the way it is’ and they do not want to be either rewarded or penalised for ‘difference’. Examples in the stories we co-
authored include students being unwilling to censure the behaviour of others or give reasons for their actions. They are more likely to present excuses or just not respond to comments or questions about student behaviour. They respect each other as individuals who are differently constructed, and might instead suggest ‘that’s just Tom, he’s a fantastic artist you know’. Adults appear to be too quick to pre-judge young people, constructing them from their own perspectives and experience, not cognisant of the experiences of being young in the early twenty-first century.

**Students prefer to do their learning away from the classroom, frequently at home**

As already mentioned there was evidence in every classroom I visited that student sense of self as a learner frequently did not align with their contrary or unfocused visage in the classroom. This was not the first time I had come across students who were continually disruptive or bumptious in class, who then completed all work and met learning outcomes over night, presenting them at school the next day or at least before deadlines, and then proceeded to be disruptive and unfocused once again in class. Many students wrote in these stories that they did not see that the classroom was a good place to concentrate or produce their ‘best’ work. Young people, despite being silenced or seldom consulted about preferred educational contexts, are shouting out both in their action and metaphor for environments that might support their learning. This is also supported by Coulter and Wien’s (2002: 20) reading of neophyte teacher Hannah Arendt’s views of freedom, action and responsibility. She believes learners need space to think as well as peace and a chance to communicate with themselves. People of all ages need space and peace to work at the cognitive level that deep learning demands. This is referred to as ‘flow’ by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), a time when creativity and imagination flourish.

In the co-authored stories the classroom students frequently contested my construction of the classroom as a place where learning was central. The students were continually telling me that despite our attempts to make learning meaningful, purposeful, enjoyable and just (Rorrison, 2004a) we seemed to be missing the point by structuring learning in unfriendly environments using traditional tools. The progressive concepts of schools that are more flexible both in physical structure and timetable, particularly those adhering to middle schooling pedagogies are presented by Dimmock (2000) in his book ‘Designing the Learning Centred School’, and projects like ‘Anytime, Anyplace’ (Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, 2004). Dimmock refers to the classroom as the ‘impenetrable part of school’ (p. 277) and suggests challenging our Western theories and practices of education, while Harpaz (2003) and Harpaz & Lefstein (2000) may be even
closer to the mark with their alternative view of schools and classrooms as ‘communities of thinking’. Here ‘fertile questions, research and concluding performances’ (Harpaz, 2003: 2) take young people in Israel out of the classroom and into the community, providing them with resources and technologies more able to support their learning. These experiences seem to be more in line with the views of students in this study who are looking for a learning environment that gives them peace and space to work, as well as the relevant tools and state of the art technologies for motivation. Often the resources in our schools are outmoded and unreliable and the environment is not conducive to concentration. Schools currently do not appear to be constructed in ways that meet the needs of learners.

Students report that schools can be ‘unfriendly’ environments but there are also students with no home to go to and students with homes they do not wish to go to. As a society we need to question how we can accommodate the learning needs of students if we cannot provide them with environments that are conducive to learning. Internationally acclaimed author, educationalist and feminist Dr. Dale Spender2 and Smyth and Hattam (2004) are beginning to highlight these issues but there is little evidence that the educational community or the policy makers are listening to this. The social reform necessary for the huge changes necessary so that our schools might catch up with the society they serve is a huge undertaking. Turning a critical lens onto schooling is however a start. By doing this we can begin to provide trustworthy evidence based on the perceptions of the participants, to support the call for much needed systemic change.

**Students voice fear of being wrong**

Finally there are still many contradictions and inconsistencies apparent in the classrooms. Despite their astuteness and different sense of identity, there were many examples in the stories of students refusing to engage in interactions with their teachers for fear of being wrong. The concepts of right and wrong have been learned well and it became apparent in this pilot research study that students often did not feel safe enough in the secondary classrooms to express themselves without fear. Students also voiced the view that teachers usually had an answer in mind and unless they could read the teacher’s mind they were unlikely to provide the right answer, inferring that their view would not be listened to. This is why I wrote in one of the stories

The class was quiet…where were their thoughts?
‘Guess what I’m thinking’, they silently said.
‘Guess what I’m thinking’, the teacher shattered their calm.

---

2 Dr. Dale Spender AM FRSA BA DipEd MA LittB PhD was interviewed by Peter Thompson, on ABC TV's TALKING HEADS 15/4/2005
‘Lucky we have an excursion on Thursday!’

If young people are going to be productive learners then how teachers construct the learning environment and young people as learners in the classroom, is central.

**What are the preservice teachers telling us?**

I searched carefully for the ‘voice’ of preservice teachers in the stories. Their voice was mainly represented by their silence; by the way they tolerated, acquiesced and accommodated the views of teacher educator, mentors and students with little more than a murmur. They were quick to volunteer to participate in the study, yet their comments and annotations on the co-constructed stories were almost exclusively in agreement. Either my reading of the classroom as teacher educator was incredibly accurate or the preservice teacher lacked the motivation, confidence or understanding to make their perspectives known. It is highly likely that the practicum experience is disempowering for these preservice teachers, it is not quite what they expected and the outcome is their silence. An analysis of the limited comments they made, coupled with the observed changes in their pedagogy after reading the stories did, however, provide a number of emergent themes.

**The role of the practicum in preservice teacher learning**

Segall (2002) suggests that the practicum can have both ‘a huge effect and no effect at all’.

Campbell (2000: 95) claims preservice teachers have only ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, a concept originally coined by Lave and Wenger (1991) suggesting that novice members of a community of practice are marginalised and need to be carefully socialised into the culture by knowledgeable members cognisant of their needs and abilities.

The stories of this pilot study seem to suggest that this type of ‘institutional socialisation’ of the preservice teacher during the practicum may be contrary to their need to develop a sense of ‘being’ as a teacher. This also poses a number of questions about how the practicum can facilitate preservice teachers’ construction of a sense of themselves as teachers.

Preservice teachers made few changes to the story, even when comments in the text were clearly directed to them. They were more inclined to employ criticism rather than critical reflection when discussing their teaching. Although productive and critical pedagogy were employed at times in their teaching and they were offering a range of learning opportunities in the classroom, the preservice teachers appeared not to recognize this themselves. They seemed to be unable to relate to the way students themselves constructed their classroom learning and despite their practicum preparation, readings and discussions at university, give the impression of holding some utopian view of receptive students sitting in rows attentive and enthusiastic. They appear to struggle to accept that the learning outcomes in the
classroom were not immediate and obvious but more long term and subtle. They seemed to judge their success as a teacher from test scores and student output, with little recognition of the influence of the ecology of the classroom. The bell would then ring and I watched them being swept up in the frantic rush to face another (often entirely different) group of students in another part of the school, or face a discussion with their mentor that seemed not to touched on the issues that could settle the lingering doubts that hung over them. These frustrations and struggles are written into the stories that appear in chapter 6 and are subsequently supported by those who read and comment on the stories.

One story reads, ‘there were, however, several teachable moments – moments of deeper, richer, higher levels of understanding. These however were difficult to sustain which may have been related to the resistance of some students’. No comment from the preservice teacher was forthcoming, though the students actually took a more gentle view and wrote that my perception was incorrect, they had engaged with the lesson content and learning opportunities and had worked hard but ‘didn’t make a show of such things’. At a later date I introduced this point again, asking why the students were so resistant – again no comment from the preservice teacher but several excuses from students related to the difficulties of adapting to a new teacher. No support or comment was forthcoming from the mentor teacher on either of these occasions, though he read the narrative and knew that the preservice teacher and the students had also read it. Was it total disinterest or his own resistance that resulted in his silence? Why did the preservice teacher not respond? This is a complex situation, one of many that need to be interrogated if we are to see the practicum as a valuable contribution to preservice education. While teachers or schools remain mute and thus resistant to the developing conversations around the practicum and the ‘practising’ by preservice teachers in their classrooms, the practicum will not deliver the learning experiences that are necessary for the development of critically aware teachers. Instead tensions, frustrations and dissatisfaction will continue to be the reality that undermines preservice teacher education.

**Limited feedback from mentor teacher**

While there is much evidence in the literature that the practicum experience should be carefully guided and supported by the mentor teachers who become the profession’s agent for ensuring that future teachers are inducted into teaching in a manner that will aid their sense of ‘becoming’ as a teacher (Bloomfield, 1997; Campbell & Kane, 1998; Martinez, 1998; Bloomfield, 2000; Campbell, 2000; Martinez, 2002; Roth, 2002; Eyers, 2005), there is little attempt to demonstrate that learning actually occurs. Although it is generally believed that teacher identity is built from the interactions and dialogues with other teachers and
students, as well as a personal philosophy of teaching and learning, there are few processes in operation to support this synergy. Mere presentation of knowledge, literature, policy and guidelines does not ensure learning. Successful and quality teachers really understand what they do and why they do it, and successful mentors of preservice teachers need to understand what they do as teachers as well as be able to communicate this to the preservice teacher. They also need to understand better how they construct the learning of the preservice teacher. Whatever the structure of the school and the culture of the classroom, generative feedback is essential for learning or change.

*Feedback to students by the preservice teachers was also limited*

Preservice teacher feedback to students was also lacking in the learning environments I observed. I commented in one story that it was a long time since students had feedback from the preservice teacher, and the mentor agreed. The students stayed mute—why wouldn’t they? They had not needed to provide evidence of their learning or not learning! The preservice teacher did not react or change her pedagogy. Feedback is intrinsic to learning as the tool through which the learner can check his/her developing understanding and continue to build on it. It is also essential for the teacher so that student learning can be supported, extended or negotiated. Preservice teachers appeared to be unable to get to know their students well enough to decipher what was appropriate and timely feedback. It appears from this study that preservice teachers need a great deal more support from the mentor teacher. Without feeding back either individually, in groups, or to the whole class with written responses or well-managed dialogue, teachers are unable to support student learning or gauge student development to guide further understanding. Instead of remaining in touch with the class and the preservice teacher the mentor teacher frequently sat up the back in almost every classroom I visited, with limited involvement in the lesson or with the students. I will discuss this further under the heading ‘battle of ownership’.

*Processes are assessment driven rather than theory driven*

In all four sites it was obvious that the preservice teacher was aiming to maintain the status quo, follow the directions or suggestions of their mentors and accommodate the restrictions and contradictions of teaching someone else’s class, someone else’s knowledges, in someone else’s way. I found, as did Segall (2002), Smagorinsky, Lakly and Star Johnson (2002), Smagorinsky, Cook and Star Johnson (2003) and Kincheloe (2004), that the preservice teachers were more likely to acquiesce and endure current practices and did not have enough confidence and experience with the non-traditional critical pedagogies introduced at university to be able to challenge the existing classroom processes or roles. These preservice teachers had related to the course learning outcomes and underpinning theories in tutorials
and in assignments but recoiled from jeopardising their assessment outcome or the classroom dynamics by trialling progressive pedagogies in the classroom. Generally their lessons were teacher centred and their (unquestioned) knowledge was transmitted in traditional ways. Formal and summative assessments were invariably used as motivation to complete work (‘better concentrate, we have a test of Friday’), and many of the lessons merely supported the status quo.

Plutarch (circa 100AD) wrote ‘the mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled’ and William Yeats (Nobel prize winner, 1923) added ‘education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire’. More recently Wu (2002) suggested that we should be ‘lighting the fire’ rather than ‘filling the pot’. These ideas had been fully discussed at university, as had concepts of the reflective practitioner, authentic assessment, making connections with the young people in their classes and helping them make the connections with their learning. Constructive and transformative pedagogy including the indicators of student voice, culminating activities, productive pedagogies and fertile questions were clearly ‘presented’ at university but were frequently missing from these practicum classrooms.

In her narrative study ‘The making of a teacher’, Ingram (1998) reports that preservice teachers were much more focused on their own assessment outcome than they were on student learning or ‘becoming’ as a teacher. She also claims that those who were thus focused tended to achieve a higher grade for the practicum; another case of the traditional processes undermining theories of learning. Bloomfield (1997: 14) identifies these tensions around assessment of the preservice teacher as a major concern in teacher education. Despite a collaborative process where teachers and university educators worked together to develop explicit assessment criteria, when it came to assessing the preservice teacher the criteria were variously interpreted according to the mentor teachers personal views and practice. While referring to Wajnryb’s (1995, 1996) work in linguistic analysis Bloomfield discusses the supervision/assessor relationship as ‘fragile’, a ‘clash of goals’ and tempered by ‘politeness’. She concludes that the result is ‘supervisory interactions which are inadequate in terms of clarity, authority and productivity’ and recommends an assessment process that focuses strongly on a developmental perspective (Bloomfield, 1997: 16). Unfortunately Bloomfield’s study does not appear to include the voice of preservice teachers or school students in the development of the assessment criteria.

This pilot study indicates a similar lack of clarity about the assessment process in the minds of the preservice teachers. Although our assessment is both developmental and based on agreed outcomes that reflect the preservice teacher knowledge, skills and understandings at particular stages in their course, and although it is ultimately the responsibility of the preservice teacher to provide evidence of both their critical reflection and development, the
pressures of assessment by others is never far from their minds. The expectation that they are intimately involved in their ‘summative practicum review’ (as we have chosen to name it) through negotiation and the provision of their own criteria and evidence is obviously difficult to establish, the unequal power relationships of assessor and student are so firmly etched into their understanding.

The neophyte teacher in Labaree’s (2000) study highlights initial frustration and anger at needing to capitulate to the traditional academic curriculum and teacher centred pedagogy. She later calls it dancing the ‘acquiescence, accommodation, resistance waltz’ (Labaree, 2000: 211). Poirier (1992) also tells a poignant story from her practicum where she struggled to maintain her composure when faced with the injustices in one particular classroom. Other studies highlight the ‘moan’ session at the end of the practicum, where preservice teachers debrief and share their stories (Campbell, 2000). Smyth (1986, 1991) almost twenty years ago called for a need to adequately understand the social and political relationships that embody the work of teachers and questioned the appraisal and supervision of teachers based on incomplete understanding. The more recent work of Martinez, Hamlin and Rigano (2001: 7) spearheads the move to making ‘student learning the cornerstone of supervisory conversations and observations’. Clearly teacher educators need to focus more reflectively on the reasons why this gap in the intersection of theory and practice is still a chasm and such as this, that listens to the voices that have been previously been silenced, is very important.

The battle of ownership

There were several mentions in the stories of instances where the mentor either ‘takes over’ or ‘reacts to student behaviour or questions’, frequently intuitively. Not once was this viewed negatively by the students, they seemed more cognizant of a seamless interplay or synergy between the two teachers than the teachers did themselves. In one classroom where I observed frequent interjection by the mentor, the preservice teacher herself suggested a ‘team teaching’ relationship as a more workable alternative for the preservice practicum. This is an unexpected result; previous studies had suggested that a successful practicum depended on the ability of the mentor to relinquish control and allow the preservice teacher to experience the reality of the classroom. I presented these findings to a group of mentors while piloting a program of professional learning for mentor teachers. As a result each one of the eight participants decided to use this concept of sharing the classroom as the focus of their action research project that was designed to develop deeper understanding of the mentoring process. I will be able to report on their findings at a later date (Rorrison & Sutton, 2005) but what is clear already is that many mentors greet the idea of sharing the
teaching, team teaching, tag teaching and small group work as a relief from the concerns they feel about relinquishing their class. Working together with the students both teachers would remain in touch with the classroom dynamic and the wise mentor would recognise the strengths of the preservice teacher and facilitate development, support and reflection in other areas. The preservice teacher would benefit from being included within the learning environment and not ‘shut out’, while the classroom teacher would have an opportunity to spend more time with particular students and avoid the state of panic that goes with ‘handing over’ their classes. In this way teachers may become more preservice teacher receptive, rather than the current culture of schools seeing involvement in the mentoring process as yet another demand on the time of the teachers.

**Planning for student learning**

There is significant evidence in the co-constructed stories that the preparation of lessons and units of work that are student centred is often abandoned and replaced with board work, textbook research or questions and worksheets. Is this merely a safer alternative or is this issue related to the inability of the preservice teacher to find or make the time to get to know the students? As previously mentioned, if students are going to learn how to learn, then meaning needs to be translated into ‘their world and their words’. Somehow space needs to be created for preservice teachers to get to know their students better and begin to address how they might engage with them in meaningful ways. Rather than being overwhelmed by the sheer immensity of the task of suddenly becoming the teacher, preservice teachers need time to interact and learn more about their students.

In preparation for the practicum, university-based specialist methodology lecturers introduce preservice teachers to a range of strategies and models to help them prepare their curriculum in ways that are meaningful to them, as well as consistent with the constructivist underpinning of the curriculum frameworks. Although loath to prescribe a particular method of designing lesson plans or units of work, teacher educators do spend considerable time both in core units and methodology units, introducing preservice teachers to a wide range of planning techniques. They also give considerable feedback and guidance to encourage and assist in preparing the preservice teacher for classroom teaching. With the help of the curriculum teams from the support services of State and Territory Education Departments most teacher education workshop learning materials, resources, role-plays and discussions about critical pedagogy while facilitating preservice teachers learning about appropriate classroom activities. Yet practicum classroom observation in the schools suggests that many of the preservice teachers seem to have forgotten, or chose to ignore, what they learned at the university and try to plan day by day, without a unit plan or clear outcome statement. Many
of them fail to connect the curriculum framework documents with their planning, disregarding the various band levels, indicators, essential learnings or guiding principles and plan ‘intuitive’ lessons that have little connection with curriculum outcomes. This makes it difficult to reflect critically on their development. Why are they not bringing this university learning into the classroom and where is the guidance of their mentors?

**What the mentors were and were not saying**

As already discussed there is little evidence from our stories of mentors engaging in sustained discussions with the preservice teachers. There is some evidence of explanations of content ‘the what to teach’, but the overwhelming message concerning their reluctant to discuss the ‘how’ of teaching is ‘they need to find out for themselves’. There is little discussion of this in the literature though it is generally accepted as the way things are (Cushman, 2001; Rorrison & Sutton, 2005). If we couple this with Elbaz-Luwisch and Pritzker’s (2002: 287-288) suggestion that there is an Anglo-Saxon abhorrence of confrontation or uncomfortable interactions that prevents mentors from engaging in more than superficial critique, then the purpose of the practicum as a learning experience for preservice teachers is certainly questionable.

Mentors were able to provide background knowledge on individual students to progress some of the story lines in the narrative, and there was no doubt they were well informed about student progress and lack of progress. Generally, however their comments were procedural or content based, and they seemed reluctant to discuss issues of ideology or theory. Campbell and Kane (1998) in their report of fictional tales from primary schools found that despite considerable resources being spent in preparing mentor teachers, the old problems of ‘stuck’ ideology beneath surface changes resurfaced every time they sent preservice teachers to the partnership schools.

Bloomfield (1997: 18) recommends we look upon the supervision role as a ‘critical friend’ and ‘co-enquirer’, which encourages the focus to move from the preservice teacher to the learning environment. There is considerable merit in refocusing the role of the mentor but it will take a huge shift in the relationship between the university and the schools to progress this idea. Teachers who mentor preservice teachers need to be prepared well for their role.

**Summary**

While the stories co-constructed by the preservice teachers, students, mentors and teacher educator were weakened by ‘perspectives that could not be shared’, what was written and what was not written provided rich data on how the participants were variously positioned. Both the words and the silences point towards the need to reconceptualise the practicum in a
way that supports the conversations begun at university, and gives the preservice teacher an opportunity to develop as a teacher.

The teachers who volunteer to work with preservice teachers have a range of reasons for making that choice and a system strapped to find positions for their preservice teachers, inevitably finds some troublesome placements. This complexity is replicated throughout the western world (Campbell & Kane, 1998; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001; Eyers, 2005) but this does not justify the injustices and disappointments observed and reported during the practicum. There is little evidence currently that the practicum experience leads toward better preparation for the preservice teacher. It appears to be taken for granted that a system that has been in place for many years must be successful.

There are more instances in the co-constructed stories of the effect of the traditional and reductive culture pervading the practicum than of any other issue affecting the preservice teacher. The majority of observations relate to teacher centred practice, worksheets, busy work and traditional assessment tasks with little opportunity for individual creativity or negotiation. There is a culture of control and settings that reflect a mis-use of power, all making it difficult for the preservice teacher with progressive ideas.

If the practicum is to be a learning experience as it promises and not merely a time to endure and acquiesce then a more seamless sharing of the classroom responsibilities may be necessary. Purposeful learning of the pre-service teacher and the students needs to be based on critical reflection and ‘co-enquiry’. This pilot study provides evidence that participants in the classroom each think the problem differently uncovering a new view of the practicum as a time for synergy and support. Schools need to be more receptive to preservice teachers’ learning needs and more aware of the vast differences in how young people view their classroom experiences. Unless classroom teachers really understand what they do it is unlikely that either the students or the preservice teachers in their classes will benefit from their experience.

The pilot stories make it clear that narrative has great potential to ‘unlock’ the silences of the practicum but highlights the ethical dilemmas of both real and imagined fears of disclosure or confrontation. This is taken into consideration in the modification of the research design. The valuable insights from the pilot are included in the stories of the practicum written as the second layer of this study. These are presented in chapter 6.
Chapter 5 Laying Out the Hoops Again

Revised design

A second and third layer of research

Despite providing valuable insights the pilot also highlighted the limitations of the research design. Much of the specific information that was being disclosed by the participants in the pilot (the school teachers, the preservice teachers and the school students) could not be used in the stories, as the information was private, sensitive and very revealing. Each of these groups are not only steeped in their own culture and protected by their own politics but they have particular positioning in the culture of the school. Consequently they are privy to some information and have restricted access to other information. Their sense of reality and perspective are thus influenced by their positioning which in turn influences their perception and what they ‘notice’ as important to their understanding of a situation. This knowledge/truth relationship cannot be disrupted without careful consideration of the consequences when we are working within the realm of trust relationships, particularly where young people are involved. The effectively uncensored disclosure of aspects of the lifeworlds of these participants was not something I was prepared for when the research was designed. I had not anticipated the power of narrative to unleash such personal previously un-voiced perspectives.

As discussed in preceding chapters a range of modifications of the research design were necessary to ensure the stories of the practicum could still be checked by the teachers, preservice teachers and teacher educators and become a valuable resource for teacher education. In this chapter I will describe the changes that were made in the sequence of observation, data collection, story writing and the annotation of the stories. Fictionalised composite stories (Connell, 1985) are written that represent my interpretation of the theorised data from the pilot study and the field notes collected from the next round of observations. These stories provide a second ‘layer’ of data that will be read, checked and annotated by teachers, teacher educators and preservice teachers from a wide range of backgrounds and experience. The feedback on the stories from these readers will become a third ‘layer’ of data to be analysed. It will also be used to check the authenticity, verity and integrity of stories. The stories will then be modified where necessary to ensure their relevance and contribution to the field of knowledge for preservice teacher education. Suggestions of how the stories can then be used as an engaging resource for teacher education that focuses on asking and answering critical questions of the practicum experience will then be designed. The purpose is to help preservice teachers reflect on the
wide range of contexts, teacher identity issues and moral and ethical dilemmas that demand informed action and interaction during the practicum.

An unfortunate casualty of this variation in research design is the resultant inability of the most vocal group in the pilot, the school students, to be involved in subsequent checking of the narratives. This is now planned as a subsequent study where stories will be re-drafted to highlight classroom learning issues that secondary school students can relate to and comment on. Their understandings voiced in the pilot study have, however, informed many aspects of the new stories.

One of the four criteria for evaluating the quality of practitioner research suggested by Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993: 77) states that ‘the research should be compatible with the demands of the situation being researched’. Anderson and Herr (1999) in discussing the quality and appropriateness of the qualitative research method call this process validity. The complexity and multiple perspectives uncovered when bringing a range of assumptions to the surface, exploring what they mean, confronting how it came to be this way and suggesting how things can be done differently in the future, are highlighted in this study. Previously unheard views emerge to inform misunderstandings and misconceptions in our understanding. As Loughran (2006) suggests

...it may well be that arguments surrounding the nature of teachers’ professional knowledge are more a reflection of the difficulties associated with uncovering and articulating it in such a way as to fully appreciate that which it genuinely comprises. (Loughran, 2006: 15)

He goes on to acknowledge the ‘enormous array of skills, knowledge, competencies, conceptualisations and practices’ (p. 18) that reflect the complexity and messiness of the theories and practice of teaching and learning. Schön (1983) refers to this as the ‘indeterminate swampy zone’ and Labaree (2003: 14) also agrees that such research is complex and messy.

For example we cannot suggest in a document that is going to be read by the class the very next day that a preservice teacher was not adequately prepared. Nor could we comment in the narrative to be read by his peers that a student had failed to take his bi-polar medication (refer to Rollo’s story, Chapter 3). There are a range of discretions and privileges to information at play and these influence what information we can disclose where individuals can be identified and we are in a position of trust.

This leads us to the question; if each of the actors is embedded so strongly in their own world with their own rules and limitations, how are we going to be able to read across these worlds to make sense of the practicum? It is no wonder the different groups in the practicum classroom frequently fail to communicate. This is why ‘fiction’ has such potential. It breaks
down barriers and floats over fences and allows connections to be made that would otherwise not be possible. As Flax (1990: 195) said:

By the logic of postmodernism itself, the adequacy of any of these stories can be judged only by the effects produced and by whether and the extent that such stories open up or permit further, interesting conversations to proceed. (Flax, 1990: 195)

In its initial form the research design did not allow these expositionary conversations to proceed.

**Revised research design**

The method of data collection in the practicum classrooms was varied only slightly during the next stage of research. It became obvious from the pilot that each classroom had its own patterns of interactions, learning culture and dynamics. Once these has been identified and described in detail in the field notes with parallel reflections, there came a point where further notes became mere repetition. Although frequent visits to the classroom were necessary to get a sense of these patterns, it became obvious that it was not necessary to visit *every* lesson, nor continue visiting for the duration of the practicum. This allowed more sites to be visited, which subsequently provided more data for a wider range of ‘stories of the practicum’.

The original plan of checking the developing story daily in focus groups that consisted of the teacher, the preservice teacher and between four and eight school students was an excellent method of recording participant voice (and silence). But the resultant narrative was bland and of little value to teacher education because of what could *not* be told. For the stories needed to resonate with a wide range of readers as possible and probable accounts of the practicum classroom, the readers needed to see themselves ‘abstracted’ in the stories, but not the specifics of their ‘political, public, personal and private lives’ (Rorrison, 2002). As a result I abandoned the focus groups, anticipating that the stories would be written and checked when the observations were complete.

**Changed processes**

The text of the information and consent letters was slightly revised to reflect the modified design (see Appendix 1b, Appendix 2b, Appendix 3b, Appendix 4b, Appendix 7b and Appendix 8b). Stories of the practicum classroom were still constructed from the ‘field’ observation notes as before but specifics were fictionalised and observations were combined in different ways. Connell (1985) used a similar method in constructing his stories of the classroom teacher. He called them ‘composite biographies’ (Connell, 1985: 3) and stated that every detail in the stories came from his interviews, but each story came from more than one interview. In a similar vein Creswell (1998: 182) introduces the ‘impressionistic tale’ from
his analysis of Van Maanen’s (1988) research, where ‘elements of both realist and
classic writing…presents a compelling and persuasive story’. Creswell (1998) also
offers support for a range of other ‘rhetorical’ styles; ‘critical tales’, ‘formalist tales’ and
‘literary tales’ and cites Wolcott (1994) who

…provides three components of a good qualitative enquiry that are a centrepiece of good
ethnographic writing as well as steps in data analysis. First, an ethnographer writes a “description”
of the culture that answers the question, “What is going on here?”. Second, the researcher
“analyzes” the data. Third, the personal like the approach of interpreting the findings both within
the context of the researcher’s experience and within the larger body of scholarly research on the

It is not the purpose for my stories in this study to be persuasive but instead to have
‘verisimilitude’, that is to be recognisable as conceivable experience. I also hope they are
compelling and enjoyable. Creswell’s support of a wide range of storytelling does, however,
gave me confidence to developing a research design that includes the lush and thick
descriptions that produce these truly resonating experiences. There are others who support
the use of fiction or narrative as research (Bakhtin, 1981; Richardson, 2000; Belenky,
Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997; Ely, Vinz, Downing, Anzul 1997) and their support has
been discussed in chapter 2.

The stories created as the second ‘layer’ of data, were then distributed widely to be checked,
commented on, annotated, rewritten, argued, disputed, criticized, critiqued or affirmed by
readers from the education community, some of whom were ‘participants in the field’ but
most of whom were remote from the original settings, yet associated in some way with
teacher education or practicum mentoring. These ‘fictionalised composite’ stories or
‘impressionistic tales’ are presented in chapter 6. They are my description, analysis and
interpretation of the ‘data’ collected from observations, feedback, discussions and life
experiences. They are the fruits of over two hundred hours of observation in fifteen
practicum classrooms during the final two secondary practica at our university and many
other classroom observations I have conducted in my role as teacher educator and practicum
coordinator. Previous practicum observations while employed by other universities and the
reading of hundreds of preservice teacher practicum reflections also inform the stories.
Indeed the sense of the practicum that I write is openly influenced by nearly half a century of
involvement in education and my own beliefs and ways of knowing. Every word I make is
influenced by my previous experiences, so I am unavoidably a participant in my own study.
Similarly, those who read and amended, commented on and critiqued the stories (see chapter
7 for analysis methodology), bring their own rich and fertile life story and positioning to
their perspectives. These are only six of many stories that could have been written.

Creswell (1998:211) warns of possible false knowledge, mis-interpretation, mis-description
and doubtful agendas when we ask for respondent validation. Critical inquiry is especially
aware of the capricious nature of ‘voice’ yet also highlights the importance of worrying the research problem. By applying the ‘critical cycle’ of questioning (Smyth, 1989: 486), which involves describing what is going on, gathering information to work out what this means, confronting the evidence and asking how it came to be the way it is and finally recommending or reconstructing things differently, such concerns of ‘false knowledge’ are reduced (see chapter 2). It is vitally important to this research that the critical cycle of questioning has the capacity to instigate transformation rather than reproduction, and thus turns a fresh lens on the previously silenced voice of teachers, preservice teachers and teacher educators. For too long the problems of the practicum have been considered too difficult, too political and easier to avoid and it is now in danger of being used as a solution for fiscal problems in teacher education and teacher shortage. By providing ‘credible’ stories of the practicum to be read and commented on by teachers, mentoring teachers, preservice teachers and teacher educators both in Australia and overseas, it is my intent that practicum learning will be interrogated and become better understood.

The fictional composite stories (Connell, 1985) embedded in the practicum experiences of preservice teachers, focus on engagement and interactions related to learning, classroom culture and pedagogy. By first developing a framework to ensure that a wide range of preservice teacher dispositions, mentoring styles, practicum experiences and school cultures were represented I wove my observation notes into stories to capture the complexity and messiness of lived experience. I again rely on Smyth and his associates (Smyth, Hattam with Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst, 2000: 267-291) for their critical view of the extremely complex notion of school culture.

None of this is to suggest, of course, that within a particular school the culture is fixed or mono-chromatic; it may be more accurate to speak of cultures and, even then, to see them as highly contested notions, rather than unitary or always agreed upon. Various groups within the school struggle to fashion the culture of the school so as to make their view the ‘norm’ for what ‘school’ is. There is a dominant culture in schools… school culture is one of the most elusive, difficult and complex notions in the educational literature. (Smyth, Hattam with Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst, 2000; 268)

My stories are both fictional and factual; they are a synthesis of interpretation, analysis, emotion, memory and observation. At times the stories spilled out and great care had to be taken not to lose the thread of an idea or meaning. Sometimes I would have the sense that there was something more to say, more meaning hidden in the field notes, but I was unable to make the connection at that moment in time and would need to revisit the idea at a later date. Writing the stories involved a continuous movement from field notes to practicum reflections and stories from the pilot research study and back to the computer screen. These cycles continued as the accumulated notes were at times ravaged and at other times gentle cajoled to release snippets, fleeting ideas, memories and half discernable notions. The
individual ideas detailed in the field notes, stories and logs were gradually braided to write the practicum into being.

Reducing and focusing the data into what I believed to be its essence and then rebuilding these constituent parts as connected stories, involved a great deal of personal inquiry. Sometimes the self-doubt was overwhelming and my own sense of meaning frightened me. Was I sexist, racist, ageist, too political, too academic, too remote or too ‘expert’? How and why was I positioned this way? I was very aware as I wrote that I needed to be open, both with myself and with my readers. These stories are an honest representation of what I felt at the time and what I believed as a researcher, observer, teacher educator and practicum coordinator. They are not fictional in the sense of being created from imagination but are created from field notes and memory and are modified only to ensure that no person is implicated or identified. The stories are about no one preservice teacher in particular but about all of the preservice teachers I have worked with and the schools I have worked in. They are a ‘sense of’ the practicum written into existence through observation, reflection, reading and discussion. They are probable and possible stories of preservice teachers, their university experience and their practicum. They are both true and not true.

**Booklets of stories**

The stories were printed in the left hand column of the page (as before) with the right hand column left blank for comments, annotations, rewriting, critique, affirmation, argument or changes from the perspectives of preservice teachers, mentors, teacher educators, coordinators and other interested persons who consented to read them. These agreements, disagreements, ‘other’ stories, new perspectives, different perceptions, comments and annotations would become the third layer of data for analysis. The story booklet and the two page ‘Open letter and explanation’ contained six stories with a total of 178 pages (nearly 70,000 words) and is presented as chapter 6 of this manuscript.

Groundwater-Smith, Gereige-Hinson, Wride and McLelland (2005) introduced conference delegates to the use of case studies and write about the success of such practitioner research in education, while Smyth and his associates (2000) ‘hang around the places where young people congregate’ to engage young people for their research of young people who have become disengaged with school (Smyth, Hattam with Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst, 2000). Cook-Sather (2001, 2002) and Shultz & Cook-Sather (2001) trial a wide range of methodologies to give voice to both school students and trainee teachers in their attempt to open up the discourse and demystify the lived lives of young people in the schools. Each of these research project use ‘consenting participants’ who are deeply involved in the landscape that is the subject of the research, yet also become researchers as part of the process. In this
project those who consent to read and comment on the stories were both the subjects of the research and validators of the verisimilitude of the design.

I shared the results of the pilot at two different conferences and at one circulated a signing sheet for those interested in reading and being part of my research. At the other I collected business cards from those who suggested they were interested in reading the stories (I presented a pre-recorded ‘taster’ at both conferences, using my previous broadcasting experience to bring ‘Qs story’ to life). I also contacted (where possible) the teachers, coordinators and schools where I had collected my field notes as well as many of the preservice teachers who had been involved over the three year period of my research. On each contact I asked for recommendations of others from their schools or universities who might be interested in reading and commenting on the stories of the practicum. Colleagues interstate and overseas were also asked to participate, as it was important to establish whether the stories would resonate beyond the local context.

I was very careful to provide limited information concerning my views of the practicum beyond those written into the stories, to those who indicated their willingness to be involved. I removed all evidence of the research working title (Jumping Through Spinning Hoops) to avoid influencing the readers and the cover letters clearly explained that the stories were

…not true stories but a ‘sense of’ the practicum, through my eyes… an amalgam of my perspective of hundreds of hours of observation, preservice teacher reflections and discussions. The stories are neither true nor untrue…The practicum can have both a ‘huge effect and no effect at all (Segall, 2000)’. (Excerpts from the open letter of explanation, chapter 6)

The cover letter also included the following explanation on the purpose of the research.

Firstly by adding your perspectives and amending, contesting, agreeing with or adding to my perception of the practicum you will be helping to build a theory of the practicum that is imbued with the views of all participant groups. How these views inform each other will hopefully increase our understanding of the practicum and provide evidence for future changes in teacher education.

Secondly, as honest, shared and agreed stories that offer a ‘sense of’ the practicum experience, I hope to use the co-authored stories to acquaint both preservice teachers and inservice teachers with a wide range of views and experiences, before they embark on a practicum relationship.

Finally, by turning a ‘new lens’ on the practicum and the importance of perspective, I hope to uncover some new understandings about how theory and practice intersect in the learning process. (Excerpt from Open Letter of Explanation: chapter 6)

A consent form was sent with every package, which also included the booklet and two self addressed envelopes, one for the personal details and consent of the participant so that they could be acknowledged in the dissertation and future publications, and one for the return of the booklet. Volunteers were invited to return the booklets anonymously with only the details of sex, age and whether they were preservice teacher, neophyte teacher, classroom teacher (with approximate years of experience and/or nature of any school leadership positions), teacher educator or ‘other’.
The stories

The purpose of this research project from the start was to ‘write into existence’ stories of the practicum that would allow us to probe what is really happening so that changes could be made. What are the learning experiences that the practicum should deliver and how can this best be achieved? The stories are my interpretations of the data collected during practicum observations, presented in a way to make the varied experiences more readily available to a wider range of readers for further interpretation and comment. Such ‘non-traditional’ research methods rely, however, on the canons of quality research previously mentioned and it is important that each step in the process complies with the criteria of quality while at the same time allowing space for new and unexpected revelations.

As I do not have formal training in ‘story writing’ the literary techniques that I use are intuitive and the outcome of a passionate desire to present an honest and meaningful ‘telling’ that resonates with the reader and encourages their ‘vicarious’ involvement in the text. I know only too well how difficult it is to encourage university students, teachers and teacher educators to read beyond the pressing workload that they experience, or theorise and critically reflect beyond the practical issues that demand their attention. Creswell (1998: 185) recommends a

…fictional representation form in which writers draw on the literary devices such as flashback, flashforward, alternative points of view, deep characterisation, tone shifts, synecdoche, dialogue, interior monologue, and sometimes omniscient narrator. (Creswell, 1998: 185)

while Beattie (2001: 165) suggests to first make decisions about audience, content, structure, form and style. Ely and her associates (1997) recommend carefully adapting

…the various tools of narrative – characters, setting, sequences of events, atmosphere, plot, theme, dialogue, motifs, figurative language, and many other literary devices [to] render the stories complex and significant. (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul 1997: 64)

The significance and resonance of the stories and their value in the learning of novice teachers can only be assessed through the eyes of the readers. Analysing what the readers say about the stories is another complete layer of this research project. The stories are intended to be rich, dense, absorbing and enjoyable as well as evocative and informative. The criteria of authenticity, relevance, high expectation and complexity are never far from my mind. As narrator and creator of the lives of the characters, I am aware that my interpretation is only one of many and although I am both an insider looking out and an outsider looking in, my knowledge still remains only partial.

The single letters T, R, B, Q, D and V are used in place of names for the preservice teachers who are the main characters of the stories. This is a literary device created to serve as a deliberate and continuous reminder that the stories are fictional composites. Some of the
stories have several parts but others end rather abruptly (as do some practicum placements). Although I hope everyone and everything is recognisable as conceivable to the reader, nothing is identifiable. If a reader thinks they recognise someone or some incident then that is a compliment to the ‘verity’ of the story, as the incidents that are described never really happened, though they all could happen any day. While the stories cover a range of personalities, dispositions, age groups, social groups, cultural groups, specialist teaching areas, mentoring styles, teaching styles, pedagogies, school cultures, classroom ecologies and much more, I am aware that I have also missed a great number of possible stories and interpretations. There are many more dimensions to the practicum and lives of the characters that I could have pursued but the task of reading and annotating the stories needed to remain manageable. My supervisor made the comment, ‘who is going to find the time to read all these stories?’ and this concern was to cause me great angst as I waited for the readers to return their booklets. Indeed who was going to make time to read and comment on 70,000 words? Were the narratives sufficiently compelling to engage the readers and motivate them to complete the project? Fortunately they were.

**Synopsis of the stories**

Although I encouraged the readers to comment upon the booklet of stories as a complete entity, I did send a brief abstract of each story to both encourage them to see the stories as ‘possibly’ interesting, and to allow for selection if time did not allow them to complete all of the stories.

The first story is about T who is a male in his early twenties who entered university straight from school. He came from a poor country family who moved from place to place in his early years and he attended many different schools. T’s passion had been sport for as far back as he could remember. His first practicum in both the Health and Physical Education (HPE) and Science faculties of a large outer metropolitan school included both supportive and ‘laissez faire’ mentoring, but it was other aspects of school culture and politics that had the most influence on his practicum experience.

R is a middle aged female whose learning areas were Business Education, Graphic Design and Maths. She experiences difficulties adapting to the move from the work place to the university and then her practicum placement was changed at the last minute. This caused her insecurities to re-emerge and she decided to withdraw from her practicum but continue with course units at least until the end of the semester.

As a middle aged male from the Indio-Pacific region, ‘Dr B’ hopes to teach English and English as a Second Language (ESL) as he did before he arrived in Australia. Unfortunately B doesn’t really have the background knowledge in the English learning area and has little
understanding of ‘English’ literature; his qualifications and experience are entirely in the areas of ESL and literacy. He appealed to the authorities and this led to his placement in the course. B’s mentors are hand picked and have recently participated in ‘mentor preparation workshops’ but B tries to hold down a full time job and participate in his practicum at the same time. Eventually he realised he needed more time to fully understand the school culture and engage with his study. He withdraws from the practicum but not the course.

After spending many years in Europe, Q returns to Australia with the view of becoming a teacher. She is qualified to move into both Science and Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE). During her practica she is able to observe and work with some fine teachers but due to her mentor’s family emergency she is left to fend for herself during SOSE lessons in her first practicum. This turns out to be her most rewarding experience. In her second practicum she is placed with teachers who have little experience or concept of the role of the mentor or the learning that the practicum should provide.

An evocative example of our ‘Y’ generation, D rebelled against everything middle class and enjoyed days of smoking dope and drinking home brew when she was supposed to be at an exclusive girls' school. Surprisingly, she won a place at university but it wasn’t until she enrolled in her professional education units that she was forced to confront who she was and what she was doing with her life. A remote practicum in the Northern Territory helps her decide that teaching may after all be a worthwhile vocation.

The final story is about V, a young man who finds himself in an Arts/Education degree in a university campus away from the city where he grew up. He hadn’t really engaged with the idea of being a teacher but was amazed by the rapport and respect he felt for the students in his classes. Coupled with the guidance and support he received from dedicated staff at the university and in the two country schools, he completed his course despite some very challenging experiences and secured his first teaching appointment in a middle schooling setting.

*Perspectives written into existence*

Some of the stories continue through two practica, some barely touch on one. There is an attempt to develop the characters and the context yet considerable space is left within the stories for the readers to add their own perspectives. In the cover letter I even invite readers to write their own stories, recommend plots for missing stories, and suggest further chapters or alternative endings. I encourage them to

…circle, underline and mark the text in any way, as well as comment, annotate, re-write, argue, dispute, criticize or affirm my perspective of the practicum.

I also explain that
I acknowledge that ‘everyone (and no-one) has the answers’. (excerpts from cover letter)

**Distribution of booklets**

The first few booklets of stories were very tentatively dispatched to ‘critical friends’, colleagues who had shown some interest in my research. I felt greatly relieved when they reported back that they were enjoying the stories and they reflected their understandings of the practicum. I continued the packaging and distribution of the other booklets with renewed confidence.

The first booklets went to the addresses supplied at the conferences, some of whom I had met and others who were complete strangers. I tried to categorise the recipients according to their role in education and their sex. I had no control over either of these but wanted to make sure that the booklets would have a varied readership. Recipients generally self identified as preservice or neophyte secondary teachers, experienced secondary teachers, secondary teachers in leadership positions, teacher educators and ‘others’. Included as ‘others’ were primary school teachers, university graduates, university students and interested persons from a range of contacts and networks. Using this ‘opportunistic’ model of finding volunteers did not allow for selection or sampling (Creswell 1998: 118) as the contacts I made self selected by firstly responding to my request for volunteers and secondly by actually reading, commenting on, and returning the booklets.

To further ensure that I was not selective I sent an email to *every* contact, related to education, I had in my digital address book, right back to the beginning of my time in teacher education. Many of these were unable to be delivered which was to be expected, but I also had many responses and offers to take a booklet. Several volunteers also asked colleagues to participate or made general announcements at staff meetings.

Affirmative responses to my email request continued to arrive for six weeks. By this time I had abandoned my time line as the final date had clearly been overlooked by many of the recipients, and from the messages I was receiving the readers were taking their role very seriously and commenting frequently on the text. I was told that it was taking from eight to twelve hours to read and annotate the stories. I had not anticipated that it would take so long.

I continue to send out the booklet to any teacher, teacher educator or administrator who offered to read them, my initial concerns of ‘exposure’ replaced by appreciation of the support from the education community. There are several booklets that are still ‘promised’ even as I complete this study and I am still sending them to those who contact me or I meet at conferences. Any new understandings will be used to inform future study.
Details of distribution and response are presented in chapter 7. One booklet went to each of India, Sweden and Holland, 28 went to the Northern Territory of Australia (Darwin, Alice Springs, Elcho Island, Milingimbi, Batchelor, Taminmin), 4 to Western Australia, 4 to Victoria, 18 to South Australia, 4 to Australian Capital Territory and one to Queensland). As well as the 28 email confirmations there were 19 volunteers from conferences and 17 through personal phone calls or networking while at meetings, during visits to other universities or through colleagues or friends. Seventeen booklets were distributed to males and 45 to females and several were redistributed and were never seen again. Clearly some volunteers found the task too difficult or time consuming and didn’t respond further while some returned the booklets with a note apologising for lack of time due to illness or a sudden increase of work duties. Others never received their booklets and some of the completed booklets didn’t return to me. Forty booklets were returned and overwhelmingly the responses were detailed and carefully considered, reflecting a great deal of time and effort on the part of the reader.

Summary

Despite the rich data ‘written into existence’ during the focus groups in schools, the co-authored stories were bland. Many of the perspectives, particularly the voice of the students, were silenced by the need to ensure that neither individuals nor incidents were recognisable and that neither students, preservice teachers nor mentor teachers were compromised or harmed in any way. In the end, the ethical and moral responsibility of the researcher determined that another way of representing conceivable practicum learning experiences, needed to be found. Fictionalised biographical composites were chosen as an alternative style for the ‘second layer’ of data analysis and the resultant ‘stories of the practicum’ are presented in chapter 6.
Chapter 6 Spinning the Stories

Contents of the booklet

In this chapter I will present the entire contents of the booklet that was distributed to volunteer participants in the study with the few alterations that they recommended. The stories are an interactive and engaging interpretation of my classroom research. They are deliberately presented with minimal instruction or detail to encourage the readers to react to the narrative in their own way. The booklets provided a wide column on each page as ‘space’ for annotation or comment. This is a long chapter, yet the content is resonating and easily read. The following chapters will provide analysis and interpretation of the reactions of the readers of the stories.

Open letter and explanation

Thank you for agreeing to read and comment on my stories. Some of them will appear more realistic to you than others, please accept my apologies if any of them make you angry or sad.

Please note that I have used the single initials V, B, R, T, D and Q in place of names for the ‘preservice teachers’ (teachers in training) who are the main characters in the stories. This is to serve as a deliberate reminder that the stories are fictional composites. These are not true stories but a ‘sense of’ the practicum, through my eyes. Please try to keep this in mind when you comment, amend, add to or change the stories as you read them from your perspective. What is written is totally my perception, my sense of the practicum. The stories are an amalgam of my perspective of hundreds of hours of observation, preservice teacher reflections and discussions. The stories are an honest representation of my current views. It is when your perspectives are rubbed against my stories and the perspectives of others that a new understanding of the practicum might be written.

My research highlights how powerful our personal perceptions are, and how different they can be to the perspectives of others despite experiencing the ‘same’ situation. The preparation of teachers is no exception. Everyone (and no-one) has the answers. The field experience or the ‘practicum’ has traditionally been seen as a necessary part of teacher education. There is, however, no consistent view on either the process or the learning outcomes. The practicum can have both a “huge effect and no effect at all” (Segall, 2000).

These stories and my research have several purposes. Firstly by adding your perspectives and amending, contesting, agreeing with or adding to my perception of the practicum you will be helping to build a theory of the practicum that is imbued with the
views of all participant groups. How these views inform each other will hopefully increase our understanding of the practicum and provide evidence for future changes in teacher education.

Secondly, as honest, shared and agreed stories that offer a ‘sense of’ the practicum experience, I hope to use the co-authored stories to acquaint both preservice teachers and in-service teachers with a wide range of views and experiences before they embark on a practicum relationship.

Finally, by turning a ‘new lens’ on the practicum and the importance of perspective, I hope to uncover some new understandings about how theory and practice intersect in the learning process.

Please read the stories in the booklet and use the space on the right hand side of the page to comment, annotate, rewrite, argue, dispute, criticize or affirm my perspective of the practicum. You could also circle, underline, mark and comment on the written text. The more comments and markings the better. I am interested in your perspective and the ideas, emotions and reactions that the stories elicit. Some of those involved during the pilot study were moved to write their own story. Please feel free to do the same. You may even decide that there are some stories missing and recommend a plot to fill the gap, or you might like to suggest other chapters or an ending for some of the stories. You don’t need to read all of the stories though the ‘package’ is designed to cover a wide range of possible practicum experiences. Some of the stories will be more meaningful to you than others.

Please return the annotated stories in the postage paid self addressed envelope. Your contribution will be anonymous if you wish but please send the smaller envelope with your name separately so that I can thank you for your contribution if at any time the research is published. If you have any questions please don’t hesitate to call or email.

I appreciate we all live busy lives but with several national inquiries into teacher education in progress I am keen to complete my research this semester. Please read and respond as soon as possible so that I can include your views in my analysis. Please contact me if there is anyone you know who might also be able to comment on the stories. I would be delighted to send further copies either to you or directly to a prospective reader. The stories are my intellectual property and cannot be used for any other purpose without my permission at this stage.

Thank you once again. Please don’t be concerned if your perspective is quite different to mine. It is the purpose of the research to find that out.

Yours sincerely,
T’s Story

Part 1

T spent his school life moving from school to school as his parents found work in different towns in outback Australia. He, and his two brothers and sister, adapted to starting at new schools, feeling quite important for a few days then drifting into the role of the student who needed to find their place in the classroom, school and friendship groups. They were close in age and they had each other, so generally they were happy approaching each adventure with the knowledge that it wouldn’t be for long as they would be forced to move again soon. In many ways continually moving took the pressure off any commitment to their schoolwork because they always had the excuse that they hadn’t done the work in the last school. The benefit was that they learned to be adaptable and resilient and to rely on their strengths to establish their place in the various classrooms.

Sport was T’s strength. He could run fast, jump high and had a good eye for ball games. It didn’t take long in a school before he was the first one picked both in the yard and in PE when teams were selected. Although he was little for his age he could out mark most of the other students when they played with the football and he had a deadly bowl in cricket, something his dad had taught him during the frequent family games in the backyard. One of the first books he ever received was about cricket and he learned to read the sports pages in the newspaper at a young age. He would have frequent discussions with his dad and brothers about sporting teams and personalities.

By the time he reached high school T had already decided that he was going to play sport and travel with his teams when he grew up, so what happened in the classroom was something to be endured until he was free to go on the oval to practice whatever sport was popular in the school at the time. Some teachers cottoned on to this quickly and used it to ensure that schoolwork was completed by threatening to keep him in class during lunch or after school. Thus T learned to engage with the lesson content as a way of getting out of the classroom as quickly as he could. He even became adept at picking what was going to be for homework so that he could get as much of it done in class as possible to allow him more time after school.

The years passed and T collected many trophies and ribbons at sports days, swimming carnivals and, where they stayed in one place for long enough, as best and fairest in lots of sports teams. By year 10 he was already getting the opportunity to travel with representative teams to the city for carnivals and though he frequently feared his parents
would not be able to afford the cost they were always able to find the money for him to go. T was not consciously aware of the sacrifices that his parents and the rest of the family were making but had a sense of the importance they placed on his success and this helped him focus. He frequently refused to become involved in team high jinks while travelling because he feared he might disappoint his parents or jeopardise his opportunities.

T certainly wasn’t prepared when, half way through year 10, his class was given a letter and a number of documents to take home to discuss his final two years of schooling with his parents. The class were told to read the ‘Transitions’ documents carefully and decide what sort of pathway they were going to follow. Did they want to go to university? Were they going to try for an apprenticeship? They needed to make the right choices now or they could waste a lot of time later. T had heard some of the older boys on the sports trips talk about their ‘pathways’ but it was still a shock when he realised it was time for these decisions. He just wanted to play sport, probably cricket but he still wasn’t completely sure. There was something about football, the excitement of the competition and the satisfaction when you marked over the pack or kicked a goal that ignited his sense of achievement much more than a day on the cricket oval when you were fielding or waiting on the sidelines for a bat. At least at football you could chase after the ball yourself rather than wait for your turn or for the ball to come your way.

It was to be expected that T’s best subject was Physical Education (PE) though he did well in science too, particularly at his current school where the sports teacher was also the science teacher. This teacher seemed to relate everything they did to real life. Levers and pulleys were like muscles and forces or springs led into a discussion about tennis rackets. Water conservation was related to the building of golf courses and the effect on the environment and resources. During PE classes T had learned how to play tennis properly and his teacher was the tennis coach and encouraged him to join a tennis club. Weekends now involved cricket for the school Saturday morning and tennis Saturday afternoon. He had also been selected for tennis coaching on Sunday mornings. They called it a tennis scholarship and the coach donated his time for promising young tennis players whose parents could not afford private coaching. Sometimes on Sunday afternoon he would also fill in for the men’s cricket team where his dad played. They were often short of players and he and his brothers would stand on the boundary and field the occasional ball. Sometimes they even had a chance to bat and unlike his brothers who hated kitting up and facing an array of fast and ‘googly’ balls, T found the bowling much more predictable and easier to hit than the balls in school cricket. He began to get a name for himself as a run maker, but of course he could only play when they were running short of players and usually batted at the end of the line-up with the game often ending before he had really warmed up.
Although he planned to speak to his parents about subject choices it was hard to find the time. The information sat on the kitchen bench for ages, his dad promising to have a look at it and discuss it with his mum but he seemed so tired after work and mum was always so busy getting things ready for the next day that it just never seemed to happen. They kept getting reminded at school that their choices were due and then there was to be a meeting where the course counsellor would talk about the ‘pathways’ and the subjects the school would be able to offer. If they couldn’t offer your choices you could change schools, do subjects by correspondence or you could go to the city for your final two years. T didn’t believe that any of those choices would be open to him so in the end he didn’t bother reminding his parents about the meeting nor did he bother getting his choices in. He would just do the subjects that were available.

Some time later as he was leaving the change rooms T was called over by his teacher. “Aren’t you going to do PE in year 11?” he asked.

T was rather taken aback, of course he was going to do PE, it was his best subject!

“You’re not on the list,” the teacher went on, “and it looks like there are too few to make a class viable.”

T didn’t really understand the implications but knew the teacher was a bit cross. “Is Sam on the list,” he asked, “or Ben?”

“I don’t think so,” the teacher responded. “Hang on I’ll get it.”

While he waited T noticed Ben in the line at the tuck shop and wandered over.

“You doing PE next year?” he asked.

“Dunno, guess so, haven’t really thought about it,” was the response.

“Mr Mac wants to know, says there might not be enough for a class,” T told him. “He’s gone to check the list.”

After Ben was served they dropped their bags off at their lockers and eventually returned to the PE office in search of Mr Mac. They were advised that he had gone to coach the year 8 tennis team. T and Ben talked briefly about subject choices. Ben hadn’t bothered bringing back his form either.

“Too hard,” he had commented. “All that stuff about scientific concepts and language rich and patterns of subjects. My mum’s going to come to the meeting and ask some questions. She’s cross ‘cos I won’t tell her what I want to do; basically it’s because I don’t know. I’m putting it off. I’m really only interested in playing football and want to go to
the city to try out for some of those clubs. Mum won’t let me go ‘cos I have to look after my little sister after school when mum works late or is on night duty.”

The boys shared a disgruntled sigh and brief complaint in the spasmodic manner that adolescent boys talk, about footy clubs ignoring the country boys, the inconvenience of little sisters and the injustice of big decisions. They had just started discussing the premiership table when the bell went and they sauntered off to collect their bags for their next lesson.

T had forgotten the whole episode by the time science lesson came around and was surprised when Mr Mac handed him a list headed PE choices, stage 1. It only had a few names. No Ben, no Sam. Fine, they just hadn’t got around to it like him; he’d let Mr Mac know. T hung around after class waiting for ages while Mr Mac went through some worksheets with a group of girls. Why were the girls always so worried about what they had to do he had wondered. If he didn’t understand he just told the teacher that he didn’t get it when the work was due. Never seemed to cause too many problems. He was still here wasn’t he? T was starting to get impatient by the time Mr Mac came over. He had thought twice about staying but something in the back of his head told him this was more important than a quick kick of the footy before the bus came.

Mr Mac seemed really pleased that T had stayed behind. “Starting to show some interest in your future, T?” he had commented. “Good,” he added with a smile.

“You can add Ben and me to the list, sir, and I bet Sam wants to do PE too,” T offered. “Got to catch me bus.”

T turned to go but Mr Mac was quicker. “I’ll walk with you to see the assistant principal,” he said using the formal title rather than the more familiar AP, which surprised T. “I’m not allowed to tout for students so you’ll have to tell him yourself and bring the forms back tomorrow.”

Why was everything such big deal, wondered T. Is it never easy? All he really wanted to do was go home and get something to eat and drink and get ready for tennis practice. Now he’d be tied up with the AP for hours and would need to explain why he hadn’t brought his forms back and mum would be upset when she realised she had forgotten to remind him. Give a bloke a break, it was only halfway through this year and they wanted him organised for next year. Chances were he might not even be here.

T suddenly realised he had been at this school for over a year and there had been no talk at home about moving, in fact there had been very few conferences behind closed doors about money and paying bills for quite some time (the four kids used to listen at the door anyway). Dad had even been speaking about them going on a holiday, which hadn’t meant
much because T couldn’t ever remember being on a holiday. Holidays were things you read about in books or watched on TV or they were times you didn’t need to go to school.

When they arrived at the office the AP wasn’t there, to T’s relief and Mr Mac’s annoyance.

“I’ll see you tomorrow then.” T removed himself as quickly as he could promising to himself he would get mum to sign the forms and bring them back tomorrow. He would do PE and some science and see what else was on offer. Maybe he better think about ‘his future’ as Mr Mac had put it. Mr Mac had looked pretty pleased that T had taken the time to tell him that he wanted to be on the list. Maybe he should speak to him further, tomorrow, or soon…

As he walked to the car that night after tennis T noticed Mr Mac deep in conversation with his mum and that reminded him he was going to find those forms. Mr Mac gave him a wave and jumped into his own car as T approached and T expected his mum to lay into him as soon as he climbed into the car. Surprisingly she didn’t say anything. Didn’t admonish him for letting her forget to send back the forms, didn’t ask what he wanted to do with his life, didn’t ask how he had done in the maths test, didn’t ask if he had cleaned his teeth this morning, you know, all the important things mum’s ask. “How was tennis?” was all she said. By the time they had navigated the back streets and reached the main road T was curious. He asked what Mr Mac wanted.

His mum had been a bit evasive at first. “Nothing much, just chatting.”

“Mum, he’s a teacher, they never want nothing much,” T had retorted.

Mum had smiled at that, which made T even more interested. Mums don’t smile when you have a go at teachers.

They weren’t far from home when mum finally said, “Mr Mac says you’re growing up, acting more responsibly.”

“And…?” T replied.

“And nothing, that was all. We talked about his recent trip to Europe, seems they had a great time.”

**Part 2**

If he were to look back, T could have described this as the epiphany. At the time he just felt inexplicably pleased. Suffice to say, he found those forms and went through the process of making some tentative decisions with the help of his parents, taking them back to
school the next day. He also sought out both Sam and Ben and told them to get their forms in if they wanted to do PE or there might not be a class.

Now, six years later he was about to go back into a school for his preservice teacher practicum. After spending two and a half years studying sports science at university and trying out for a range of cricket positions in state teams he had decided to swap courses and be a Health and Physical Education teacher (or HPE as it was now more commonly termed), a more expanded role than the ‘sport’s teacher’ which is what they used to call Mr Mac. He had been coaching in local schools to put himself through uni and really enjoyed working with young people. He often thought of Mr Mac and realised that as a teacher he had done a lot more than teach. He had actually influenced their lives in many subtle ways and T appreciated that he would not be where he was now without the Mr Mac’s of the world. Now T was armed with a little knowledge, lots of memories and even more enthusiasm. What differences could he make to the lives of young people? He knew that he related well to the boys in the teams he coached but how would he go with the girls? He had been told it wasn’t easy out there and he had been placed at a large high school in the outer suburbs. His schools had always been so small in comparison; he was interested to find out how this school was different.

T had contacted the school as soon as he heard where he had been placed and had already visited his mentors. Not that it had been all that satisfactory. Firstly he had taken the wrong exit off the freeway and had been late. Then his teachers had been difficult to find because the union had called a stop work meeting at a nearby venue and the timetable had been adjusted at the last minute. To make matters worse T had assumed he would be teaching PE, but the HPE class were about to start on a health unit, something T felt he had not been well prepared for in his degree. The science class were about to start marine science, which was much better for T, who had done a unit in marine ecology at uni and felt he had a basic understanding. He had already collected a number of resources, photographs and websites and had been able to relate to the program that his mentor had given him though he did re-write it to make it more like the programs that had been introduced to them at uni. His mentor had said he could do what he liked with it so he had brought along a few ideas to check.

‘Human Relationships’ for the HPE class was a different issue. There was no unit program, apparently the person who had designed the unit had left and taken all her resources with her. His mentor had some vague idea about a kit that supported work on contraception, and there had been a video about pregnancy that he thought might be in the library. He had suggested T do a ‘Google’ search or check what was available at uni. Although he had taken a brief look in the uni library he had assignments due and coaching
commitments and had been unable to focus much on the topic. Fortunately this first week in the school was for introduction and induction so he would see how his mentor introduced the unit to the students. All HPE lessons were doubles (two lessons together) so it could be difficult to sustain interest for a whole hour and a half especially, T assumed, when the students would rather be outside playing sport.

Walking straight to the HPE office T pushed the door but it was locked. He was a little puzzled so wandered towards some boys playing handball against the wall. “Have you seen the HPE staff?” he asked.

“Monday morning staff meeting,” was the rushed response from a very athletic lad who literally flew after a ball that had looked like a certain winner.

As he walked back towards the staffroom T mused how much the lad was like himself at school – small but very athletic. What would he do with his life? He also wondered why no one had told him about staff meeting. How was he going to get in the door without anyone noticing his lateness? T arrived at the staffroom to find the meeting had not yet started; they were still waiting for the principal.

“She keeps us waiting like this every Monday,” he heard from behind the door and turned to see his HPE mentor balanced on the back of a chair, his arms and legs crossed. “Bit of a power thing I reckon,” he added with rolled eyes. “How did you go with the sex education stuff?” T admitted he hadn’t had much time to look yet but had made an appointment with one of his lecturers who had been a PE and Health teacher in a previous life. His mentor looked a bit concerned then smiled. “Maybe we’ll just go out and play games today,” he said. “Pity to waste the good weather.”

So T found himself on the oval sitting under a tree with what seemed like nearly half the class while his mentor played and umpired touch football with the other half. There had been all sorts of excuses for not participating. No gear, injuries, lost shoes, headaches… and a group of girls who just seemed to expect that they could sit together and talk. No one sat close to T initially but eventually curiosity got the better of a group of boys.

“Are you T T who used to play state cricket,” they asked. T nodded, not knowing where to take the conversation. He didn’t ‘used to play’; he hoped he would be back in the line up quite soon. He had played briefly when another of the fast bowlers had injured his shoulder but had quickly been replaced when the injury was better.

“Follow the cricket, do you?” he asked.

The student nodded and went back and punched his friend on the arm. “Told you so,” T heard him say.
“Effing know all,” was the response followed by a leg wrestle that had the first boy flat on his back in seconds.

“Sir, sir, he’s fighting me,” was the call. T pretended he had not seen or heard anything. The fighting noises continued behind him but he was saved from thoughts of intervening by the group of girls who had sauntered over.

“Sir, can we go and get a drink?” they asked.

“You’ll need to ask your teacher,” was his response.

“He won’t mind,” they said as they wandered off.

T was going to call them back when he heard, “Sir, sir, John’s got a blood nose.”

He turned to see the boys who were wrestling both had blood on their faces and found it hard to work out which one actually had the blood nose. “Where does the teacher keep the first aid kit?” he asked, aware that he didn’t know anything about these kids, any blood born viruses they might carry, nor what the procedures were in terms of blood injuries – after all he hadn’t been expecting to be on the oval, never mind partly responsible for a group of kids. T asked Jack to bend forward and pinch his nose just below the bridge. In the meantime he sent one of the other students to fetch their teacher, who immediately ran over all hot and sweaty but not looking at all concerned.

“You two been fighting again?” he accused. “The pair of you can go to nurse and get cleaned up. I’ll speak to you in my office at recess.” At that he ran back onto the field blowing the whistle and getting the game immediately under way.

T tried to concentrate on the game but couldn’t help reminiscing. The whole class would have been out there on the oval at his school. No excuses like forgotten gear; you would have been told to take your shirt and shoes off. But then they didn’t have girls in their PE classes. To be honest T couldn’t really remember any girls in his early years at high school. He supposes they were there but he had very little to do with them.

He couldn’t remember any health in PE either. And certainly no ‘human relationships’ or ‘sex education’.

The group of girls arrived back from the taps interrupting T’s thoughts. He breathed a sigh of relief even though he wasn’t really responsible for them. They sat much nearer him and started to ask lots of questions. Where did he come from? Why was he here? Did he like sport because they hated it? What was he going to teach them? Did he have a girlfriend? Ignoring the last question T made an excuse about checking on the boys and walked over to a group who were by now lying on their backs laughing and throwing handfuls of grass at each other. He was glad to get away from the girls as he felt a little uncomfortable with their
friendliness and knew he needed to be careful how he responded. He was also astute enough to realise that he better have a girlfriend while he was on prac, in theory anyway. It could be safer.

Turning around, T noticed the group on the oval heading for the change rooms then his mentor arrived and called the other students together.

“We are going to play invasion games on Wednesday,” he announced. “So bring your gear.”

T watched as the girls exchanged meaningful glances as they all walked towards the change rooms. His mentor left him standing outside with the students murmuring something about checking with the nurse. T wasn’t sure if he was supposed to stay there or not and walked to the taps to have a drink. Fortunately the bell went and the students departed so he headed for the HPE office to collect his morning tea before going to the staff room. The office was busy, students were everywhere talking to staff and no one seemed to notice him. He collected his backpack and took off for the staff room hoping he would find the other preservice teachers there to chat to.

Lesson three was a designated observation lesson according to T’s timetable. He was going to observe another HPE lesson, this time year 9 gymnastics with the HPE senior, Dave. He found the class lined up outside the change rooms while their teacher collected their valuables in a box. They were then told they had five minutes to change, that they wouldn’t need shoes and they should meet in the gym. As soon as they arrived they were to collect a skipping rope, a fit ball or an elastic stretch band and begin their warm up. They were also reminded to hold all stretches for fifteen seconds minimum and only skip on the mats so they didn’t hurt their feet. T thought this was more like it. He was going to learn something here.

The lesson was quite amazing. All but one of the students was changed and ready to go within five minutes and they seemed to take their warm-ups seriously moving from skipping rope to fit ball to elastics and focussing on all parts of the body. After about ten minutes Dave called them together and went through the day’s program. Each student had a task card that they had designed themselves during a previous lesson. They were concentrating on three apparatus of their choice and had elected certain levels to achieve. It was obvious that no one had been forced to choose an apparatus or level that imposed any threat but most were challenging themselves. There was lots of noise as they progressed through the lesson, much of it encouragement or advice while the more confident students helped the less confident. The teacher moved around the room always scanning the group and offering feedback and ideas to the students nearby. A couple of times he called students
over to demonstrate for a small group and occasionally demonstrated himself. He was very encouraging and the skill level throughout was high. He stopped the whole class on only three or four occasions to demonstrate a spotting technique or a skill that seemed to trouble many students and spent equal time with both the boys and the girls. Even though the girls generally concentrated on floor work and the beam there were some mixed groups where both boys and girls used the vault and the high bar. One boy was particularly skilled and could vault from the floor to splits on the beam and he was coaching a small group who showed much determination and progress.

With ten minutes to go Dave asked the class to sit together on the mat and questioned them about their progress and achievements. “Did anyone do something today that they have never done before?” Lots of hands went up. “How did it make you feel?”

“Great”
“Successful”
“Cool”

“Did anyone help someone achieve something they hadn’t done before?” Dave added.

Again, lots of hands.

“Tell us about it Abby?”

And so the conversation continued, many of the students keen to relate their successes. They finished the lesson with a quick stretch and then were asked to fill in their task cards.

“How about the homework? Don’t forget to write up what you want to achieve next lesson,” they were reminded. “And keep working on your floor and apparatus sequence design for homework. Remember there must be a starting and finishing pose for both and at least five different moves. The drawings must be big enough for the judges to see from two metres away.”

They left just before the bell and Dave adjusted some of the equipment to a higher level.

“We have gym club at lunchtime,” he explained. “We have a really keen group, many of whom are also in the community club. The club uses our gym and in return we get to use their equipment. We try to share the supervision between the staff but there are a couple of parents who come in to help out. They know a lot more than we do and welcome any new kids, hoping they might join their club. Seems to work well for everyone.”
Interested in how this worked T asked if he could watch for a while and wandered around the room while Dave went to greet some of the mothers who had just arrived. T wished he could have a swing on some of the equipment but was mindful of the time that had passed since he last tried. Maybe one day he would slip in and have a practice when no one was there.

After lunch T had a free lesson and set off in search of his science teacher. He would be observing the year eight class in lesson six and wanted to show her his unit plan and discuss some of his ideas. She was nowhere to be found so he made a copy and waited in the science faculty office. The phone rang several times but he didn’t know whether to answer it or not and decided to let it ring. All he could say was that there wasn’t anyone there and he didn’t know the staff names as yet. Finally his science mentor arrived, collected a stack of books and motioned him to follow her to class.

The class were finishing off a unit on arid ecosystems and had planted a garden with drought resistant and arid plants that had mainly come from their homes or the local nursery. The students were proud of what they had done and were keen to explain their methods of planting and the names of the plants. They were now researching and, with the help of their technology and design teachers, ‘making’, animals and birds to put in their garden. Some students were painting and some were stuffing fabric while others poured over books of birds and animals. Several students collected movement slips to visit other parts of the school proudly displaying permission notes from their woodwork teachers or art teachers that allowed them to spend the lesson using equipment or resources in their areas.

Amidst signing movement slips, noting activities in a diary, answering an array of questions and the occasional reminder about the noise level, their teacher gave advice, smiled encouragement, returned a recent test and wrote homework details on the board. During a brief lull she approached T who was scribbling furiously in his journal and apologised profusely for not introducing him.

“They are so used to having visitors,” she told him “They just go about their work. They will all come back five minutes before the bell and I’ll introduce you then. We must get together and look at the marine science unit. How are you situated tomorrow? I have a good day I don’t teach until after recess.” And she was off having noticed one of the students having trouble getting his wooden sand goanna to stand on a rock.

This is going to be a hard act to follow T concluded as he put down his journal and moved to observe some boys attaching little painted budgies to a tree. The students chatted happily to him about the birds and how the male was more colourful than the female.

“They mate for life and can live without water,” he was told.
“Do you know what they eat?” T was hoping to keep the conversation going.

“They're not that fussy, see that book over there, there is a huge list in that about what they can eat and I also checked it on the Internet. Dad took me to the pet shop on Saturday and we tried to find a live one but couldn’t. The budgies in the pet shop are all the wrong colours; the bigger birds would kill them within an hour. These blend in much better with the desert foliage,” he added proudly.

T was impressed with the enthusiasm. So it was a whole family affair! He had been told about this sort of pedagogy at uni, cross-curricular activities negotiated with the students and sometimes involving the wider community but he hadn’t been sure what it was going to look like. He was impressed. His admiration for the teacher was heightened further as the students began to return to the class and sat down reading the whiteboard.

“Well done everyone,” the teacher exclaimed. “The garden is looking wonderful. Remember you only have one more lesson and then we need to complete our assessment tasks. Start thinking about how you might demonstrate your knowledge about the flora and fauna of the desert region so that we can put some evidence in your portfolios. Now I have a surprise for you. I want to introduce Mr T who is learning to be a teacher and he has come to this classroom from the university so that you can teach him.”

“What are we going to teach him?” came from the back of the class.

“Marine Biology,” the teacher responded. “And I have another surprise. The principal is going to come and officially open the garden at eleven tomorrow. That’s straight after recess so don’t be late. I’ll get a ribbon and some scissors if some of you can be here early to set it up. Now, quickly copy down your homework while I duck next door and ring Art and find out where Sue and James are.” With that she disappeared next door but left the door open and kept an eye on the class.

Jane, his mentor, had already packed her bag when T looked up from furiously scribbling in his diary. She explained she had two little ones to collect from childcare and her deal with herself was that she would always be there for them as soon as possible after school. She did all her preparation in the evenings after they went to bed. T was secretly glad she needed to leave. Now he had more time to spend on his unit plan. It was very bland in comparison to what he had just observed so he had a lot more work to do. Who was it that had told him that science teachers were traditional and didactic?

It was a long drive to the western side of the city where T would be coaching after school so he had arranged for someone else to take the warm up. It had been suggested at uni that they give up their part-time work while on prac but he needed his coaching money to pay for the petrol to drive to the school. What’s more he couldn’t let the kids down in the
middle of the season; they were doing really well and had settled into a good little team. T collected his gear and left as quickly as he could, going through the day in his head as he drove to the other side of the city.

Following his coaching T had his own cricket practice and it was dark and getting quite cold by the time he reached home. He shared the house with a number of other students and it looked like most of them had already eaten by the mess in the kitchen. He cleared a space, cut himself a vegemite sandwich, poured a glass of milk (that was all he had left in the fridge, he had actually hoped to stop at the supermarket but forgot) and went to his room. He could hear some TV drama and some music from the other rooms so assumed everyone was in so he went back and locked the doors and switched off the kitchen light. He would leave the mess to the cockroaches as usual. T was tired and just wanted to get to bed.

The morning was a rush as always and T only had time to grab an apple and his bag before he flew out the door. He wasn’t sure that he liked these early starts or the morning traffic. He made a mental note to get a place nearer his school the following year, that is, if he survived his pracs this year. After the hectic schedule yesterday he was looking forward to a less busy day and time to prepare some lessons. He had a double science after recess and that was all. He realised that he was looking forward to the science class. It was really more like a technology/ home economics/ art/design class though he had been surprised how much the students actually knew. It would be interesting to see how they wrote their own assessment tasks and then their portfolios. T realised the student centred pedagogy had been similar in the gymnastics class and wondered how many other teachers in the school worked on this almost individualised program that seemed to allow students to determine where they were at the beginning and where they felt they could be at the end. He would need to talk to someone about it. This might help him answer the question in his practicum assignment about innovative programs.

The traffic wasn’t as congested this morning and T arrived at school in good time. He went to the staffroom to grab a quick coffee and realised how hungry he was. He hadn’t actually seen the school canteen but had smelled it yesterday so went off in search of a nice bun. On turning the corner T was stunned by the number of students congregating around the tuck shop, and by the number of cultures represented. He hadn’t noticed the multi-cultural nature of the student population the previous day. He smelled hot chocolate and toast and it reminded him of school camps and sports trips. Right in the middle of it all, serving hot chocolate with a ladle was his HPE mentor, Steve.

“Morning,” he smiled. “Come to help, thanks. Could you just check the toast for me?” T followed the smell of burning toast and managed to save most of it from the
antiquated rotating toaster that seemed to have stuck. He piled it on a plate and took it out to Steve.

“Just put it on the table over there and grab a piece yourself if you like.” T did so and while he was spreading it with butter and vegemite one of the students came up and did the same.

“You a disadvantaged youth too, sir” he asked. T recognised one of the students from the HPE class.

“No, just hungry,” he responded.

“Me too,” laughed the kid as he moved back to a group of young people who were enjoying their hot chocolate.

T turned back and approached Steve, who looked up from filling what seemed like a never-ending array of cups with hot chocolate.

“Could you put on more toast,” he asked. “It is almost time for the bus from the river side to arrive and there is usually an absolute onslaught. How was the butter situation? Any peanut butter left? They seem to love that!” T almost missed the last part of the conversation as about thirty young people came around the corner making a considerable din. He rushed in to put on more toast and was absolutely flat out keeping the toast plate full for about ten minutes.

“Don’t put on any more,” he heard behind him. “They’re not allowed to be late for Home Group – that’s what we call pastoral care. That causes all sorts of problems.”

Steve filled the now empty urn with hot water and started scrubbing. “How many you reckon were here? Thirty? Forty? Fifty? Thanks for your help, by the way. My offsider is sick and the senior school students who usually help have an early lesson on Tuesdays.”

T guessed there were at least 50; he had made three loaves of bread into toast.

“I used to count the cups when I washed them but there was some complaint from a council health inspector about possible infection so the school decided the office staff would collect the mugs and put them in the staffroom dish washer. Did me a favour really. The school council needs numbers though, for a funding proposal they tell me. Least of my problems counting heads, I just want to feed stomachs. I just tell them what I think they want to hear.”

With that he rushed out the door and T could hear him chasing the students off to class. He was threatening them with closure if they didn’t get to Home Group on time and
there seemed to be amiable quipping going on, though T, who had taken on washing the
large urn, couldn’t quite hear. Steve came back in with the toast plate and one piece of toast.

“Yours,” he smiled. “Can you bring all the condiments in after you have spread it
please?” With that he started tidying the kitchen, covering over the toaster and then grabbed
the broom.

By the time T arrived back at the staffroom there was no one there and his coffee
was cold. This wasn’t quite how T had imagined it. He had been looking forward to coffee
with the other preservice teachers so they might ruminate over school issues and have some
intellectual conversations involving some of the other staff. Maybe later? Checking his
watch he looked for his bag and found it on a seat by the door. He needed to make a phone
call about the team he coached and the number was in his wallet. His wallet wasn’t in his
bag. He was sure he had put it there before he left home, maybe not? He reached for the
phone book, made his call leaving the inevitable message on a machine, and was pleased to
see Kay, one of the preservice teachers, arrive.

“Don’t you have Home Group?”

It didn’t appear so. Seemed strange, he’d check with Steve. Maybe it was because of
the breakfast program. He started to tell Kay about the breakfast program. She already knew
about it, her mentor had told her about the number of kids who came to school with no
breakfast and sometimes no dinner and how the school had decided to arrange breakfasts.
Apparently it had been a little tricky at first, the senior classes were to rotate responsibility
but that fell in a hole around assessment and exam time. Staff were then rostered but that
didn’t work, some complained they were here to teach and it messed up early lessons and
before school meetings. Then Steve took it over and it hadn’t looked back- except when the
health inspector came. Apparently the principal, ‘she who must be obeyed’, had gone all out
fighting the District Council and it had even hit the newspapers. It had been quite big news
all over town for a while. T wondered which planet he lived on. How could he have missed
it? And now he was in the middle of it – at least it meant he could have breakfast!

T didn’t manage to achieve much that morning. He had another call to make and
Kay told him the office staff had put a number of forms in the ‘student teacher’ pigeonhole.
The school needed contact numbers, police clearance numbers, previous experience, subject
details, other interests…the list went on.

Recess arrived and he collected his bag and headed for the science block,
remembering he had promised to meet with Jane before recess. He knew the students would
be getting organised for the garden opening and he hoped he could be of some assistance. He
also noticed the kids in the yard seemed to be pretty passive in comparison to what he
remembered. Quite a number were talking on mobile phones and others had earphones. He
didn’t know why they bothered; even he could hear the music through the earphones. The
girls seemed to be sitting around in small groups and the boys were in larger groups or on the
periphery of the larger groups. Generally it looked like the different cultural groups hung out
together though dotted here and there were mixed groups. He was aware that he was making
generalisations and those students who looked Asian could be third generation Australian so
he made another mental note to ask some questions about the student cohort. In the
meantime he would listen out for accents and try to become more informed by talking to the
students.

Almost the entire science class were adding finishing touches to the garden. There
were replicas of arid region birds and animals everywhere, as if they had all hatched
overnight. Others were getting their final tweaking and there was lots of discussion about
how to place them in the garden. There was a tall girl standing to the side with a stuffed
animal under her arm. It was a little large for the garden and she looked bewildered. T hadn’t
noticed her yesterday but she seemed to belong to the class. He watched as one of the girls
moved over and whispered in Jane’s ear and they turned towards this particular student.
They walked over and T could hear some very loud and hesitant parts of a conversation. The
student who alerted Jane seemed to be patting the stuffed animal that was still under the tall
girls arm. T recognised that this was a student with a disability and watched intently while
she was gently coaxed to the garden gate near the ribbon that had been set up for the
opening. Several other students joined them. After much discussion and gesturing
the large animal was placed in a very conspicuous position right at the gate. Everyone involved
seemed pleased, especially its owner.

After roll call they were about to go out into the garden to await the principal when
one of the boys up the back put his hand up. “Miss, you know that big lizard we have at the
gate?”

“Yes, Tom.”

T held his breath, what was he going to say about the ungainly lizard?

“Well, miss, I think we should make a sign to put next to it, something like
‘Welcome to 8 B’s garden’, you know, let everyone know what we did.”

“Good idea Tom, any volunteers?” A number of hands went up but they were
interrupted by the arrival of the principal and they all went out into the garden. T was lost in
thought and missed most of the opening ceremony. He remembered the taunting of disabled
students that occurred when he was at school and puzzled about the change. Maybe uni was
right, things are changing and the message we get from the media only focuses on the
negative. Already today he had seen a breakfast program and an excellent example of an ‘inclusive’ classroom as well as young people who are more accepting of difference than he ever remembered.

Jane seemed impatient to move on but walked around with the principal pointing out the features of the garden and calling individual students to speak about their contributions and how the flora and fauna adapted to the arid environment. When students didn’t know answers they were directed to the computers or resource books to find out. This seemed to work really well with most of the class either on the computer, reading research books or finishing off their figures. A few students asked for leave passes to go to the library to find answers and were asked to be back by the beginning of the second lesson. Eventually the principal left and Jane started writing the lesson sequence on the board.

“Best laid plans…” Jane sighed, as she placed some photocopied sheets on the front desk. “But it was good practice and I think some of them realised the gaps in their understanding.”

The noise level was getting quite high as the students drifted back into the classroom. They were socialising and T heard snippets of conversation about TV programs, bands, sport and other people. He was surprised that Jane let this happen and wandered out to the garden to find Jane deep in conversation with a group of students. One of them had been crying and they were all looking at their feet. T ducked back inside believing that he did not have a role to play there, at this stage in his prac.

By the time the bell went for the second lesson everyone seemed to be back in their desks and Jane handed out the worksheet and directed them to the board. They spent the lesson discussing the fertile question that had begun the unit and the research questions and outcomes they had designed in groups. There had obviously been a lot of background work before they had made a start on their garden. By brainstorming in groups they identified which questions they had answered and which they had failed to answer. After that they shared group decisions with the whole class and any points that were not clear Jane directed back to the group. T was surprised how insightful some of the students were and how aware of their learning processes they appeared. Jane eventually turned their attention to the worksheet and asked them to frame three new questions that would give them the opportunity to demonstrate what they knew about the arid landscape. After a few minutes she paired them up and asked them to read each other’s questions and make suggestions for improvements. This was to be finished for homework and the questions would be transferred to separate cards and pooled the next day, for the end of unit assessment. Some of the students found the task difficult but were helped by their partner while others seemed to
enjoy the challenge. The disabled student was paired with the boy whose dad had taken him to the pet shop and he was patiently trying to write a question for her. Jane was moving from desk to desk commenting on questions and making suggestions. Occasionally she pointed to spelling errors and stood right next to any students who were off task. The time passed quickly and soon she was back out at the board calling for their attention and pointing to the homework task.

“This means you need to bring your best brains to the lesson tomorrow so that you can answer the questions,” she said just before the lunch bell sounded.

Jane and T walked to the staffroom together and Jane explained the presence of several Downs Syndrome students in the school.

“The kids are great with Suzie but it is hard,” she went on. “She doesn’t come to every lesson and can be quite demonstrative if she gets confused. It was good Prue noticed her standing there with her lizard; I was so obsessed with the principal coming that I had totally forgotten she joins us today. I worked with the students all morning to get the statues finished, their English teacher let us use the double English because we have worked on this self assessment idea together and she knew I would do the explaining today and it would be more like an English class.”

Jane stopped talking as she reflected. “I’m not sure I did it very well but the English teacher will go through it again before their English assessment and that will reinforce the whole idea. It’s like a middle school concept, with middle schooling pedagogies and cross-curricular activities, yet we still work within the traditional timetable. It is a little more work but we believe it is worth it, we don’t believe knowledge is divided into subject or discipline areas.”

Jane provided T with more details about the class as they walked into the staffroom. One of the students has Asperger’s syndrome but he was ok so long as he wasn’t cornered. “He goes through stages of extreme attention seeking behaviour but has been good during this unit. I’ll point him out and you might be able to talk to him about his knowledge of the marine environment. If you can pick up on something he knows about he will focus in and benefit a lot more.”

Another student’s brother had died only a couple of weeks ago. Jane had given him permission to leave the classroom anytime he felt sad and wanted to see the counsellor. So far he had been fine in class but she had heard he was in a lot of trouble in the yard, taking out his anger on the other kids. The school counsellor was worried about him but taught him for maths so was able to watch him carefully. The girls were a bit chatty and there were a
number of class members who could spend a whole lesson not doing anything if you didn’t keep an eye on them, he was warned.

T found some of this hard to believe, they seemed like a model class. “You’ve seen them at their best,” Jane told him between bites of sandwich. “You have been lucky, this unit and the garden and all really struck a note with them and I’ve been pretty flexible letting them work with art and tech and in the library. It worked and we will see what they learned when we read their assessments. My gut feeling is that they learned heaps but it doesn’t always work like this, I’ve had some total disasters, I’ll tell you about them one day. Certainly the individual evaluation notes I’ve made during this program have indicated good progress.” She smiled a wry smile and excused herself. She needed to get ready for her next lesson.

When he walked past the gym, T put his head through the door, but everyone seemed so involved that he decided to go to the small area in the HPE office they had given him as a desk. He had programs to write and he really wasn’t any further advanced than he had been on Monday. Jane had obviously forgotten their meeting to discuss the marine science so he had better re-schedule that too. Steve wasn’t in the office and the others just nodded a greeting and went back to what they were doing. He found his programs and sat looking at them for some time. Next time he looked up he was alone and still wondering how to advance his plans. He needed to speak to someone who could help. He was confused about Steve. He had made up his mind that Steve wasn’t serious about his teaching. They used to refer to such teachers as ‘Jocks’, PE teachers who just played games with their classes. But the experience this morning at breakfast had changed his view. Who could he talk to? Perhaps he had better make that appointment with the PE lecturer at uni and see what he could find out about this health unit. He had eight double lessons and all the relationship and safe practices outcomes in the curriculum framework to cover. What had Steve said? There were videos and kits on contraceptives and maybe some websites. He needed to find out how to get the class into the computer rooms, book an area with a video and locate these kits. He began to make a list of questions and tasks. He tentatively wrote names next to each one, then read his timetable and tried to allocate all the tasks to his free lessons. He was still pondering over the activities time Friday afternoon when Steve and the senior, Dave, walked in, deep in conversation. He wasn’t sure they had seen him so he walked over. They both acknowledged him but went on talking so he busied himself studying the notice board. There was a plastic sleeve pinned to the board marked ‘staff timetables’ and so he took it down. He sorted through it and found the timetables for both Steve and Dave realising he needed to know when they had their free lessons so he could
meet with them. He was on his way back to his desk when Dave asked him how it was going.

“Great,” he responded, but not very convincingly.

Steve took over. “He’s a legend,” he claimed enthusiastically. “Saved the day at breakfast. Cooked about a hundred slices of toast in ten minutes flat.”

T smiled, “Thanks.”

The bell interrupted them and the two teachers grabbed their bags and took off like a shot. T went back to his list feeling somewhat happier and tried to map Dave and Steve’s free lessons onto his plan. They didn’t have many frees he realised, when do they do all their planning and marking? He was relieved to see both were free last lesson Tuesday and hoped they would soon be back into the office. Meanwhile he would see what he could find in the library and try to catch up with the other preservice teachers. Maybe they had worked out how to book the computer room or the video players?

The librarian was really helpful and also explained the process for room bookings. It was all computerised now, he was proudly told. She showed him how to do the bookings and recommended which rooms were closest to the HPE office. She was also able to take him to the staff research section of the library but added that the HPE office had its own research library and they hadn’t even returned the resources from last year. She suspected some of them had gone walk-about with the staff who had left and also recommended that T use the uni teacher resource library. Her daughter was a HPE teacher in a primary school and often borrowed from the uni library.

“They seem to have more money than us,” she had added, “and seem to update more regularly. If you find anything useful let me know. I’ll get it for the school. We have a certain amount of money to spend on each department but HPE hardly ever reach their allocation. They are too busy to get around to it, they tell me.” With that she left T to browse.

She was right there wasn’t much there for HPE but there was a huge marine science section. T was deep in a book on the Great Barrier Reef when the bell went again. He couldn’t believe how quickly the time passed.

When he arrived back at the HPE office both Dave and Steve were at their desks. He found out where they kept the key to their resource cupboard and after struggling with the lock for a while managed to get inside. What a mess. Everything seemed to be rammed in and he moved one book and what seemed like half the cupboard contents fell out. Dave laughed behind him.
“You would do us huge service if you could bring some order to that cupboard,” he commented. “The staff member who used to look after it was transferred and we just haven’t had time to do anything with it.”

T told him he would see what he could do but at the moment he was looking for some sex education or personal relationship resources. Dave smiled knowingly and suggested they should be there somewhere. He called Steve over and they discussed what T should be looking for. “I think it is a green folder…and there is a video…and somewhere there is a big magnetic board where you can stick all these models of a growing foetus and show how contraceptives work. It’s probably behind a cupboard.” He started to look behind cupboards, gave up and added. “There is also an STD game somewhere…and some details about AIDS. The government had a huge promotion a few years ago and bombarded us with information. Sue used to look after all that too.”

They left T to search through the cupboard promising to ask the others if they had anything that T could use for the year 10 unit. “After all we will all need to teach it to the year 10 classes as we rotate through the semester,” Dave added. “You are just unlucky that you are first.”

The realisation hit T that in some ways he had been set up. No one had wanted to prepare this unit and it sounded like the now absent Sue used to do it all for them. He was a solution to their problem. Well, he would show them that males in the twenty first century are just as capable of dealing with sensitive issues, even with fifteen-year-old students. He attacked the cupboard with a renewed gusto and began sorting the folders, books, worksheets, videos, cassettes and DVDs into some sort of order. There was actually some good stuff here, he might come back and make copies later.

Just as he was about to give up T found a sealed box at the back of the cupboard. It was quite heavy and he lifted it out. It had a label *Personal Relationships – Year 10 Health* and inside there was a video, folders, plastic sleeves, laminated notices, folded posters… so Sue hadn’t taken the stuff with her.

It was quite late by the time T had tidied the cupboard and squeezed everything back in. Most people had gone but Steve was still at his desk.

“I found some of the stuff you told me about,” T offered. “Sue had packed it all away for you.” He didn’t add that he had also found unit plans and lesson plans and step-by-step instructions. He’d let them sweat for a while. Steve looked up almost apologetically.

“That’s great. Do you want to sit down with me on Friday morning and go through the unit? I’m flat out until then. We are up to finals in the interclass Friday afternoon sports
and I haven’t even done the minor position draws yet.” Steve was trying to show some interest.

T gave him thumbs up to indicate his agreement, popped one of the folders into his bag and said goodbye. He couldn’t believe it was only Tuesday; he seemed to have learned a lot already and was looking forward to sharing it with his brother over dinner. Since his brother had come down to the city for TAFE they had made a habit of catching up for a drink and dinner on Tuesdays. Roy was going to be a chef and had made friends with many of the apprentices around town so they were usually assured of a great meal and sometimes even a ‘doggy bag’. He remembered then that he must have left his wallet home but wouldn’t have time to collect it. He would borrow from his brother who always seemed to have plenty of money. His weekend job in one of the city hotels was well paid although he worked long hours.

T had looked for his wallet at home but it was late and he was exhausted. Again in the morning he was running late and it wasn’t until he was driving to school that the realisation hit him. He had been on his way to the tuck shop when he joined the free breakfast throng. His wallet was in his hand! He remembered they had been told about this at uni too. There was a high incidence of new teachers (and new people in any workforce) being robbed. T didn’t feel good; it took the shine off things. He felt like giving free breakfast a miss but he had promised and he wanted a good report.

Moments after he arrived to help with breakfast Steve threw something at him. “This yours?” he asked. “You should be more careful.” T caught the wallet that was hurled towards him and was applauded by a group of students nearby. There was something about the look they gave him that told him they knew something about it and a voice in his head warned him not to check it, to just put it in his pocket. And that was what he did as he walked over to make the toast.

“You do the hot chocolate today,” Steve suggested with a knowing look. “You get to know the kids better.”

And so the week progressed. There was stimulus and information overload and everyone was really too busy for him but the school had a good feel about it. By Friday afternoon T felt he was as ready as he could be for Monday, which was his fullest day. Just a few finishing touches to make over the weekend. He had even managed to learn some names and earn a bit of respect. Dave had been pleased about the tidy resource cupboard and Steve had been impressed by his good sense in not checking his wallet in front of the students. Yes, it had been stolen but some of the kids had decided it wasn’t fair and somehow had
managed to get it back intact, or maybe a few dollars light but nothing significant. They said no more about it.

Double ‘Human Relationships’ first up Monday. T had the good sense to use the students’ weekend experiences as a starting point. He had chatted to some students on Wednesday when the others were playing ‘invasion’ games and had a pretty good idea what they had covered in the past and what seemed to interest them. He was shocked to learn that they had no memory of the ‘grim reaper’ ads during the community AIDS promotions; in fact, they had little knowledge of HIV in Western society. They seemed to be aware of the devastation that it was causing in Africa and had heard of safe sex and blood rules but didn’t really know what it was about.

Sue’s lesson and unit plans had been invaluable; in many ways she had done most of the work, from resources to web sites. There were overheads and work sheets, games, group work activities, DVDs and videos. T had only needed to update a few things to make it meaningful for this group of year 10s. He had planned to start with some open questions and some brainstorming so that the students could work out what they wanted to know, then mind mapping so that they could work out what they already knew as a group. He wanted the students to be able to share their knowledge rather than expect him to provide the content. What scared him though, was that he hadn’t seen how they worked together in the classroom, nor did he know if they would even answer his questions or engage with the activities. When he had shown his plan to Steve he had watched intently, and although Steve had given the impression of studying it intently, he was sure his mind was elsewhere – probably on the sports draw!

T was really nervous as he set up the room for his first lesson. He had spent hours going through it over and over again and had even rung his little sister to see what she thought. She said it sounded cool, and then giggled, which wasn’t much help. He wished he had been able to run through the lesson plan with Steve. T’s palms were sweaty and his breathing was quite shallow as the class filed into the room. Some of the boys threw their bags in the corner apparently in disgust at having PE in the classroom. T kept writing on the board thinking that maybe when he turned around he would have turned into a teacher instead of this shaking leaf. The classroom noise of desks and chairs had almost ceased when T finally turned around to a sea of eyes and faces. He had heard that some preservice teachers ‘choke’ at this point and despite their preparation their mind goes blank and nothing comes out of their mouth. He worried for a split second that that was going to happen to him. He glanced at Steve who smiled encouragingly and nodded his head imperceptibly as if to say, go for it. He took a deep breath.
“Hands up if you don’t like Monday morning,” he asked with quite a convincing tone.

Most hands shot up and he was relieved to see that some of the hands belonged to students whose names he knew.

“Pete, tell the class why you don’t like Monday.”

“Have to come to school.”

“And,” he prompted.

“Can’t just hang out with my friends.”

“Spot on,” said T. “Megan, what about you?”

“Same, sir. I prefer to do things with my friends.”

“So relationships are important?”

“Sure are,” from the back of the room.

“Tell me why?” T queried a student he didn’t recognise at the back of the room, relieved that his line of questioning was heading in the right direction.

“Yer mates make you feel good, like happy, you know.”

T used this line to involve the rest of the class. “Turn to the person next to you and tell them what it is about being with friends that makes you feel good,” he requested. To his delight there was an immediate swell of noise as ten to fifteen conversations took off. T took the opportunity to switch on the overhead projector where he had a long list of reasons that the students might come up with (gratis Sue, whom he had never met). He let them talk for about thirty seconds and then said “Hands up if some of the reasons given by the person you talked to are here.”

Again T was relieved. Gradually most hands went up as the students read the list, and the sea of faces were still pointed his way. “Let’s quickly find out which reasons came out most strongly,” he said. “We’ll just go up and down the isles starting with Megan.” (It was obvious Megan was a good starting point she had already volunteered an answer).

As he pointed the students responded. After all it was the idea of the person to whom they had been talking not theirs, so they felt comfortable they weren’t being too revealing. They had reached the third row of seats when there was sudden silence. All he got was a shrug and a look that was rather challenging.

He was prepared for this. Sue’s notes had warned him. “Glad you brought this up,” he said. “Would you like to pass?”
“Yep.”

So he moved on. There were a couple of other “pass” responses, followed by small giggles from the class and he calculated that it was time for plan B. At some stage in the lesson he had planned to negotiate ‘class rules’ for this unit of work. There could be many sensitive and personal issues discussed and carefully constructed and agreed rules would be an advantage.

The class was quite adept at designing class rules. They had obviously done it before and were aware of the need to speak in the third person, of sensitivity and confidentiality, the right to pass and to respect another’s right to speak or right to remain silent. They had some good ideas on negotiating assessment and seemed pleased that they were being involved in making these decisions. As they tidied up the class rules there were more and more questions about what they were going to be covering, so T decided to vary his lesson plan and go through his overview with them. He tried to involve everyone in the discussion but became increasingly aware that certain class members were asking and answering all the questions while the others just looked on (or looked out the window, or doodled in their books). Time for the video clips, he decided. He had previewed them over the weekend and knew they would engage the class and he wanted to get their ideas about fun activities and risk taking behaviours.

The class went quickly into passive viewing mode though they seemed to be genuinely interested in the quick moving clips of young people enjoying themselves in all sorts of situations; parties, fun parks, skiing, skateboarding, surfing, playing sport, shopping, computer games, beach games, swimming pools, kite flying, videos, movies, bands… T had forgotten to give them the worksheet with questions to answer during the video. He paused the program actually relieved to hear a chorus of, “Oh, sir, no, let us watch this,” as he quickly passed out the work sheet. Looking at his watch he calculated he had time to go through it with them, finish the video and still squeeze in the people bingo quiz he had prepared. He wanted to see how they mixed as a class before he launched into the group work in the next lesson. He had forgotten to buy a prize for the person who was able to first match a name to all the bingo questions but it was too late to worry about that now.

After the video and the worksheet he explained what to do for people bingo and they enthusiastically launched into matching names with questions.

“You got any brothers and sisters, sir?” he was asked.

“Two brothers and a sister,” he responded.

“Me too, can I put your name on here?”
T realised that this would be a way to get to know more names so nodded yes and added,

“What’s your name? You have blue eyes, that’s one of the questions.”

The game had a winner in no time and T noticed even Steve had joined in. He collected the sheets, asked the class to copy their homework from the board and was about to go through the worksheet when the bell went. He tried to talk on but the class had already packed their bags and were heading for the door.

“Just one more thing,” he tried. “Listen in, please!” But it was to no avail, they were gone, they were chatting, they were not interested anymore.

“Let’s go to the staffroom for a coffee,” Steve suggested. “You missed the staff meeting this morning and there are a number of timetable changes on the white board you had better get down.”

T couldn’t believe it. He had totally forgotten. What a fool! He began to apologise to Steve who waved it away.

“No probs,” he said. “It was worth it. Good lesson. I’ve made a few comments on the feedback sheet but a great start I’d say.”

They arrived at a very busy staff room and Steve was immediately called away. T went in search of the other preservice teachers to find out how they were going. It was good he had that first double lesson down, only seven to go!

He found the others out on the balcony. It was a little cooler and they had found it was a good place to talk. Many of the younger teachers seemed to congregate out there too. No one else had taught their first lesson yet but they would all have done so by the end of the day so they agreed to meet quickly for a coffee after school. T had to get to coaching but calculated he could spare a few minutes, it would be nice to hear how the others had survived. They seemed to have a mixed group of mentors and Anna was on the brink of throwing it all in. Her principal mentor had been pretty tough on her, ripping into her in front of the class and she had been in tears several times last week. She hadn’t even taught yet but had been dressed down about taking resources home. T had recommended the she go and see the course coordinator and ask for a new placement and was surprised to see that she was still there. He decided not to ask any questions, as it was obvious she was reading through her lesson plan and was looking a bit pale. He gave her a reassuring wave on his way to help Dave set up for gym class.

T was again mesmerised by the gym lesson. Dave never cease to amaze him. He seemed to know exactly what each class member was capable of and they worked so well...
together. He appeared to have eyes in the back of his head and sensed immediately when someone was off task. The students really respected and trusted him and would try skills that were quite complex with his support. They frequently referred to or adjusted their task cards and some were even perfecting their routines to music. They had obviously been working on their routines in their own time as they had improved dramatically from the last lesson.

Finding his observation proforma a little restrictive T had modified it over the weekend. There was room now to list the opportunities Dave offered for interpersonal relationships and peer group support. There was a lot to write and then he walked around the class, from time to time hearing snippets of conversation between students. There was certainly a lot of learning happening in this classroom, students were learning a lot about themselves and each other as well as gymnastic skills, balance, fitness, exercise physiology and biomechanics. Dave made it all look so easy.

The entire lunch hour and the following lesson were dedicated to perfecting his first science lesson. Jane was certainly a hard task to follow and T had also spent much of the weekend making his plan less teacher and content centred. Fortunately he knew his material well and had lots of activities for the students to do. His biggest challenge was going to be keeping them focused in the last lesson of the day and keeping his own energy levels up. He felt quite tired already. His plan was to spend much of the lesson finding out what the students already knew and helping them design strategies for finding out more about a particular aspect of marine science that interested them. Jane had told him that whales, dolphins, surf and waves, the Great Barrier Reef and sonar had been great hits in the past and had reminded him that the recent tsunamis would probably stimulate some questions. She also warned that it was possible that with such a multi-cultural cohort there could be someone who had lost a relative or friend in the tsunami so he needed to progress carefully there. T had brought along a video on the Great Barrier Reef as a discussion starter and had designed a wide range of open questions to help the class focus on the topic. They seemed like a cooperative class so he was hopeful it would go well.

T arrived early but there was another class in the room completing an experiment. Their teacher looked a bit frazzled and the atmosphere seemed tense. There were five students sitting outside the door looking pretty grumpy. He couldn’t hear exactly what was going on inside the classroom but the teacher seemed to be yelling and T could see through the window that most of the class were fiddling with apparatus in ways that he recognised to be a little dangerous. They didn’t look like they had started to pack up and there was only a minute to go.
Consequently it was well after the bell before T’s year 8 class entered the science classroom, so Jane offered to call the roll while T set the video and wrote the first set of questions on the board. By the time he was ready the class were deep in conversation with Jane about their assessment from the previous week and were quite resentful when she handed the class back to him, telling them that they would discuss it further at another time. Some of them seemed to deliberately look out of the window when he introduced the topic and the video. Fortunately the video was of such a high standard that before long they were all watching in fascination. The marine environment holds so many surprises and they were introduced to marine animals that were huge, tiny, colourful, almost transparent, fast, slow, shy and aggressive.

Questions designed to interrogate the reasons for such variety in the marine environment followed the video. T wanted the students to problem solve, make connections and really understand how the marine environment had evolved. He hoped they might relate their ideas to the arid environment they had been studying with Jane and recognise the similarities in adaptation. He used the example where John had told him the birds in the pet shop would have been captured quite quickly due to their inability to camouflage and related this to the different coloured fish. One bright spark suggested he preferred to catch the fish and this started a discussion on the effect of man on the marine environment. That led to pollution, the Crown of Thorns in the Barrier Reef and further comments about other introduced species. The students found that they actually knew a lot about the marine environment already and T tried to lead them towards the importance of this knowledge to their everyday life. Just as they seemed to have run out of ideas the movie ‘Nemo’ (the animated fish) came up and there was a renewed interest. It seemed that nearly everyone had seen ‘Nemo 1’ and were keen for ‘Nemo 2’ to be released. They asked T if he would take them to see it? T avoided committing himself but used their ideas to expose even more knowledge and understanding. T hadn’t seen the movie but had seen enough of the shorts to have a reasonable idea about it.

The next step was to help them write their own research question related to a problem or inconsistency in the marine environment. They should then discuss it with another student to tease it out a bit more. For homework he wanted them to discuss it further with an adult or research it further on the Internet. T was aware of the ‘essential’ learnings in the curriculum framework and wanted to stress the ‘learning community’ and the importance of a range of communication skills.

The students seemed quite focussed and most had the beginnings of a research problem. Jane had helped by taking on board the more difficult students allowing T to concentrate on the many questions that were being addressed to him. He was trying very
hard to rephrase the questions and turn them back on the students but realised he needed lots more practice. They were however getting the idea of problem-based learning and most had come up with a question that they shared with a partner. Once they had it phrased they were allowed to come and write it on the whiteboard and before the end of the lesson they had a range of amazing questions, the sort of naïve yet insightful questions that young people are so adept at asking. T was having so much fun that he almost jumped when Jane tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to the clock. The lesson had gone so fast. He quickly reminded the class about their homework task and had just finished when the bell went and the chairs were immediately pushed back and the students disappeared.

T copied the research questions off the board as Jane collected her bag and waved goodbye. “Went well, talk about it tomorrow,” she called as she disappeared out the door.

With his head still spinning T walked towards the staff room. All those questions and the speed of the lesson had exhausted him yet he was pleased to report to the others it had gone quite well. The other preservice teachers seemed to have survived their first day too, except Anna who was nowhere to be seen and T didn’t have time to go looking for her. He really had to rush to get to training or his team were going to feel neglected. He promised himself as he rushed out to his car that he would chase Anna up straight after ‘breakfast duty’ the next day. He felt good, like a weight of self-doubt had been lifted. He had enjoyed teaching his first lessons and had enjoyed relating to his classes. He wondered if his students would spare the lesson another thought but realised that was probably too much to hope for.

True to his word T went looking for Anna straight after he had cleaned up the breakfast remnants. He already recognised a number of students from his classes and had a few brief conversations between making toast and serving hot chocolate. He realised quickly that students didn’t want to talk about school while at breakfast nor did they want to be identified in class as part of the breakfast program. Sport, bands and computer games were safe topics and T was able to join in especially well when sport was the topic. He made a mental note to look up some of the bands and recent music. He’d never been part of that scene and had missed out on the development of the computer games partly by being in the country but mainly, he suspected, from being so poor.

Anna couldn’t be found and T didn’t want to make his search too obvious. Anna wouldn’t appreciate him advertising that she was unhappy. Anyway he had a double science lesson to think about. He had fallen into bed straight after training so had not written his reflections on the previous lessons nor made adjustments to the imminent double lesson. Luckily he had planned this one at the same time as lesson one so felt reasonably
comfortable with it. He knew Jane should be free, so he collected his bag and headed for the science wing.

Jane handed him his feedback sheet as soon as he arrived. “I sat down with this and your lesson plans as soon as the kids went to bed,” she remarked. “I’ve made a few comments but I think it went well.”

They went on to discuss the double lesson coming up and particularly the move from the classroom to the library in the middle. It appeared that many of the classes in the corridor also had a double and wouldn’t appreciate being disturbed. T was also reminded to give the students lots of warning in the library to borrow their books early and avoid the last minute rush.

“Some of the teachers claim the librarian runs the library like a military establishment,” Jane explained. “But I actually get on with her really well and she has been so helpful. She will take my students individually, like during the garden unit, and even came over to see how the garden was progressing.” T had found the librarian very helpful on his previous visit and resolved to keep on the right side of her.

Jane excused herself explaining she had some photocopying to do for her year 12 class who were going to meet her in the library while the year 8s were doing their research, so she left T to read her comments and make his adjustments.

The lesson had turned out to be a bit flat. Firstly he had forgotten Suzie was going to be there and Jane hadn’t reminded him. Then not many of the students had looked at their research question for homework and only a few had discussed it with a knowledgeable adult. One student had a brother working in marine biology in Queensland, another an uncle in aquaculture in Tasmania and a third had a mum working for the local authority in coastline protection. These people had all offered another perspective and had made the area more relevant for the students but T was disappointed with the general lack of response. Maybe he should have paid more attention during the methods workshop on framing questions? He went on to introduce wave motion and although most of the students copied the notes and drew the pictures of a breaking wave he was aware that they had little enthusiasm. Whenever he walked through the room he could sense something happening behind him but was never able to work out what.

Once the notes and drawings were copied, T went on to explain that they would be going to the library to research their question in the second lesson. That seemed to please them. He slowly and clearly instructed them that they were to leave the classroom very quietly and not speak until they reached the bottom of the stairs and were in the yard. He told them what they needed to take with them and that the classroom would be locked when they
were out. He also reminded them of the rules and conduct expected in the library. In the meantime they were to turn back to their question and start to mind map their ideas.

Jane had assured him they had done this before but there was a general unrest and claims that they did not understand. T looked helplessly at Jane who came to the front of the room and immediately started drawing ellipses on the white board.

“Remember we mind mapped during the unit on mammals,” she reminded them. “We brainstormed all the things we knew about mammals then we put them into groups in much the same way as our brain groups our knowledge.” T could see a few nods and a few knowing looks. They seemed happier with Jane out the front and there were lots of hands in the air and many questions. She reminded them of other activities they had completed with the mind mapping and it was obvious they shared an understanding and experience that T did not feel part of. Jane had such a relaxed manner and was still talking and answering questions when the bell went. There was an immediate shuffle as books and pens were collected and bags packed. At least they had been listening to him, T reflected. They knew they were going to the library. Then he noticed Jane’s expression as she glanced towards him, unsure what she should do. But it was already too late. Some of them were already out the door, talking and laughing at the top of their voices. T quickly grabbed his books and followed while Jane stayed behind to get Suzie organised and lock the room.

The library session went quite well but T remained a little angry. He had arranged for the librarian to collect together all the marine biology books suitable for year 8 and they had been placed on a couple of tables at the back of the library. A few students headed straight for the computers and were doing Google searches. T hoped they knew what they were doing, he had intended explaining some good sites but they had run out of time.

Moving around the library and talking to the students individually was the most satisfying part of the lesson for T. Most of the students had decided on a topic and he helped them fine-tune their question and develop a number of sub-questions as their knowledge increased. Suzie was sitting with Jane listening in on her discussions with the year 12 students and T decided to let her stay there. He was more concerned about the group of students who had honed in on the computers and who seemed to always have the home page on the screen when he walked over. By surreptitiously watching them from behind a bookcase he worked out that they were logged into the email page and were spending most of their time writing emails. It could be worse. Although T assumed that any unacceptable chat sites would have been blocked, he had heard that many students had found alternative ways to access them. He walked past a group of students from another class crowded around one computer and recognised a video clip that was particularly suggestive and wondered
about the school policy. He had forgotten to ask about it and needed to acquire a copy. Again he was reminded of how complex schools were and just how much they needed to get their heads around in a short time.

By the time he confronted the email group the lesson was almost over. T guessed they would deny what they were doing so he didn’t waste time arguing with them, he just asked what their research question was and gave them some appropriate sites. Several of them hadn’t given the question much thought so he gave them some ideas. T was suddenly distracted by some loud voices behind a shelf and thinking he recognised one of them he headed that way. Looking over his shoulder he noticed at least one student immediately flick back to the email page. He made a mental note to discuss some strategies with his mentors for dealing with these problems.

Jane had reached the voices before him and was talking to Luke who T remembered had been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, possible Asperger’s syndrome. T had forgotten about him and Jane’s advice concerning finding a focus for him. As he approached, Jane turned and suggested she and Luke go and open up the classroom and T should send the students up in twos or threes to collect their bags. By the time T had tidied the books and thanked the librarian there was no one in the classroom and the door was locked. His bag was still inside and he resolved to ask for a key for the rest of his prac.

As he went to lunch T felt a little dejected that his mentor had needed to bail him out twice in one lesson. He checked with the office and immediately found out the difficulties involved in organising a key and mildly irritated went to search for Anna. Despite surreptitious questioning he became no wiser as to her whereabouts and with his bag now locked in the science classroom he searched for Jane to borrow her key. Most of the preservice teachers were busy getting organised for their lessons so there had been little opportunity to talk. One of the females agreed to ring Anna if she didn’t see her that afternoon. T realised that he hadn’t had much to eat for a couple of days and was looking forward to meeting his brother for a nice big feed that evening. Thank goodness for breakfast club it was his only chance to eat!

The lab assistant spent the afternoon showing T how to use the wave machine and how and when to add the sand and increase the wave size. He quite enjoyed himself and assumed the students would too. He devised some practical and open questions, hoping to stimulate inquiry based learning, but was feeling less confident that the class were engaging with his teaching. He had a list of different ‘pedagogies’ from uni and was trying to vary his teaching style to meet the needs of the students but was increasingly becoming aware that there was more to ‘becoming a teacher’ than presenting an engaging lesson. Some students
seemed to ‘engage’ all the time. Others seemed totally disengaged, like they felt school was a waste of their time. Students appeared to be continuously looking for distractions to move the moment on; they appeared unwilling to concentrate beyond the superficial ‘must know’ informational knowledge. T was aware that he was missing something; something that he suspected might take more than a few weeks to learn. He was sure that the students were completely comfortable with the roles they played in the classroom and the patterns they had established had group consensus. In some ways they seemed to protect each other though some were more committed than others. He wondered what it was like in their art class and their English class. Were the patterns different, did different students answer the questions and run the ‘show’? He had the impression it was all a bit of a game for the young people in the classes and they were testing him to see how he played the game. He really wasn’t sure of the best way to respond.

T didn’t have much time to ponder this issue. He had a science lesson and a double HPE lesson to organise for the next day. He had arranged to meet with Steve in lesson six to go through his ‘Personal Relationships’ plan. He was still holding out on just how much he had retrieved from Sue’s material but was going to show Steve the whole kit today. He needed to have Steve’s support as some of the areas the students had shown greatest interest in were quite controversial and he needed to know about school policy. Students had asked about suicide, contraception, abortion, HIV, STDs and drugs. He had added conflict resolution because they had done that at uni and he felt confident about presenting it this week. He could then spend one double on each of the others if Steve agreed.

Steve seemed quite impressed by his plans and suggested he speak to Dave about school rules on sensitive issues. Steve still gave the impression that he was relieved that T was taking this unit and T wondered if he would take a preservice teacher at this time every year for the same reason. He wondered about asking, but Dave arrived and he immediately grabbed him before he became involved in anything else. Apparently a letter had been sent to parents at the beginning of the semester informing them, among other things like bus trips to the local pool, that there would be a human relationships unit that might deal with sensitive issues. Parents were to indicate their consent by ticking the appropriate boxes and signing the form. They were filed in the faculty office and T would need to check them. Dave added that a diary note to advise parents that they were covering these issues now would be wise in case they noticed some sudden changes in behaviour at home.

There was so much to remember and T appreciated the advice. What would have happened if he hadn’t asked? He guessed he could have ended up in strife? What was Steve thinking of? He was a nice guy but he hadn’t made T much of a priority, he felt more like an assistant teacher than a preservice teacher. Some of the other preservice teachers complained
of this too. Even worse, one of the women doing the course had told him over the weekend that her mentor admitted to her that she hadn’t wanted to take a preservice teacher but had been forced into it. How would that make you feel? Fortunately Gwen was coping with it but it was a hard call. They did get paid to do it after all, although it had been mentioned that it wasn’t much after tax. Teachers and schools really were multifaceted places, not for the faint at heart!
R’s story

Part 1

It had been another day in front of the computer screen with very little opportunity for interaction, the occasional phone call from clients the only break from the screen. R’s neck ached and she looked at herself in the lift mirror and could see she was beginning to slump forward at the shoulders from poor posture. She wondered how this had happened, an office job was the last thing that had come up on those career tests they did at school. Working with people, being creative, working with animals, designing, working with children were the career pathways suited to her interests and disposition.

It wasn’t that her job in the publishing company didn’t offer interesting opportunities, it had just become too much about money and administration since she accepted her last promotion. At first it had been fun meeting the corporate clients and discussing their needs but in the end not many of them were willing to make major changes to their publications and year books, stressing accuracy and clear graphs and tables as a preference. She had been able to convince many of them that more photographs of their operations would improve their publications and that had been an exciting prospect but in the end most companies had their own photographer (who was willing at a price) to provide photographs and the amount of paperwork that had entailed counteracted the potential enjoyment of a new design. Then her director had refused to let her cover the other clients herself, explaining she was too valuable in the office to be travelling around with a camera and they would get their local photographers to provide a selection of digital photographs for her to choose from. In the end that had meant more time in front of the screen editing and digitally highlighting poorly composed images.

Walking to the car R tried not to feel ungrateful but her neck really hurt and her eyes were sore. She had a good job. She was well respected and worked in a nice office building in a picturesque part of the city, though she had to admit that she couldn’t remember when she was last outside the building during day light hours.

She had a lovely family, great husband, nice house…and she was thankful. But they were also part of the problem, if she was honest with herself. She had dedicated herself to the family and really they didn’t need her any more, the kids that is. Aaron, her husband still needed her; they were still very much in love. Love. That had been the problem from the start.
R had done really well at school. She was a bit of an all-rounder, which had made it difficult to choose subjects in her final years. She had decided on English, Maths, Biology, History and Fine Art so she could ‘keep her options open’ and had applied to do an Arts degree at the local university. She had planned to do a range of subjects in her first year and then choose a career pathway. But she met Aaron and they hadn’t spent much time at uni. They had spent most of their first year in each other’s arms. How she had ever managed to pass she still didn’t know. Aaron had failed dismally. He had then taken an apprenticeship, which he had been much more suited to anyway, and was now running his own business and happy as can be.

R had done much better in her second year but had limited her options by having such low grades and still hadn’t been able to progress towards that career pathway. She had moved to units more related to business but had kept up with her design interests by enrolling in a new unit in graphic design. It was hard to believe how basic the software and computers had been then, she reminisced. Yet she had been lucky. Their lecturer had just returned from Europe and was so knowledgeable and enthusiastic. He had managed to get a grant from the uni and they had world-class software and with his help had been able to ‘build’ some of their own. The class had won an award for innovation and R had decided to enrol in the same stream again the following year. It was while they were waiting in line at the ceremony to get their award when she had first fainted. It had been quite hot so in the end she had not thought much about it, other than how embarrassing it had been. Then she hadn’t felt well right through the Christmas break and eventually went to the doctor who had smiled at her naïvety.

“You’re fine,” the doctor had said after a thorough examination. “And so is the baby.”

Just like that, as if it was an every day event. Like you have a cold virus or an infected foot. R could still remember the way shock, disbelief, anger and pleasure intermingled and coasted through her body, followed by the coolness of the realisation when it all hit her brain. Aaron. She had known immediately she needed to speak to him before she let her mind start to deal with this. She had apparently walked out of the surgery without paying and found Aaron in the coffee shop where they had agreed to meet. Aaron had offered to go to the doctor with her but she had really thought she was going to be told to take some vitamins and had been mildly embarrassed by even going in the first place. She was never sick and didn’t even know the doctor.

Aaron had seen her coming and knew immediately something was wrong. He admitted later he had been relieved when she whispered that she was pregnant, he had
already suspected much worse from the look on her face. Was it cancer, AIDS or brain tumour?

“It’s not so bad. We’ll cope,” he had reassured her.

R had burst into tears. “We’re not even married… and what about money… and what about uni… and what about that holiday in Europe… and a house and a new car?”

Aaron had been so understanding and here they were twenty-five years later and they had all those things, including two wonderful children. R had even finished her degree, eventually, and had been surprised how easy it had been to get part-time work in computer design when the kids went to school. Aaron had said she didn’t need to work but she had a desire to be just a little independent and had enjoyed buying extra things for the kids and paying for a couple of nice holidays. They had even put a deposit on a holiday house on the river when the kids were small and it had been the only way she could drag Aaron away from work when he was building up his business.

Driving home, R listened to the radio commentary on the recipients of the Queen’s Birthday Awards. Yesterday had been a holiday for the Queen’s Birthday and they had gone up the river to their house for the weekend. It hadn’t been the same without the kids, in fact they had packed up Sunday afternoon and come home after sleeping virtually all day, both days, on that awful mattress they had talked about replacing for years. Might as well go home and sleep on a comfortable bed they had decided. The broadcast R was listening to highlighted some of the ‘ordinary’ people who received some of the lesser awards and R felt herself drawn to the discussion of those who had dedicated their lives to the disabled, the sick or young people. She wondered what she had done that was significant. Other than produce two fine young men? She smiled thinking about the boys who were now quite independent. The program changed to music and R navigated the peak hour traffic vaguely aware of a feeling that had settled on her. By the time she arrived home she was feeling quite irritable, but not sure why.

As usual Aaron wasn’t home, so she poured a wine and flicked on the TV to catch the news, musing on how she wasn’t even forty-five yet but was doing much the same things as her mother and father and they were in their late sixties. She watched with interest interviews with some of the people who won the awards the day before. Just wanting to make a difference was the major theme and again R wondered what difference she had made. Was this it for the rest of her life, sitting alone and dozing in front of the TV at seven-thirty? She heard a car and felt a pang of guilt, no dinner ready. Then she remembered that when the kids had left they had agreed to cook together or go out or just not bother, depending what sort of day they’d had. Aaron had put on a lot of weight with all the business
lunches and really didn’t need a big meal in the evenings. She was just as happy with a plate
of soup and some toast. They had fun cooking together and had made it a special time to
cement their love… how many times had they not managed to finish cooking…

But tonight R was grumpy and unsettled and Aaron was atypically exhausted. He
was usually the one with the energy. They prepared dinner in silence and just to start a
conversation R said, “I’m thinking of going back to uni.” She wasn’t quite sure why she said
it or if she meant it but it certainly kept the conversation going.

“More graphic design?” Aaron asked in his usual pragmatic way.

“No, something different,” she paused and glanced at Aaron. “I, …em… I want to
make a difference.”

Aaron smiled patronisingly. “You do, hon, I couldn’t live without you.”

“Yes but you’re never here and I’m bored at work and sick of computer screens.” So
the conversation went on, feeling spilling out, ideas she didn’t know she had. By bedtime she
had committed to surfing the web in her lunch hour and looking at the postgraduate courses
on offer. She had been bright at school so maybe she could really achieve something after
all.

It had taken many lunch hours and several phone conversations with crisp, business-
like course coordinators to begin to make sense of R’s options. Basically her degree was fine
but grades not good enough to go on to honours or masters.

“But I had babies and other responsibilities,” she complained to an uncaring phone.
She had almost given up when she had lunch with a friend and started to go through the
saga.

“Why would you go back to uni?” her friend exclaimed. “It’s so expensive and all
those essays… and young people… and crazy old pompous lecturers.” Their eyes met and
they both laughed.

“Remember how we used to sign in and then disappear and they never found out?”

R nodded but wasn’t sure that they didn’t find out. Really, what did the lecturers
care? The students were the ones missing out and now she couldn’t do what she wanted to
do because of her poor grades.

“I just want to make a difference,” she responded. “I’m in a rut; I don’t feel I’ve
done a lot with my life.”

“What does Aaron say?”

“The usual, you know Aaron. It’s up to me.”
They had talked like this right through lunch when her friend had said, “Why don’t you become a teacher? Remember how much you used to enjoy listening to reading at the boys school and how you used to stay all day and help around the classroom?”

R didn’t think she had the energy anymore for little kids but a seed had been planted. Could she blend her passion for computer graphics with teaching? With all the courses she had attended over the years she must still be ahead of the field. But she didn’t want to teach adults to make more money, she wanted to work with young people and help them make their way in the world, like her boys. How many of the boys’ friends had dropped out of school and wandered around for many years? Lots of them had ended up in trouble or limbo just because they were bored and didn’t know what they wanted to do. Others, like her two, were more interested in adventure than school and had taken off as soon as they could for the ski slopes or the waves and reefs, thankfully in her boys’ cases with their degrees behind them. Is it possible to bring the meaning and the adventure into the classroom or the classroom into the adventure? She could see huge possibilities with computer graphics and big screens in classrooms…images superimposed and students writing programs to fulfil their dreams.

“Another coffee? Excuse me. More coffee?”

R looked up and shook her head. “Must get back to work. Thanks Vicki, you’ve made my day.”

It took many more lunch hours of phone calls and many evenings sitting in front of the computer. R mused that now she knew why so many young people still opted for a basic science or arts degree. It was all extremely complicated and some of the language difficult to understand. What was the difference between intensive and ‘fast-tracked’? How did the credit points add up? Why wasn’t a graduate certificate in education a teaching qualification but a graduate diploma was? What were methodologies and how did you choose them? What were ‘mentors’ and ‘practicum’, ‘learning areas’ and ‘middle schooling’? Did she qualify to teach VET in schools? She certainly had sufficient knowledge of the business world. The list of questions went on and she was lucky enough to eventually find someone at a local university who was prepared to answer some of them. In fact this coordinator was so passionate about her courses that she gave R her home number so that they could have a conversation without others in the office overhearing her plans. After more discussion R was left with the decision, full-time or part time? Did she continue to work or go all out and get the course finished? Should she study on campus or do some units externally?

She sent an application to the university with a copy of her fairly tattered and particularly unimpressive transcript deciding she would leave the other decisions until she
knew if she was accepted or not. She had read in the paper that education courses had been popular over the last few years and the entrance scores were now quite high. However her contact at the uni had sounded optimistic, there appeared to be some need for graphic design and maths and it looked like she had enough in her undergraduate course to cover that. Her business experience would give her an extra subject to teach in the senior secondary classrooms, though she had imagined herself in the ‘middle school’ saving a few lost souls. She didn’t really imagine that she would fail to get an offer. There had been a recent program on the TV discussing teacher shortages and the area of ‘boys and education’ and she was particularly interested in getting involved.

Part 2

R felt really nervous when she attended the introductory workshop. She had taken her annual leave and what was owing on her long service leave on half pay so she had enough leave to get her through to the first semester break. She was relieved to see that many of the other students were mature age like her but found it difficult to concentrate on the continuous flow of information from a range of lecturers. They were immediately going into the secondary schools for three days of observation and needed to know the basic structure of the curriculum and school culture to make the most of their time. They were handed proformas for observation and a range of questions they should seek to answer. They were to try to start ‘networking’ with teachers in their subject areas while they shadowed a teacher for the day. Three days and three different schools then they would come back and share experiences. If they then decided it wasn’t for them, they could still change courses or cancel their enrolment.

R found the pace, noise, smells, bustle and general ‘messiness’ of the schools quite daunting and wondered straight away if she had made a mistake. Parking had been difficult, signage in schools almost non-existent and she had hardly had a minute to herself during those three days. Generally the teaching staff were friendly, but distracted, and the students in the classes were either suspicious of them or disinterested in them. Some teachers did not even introduce them to the classes and often the students were reluctant to give up their seats at the back of the room. At first she had tried hard to fill out the observation sheets but even that proved difficult.

What did the students learn?

How did the teacher relate to the class?

What roles did the teacher play?

How many students did the teacher encourage?
What did the students do?

Did you learn anything about teaching from this lesson?

There was so much happening that R found that she didn’t know where to look or what to focus on. Some students didn’t seem to do anything. Some chatted, some read novels under their desks and others were sending texts on their mobile phones. The maths lessons often didn’t seem to vary much from the lessons she remembered at school and the business studies and SOSE lessons seemed to mainly consist of students doing their own research or working in groups. Sometimes they were in computer rooms or the library, other times wandering around the yard or stepping out measurements on the oval. Some teachers were very traditional; the classrooms very ordered and quiet, while others seemed to be doing a hundred things at once with students spread all over the school. She didn’t get much opportunity to observe graphic design or IT classes. Generally she was told these were integrated across the curriculum in the middle school. Technology in the classroom was every teacher’s responsibility.

There was also quite a difference between schools, both in terms of resources and student output and attitude. R immediately reflected on her own schooling and that of her boys. She hadn’t realised the huge diversity in schools, classrooms, teachers and students. She had been fairly naïve thinking it would still be as she remembered it and they would all be waiting for her to come to ‘make a difference’.

But R wasn’t a quitter and she was going to see this through, at least until the end of semester. Admittedly a few of her peers didn’t return after the first week and she wasn’t surprised. Some of the people she had spoken to on the first day had been quite unsure of their choice and some didn’t even seem to like young people. She had come to realise that there was going to be more to teaching than knowing your subject matter – and she wasn’t even sure she knew that. Although her boys had both responded very positively to her change in career she had detected a look of incredulity on the faces of friends who had some experience with schools. Now she was beginning to realise why. But her youngest son had been particularly excited for her, reminding her that many of his friends used to congregate at their place at homework time and she had often helped them with their studies. That buoyed her a little.

“They thought you were cool,” he had told her. “They reckoned back then you should have been a teacher.”

R found the first term very difficult. She spent hours in the library and had trouble getting her head around the readings and the lectures. Jumping into postgraduate study after such a long break may not have been such a good idea. The maths ‘methods’ was fine. It was
straightforward. This is what the curriculum states and this is what you need to do. There was some talk about student diversity but most of the time they spoke about the different aspects of maths, the role of discrete maths as opposed to algebra and calculus… recent changes in calculators and the difficulties experienced by maths teachers when the students were ‘tuned out’. They came up with a range of solutions to this enduring problem and left lectures and tutorials feeling that they had accomplished something. At least they had been told what to do in the maths classroom.

The readings in the other units were rather heavy going and the concepts quite foreign. Constructivism, ‘lighting the fire, not filling the pot’, student not teacher centred education, student learning outcomes, bands, strands, indicators, authentic assessment, productive pedagogies, outcomes based education, problem based education, fertile questions, formative assessment, summative assessment, meaningful, purposeful, engaging, student voice… R tried hard to make sense of it all but it wasn’t until tutorials started and she could talk with the other students that it began to gel. She often found that she was intimidated by the language and jargon but when she was able to discuss it in small groups she would suddenly make sense of it while explaining her ideas to other students or listening to them explain their thoughts to the group. As time went on the different units seemed to make linkages to each other, like a big jigsaw that started to come together. Sometimes over coffee with other students, or while writing her journal or assessment tasks, the missing bits of the jigsaw would fall into place. But it was hard work and she dedicated long hours, and frequently doubted her ability.

R also felt mildly irritated that a number of the preservice teachers were still working and consistently used it as an excuse for not doing their readings or preparing fully for tutorials. Others would yawn their way through lectures and tutorials or just skip sessions, sometimes leaving their groups with material missing or big gaps in their presentations. Some had little respect for the lecturers or their own opportunity for an education, bleating about their rights and their frustration about ‘jumping through hoops’. They believed that they knew it all already and had not been moved by discussions, readings or lectures about the need for educational reform and an education ‘system’ that met the needs of young people and gave them an equal right to a future where they could contribute as citizens of the world. R had particularly resonated with that idea, thinking about her own two boys, one in the Middle East working for AusAID and the other in Europe. They were certainly citizens of the world.

Already some of the preservice teachers in her course were modelling themselves on teachers from the past and R recognised the traditional, controlling teacher who expected dependent and compliant students to learn facts and regurgitate them in the tests. She had
read that this style of teaching would not engage the majority of students even though she hadn’t yet worked out how teachers did meet the diverse needs of the students in their classes. Others she could tell would be laissez-faire in their approach, they thought young people should be responsible for their own learning but didn’t understand that the same young people could not make choices if they had not been informed about or introduced to the alternatives. R had read the literature and listened to the lecturers, she had completed her assessment tasks and passed with high grades but no one had yet told her how to teach. Where was the road map or the directory? Surely they were not going to be sent on prac without a user manual?

Part 3

By the time the first practicum came round R was beginning to feel a little disenchanted and wondered whether she might cut back to part-time and see if she could convince her boss to let her return to work part-time. Aaron was happy to support her financially but she really enjoyed the independence of her own salary. Not having any income for the rest of the year was beginning to worry her, as was her ability to keep up the pace. Admittedly she was getting Distinctions and High Distinctions for her assignments but they seemed to take an inordinate amount of time. She actually enjoyed the challenges they offered and put a lot of extra effort into her presentation, tables, lesson plans and programs. She spent hours on her graphics and frequently helped other students with theirs. She began to enjoy the collaborative nature of aspects of the course and even dragged Aaron along to some of the uni functions that had turned out to be quite fun. What frustrated her though, was the lack of answers. She wanted to know, step by step, how to teach, how to cater for all these different learning styles and not lose control of her classes. She’d had a few nightmares where a class was rioting and she was standing at the front but couldn’t move nor speak. It had been really worrying her.

To make matters worse R’s practicum placement fell through at the last minute. It was no-one’s fault. One of the staff members had died, suddenly, and thrown the school into a spin. They had been apologetic but they needed to make staff changes and a preservice teacher was going to make things too difficult. With three days to go the university had not yet found her an alternative and R was feeling a mixture of anger and frustration. What could be so hard? She didn’t have two heads and there was supposed to be a shortage of maths and computer teachers!

Finally she was advised to turn up to a particular school on Monday morning and things would be worked out once she was there. They had found someone to mentor her in SOSE and the school had a large maths department and surely someone would volunteer.
The preservice teacher coordinator at the school had sounded evasive when she had pressed for more information, and not knowing the school or the system, R decided to wait until she arrived as had been recommended.

Shar, one of the younger preservice teachers, was also going to Hills High School so R had arranged to pick her up. At least they could arrive together and get lost together. She had spent ages choosing what to wear and had been running a few minutes late when she arrived at the agreed meeting place. Shar was nowhere to be seen and R began to get worried. Had she already gone? Had she forgotten? Was she sick? Why hadn’t she recorded Shar’s mobile number? Being already quite tense her blood was almost at boiling point by the time she saw Shar saunter around the corner. What was worse, Shar looked like she was ready for a day at Uni, her short denim skirt and low necked tank top did not look like the ‘appropriate dress’ that had been recommended at uni. R immediately imagined the year 11 and 12 boys’ eyes popping out when Shar leaned over their desks. Still, it wasn’t her problem; she had enough to worry about. She still had to sell herself to the maths department.

There were five preservice teachers from her uni course and two from another university all starting on the same day and they were made to feel very welcome at the Monday morning staff meeting. They were even applauded as they were introduced which was rather strange but R didn’t have time to ponder as she was whisked off by the maths senior teacher to the maths faculty office to see what could be done about her classes. They went from teacher to teacher looking at the classes that they taught and the lines that were available. They chatted about classes, responsibilities, programs, loads and previous experiences with preservice teachers, but not one of them seemed to have a class for her. R had a real sense of being a burden, a nuisance or an inconvenience that had been thrust upon them by a mixture of an administration that just didn’t understand and a university that was on another planet. She tried to keep smiling and make herself as attractive a proposition as she possibly could, but obviously didn’t do a very good job because they had spoken to everyone in the office and each one had a really good reason for not being her mentor.

“That leaves Nita,” she was told. “But she won’t be in today, she rang in sick. You could still go to her classes and see what you think. She is on line 6 with a lovely class of year 10 girls. They are working on a remedial program, we call it ‘everyday maths’, and it is a small group. See what you think? There will be a relief teacher there.”

The bell disturbed them and R was left to find her way back to the SOSE staff room to collect her bag and her folders. All of the preservice teachers were to meet with the assistant principal and would spend the morning before recess learning about the school and
generally finding their way around. R had imagined she saw a look of concern pass over the assistant principal’s face when she explained that she might be with Nita, but he smiled quickly and explained that they were usually more organised but this had been a very late request. The assistant principal had known the teacher who had died and commented that she would be a great loss to teaching.

The first day had passed quickly in a blur of noise, classes, coffee, lists and protocols. R felt like a student herself sitting at those little desks and being jostled through the corridors between classes. She was glad to get into her nice quiet and clean car at the end of the day but didn’t drive home. She took a detour to one of the local national parks and went for a walk, enjoying the solitude and the chance to think. She was filled with self-doubt again. Was she up to this? Should she trade the pristine office and plastic clients for this jungle? They didn’t seem to appreciate her wealth of knowledge and experience. She had always been efficient and effective in her work, appreciated for her organisation and manner with customers. She had shown good growth in her client base, added to the profit margin of the company and scored well on accountability graphs and tests. She had been well compensated with promotion and salary so she had obviously been successful. But no one in the schools seemed to care about that. All they could talk about was their students, their stress levels, their marking and their workload. No one asked her a thing about herself. It was all Suzie ‘this’ and Tommy ‘that’. Who was improving, who was getting worse. In the faculty office they swapped ideas on handling difficult students and shared knowledge about what was happening in other subjects, in sport and at home. They compared siblings, friends and work, shared successes and failures while at the same time preparing worksheets, photocopying, answering phones and checking emails. They walked in and out balancing books, folders and computers, frequently tailed by surly or brash students who were to be dealt with as soon as the load was relieved. Is this the life R could see for herself?

Day two was even worse. Shar had been more suitably dressed and on time but R had walked into the maths staff room interrupting a very earnest conversation between the senior teacher and a young teacher who had obviously been crying for some time. Her eyes were red and puffy and she had a box of tissues on her lap. The senior teacher looked up and indicated to R to meet her next door. R couldn’t help but jump to the conclusion that the tears were because Nita had been told she was to have a preservice teacher and she was not pleased. It must be difficult to be the youngest teacher on the staff and a female to boot. R wondered whether to call it quits now, and not put Nita through the experience that she obviously didn’t want. Poor thing she must feel she is being punished for having a day off.

The maths senior teacher didn’t mention the tears when they met but brought Nita’s timetable and unit plan for the year 10 girls’ class. Nita would be free last lesson to chat with
R and in the meantime she was welcome to visit the class period 4. R was told again that it was a nice little class and she would have a chance to be adventurous and trial a range of pedagogies and that Nita was having great success with them. This was probably meant to be a challenge but R saw it as more stress. Now she would need to match up to the successes of the mentor teacher in the eyes of the senior teacher.

R made an appointment with her coordinator and drove to uni straight after school. They spoke for over an hour about her misgivings. She knew it was no one’s fault but she wasn’t comfortable with her placement. She also knew that at this stage there were no other alternative placements. She had been looking forward to the IT and computing classes at the other school and maths with a teacher who obviously didn’t want her was too much of a compromise. In fact, the whole school setting was just too much of a shock. She needed more time to adjust.

They decided she would withdraw from the practicum and continue in the course part-time until the end of the semester. After that she would reappraise her future involvement. In the meantime she would try to cancel her leave and go back to the office where she felt comfortable and knew what she was doing.
B’s Story

Part 1

B taught English in a number of countries before he arrived in Australia and had been surprised that he was unable to secure a teaching position without a teaching qualification. He had tried a number of other jobs but as his family grew older he decided that a profession like teaching would offer him more security and considerably more employment options. He had a Doctorate from his home country and was confident he would be able to complete the graduate teaching qualification. There had been considerable discussion with the female coordinator about the suitability of his undergraduate degree and the subjects he would be able to teach but a letter to the Vice Chancellor on his official letterhead ‘Dr. B…’ had done the trick. Obviously the Vice Chancellor was a wise man and he could recognise B’s qualities! His request had even exempted him from the observation practicum in the first week, as he had explained he had taught for over twenty years.

When he had arrived late for the introductory workshop B believed he had observed a look of annoyance on the lecturer’s face and decided to put her in her place. Every opportunity he had he asked questions, queried the progressions and formats and generally established himself as knowledgeable and a force to be reckoned with. Although he did attempt to be on time for the rest of the week he felt justified in believing they would need to realise that he had the responsibility of being the breadwinner for his family and he could not commit to being on time, every time.

B’s wife arranged to buy his textbooks and collect his readings while he was at work and sorted the different units into coloured folders and ensured that he had sufficient paper and pens. B made sure that he read the study guides carefully and completed his tutorial tasks and readings for the first week. Unfortunately he did not have a computer at home to access the on-line learning materials, which he would explain that to his tutors and lecturers and ask them for hard copy.

As the semester progressed B fell further and further behind with his readings and was greatly disadvantaged by not having a home computer or on-line learning access. Many of the units relied on information being emailed or being available on line. Sometimes he was expected to use discussion boards to debrief activities and tasks and a percentage of the final mark was to be allocated to these ‘virtual’ discussions. Even more difficult was the necessity to word process assignments and then email them to the lecturer so that they could be checked by plagiarism detection software. B couldn’t even understand the concept of
plagiarism. Was it not a great honour for others to copy your ideas? Were the readings and texts not provided so that they could answer the assessment questions?

B spent all weekend in the university computer room when his first assignment was due. Fortunately it called for his own opinion and an analysis of a dialogue between students and he had managed to convince some of the other students also working in the computer room to help him correct, format and print his work. Despite his annoyance at having to ‘jump through the hoops’ he was quite proud of his product and even admitted that he had learned something about an education system that was obviously quite different from those he had previously known. Several of the readings had been related to the management of classroom learners, the need to employ a wide range of pedagogies and the importance of ‘lighting the fire’ not ‘filling the pot’. He was very interested that many of the classes had less than thirty students and that boys and girls took their subjects together. His classes had been either small groups of adults or large groups of sixty or more, usually boys. His lessons had followed the same pattern every day; homework marking followed by teacher lecture, student worksheets, marking of worksheets and setting of homework. B felt he really didn’t have time to engage with the ‘new’ ideas being presented in lectures or make changes in his teaching. He had a job to worry about and a family to support and just wanted to get this qualification as quickly as possible.

When asked by the uni for practicum placement preferences B had asked to be placed at a particular school and had been particularly annoyed when he found out that by admitting that he had a relative at the school he precluded himself being allocated there. This small private school’s structure would have been much more like the schools he had taught in many years ago. B had read in the newspaper that students were disobedient, rowdy and difficult in Australia but was sure that they just needed a bit of discipline and needed to be kept busy. There had been some talk in tutorials and lectures about ‘appropriate pedagogy’ and meeting the needs of the ‘now’ generation but B really felt that was for teachers who couldn’t keep control or firmly regulate the students. B believed that he understood what authority was and his students would soon understand.

On the first day B arrived at the school in collar and tie and with his shoes carefully cleaned and his brief case in his hand. He was surprised to see how casually the assistant principal who met him was dressed and even more surprised when he was taken into the staffroom. He had asked to be addressed as Doctor B… and was introduced to a range of staff members that way, some of whom made a joke about how nice it was to have a doctor on the staff and others seemed to smile knowingly. B had been allocated two mentors, Chris and Jai, but neither were available until after Home Group so he was able to study his timetable and begin to memorise lesson times. He was pleased to see that most of his
allocated classes were in the mornings and it looked like he would be able to slip away at lunch time on a couple of days. That would make it easier to do the afternoon and evening shifts at work and take the pressure off his wife who was trying to earn enough money to supplement their income while he was doing his practicum.

Jai was first to arrive and smiled brightly. He was very tall and very black. He seemed to fill the room the moment he entered – almost everyone seemed to be immediately touched by his enthusiasm and there were smiles all round. By the time he crossed the room even B was smiling and they shook hands as if they were long lost friends. They were going to wait for Chris and then discuss the timetable and make sure that B was going to have a nice spread of classes and that he would be happy with the work he would be teaching. Jai explained that he and Chris had already had a chat and there were a few ideas that they had come up with to get B started.

Jai spoke slowly and had quite a strong accent. B noticed that the smile never seemed to leave his face and his manner made you want to agree with everything he said. He had just left to check that the meeting room was free when a very pretty and very young looking teacher entered the staffroom, looked around and spied him in the corner.

“You must be Dr B.” She approached him with her hand out. Her grasp was amazingly firm and on closer inspection she may not have been quite as young as B had first thought.

There was an uncomfortable hesitation so Chris went on to explain that she had been detained by an incident in her classroom. She was obviously aware of the effect her stunning appearance had on people and prepared to fill the gap with chatter and reassurance. Jai had returned so they quickly whisked B into the meeting room that doubled as a student interview room and had glass windows on three sides. Jai assured him it was sound proof and a great place for interviews if you found it necessary to speak to students alone. It had a line of sight to the assistant principal’s office and the counsellor’s office so was a safe location to be alone with students.

Chris began their meeting with a slightly embarrassed smile. “We’ve actually talked about you before you arrived,” she began. “There are a few things we’d like to discuss.”

At this point Jai took over. “Sometimes it is difficult being new and different, until the kids get to know you,” he explained. “We wondered if you really wanted to be called Doctor? We usually get by with Sir and Miss, to be honest. We do encourage the students to address us and Sir and Miss are about as much as they can manage. And with a name like mine, Aralaminani, it isn’t worth going there.”

Jai and Chris looked a little uncomfortable but smiled reassuringly at each other.
“And while we are on the topic the students might feel more comfortable with your jacket and tie off. Like more relaxed. As I said some of them don’t do difference really well and we would like to help you achieve a seamless transition into your teaching. You can do what you like once they know you but they tend to be a bit suspicious at first.”

Chris and Jai went on to explain that they had been attending mentoring workshops at the uni and were really trying to help their preservice teachers achieve a successful practicum. They had been briefed on the current teachings at the uni and could see that some of the things they used to do were rather counter-productive. In the past they had modelled their own mentoring on how they had been ‘supervised’ as student teachers, a bit of a sink or swim model, and could see that it hadn’t been ideal. Now they had been introduced to some new ideas and wanted to try them out, if it was ok with B. For the first few days they just wanted B to ‘shadow’ them, go to classes with them, sit wherever he was comfortable or where there was a space and get a feel for the classes. Unless the kids started to ask questions they wouldn’t even introduce him as a preservice teacher, just let the relationship with the classes develop naturally, as time went on. They recommended that he just observe as a ‘visitor’ and didn’t feel obliged to help students or get involved too early, until he began to understand the dynamics of the different classrooms at least. They talked about working as a team and trying to get together at least once each day to discuss progress and learning.

B just nodded and made a few notes and before long found himself following Jai across the school to a year 9 English class.

Despite his amazing presence Jai didn’t dominate his classrooms. The students seemed to know what was expected of them and Jai moved from group to group or desk-to-desk offering advice or the occasional reminder and encouragement. He frequently sat at empty desks and after reading student work or observing group activity, joined in discussions or helped out with ideas. He spoke quietly and slowly and the students appeared comfortable and friendly. Some students worked alone, others seemed to work closely in pairs or small groups. The occasional student moved from group to group and never appeared to settle.

Jai encouraged the students to talk about their work or what they were planning to do to achieve their negotiated outcomes and frequently referred them to the notes stuck into the front of their books. He explained to B that they always spent the first few lessons of a topic negotiating what the students wanted to learn and how that might be achieved. This was then written by the student under the headings ‘What I already know’, ‘What I would like to find out’, and ‘What I need to know’ then pasted into the front of the workbook. Jai collected the books at the end of every lesson with the aim of looking through them to check
on progress before the next lesson, though he admitted to B that his main reason for collecting them was that he had learned that students so often forgot to bring their books that it was worth the trouble of collecting and distributing them just to ensure student work didn’t get lost. He invited B to look through the books during his free lessons.

Chris’s classes were quite different. She only had small classes and very few of her students could speak or write in English. She explained to B that a number of them were asylum seekers and others were refugees. There were also a few indigenous Australians where Aboriginal English was their third or fourth language and although they could make themselves understood orally their writing skills were not well developed. Chris also explained that she spent a great deal of time developing trust both between students and with herself, as many of the students had experienced little continuity in their learning and were very insecure.

The students would spend most of their day in what was generally called the ‘ESL’ unit. The acronym stood for ‘English as a Second Language’, though Chris explained that English was seldom the second language of her students. It was usually the third or the fourth language and ‘English an Additional Language’ would be a more appropriate term. Her students only joined the mainstream classes for the practical subjects like Physical Education, Music, Drama, Art and Technical Studies. If they didn’t want to attend these lessons, which could be rather overwhelming at first, they were able to stay in Chris’s room and work on their reading and writing skills. It was Chris’s opinion that they benefited greatly from attending their practical lessons and she would work hard to develop friendships between the new students and the more confident students who would take them to the other classes and help them develop a network of friends.

B was rather overwhelmed himself for the first few days, his concept of what the teacher does was being continually challenged and his sense of himself as the teacher in control had no place in these classrooms. He knew that despite the discussions and readings at uni he had maintained his belief in the model of teaching from his past – authoritarian, didactic and transmissive – and he could not see himself emulating these teachers. He wondered if this had been a plot cleverly devised by the uni coordinator, but also admitted to himself that the students in the classes that he was observing were certainly more involved in their learning than he could remember in his lessons. His students used to avoid him in the yard and he remembered the fear in their eyes when he asked them a question or returned their work. In some ways he had enjoyed the power he had held over these students and had felt a sense of achievement when they had obviously studied hard and memorised their notes to recall the answers and achieve good scores in their tests. He had frequently been congratulated by his superiors for achieving such high grades with his students and had
worked them harder and harder to achieve more accolades. His promotion and continued employment had depended on these test scores and all of the teachers he knew had ‘taught to the test’. Schools in most of the countries where he had taught English were also graded and funded depending on test scores and the ‘better’ teachers were employed at the ‘better’ schools. Student needs or learning styles couldn’t be considered when classes were close to sixty and those who did not achieve high scores soon dropped out of the education system or were moved to less ‘advanced’ schools.

By the end of the first week B was ready to admit that whether it was a clever plot devised by the uni or merely a coincidence these two mentors were well respected throughout the school. He was being told repeatedly that they were excellent teachers and he was very lucky to have them as his mentors and could see for himself the influence they had on the learning of their students. Their daily meetings usually consisted of impassioned comments like, “Did you notice the quiet girl down the back actually asked a question in English,” or “Mark completed his work plan today and it was quite impressive…..” B found that after the first few days when he had been regarded a little suspiciously the students started coming to him with their questions or problems and he had gradually become more and more involved in the classroom. Despite this he was beginning to dread the time when he would be asked to take over the teaching and was not looking forward to their meeting on Friday at lunchtime.

Both Jai and Chris were in the ‘glassed’ meeting room when he arrived. They had taken to meeting there instead of the classrooms or faculty rooms as students continually interrupted them. They both looked up and smiled when he arrived.

“Time to plan for next week,” Chris announced. “Is there anything in particular you would like to do, now that you know the classes better?”

B hadn’t been prepared for the meeting, with work and school he hadn’t had a spare second. He knew deep down that they were going to ask this question, it was consistent with both the promise they had made on the first day and the way they conducted themselves as teachers. He needed to take the initiative. He was the learner and he should have as much ownership of the learning process as possible. They would facilitate and enable his learning. He had copies of both teachers’ semester plans and though both had impressed upon him that they were flexible, they did identify the student learning outcomes and how they fitted into the curriculum framework. They had each developed a range of indicators that reflected student achievement and were continually providing feedback to their students related to how they were progressing. By scaffolding learning experiences for the students and connecting their learning with their current knowledge the whole experience was transparent
for student, preservice teacher and anyone who took the time to observe the lessons. B had observed that students were focussed on their projects, readings, research, discussions or computer most of the time and neither Chris nor Jai, in his view, seemed to do a lot of what was traditionally thought of as teaching.

The classroom climate would change from day to day depending on a range of variables; who was present, the time of the day, the weather or previous lessons the students had come from and there were a number of more subtle effects…placement of desks, arrangement of students, access to computers…things that most students would take in their stride but some were easily distracted. At a superficial level the patterns in the classroom changed very little but B had noticed more and more of the subtle changes as he became more involved. His own presence in the classroom was obviously an influence. Some students related to him immediately while others treated him as an interloper and would double-check everything he told them with their teacher. He wished he could sit them down and tell them that he had taught for many years and they needed to trust him. Chris and Jai had explained that he would need to build that trust, it wasn’t a given, but B felt there wasn’t enough time. He would rather lecture them and explain that they should trust him.

A glance passing between the two mentors brought B out of his reverie. He started to make excuses and bluff his way out of his predicament. He had been busy. His daughter had been sick. He had assignments to finish for uni. He hadn’t been properly prepared for this. In fact any idea that came into his head that could lay the blame at someone else’s feet. But B was to find out there were no extensions, no stay of execution when it came to his teaching. On Monday he would be responsible for facilitating the learning in two out of the four classrooms he had been working in. It was his choice in terms of year level and class but Chris and Jai needed to know by the end of the day. They also needed to see unit plans and lesson plans at least half an hour before Home Group on Monday morning.

Jai recommended that B prepare the next unit for the year 8 class as they had completed their directed study on ‘poets with meaning’ which had been basically an individual or pair assignment and they were ready for something a little more interactive. They had three more units to complete this semester – ‘literacy, language and culture’, ‘media today’ and ‘drama’. He recommended that B should decide between the first two.

Chris, on the other hand, admitted that she was so connected to all her students that she would find it hard to step back. She hoped that whatever B decided to teach he would let her be involved. Jai indicated that he would also like to remain involved.

Sensing that B was a little overwhelmed and after checking that he still had copies of their semester unit plans and their personal timetables in case he needed to catch them, the
two mentors left B to prepare for the following week, explaining that they really needed to know his plans by the end of the day so they too could do their weekend preparation for the week ahead. B wasn’t to know that both teachers would have back up plans to ensure valuable lessons for the students if B failed to prepare adequately. At this point he was still wondering where the week had gone and how he was going to be ready for Monday.

B spent the next hour deciding which classes to teach and which units to cover. He was working an extra shift on Saturday so had cancelled his Friday night commitment. He knew Jai was free last lesson on Friday so he pounced immediately when Jai entered the faculty room after his year 12 class. They discussed for some time what he might teach in the media unit and referred to the curriculum framework and Jai’s extensive collection of resources. B then went in search of Chris hoping to catch her after school. He knew that she spent a lot of time in their faculty office after hours and at weekends and was hoping to arrange to come in to use the computers over the weekend. Otherwise he would need to spend most of his weekend at uni a long way from the resources that he needed to use.

When Chris finally said goodbye to the last of her students it was quite late, but as always she was obliging and smiled sympathetically when he admitted to still feeling rather overwhelmed by the range of student ages, backgrounds, literacy levels and learning needs. Chris had told him that honesty was the best policy.

“If you don’t know or understand something, just admit it. That’s all part of intercultural interaction.”

She must have seen the doubt in B’s eyes. “Frequently other students will help you out- or I will. These students have generally been through a lot in their personal lives and they are much more understanding and resourceful than students who have had a sheltered life.”

There was a pause while Chris waited for B to take it all in. “I have found that students of the current generation have quite a different outlook on life from that of most of their teachers and we really need to try to get into their shoes occasionally. We need to ask lots of questions. What assumptions have we made about the learner? What do they need to learn? Why? Have we asked them?”

B had tried to get more direction from Chris and focus more on the step-by-step specifics of the lesson but she looked so tired and in the end she confessed that she was exhausted, it had been a long week, and she wasn’t thinking straight.

“Just keep referring back to the learning outcomes we have documented on the unit outlines. Do what is comfortable for you. You don’t need to replicate my teaching style. Anyway I’ll be there to help out.”
With that she collected her bag, promised she would be there by 12 noon on Sunday and disappeared towards the car park. B remained in the office somewhat paralysed by the enormity of the task. Unit plans and lesson plans for Monday morning and he had promised to take the children to the beach and work all day Saturday. He also had commitments at the ethnic community centre on Sunday night. Maybe he couldn’t do this after all? Had he underestimated the demands? Had he really expected teaching in Australian schools to be quite like what he had observed? Maybe he should have attended the observation practicum at the beginning of the course after all?

As a teacher B had controlled his classes with the iron rod of fear of failure. A good education was such a privilege where he came from and made such a difference in life’s chances. It was the first step in overcoming disadvantage for many students and it could be done by sheer hard work and dedication. A whole family’s future might depend on the success in the education system of one student and that pressure tended to ensure compliant and receptive students. Things were quite different here. Most students didn’t have that expectation or pressure put on them and made so many more choices for themselves. Schooling wasn’t just about jobs and opportunities but about learning how to learn and learning how to find information, analysing what you found and forming your own opinions. The role of the teacher was quite different. The hoops were spinning in ways he hadn’t expected and he didn’t know quite what to do next.

**Part 2**

B’s wife had been very understanding and instead of the beach had convinced the children that they would go to the movies. B dropped them off on his way to school at 12 noon on Sunday and had arranged for his wife’s brother to collect them and take them to the community centre. He would meet them all there. It was good for his children to spend time with others from their parent’s country and listen to the stories and play the music and games. In his own head he didn’t see them as Australian children, even though they had all been recently naturalised. The ceremony had been moving and the extended family had been excited but he always felt in the back of his mind that he would like to take his children back to where he had grown up, where he felt comfortable and didn’t always feel different. When they had decided to come to Australia there had been a great deal of unrest and it seemed the right thing to do but he had recently heard reports that things were much more settled politically. Also his parents were getting older and they would need some extra support before long.

Jai had recommended to B a range of weekend papers on which to base the first media lesson but some didn’t arrive at the newsagent until Sunday afternoon and by then B
had completed his planning. He carefully cut headlines and stories from the local papers. The students would need to match the stories with the headlines and design their own front page or centre spread. The students would then explain why they had designed their papers that way. This should lead into a discussion about attitude development, values, visual influence and language…and this should lead to the design of a classroom magazine over the next few lessons. This class always seemed very focused so B was not anticipating any problems.

Immediately the students filed into the room B was aware that the classroom sounded different and was surprised by the amount of crashing and banging as desks and chairs were relocated and students argued over the seats at the back of the room.

“What we are going to do today is…” he began as soon as he could, thinking it would put a stop to the noise. But it made no difference. He raised his voice and began again.

“Today we are going to start a unit on media.”

Still no reduction in classroom chatter. A couple of the students down the front were looking his way so he looked at them and went on.

“I want you to take out your books and write Media and the date at the top of a clean page,” he continued in as loud a voice as he could muster without shouting.

A hand went up at the back of the room. It was John who was always the one to ask the questions in this class.

“Don’t have our books, sir.”

B looked at Jai who was standing near the front looking through a filing cabinet obviously trying to be low profile.

“Oops, sorry guys, my fault,” he said as he disappeared towards the faculty room.

As Jai left the room there was an even louder swell of sound. Most students were talking with their neighbour though some were shouting across the room. A few were sitting alone, one of whom was chiselling his ruler and another painting her finger nails with felt pens. B felt at a loss so turned to the board and wrote the word ‘media’ in large letters followed by the number one. He turned again to the class and was relieved to see that most faces were turned expectantly in his direction. The noise level had not reduced however; one student was even bouncing his basketball on the floor beside his chair while another added to the noise by drumming his ruler and pencil on the desk. B was at a loss and could actually feel the signs of fear or apprehension rise in his throat and chest.
“Here they are, Tom and Sandy can you hand them out please,” came from behind as the class went quiet and the two noisiest students collected the books and distributed them around the room.

Most eyes flickered between the two teachers and those students bouncing balls, banging desks or painting fingernails must have received ‘the look’ from Jai as their expressions changed from defiance to looks of guilt and remorse quite quickly and within seconds there was silence as almost everyone opened their exercise books and wrote ‘media’ at the top of the page.

B very quickly wrote a number of points on the board and the room remained silent as they were copied into their workbooks. He glanced over his shoulder a couple of times wishing he had more to write and they could remain like this all lesson. Alas, no. He would need to start talking again.

A very quick explanation of the purpose of the unit and why the media had such an influence on their lives followed. B then spent some time explaining how he had at one time edited the translation into English of a local newspaper while he was living in Bangkok. He told them how popular his translations had become and how he had been asked to give up his teaching position and join the newspaper. His principal had however begged him to stay and had offered him an increase in salary. He was going to tell them more about working for the newspaper but noticed the class was becoming restless so passed out the headlines and stories he had prepared for them. He then watched helplessly as the class erupted again as they tried to match stories and headlines. There was much swapping and discussing while the class rearranged itself into friendship groups with a number of students on the periphery choosing to sit back and watch.

Realising that he had forgotten to explain how the groups would need to work together to produce a classroom newspaper and justify their particular choice of font style, headline size, layout, columns, case, borders and shading B asked again for silence. This time he didn’t even wait and he immediately attempted to speak over the throng, his words hardly reaching his own ears. He abandoned this and decided to approach each group separately; after all isn’t that what he had seen Jai do? Jai took his cue from B and moved towards the groups.

While B chose the quietest and smallest group to start with Jai joined the largest and noisiest group. It was immediately apparent to B (and he assumed Jai also) that the students had completed the task and were noisy because they were not being sufficiently challenged. They had already decided on the audience and the purpose of their news stories and had rightly assigned a very low reading and comprehension age to the cuttings. At this point B
should have introduced the more complex articles by leading journalists from a range of
national or highly regarded publications so that students could compare and critique the
more complex language and concepts. A wider range of stories should also have been
available. These students were capable of tangling with international issues and current
political issues and B had not prepared for this. Indeed what he had prepared, he realised
now, was at a level much more suitable for younger children.

As students socialised and disrupted each other in the way young people do when
they are bored or not engaged at an appropriate level, B for the first time made sense of the
‘bands’ and ‘levels’ and the various taxonomies of learning in the curriculum. This lesson
was about interpreting and describing which were ‘comprehension’ type skills. These
students were generally beyond that. They found application of this understanding was a
relatively mundane task. They were ready to work at a more complex cognitive level. Jai had
told him they would be able to plan, design and create their own newspaper with just a little
background information and a framework or structure with explicit details about what they
needed to achieve, why and when. Why hadn’t he listened?

B realised that he had not adequately prepared for this lesson. He had failed the first
step; know your students. He now appreciated this wasn’t just about their names, their
backgrounds or even their learning styles. He needed to know and understand what they
could reasonably be expected to achieve and help them do it. He should have been more
diligent in his reading of their previous work, should have listened to them more carefully
during the previous week and should have taken Jai’s advice more seriously. He needed to
spend a great deal more time in preparation.

With a sinking heart B took a deep breath in readiness for bringing the class to
attention and attempt to take control of the classroom. Just as he was about to raise his voice
over the cacophony of sounds he saw a hand raised at the back of the room. The student
most central in the group that Jai was sitting with had a question. B was tempted
– this student was a fairly demanding personality who tended to control the dynamics of the
classroom and B wanted to take control himself. The decision was taken out of his hands as
the student spoke up.

“Sir, I read an article on the internet over the weekend about sweat shops in
Melbourne. It discussed how the multi-nationals had not only infiltrated all of the developing
countries but were also responsible for slave labour right under our government’s nose.”

“Yer. My sister reckons we should only buy things that are made in Australia,”
another student added.
“But even then we can be supporting those who don’t abide by international regulations on human rights,” responded the first student.

Another hand went up and B realised that the noise level had dropped and nearly all of the class were attentive. He nodded towards the student.

“Do you think we could focus this class newspaper thing on these issues?” asked the student who had been painting her fingernails. “I’ve heard that even using mobile phones can cause problems for some communities in Africa because the material used to make the smaller parts is only available on native land or something. I’d like to learn more about that and I’m sure lots of other kids would be interested.”

There was a general murmur of consent so B nodded himself. The chatter increased again and trying not to lose his advantage B asked for a class vote. He had watched Jai do this on several issues and felt sure that he could manage it. Jai believed that the class as an integrated group should have ownership of their curriculum decisions and that debate and negotiation should be an everyday occurrence. Dramatic and continuous change were the only things that were certain in the future lives of these young people, he had told B, and it was important that they learned to manage change and understand their role in productive and transformative learning. Education is active and learning is effortful and demands that the learner accept change. Young people need to feel that they have some control over this, otherwise according to Jai, they will opt out and not accept responsibility for their own role in the classroom.

B wrote ‘Class Project – Global Issues Newspaper’ on the white board, relieved that he had recently attended a lecture on global education for Australian schools where there had been a number of ideas presented.

“What about ‘global issues for kids’?” The question came from the back of the room.

“Kids are baby goats,” was a quick response from the front.

“What about for the ‘now’ generation?” From the back of the room.

“Suits me.” From the front.

B altered the statement to ‘Global Issues for the ‘Now’ Generation Newspaper.

“Any other changes,” he ventured feeling more confident.

“I think it would be better if it was published on the web,” was the suggestion when he nodded at a half raised arm.

“Good point,” B agreed. “Any other comments?”
“Maybe we should do both, and use the leaflet to advertise the website,” suggested another student who until now had been looking disinterested, spending most of the lesson drawing in the back of his book. “I’d be interested in designing a website and logo. I’ve got one half designed already.”

He held up a black and white sketch that was very artistic but didn’t mean anything to B.

“Cool,” he heard from the middle of the room. There was a general murmur of approval.

B noticed Jai glance at his watch and did the same. It was about two minutes to the bell and he realised he had better wrap the lesson up.

“So we have general agreement that we attempt a website and a newsletter of some kind focusing on global issues that interest and affect young people?”

He paused to look around the room and make sure they were listening. Most eyes were looking his way.

“All in favour?” There was general consensus and immediate shuffling and packing of bags. “Please pass your books to the front,” he managed just before the bell sounded.

Books flew in all directions and he fielded a few while Jai tried to bring order to the crush at the door. B was still stacking the books when Jai reached him.

“Saved by the bell, hey?” Jai commented. B took a deep breath and breathed out slowly. What had he let himself in for? This could be rather a complex project and would mean a lot of work for him.

“I think you caught their interest,” Jai added. “Sounds like a big project. Maybe we can chat to the SOSE teacher and see what they are working on this semester. Strikes me that this could be a good opportunity for cross-curricular integration.”

Both B and Jai had another class to attend so agreed to catch up at lunchtime to discuss the lesson. B had been arranging all his meetings at lunchtime or in free lessons so that he could slip off undetected in the afternoons. He now had an observation in Chris’s class, his last one before he would take a lesson straight after lunch. There were a few things he had noted he wanted to watch in Chris’s classroom and he didn’t want to be late. The class that he had chosen to teach only had about twelve students. The students were all quite new to the school and even Chris was still getting to know them. Very few of the students spoke English at all and generally spent their time copying from the board, filling in words on work sheets and tracing over words in workbooks. Chris had told him it takes at least six
weeks for the students to start feeling confident enough to speak in front of the class and this second class she was working with had been with her from between six and eight weeks.

B wanted to closely observe how Chris interacted with her students. He found it hard to believe that the students could develop from the current level of the beginning class to the communication and collaboration level of this other class in just eight weeks. They responded well to Chris’s vivacious personality and ready smile. She was young, pretty and gentle but not one of the students seemed to take advantage of her easy going style. They were always polite and would watch her carefully while she moved around the room talking, explaining and clarifying in her careful speech. They seemed to take many of their clues from the tone of her voice and her actions rather than what she said. She also had an incredible range of resources that she kept in an expanding file on the front desk. Each time a student showed interest in a topic she would have something to give them to help with their understanding. She provided URL’s for a range of relevant ideas directing the students to the laptops that filled a bench down one side of the room. She tried to make it clear to the students that though their English language skills were still developing, their cognitive skills and ability to construct higher-level concepts and summarise, interpret, design, create or judge, were not impaired and needed to be continually exercised. She insisted that they work collaboratively as soon as they had developed trusting relationships with their peers and encouraged group interpretations and clarification, urging students to help each other with pronunciation and word use.

Chris very seldom stood at the front of the room asking questions or directed the students as a class, though she was careful to explain everything she did with slow and very precise diction. She had laughed when B had told her he was worried about his accent, and confided in him that when she was in Holland, the English teacher at the university had told her that she would fail oral English because her pronunciation and accent were so bad. In Australia her rounded vowels and carefully pronounced consonants were decidedly clear compared with the more nasal versions that Australians often adopted. Chris had explained that it’s all about what you are used to hearing and that it would be good for these students to listen to a different accent. She did remind him however that he would need to talk much more slowly and be prepared to repeat himself on many occasions.

During their discussions Chris had made it clear that B should focus on something he knew a lot about so that he could use his energy to concentrate on being inclusive and modelling good conversation and explanation. He must take care to construct his lesson to encourage optimal student participation and prepare his questions in a way that invited students to repeat previous learning many times to consolidate their language use. Chris had explained that she used to plan her questions and explanations word for word in advance to
ensure maximum understanding. Gradually, she claimed, it had become second nature and she had done it so many times that she didn’t need her notes.

“Take care that you don’t stand at the front and lecture or talk at them,” she had warned. “They will just sit there and look and not understand a word! You won’t be doing them any favours.”

B had decided to focus on the topic of community and show a map of the various communities he had lived in. He had hoped that the students might recognise their own regions and they might be able to talk about them. He also logged on to globalearth.com, which allowed them to view the earth as viewed by the satellites. It was possible to zoom in so close that you could actually see cars on the roads. He had already set the school in the memory and was looking forward to the student’s reaction as he zoomed in from a satellite view of Australia, to one of the state, then the region, the city, the suburb, the street and finally the school with its ovals and classroom roofs quite distinct.

Jai hadn’t been able to meet at lunchtime as planned as another meeting had been called, so B spent the time tinkering with his lesson plan for the lesson after lunch. He wasn’t going to run out of ideas in this classroom or pitch it too low for the students. He was going to blow them away; community, culture and society were something he knew lots about. He had practised his questions and had work sheets ready. They wouldn’t just be tracing over words or filling in spaces.

Immediately the students arrived B handed them a sketch of the world that he had prepared and showed them the cities where he had lived, on an overhead transparency projection. Bombay and Andhra Pradesh in India; Penang in Malaysia; Jakarta in Indonesia; Singapore; Bangkok in Thailand; and Rabaul in Papua New Guinea. In each of these places he had taught English and he described the different classrooms and communities and told stories about his students. At times he could hear himself talking a little too quickly and slowed down but the student’s eyes never left his face. This gave him encouragement and he went into even more detail about his life in these cities. When he had finished he asked the students to come to the front and mark their home town or region on the map. There was no movement. The students still looked at him with their big eyes hardly blinking. He began to feel like a curiosity in a shop window. He asked again. There was no flicker of engagement or understanding. Chris wasn’t smiling in her usual way either and an awkward silence fell on the classroom. B attempted to hand a marker to the student closest to him but she just looked at him. Chris eventually stood up and came to the front.
“Mark with your pen like you see here,” she said in her slow, clear diction as she picked up a pen and marked large red crosses over the dots that B had placed on the map. The students followed her lead and marked crosses on their maps.

“Ask them to repeat the names of the cities after you, while you point to them,” she whispered to B.

Pointing to the whiteboard image B slowly sounded out “Bang…Kok.”

“Bang…Kok,” was whispered from various locations in the room.

“Bangkok,” he repeated.

“Bangkok,” came the echo a little louder.

“Sing…a…pore,” he said, moving the pointer.

“Sing…a…pore” came the echo barely above a whisper.

They tried again, and again it was more confident on the second try. Gradually they covered all of the sites on the map.

“Shall we start again?” Chris interrupted in her careful diction, signalling to B with her eyes that it was a good idea. B pointed to Thailand.

“Bang…kok,” he heard from the back of the room.

“Yes, Bangkok,” he repeated and looked up in time to see a huge smile spread over the student’s face.

He pointed to another city.

“Sing…a…pore,” he heard from several directions and Chris clapped and all the students smiled.

He tried another.

“Bom…bay”

Then.

“Rabaul”

“Andhra Pradesh”

“Jakarta.”

The responses became more and more confident and all of the students were joining in.
Just when he was wondering what to do next, Chris came out to the white board and with a big cross, marked the east coast of Australia.

“Sydney,” she said. “I was born in Sydney.”

“Syd…en…ny,” came from somewhere in the room.

“Syd…en…ny,” was repeated.

“Why don’t you see if they can work in groups and point to other places they know,” suggested Chris. Remember we use the number game and they sit in groups of that number.

“Three,” said B, holding up three fingers. “Sit in groups of three.” He tried to talk slowly and clearly like Chris did. The students moved into three groups of three. Chris joined a fourth group of two to make up the three and began pointing to different places on the map and saying their names. The other groups watched and gradually began to do the same while B helped the group closest to him. Gradually he heard names that he didn’t recognise and the maps were beginning to have several crosses, mainly in Northern and Central Africa and the Middle East. Some of the students were crossing indiscriminately and it appeared that they had little idea where they had come from, while others began to show their group members a range of places they seemed to have visited on their way to Australia. A few of the class members remained very quiet and B sensed that he saw fear or at least concern in their eyes. It was at this point that the bell sounded and B looked at Chris with surprise. He had set up the computers for globalssearch.com and now they had run out of time. B collected the maps and dismissed the class.

“We’ll debrief after school,” Chris said over her shoulder as she picked up some folders and rushed through the door. “I have my Japanese class now.”

B didn’t have time to tell her that he had to pick up his wife and then had to go to work so he left a note. He left a similar note in Jai’s pigeonhole as he walked through the staffroom on the way to his car. He sensed that things hadn’t gone as well as he expected but didn’t have time to reflect on it now, he needed to navigate the traffic, drop his wife at the children’s schools so that she could walk them home, then get to work as quickly as he possibly could. Hopefully there would be some quiet times at work tonight when he could look through his notes and think about the lessons.

Predictably it was a busy evening at work and after very little sleep and the usual rush to drive his children to school and his wife to work, B arrived at school quite late and not well prepared. Fortunately both his lessons were after recess so he could spend the morning getting organised and maybe he would be able to skip one of his scheduled observation lessons. He decided to make a cup of tea and sat down in the staff room to
consult his timetable and check on the availability of his mentors. Neither was available until after recess so he would need to plan his lessons without feedback from the previous ones. He wouldn’t have minded a little help in terms of where to go next but he had survived his first lessons ok, so it should be fine. Jai had told him that he had “caught their interest,” and Chris had been clapping and smiling by the end of the lesson.

B went to the library for inspiration. The class had agreed to design a class newspaper and website focusing on the sorts of global issues that interested young people. He would speak to the librarian and book the computer rooms.

The librarian was busy when B arrived and offered to make an appointment to discuss his project. She hadn’t been able to understand that B needed to discuss it immediately as he had a lesson in an hour. She tried to reason with him explaining that there were over ninety teachers in the school and most of them had a lesson in an hour and some of them had planned her help weeks ago. B tried to argue, repeating the importance of his request over and over, explaining that he had a sick daughter and needed to work as well as study. He told the librarian that university hadn’t provided him with enough resources and his mentors hadn’t really prepared him for the classes. He explained that students didn’t listen like they did in the other schools where he had taught. He even commented that he was being discriminated against. In the end the librarian had simply walked into her office and closed the door. B had almost followed her but couldn’t open the gateway at the borrower’s bench. It was then that he had spied Chris with a class in the library.

“I need to book the computer room,” he told her as soon as he was close enough for her to hear.

Chris put her finger to her lips and her eyes swept over a range of older students in various poses of concentration; pens in mouths, hands on chins, elbows on tables, chairs rocked back, chairs rocked forward…then about fifteen pairs of eyes lifted towards him.

“I just managed to get them all working,” she whispered and motioned towards a bookcase.

B followed her. He was still angry with the librarian and now he was being treated in a less than welcoming manner. What was it with these teachers?

“You need to book the computer rooms with the librarian,” Chris told him. “You usually need to book at least a week in advance but you can be lucky.”

B turned on his heel and walked off. He was angry, frustrated and disappointed. What was he going to do? He needed to find someone to help him out, fast.
After collecting his brief case from the staff room B headed for the English faculty office. Surely someone would be able to help him out. It just wasn’t fair. He was new to this and wasn’t getting much support. Unfortunately the room was empty so he sat down at the desk they had provided for him in the corner then noticed a steaming cup of coffee on the English coordinator’s desk. Hopefully he would return very soon.

B could feel his heart was pounding and he was sweating profusely, his shirt was dark and stained under the arms and felt damp on his back. He looked around the room for inspiration and spotted Jai’s filing cabinet remembering it was full of resources. Breathing shallowly and quickly he started flicking through the filing cabinet opening every file that was marked media, or anything vaguely related. Nothing seemed to suit his purpose but a sticky note referred him to the compactus at the back of the office. He searched it and found a book entitled “Media Studies” and checked the contents. Chapter 3 had the title Media: Language and Attitudes. He skimmed it quickly. It presented a number of ideas related to the power of the media and covered topics of page design for greatest affect, headings, persuasive language and journalism. Nothing in the book discussed web design but that was to be expected as it was pretty old. He counted the books – twenty-eight, that should be enough, he decided.

Just as he finished transferring the books into one of the boxes he found nearby, the English senior arrived back at his desk.

“How is it going?” he asked.

“We don’t seem to have any books on web design,” B responded.

“Er…no. Most of that stuff is taught in IT. Anyway I find the kids seem to know more than even the latest books. They are all into ‘blogging’ at the moment. That way you can create a site without having to do any design…and it’s free. You just enrol all the people you want to use your site and send the web address to them and…pronto…you have an interactive site…apparently.

Pete took a sip of his coffee and went on. “I haven’t tried it myself. Seems you might have to be careful what you put on it because it comes up on a Google search and you might get unwanted visitors. Not sure if they can interfere with the site though, if they aren’t enrolled”.

He seemed quite pleased with himself and started flicking through the papers that lined his desk. “Thanks for reminding me, I might just get onto this myself. It would be perfect for my media class.” With that he picked up his coffee and left the room like a man on a mission.
B immediately typed ‘blogging’ into the computer, thankful of his Internet tutorial at uni, and pressed Google search. He made seventy eight million hits! Things were immediately looking up. He selected definition and immediately felt better.

(WeBLOG) A Web site that contains dated entries in reverse chronological order (most recent first) about a particular topic. Functioning as an online journal, blogs can be written by one person or a group of contributors. Entries contain commentary and links to other Web sites, and images as well as a search facility may also be included. A blog with video clip entries instead of text is a "video Weblog" (see vlog).

Although some blogs invite feedback and comments from visitors, Internet newsgroup discussions, which started long before the Web, tend to be more question-and-answer oriented (see newsgroup).

Software and Services
Blogs took off in 1999 after blog development applications such as Pitas, Blogger and GrokSoup were released. The template-based software made it easy to create an online blog and continuously add entries without having to write the pages in HTML. Blog hosting services make it even easier to create a blog. All the development is done through the browser, and no software downloads are required.

Sites that Index Blogs
By the end of 2005, there were more than 18 million blogs, and there are sites that track and index them (visit www.technorati.com and http://blogsearch.google.com).

The News Feed
Many blog sites offer an RSS or Atom syndication feed that provides headlines of their latest entries along with URLs to the content. (see syndication feed).

B printed the weblog definition and searched a little more. There were articles and books available on line that looked at the history and techniques of weblogging. From what he could make out it was like pre-surfing the net, collecting all the information and links in one spot, and ‘publishing’ to the web.

By the time the recess bell went B had calmed down, stopped sweating and had a great deal of information for his students. He had photocopied several pages for the class to read and had made overhead transparencies of many others. He had scribbled out a lesson plan that included the outcomes that Jai had recommended and was overwhelming in his enthusiasm when Jai came over to see how he was progressing with the lesson.

“You know you talked too much and too quickly yesterday, don’t you?”

B nodded.

“You nearly lost them. Sam saved the day for you and the other students went along with him. He won’t always do that. Sometimes it will go the other way. You need to try to anticipate their reactions and be very aware of the dynamics in the classroom. Do you believe in chaos theory? Anything can happen especially if you don’t challenge them and
value what they already know. Their sense of time isn’t the same as yours, they are used to jumping around from Website to Website, and they are always looking for distractions to move the moment on. Their thought processes aren’t methodical and sequential like ours; they don’t connect with the sorts of things we connect with. They will have virtually forgotten what happened in yesterday’s lesson unless you structure those connections for them.”

Jai didn’t seem to be enjoying this, it was almost as if he had scripted his speech and he was determined to see it through.

“They might give you a honeymoon period and then will come in for the kill so you really need to plan thoroughly and talk as little as possible. It is their learning that is important, not you, and they will contest your methods quite vigorously if you start imposing your views or your sense of the world onto them. I’ll try to help you out as much as I can but I can’t jeopardise my own relationship with them. It has taken me weeks to establish a classroom dynamic that we are all comfortable with and they are a bright group whose trust is important to me. Try to surf the wave with them, don’t battle against the current. It will make your life hell.”

Jai and B had both been unaware that they had a visitor. Chris had been listening to the last part of Jai’s ‘speech’ and she nodded emphatically as Jai moved away to answer the phone.

“He is such a wonderful teacher,” she said, her eyes brimming with tears. “He taught me how to listen and communicate with kids – real communication at a cultural level. Youth culture that is. I used to think I was young and hip and understood the students but it was all about my ideas, my performance, my values, and me. I was turning some of the students off. Jai taught me how to make their learning central and forget about myself. After what he went through before he came to Australia I can’t believe he can be so selfless. He really seems to understand the ‘lifeworld’ of the young people he deals with. I wish the other staff in the faculty would listen to him. Some of them treat him like an oddity and some are downright rude. But you’ll find out.”

B just nodded again. He had a lesson coming up and was beginning to feel his blood pressure rising.

“Can we talk at lunch time about yesterday’s lesson?” he asked.

“Yes, fine. That’s why I came over. I thought perhaps you were sick or something when I didn’t see you in the staffroom this morning. I was a bit worried. Don’t be too hard on yourself; you’ll be fine you know.”
She waved to Jai who was still on the phone as she headed for the door. He smiled and lifted a finger from the phone to return the wave while he made copious notes with the other hand. They really seemed to get on well, B noted. By the time Jai had finished on the phone it was nearly lesson time so they went through the plan very quickly. Jai looked a little doubtful but B was emphatic, this was going to be great.

B arrived at the classroom before the students, placed the textbooks on the desks and set up the overhead projector. He wrote, read chapter 3 and the title of the book on the whiteboard and colour coded the weblog notes on the front table so that they matched up with his overhead transparencies.

The students arrived with their usual chatter and clatter as they rearranged desks and chairs. B wasn’t ready to deal with this so he kept writing their reading instructions on the board. When he could delay no longer he turned around to find a completely different arrangement of students from the previous day. Sam wasn’t there and the girl who had painted her fingernails had blue hair and was watching him with arms crossed waiting for his reaction. Not being prepared he had obviously stared and probably a full range of expressions would have crossed his face. Most of the other students were watching him carefully too. B had no idea whether to comment or not, so decided to just go ahead with the lesson. At least they were fairly quiet and attentive.

Not one of the students had picked up the books he had paced on their desks. Several of the books had fallen from the desks during the re-shuffle.

“Please turn to chapter 3 in the books you will find on your desk and follow the instructions on the board.” B found that his throat was tight and his accent seemed stronger than usual.

“Can’t understand your lingo,” he heard from the back of the room.

Pointing to the board B repeated his instructions. A few of the students picked up the book and flicked through it. One student kicked the closest one with his foot towards another student who didn’t have one and proceeded to talk to his neighbour. B reprimanded him for talking.

“Don’t have a book, sir.”

B felt himself get angry but casually picked up a book from another desk and put it on the student’s desk. By this time about two thirds of the class were reading the book and one of the students had a hand in the air.

“Can we have our exercise books, sir?”

“Yes, sorry. Can you hand them out please.”
“Can’t someone else do it?”

B was quite shocked. He picked up the stack of books and was heading towards the offending student when alarm bells sounded in his head. They had talked at uni about confrontation in the classroom and had provided a number of scenarios with different outcomes. Avoidance was high on the list. At the time he had thought it was a bit hypothetical. He walked past the student and called out the name on the book on the top of the pile.

“Yes”

Gradually he distributed the books and by the time he had finished most of the students were reading the board and writing in their books. Some however hadn’t even picked up the book and others were getting restless, throwing paper across the room and generally trying to distract those who were working. B was beginning to feel a little panicky when Jai unfolded himself from the chair at the back of the room and placed books in front of the vagrant students. They immediately flicked through until they came to chapter 3 and began to read.

“What do we do now?” he heard from behind him.

“Have you finished the work on the board?”

“Yup”

“Can I have a look?”

“Don’t you believe me?”

There was a snigger from the front of the room.

The student has indeed finished all of the questions and although B only scanned the work he seemed to have found the right answers.

“How many others have finished?”

A number of hands went up.

B had a dilemma. Several of the students had not even started and many had finished. Should he introduce the weblogs now?

He walked as slowly as he dared to the front of the room and switched on the overhead projector. After asking for the classes’ attention he proceeded to introduce the concept of weblogs. He reminded them of the class decision to produce a newsletter and website and explained how weblogs work, giving a brief history by reading the overheads that he had prepared.
Some of the students were listening, some were reading, some were writing and one had his head on the desk apparently asleep.

B then went through the technical details and handed out a sheet to every student. He described how to develop weblogs and how he thought they would work for the class project. He had printed many examples and handed out more sheets. His voice became louder and louder as he read through the sheets and tried to remain above the classroom noise. Several of the students were looking despairingly at Jai when there was a loud ‘pop’ and the projector lamp went out. There was a sudden hush, then laughter. Jai immediately stepped in full of apology. He explained to B where to find a new lamp and B was glad he could leave the classroom. He was sweating profusely and his pulse was booming in his ears. He felt unwell, his head ached and he was short of breath. He sat on the floor while he rummaged in the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet and had just put his head back against the wall and closed his eyes when the English coordinator walked in.

“You look terrible.”

“I don’t feel well.”

“Shall I call someone?”

“No, it’s ok. I just need to catch my breath.”

By the time B arrived back to the class they were sitting in groups brainstorming and drawing concept maps for the newspaper and weblogs. Most groups were talking excitedly and had made extensive notes. It was almost bell time so Jai asked them to pass their books to B who would decide which designs merited consideration for the next step.

“Choose ours,” he heard from one side of the room.

“No, ours,” came from the back.

“I’m sure Mr B is open to bribes of chocolate and ice cream like I am,” Jai laughed and the class joined in.

The bell sounded and there was the usual rush for the door.

“See you tomorrow, sir,” chirped one of the girls as she passed in front of B and out of the door.

“Yes. Bye.”

**Part 3**

B and Jai had another class to go to but Jai suggested B have a breather and catch up with the observation another day. With a last worried look at B he rushed off leaving him to
collect the books and re-organise the tables and chairs. B was somewhat relieved and was going to suggest he skip the class, but didn’t know how to bring it up. He had a meeting with Chris at lunchtime and hadn’t yet prepared the lesson for the class after lunch. He was feeling less and less confident about engaging these students. Teaching English in Australia was certainly vastly different for teaching English in other Asia Pacific countries. He didn’t really understand Australian youth and Australian ways as Jai had inferred. He had no idea about classroom ecology or dynamics and his teaching style just didn’t work at this school. It was a pity they hadn’t let him choose his own school. It would have been different there. That was it. It was the school they had placed him in. It didn’t suit him. Perhaps he should ring the coordinator and explain that he needed to change schools. It wasn’t his fault. He had been discriminated against. It just wasn’t working out.

Finding it hard to concentrate on his lesson planning B looked back on his lesson observations from week one. He found them very superficial. He had written nothing that could have prepared him for the realities of teaching these classes. The students were engaged, connected, and enthusiastic. The teachers were forever asking questions, clarifying issues and capitalising on student interests and knowledges. It seemed so easy. The classrooms had a sense of success, of possibility and of trusting relationships. They were nothing like the battlefield that he had experienced. Maybe it wasn’t the school. Maybe…

By the time B met with Chris, he felt physically and mentally exhausted. She was very gentle with him but still highlighted some of the areas where he needed to make major changes.

“You talk too much,” she told him. “They hardly understand a word of English let alone our conventions and expectations. Their worlds have generally been turned upside down and some of them probably don’t wish to be reminded of their past. You have to let them make decisions for themselves and model slow and clear pronunciation. Try to imagine what it is like sitting in their seats. Who are they? Why are they there? What will make them keep coming back so that they can develop their new identity? Their lives are in crisis. They need a place that is calm and where they can learn trust. They need to be helped to make sense of their lives.”

With sinking heart B eventually admitted that he really wasn’t prepared, the façade was over and he felt that he could not face the class. With little time left to negotiate Chris agreed to take the lesson but asked him to explain the globalsearch.com and demonstrate how it worked. He agreed to do that, already beginning to breathe easier.
“I might as well tell you I need to rush off straight after the lesson again,” B added. “I need to be at work by four and as my wife doesn’t drive I collect her from work and drop her at the children’s school first”. As he continued the usual confidence left his voice.

“We need the money. I can’t give up my position, even though I have cut back a little.”

He paused and looked out of the window as if he was taking time to make a decision. “I’m also going to ring the liaison lecturer and ask him to come in tomorrow. I’m not sure I am going to cope with another three weeks.”

Chris had just nodded and they walked towards the classroom together.

“Bang…kok”

“Syd…en…ny”

“Sing…a…pore”

Chris and B’s eyes met in surprise and they laughed.

“Well, they learned something yesterday didn’t they!” Chris chuckled.

The lesson went well and the students really enjoyed globalsearch.com. They spent some time finding all of the sites they had marked on their maps and while some drifted off to read books and practice their letters two of the boys spend the entire second half of the lesson learning how to find the site and search and save different activities. B was able to teach them a number of words for the different computer icons and formats. He began to feel quite comfortable with them and they seemed to understand him easily.

That night after work B told his wife that he was going to defer his teaching units until the following year. He had started the course with the wrong attitude and now realised how wrong he had been. Teaching in Australia was quite different from his previous teaching and at this stage he wasn’t ready for it. He would volunteer to spend some time at the school with the ESL students and continue with his Learning Theory unit and Adolescent Development unit. Maybe if they saved more money this year he wouldn’t have to work during the practicum. He admitted that he was feeling very stressed and had felt quite unwell.

The meeting he organised with the university liaison lecturer and his mentors was quite a pleasant affair. Everyone was very positive and all agreed that B had made a good decision. B was reassured to hear both his mentors praise some of his innovative ideas and his developing rapport with the students. Everyone blamed the pressures of trying to work, having a family and full time study. B felt a huge weight lift from his shoulders. He was
actually looking forward to spending time on his readings for the two units he had decided to continue. He also arranged to visit Chris’s class each week to watch the progress and help out where he could. It had been hard to let go of the old theories that had worked in the past, and hard to blame himself and not everyone else, but in the end the dedication and incredible knowledge of his mentors had demonstrated that there was another way and he just needed time to get to understand it better. Now the ideas and theories introduced at uni were beginning to make more sense!
Q’s Story

Part 1

Q always thought that some day she would like to settle down and become a teacher though after completing her degree she was determined to travel, experience the world and spend some time helping those less fortunate than herself. She worked in a number of laboratory jobs while she was at university and during the heady days after her science degree when she found lab work flexible and easy to get in the major cities around Australia.

Eventually, with a little help from her Grandmother’s estate, she travelled to Europe where she had planned to extend her qualifications, though she found study and the life of the student in the cold and dismal British cities both difficult and uninspiring. Her money didn’t go far and she missed the fresh food and sunshine of Australia. Despite an open return ticket she never seemed to raise the finances to actually get back to Australia in the manner that she had imagined (some time travelling through Europe, then a cultural experience in India) so eventually took a job in London, living in a bed-sitter and taking short trips to the continent whenever she had saved enough money for the ‘weekend specials’ that attracted the Australian expats.

The years passed by and while brushing her hair one morning looking into the mirror that was fogged by the cold air heralding the coming of another miserable British winter, she noticed a grey hair. She spent the day with a nagging ache in her chest and it was only while at the pub that night with the usual crowd saying and doing the usual things that she realised she was at a crossroad. It was time to make a decision on her future, what was she going to do with her life? Where did her future lie? Where were her talents going to be utilised? Could she endure another winter in the UK and what would it achieve?

Q had kept in touch with a few university friends and knew that there was an impending shortage of teachers in Australia. That night she escaped the pub early and decided to avoid the squash in the tube by walking the colourful and noisy inner London streets back to her flat in the basement of a grand old house not far from the gardens that were already bathed in the eerie orange light of the old-fashioned London lamps. She seemed to take it all in with amazing clarity that evening, smelling the mixture of car fumes and the musty leaves that were beginning to fall and collect in the gutters. This had become home in a sense of normality and expectation but she missed the languid openness of even the biggest of the Australian cities she had lived in.
After spending a few nights on the internet and being unfamiliarly affected by her mother’s instant teary exclamation, “so you’ll be home for Christmas” when she called, Q realised that she was cascading into a new chapter of her life. Was her disposition really suited to teaching? What did she really know about young people? Was she ready to ‘go home’? Maybe a new adventure in one of the more remote universities would act as an intermediate step?

So following a busy Christmas and many happy reunions with friends and family, Q started her ‘professional year’ as a trainee teacher in a smaller university away from the southern Australian cities. At first it was difficult engaging with the language and concepts of the course and the three days she had spent shadowing a teacher in three different schools during her first week had been a surprise. Schools were quite different places from what she remembered. Kids seemed very young and unsophisticated (and disinterested) and teachers appeared to be pre-occupied and not necessarily accommodating of her questions or comments. Yet surely she just had to jump through a few hoops, attend a few lectures and tutorials and the lecturers would see she was up to the task.

There seemed to be no time to do anything but attend lectures and tutorials, read the huge numbers of references and support papers and write assignments. To make matters worse, most communication out of class was digitally on ‘Learnline’ or by email, which meant a huge commitment of time in the computer labs or the library. Basically the lecturers were saying the same things, knowledge was constructed by learners building on what they already knew, and it was the job of the teacher to engage students in this process by using progressive and productive pedagogies. However, they all had their own spin on how that could be done, and it was increasingly difficult to navigate those ideas and position oneself clearly in the role of the teacher. Q believed the impending practicum would answer some of her questions and was looking forward to the experience. She had said she was happy to be placed anywhere within walking distance or on a bus route, her finances not having spread to a car or even a bicycle at this stage. She was actually looking forward to the break from late lectures and continuous readings and assignments. It was amazing how quickly procedures and expectations at university had changed. She seemed to have fallen behind in terms of computer literacy and had been surprised at the expectations of the lecturers for graphs and tables, references, footnotes and formatting. There was also a lot more group and collaborative work than she ever remembered. Maybe life would regain some normality when practicum began and she would be able to finally apply for some of those tutoring positions she had seen advertised. Austudy had seemed quite generous at first but the reality of setting up a flat and buying a few texts had eaten into what had been left of her meagre savings.
Q wasn’t prepared for the sense of unimportance she felt in her first few hours in the school. She had tried to make contact the previous week but whenever she had managed to get to a phone between lectures the contact she had been given at the school was not available. She left several email messages but even then was unsure who to direct them to. Her mobile was not reliable and she hadn’t set up message bank so in the end the school office manager had told her just to turn up on Monday well before starting time and it would be fine. Q sat in the front office with three other preservice teachers in her course for at least twenty minutes while the assistant principal dealt with a particularly ‘nasty’ incident that had happened in the yard before school (according to the office staff).

Eventually they were summonsed into an office where the desk was covered with papers and the walls thick with notices, posters, timetables, memos, photos of classes and other school groups and a few faded mementos of artwork and thank you cards. Before they had even found a seat the phone rang, the assistant principal turned to the computer, scanned through what seemed to be pages and pages of emails, offered a few suggestions concerning who should be in class with the year 9 boys, then turned to them with a pleasant but slightly distracted smile and welcomed them to the school. Crossing to a large filing cabinet she extracted four folders and handed one to each of the preservice teachers. Inside, she explained were their nametags that they must always wear while on the school premises or while conducting school business. There were also copies of their timetable, the school policies and strategic statements, a map of the school, their photocopy pin number and the names of the teachers who were to act as their mentors for the next five weeks. She explained that she would be out of the school at a conference for the next three days but if they had any problems to talk to their mentors. She asked if they had any questions and when none were forthcoming she handed them a copy of the class notices for the day explaining that this was their daily bible. Any changes to bell times, timetable or class allocations would be found on these notices which they could pick up from the staffroom daily. She had just finished pointing out where the special notes relating to each year level could be found when there was a brief knock and a tall, somewhat untidy man entered the office and introduced himself with a broad smile and a wink. This was the student counsellor and he had the pleasure of showing them around the school and bringing them back to the staff room for recess where they would be introduced to the staff and their individual mentors. Almost on cue the phone rang again so they shuffled out of the office behind the student counsellor who pointed out the toilets and led them into the staff room for a welcome coffee. Thus began the first day.

The rest of the week passed in more or less of a haze. The only reassuring element being that the other preservice teachers felt the same. The classes seemed to follow a similar pattern
despite the different learning areas. The classrooms were also alike, desks in rows of twos or threes, some faded and some new posters on the walls and students who tended to sit in similar configurations and positions in the class. Lessons also had a similar pattern, revision of previous lesson, new content, and a range of activities from board work to worksheets to group work. There appeared to be almost identical sequences of questioning, teacher requests, student compliance or non-compliance, continuous disruptions either by disengaged students or teacher reminders, refocusing demands and idle threats. Energy levels of both students and teachers dwindling towards the end of the lesson with an almost discernable breath of relief as the bell rang to announce brief freedom.

Q endeavoured to learn some names in the classes where she was going to teach and took copious notes on pedagogy and teacher strategies hoping that on review there would be some sense in the account to help her navigate through the ‘jungle’ and decipher some sense of the teaching/learning environment. The conversations at university had suggested that outcomes and indicators should be clearly stated in lesson plans and open questions and clear rationale should drive the curriculum. It was difficult to discern the outcomes within the maze of interactions in these classrooms and there appeared to be limited agreement between the needs of the students and the focus of the teachers. Maybe she was missing something? Her lecturers had suggested that as observers they needed to get beneath the surface appearances of the classroom and focus on the learning (in terms of engagement and interactions and subsequent change in understanding, knowledge or skills), classroom culture and pedagogy. The observation sheets provided by the university were not always useful, sometimes they asked the wrong questions and sometimes they did not leave enough room for answers. Admittedly they had been advised that these proformas would need to be individualised according to needs and learning areas but there seemed to be so much to think about and too much to observe. Q was also aware of the glances from the classroom teachers as she wrote furiously during the lessons and was not surprised when one of the teachers asked at the end of a lesson if she could read what Q had written.

“It’s nothing much, really,” Q had responded. “I’ll bring it to our next meeting. Must dash I have a meeting with Bill,” and she disappeared before the teacher had a chance to dissuade her. Breathing a sigh of relief she tucked the sheets into her folder making a note to re-write them before the next meeting and remove some of the more acidic comments like; Why didn’t the teacher... and Poor Tom, he had his hand up for over five minutes, and I would have... Better be more careful, she thought, I’m really at the mercy of these teachers for a good teaching report. I don’t want to upset them.

Q was beginning to wonder how she was going to begin her teaching on the following Monday when by Friday recess she still had no idea what she was going to be teaching in
either of the leaning areas. Friday recess was traditionally a full thirty minutes with morning tea provided by a different faculty every week. It was a great surprise to all four preservice teachers when the staffroom filled to overflowing and the atmosphere was convivial and noisy. It was more of a surprise when they were collectively awarded a trophy as the most ‘innovative, hardworking or stressed staff member of the week’, amid applause and a number of jokes. They weren’t sure which award applied but accepted it in the friendly manner that it was awarded somewhat bemused that these staff members even knew they existed. There had seldom been a hint of recognition as they navigated their way through corridors and between buildings during the week.

After very fast coffee and cake the staff gradually began to dissipate and Q was left in the staff room with the principal who was heaping leftover cake onto a plate. She looked up and must have noticed Q’s quizzical look.

“ITs ok, it’s not for me,” she smiled. “It’s for the staff on yard duty. I always put some in the fridge for them and they come and get it in their next free. Anyway, how are things going, Q? Bill tells me that you are fitting in really well and should be fine in front of the class next week. He tells me they are doing a unit on wave motion and has invited me in to see the new computer simulator at work. I’m looking forward to that.”

Q smiled and murmured some inane comment about looking forward to it and took off immediately to find Bill and find out what this was all about. Deep in thought she turned the corner from the staffroom rather sharply and bumped smack into Bill who dropped his papers. They both chased them over the lawn and when they had finally collected them she glanced up, caught Bill’s eye and saw in his face that he was finding it hard to control his mirth. She too burst into laughter and they fell into the staffroom almost out of control.

“Glad you’re here,” Bill spluttered. “I was looking for you. We need to sit down and work out next week’s lessons. I checked your timetable and it looks like you are free from one-twenty. So am I. Meet you in my office? That’ll give us a couple of hours if we need it. Must fly, photocopying is waiting.” And he was off, leaving Q feeling quite good and not so stressed after all.

Turning around she saw Sue checking her pigeonhole and approached her.

“Hi Sue. Sorry I had to rush off on Wednesday. Wonder if we could catch up to look at the lessons and program for next week?”

Sue looked up with her usual expression of distraction. The only time Q had seen her not look like this was when she was with her students. In class she was passionate, engaged, focused and alive with humour and interest. The students loved her and seemed to almost resent the intrusion of another adult into the classroom.
“Fine, yes,” she responded hesitantly. “But I won’t have a minute till about three-thirty. Are you staying for happy hour?”

Q hadn’t heard that there was a happy hour and had actually planned to have a look at a second hand bike after school but agreed to meet then, at which Sue virtually flew through the door with a last comment over her shoulder.

“We’re in room 28 in lesson 5.”

Q could see her almost running through the yard and could imagine that distracted look would be on her face.

It was after six before Q left the school. She photocopied almost a ream of paper so that she could take resources home for the weekend. She also spent an inordinate amount of time on the computer searching for suitable sites for student research into wave motion. Then she decided to redevelop her observation sheets and designed a weekly plan where she entered the free lessons of both her mentors so she would find it easier to plan her meetings with them. She wasn’t going to leave it until Friday afternoon next week. She had missed happy hour (which turned out to be more than two hours) and it had certainly sounded like a happy time.

Early Saturday morning Q rang and cancelled her planned evening out and the picnic she had hoped to attend on Sunday afternoon. She laid out her scribbled notes and program ideas and sorted through the resources she had collected at school. She then climbed to the back of the store room and found the boxes of university notes and books that her mother had insisted on her bringing with her. One by one she checked the contents, reminiscing about the fun they had during her undergraduate degree. She was glad she had transported her boxes of the undergraduate notes as they brought back lots of memories and gave her lots of teaching ideas. She even lost the gnawing feeling in the pit of her stomach for a while, but it soon came back. How was she ever going to get on top of the necessary content knowledge in a weekend? Uni was right. You need to have a strong undergraduate degree in the subject areas to be able to develop appropriate curriculum, and you need supportive and timely mentoring.

Bill had provided lots of ideas, worksheets, resources, pre-used and pre-loved units and plans, assessments and examples. Sue on the other hand had provided her semester plan and a copy of the set text, neither of which bore any resemblance to what had been going on in her classes during the week. She had also confided that she hadn’t really wanted a preservice teacher this semester but had been forced into it because no one else was available. Uni had warned about this too but Q just didn’t expect it to happen to her. Only four more weeks she thought as she started sifting through her fourth box of notes and resources.
Although everything had seemed clear during their discussions on Friday, Q found it hard to work out what she was supposed to be covering on Monday. She was getting quite frustrated when the voice of a uni lecturer suddenly came into her head. “Learning isn’t about filling the pot but about lighting the fire.” Then she recalled her methodology and curriculum lectures where concepts of ‘fertile’ and open questions and unit ‘outcomes’ were highlighted. “Design down and deliver up” they had stressed. It wasn’t about pouring in as many facts as she could but about designing and creating opportunities for the students to learn, to make meaning from a range of ideas, activities, tasks, experiences or conversations over a period of time and to take the ideas somewhere where they hadn’t been before.

Q consulted the Curriculum Framework and again read about her learning areas, the focus, the purpose, the outcomes and the indicators. She read about how they could incorporate the essential learnings and link to a range of other learning areas as well as the overarching issues of literacy, numeracy, indigenous knowledges, studies of Asia and information communication technology. It all began to make sense. It didn’t all need to happen in her classroom on Monday but it was about a learning journey from preschool to year 12 and her students were going to be at different points along that journey.

Armed with this new understanding and musing that she had just learned something in the true sense of ‘making meaning’ and constructing ideas, Q went back to the material that she had collected from her mentors. First Science with Sue, year 9, nice class, never much noise in the classroom and lessons seemed to go smoothly. But how much learning was happening? Sue told lots of stories about her travels in Africa, Asia and the Himalayas. The students were frequently transfixed, well most of them anyway. Last lesson Tom was up the back pulling his calculator apart and Chris was sending text messages on her mobile phone. Come to think of it there was another group of girls designing or drawing clothing and Peter had his head on the desk most of the lesson.

Q went to her bag and withdrew her observation sheets from science. She had missed the lesson on Monday, as it had been lesson one. Tuesday’s lesson had been planned as an opportunity to complete a research project but the computers had been down, so the students had very little to do as their work was stored on the server. This was when Sue had told them about the Orang-utan project in Kota Kinabalu in Sabah. The older orang-utans had become too dependent on humans so they were reintroducing the young animals to the wild through a gradual program that ensured they learned to fend for themselves. This had been Q’s first lesson in this classroom so she had busied herself with counting heads, drawing up the classroom arrangement (basically desks in rows), watching the teacher and she had to admit—listening to Sue’s story about the Orang-utans. There wasn’t that much on the observation sheet that was going to help her now.
Wednesday had been a bit of a problem; the computer room was on-line but had been booked by someone else. Sue had managed to book the computers in the library but there were only 15 of them and nearly 30 in the class. They would need to work in pairs Sue had told her as they walked to the library, it was a double lesson so they would have lots of time. In the library Q had found it wasn’t a problem, many of the students had actually finished their research projects at home and were happy to use this time for socialising and flicking through a range of magazines. As Q read her notes she realised the group of girls must have been designing clothes on Tuesday because she had noted that on Wednesday they were studying fashion and design magazines in the art section of the library. Others she noticed had found the year 11 boys in the research section and were enjoying some unscheduled discussion. Q read further, Sue had spent most of her time with a couple of boys who obviously hadn’t started their project and were still flicking from website to website at the beginning of the lesson. Q had settled in the corner with two girls who were also struggling to make a decision on their topic though claimed they had done stacks of work but had ‘lost it’ when the computers went down. Q hadn’t believed them but had gently directed them to some sites she knew on the topic of sustainability to help them out. She kept reminding them that their project was due on Friday; unaware at this stage that there was no lesson on Thursday so this was their last chance to get the work done. She had left them to it about half way through the lesson and had wandered around the library ostensibly looking at the resources but basically just watching and listening to the cacophony of chatter, laughter and library noises. She remembered thinking how easy it would be to get lost in a school, just be there, going through the motions, but never really doing anything. Everyone seemed so busy, would anyone notice?

Q moved on to the Friday observation sheet. There had been a fire drill at the end of the lunch break and the year 9s had arrived very late with a range of excuses. They were very unsettled and although Sue had made several attempts to start the lesson, every time some one new arrived she started again. The students worked in groups of four and were to show each other their research projects and explain the process they went through and the conclusions they had drawn. Sue had written the progression step by step on the board. After twenty minutes each student would have thirty seconds to offer an ‘abstract’ or a synopsis of someone else’s project to the rest of the group. Q had thought it was a great idea and had made a note to use the strategy herself. But with the late start and four or five false starts the whole process had become a bit fragmented. What’s more a number of students didn’t have their research projects with them. Sue must have anticipated this because she had arranged groups so that there was at least one completed project in each group. It was clever because those with completed work didn’t need to present to the group. That meant those who had
not completed their project did the presenting in class. In fact some students spoke for longer
sharing their experiences during this informal time than they ever did in formal lessons. A
number who were obviously not fluent English speakers were particularly communicable in
this setting.

The lesson had gone quite well and Q’s notes indicated a new respect for the way the
students seemed to be genuinely interested in what their peers had produced. Generally they
presented each other’s work in a particularly respectful (though very brief) way. The lesson
had finished early due to the lack of completed works and Sue’s apparent lack of awareness
that a number of students seemed to avoid presenting. Instead of forcing the issue Sue had
talked about the effect of tourism in the Himalayas, explaining how it was no longer
sustainable, as all the trees had been cut down for fuel and now all they had for heating and
cooking was cow or yak poo which they dried then burned on their fires. All other fuel had
to be carried to the villages, as there were no roads or air services, so the process was very
time consuming and the cost exorbitant for these poor village people. Many of the students
had again shown an interest in the story and Q realised now that both the stories that Sue had
told were right on the topic of environmental adaptation.

Buoyed by all these revelations Q went back to her planning. Sue has been pretty clear. This
was the program, this was the text and we were up to here… Bill had been more flexible; we
needed to cover the effects of climate change on the sea and coastline. Q was to see what
you could do in four weeks and he would pick it up when she left. But what had she learned
about Bill’s class through the observation lessons? They seemed very young and the entire
week had revolved around their own political parties being formed, an election and then the
first sitting of parliament had been during their double on Thursday. It had been pretty
chaotic and they had actually gone to the drama room to give them more space and allow for
more noise. Q wasn’t really sure what these students would be like in the classroom for a
normal lesson. (Though she was soon to find out that her concept of normal lesson didn’t
really exist.) Maybe she should have spent time observing them in other lessons instead of
having coffee with the other preservice teachers and tagging along with the biology teachers.
Perhaps she should focus on science on Saturday and SOSE on Sunday. Jumping from one to
the other wasn’t going to work.

Q went back to the Curriculum Framework and read carefully the outcomes for the Science
unit she was to begin on Forces. She then read the chapters in the text book noticing that the
text was printed in 1995 so was already over ten years old. These kids were being born when
this text first went to the editors she thought. She wondered if it was still relevant but had
been told to follow it step by step.
Once she made a start Q found it wasn’t that difficult to plan the unit. The Curriculum Framework was easy to follow and the text really had done her work for her. It was perhaps a little dry but she would do what she could to spice it up. The university required the unit plan so she might as well do it properly from the start and use the proforma recommended by the Curriculum Branch. She would do the lesson plans just a couple of days ahead in case she needed to make changes but would make sure that there was enough detail in the unit plan to keep her going if she found herself too busy.

Things progressed well for the rest of the morning, great outcomes and indicators on the plan, lots of resources and experiments planned for the lab. There was a clear focus on experimental design in terms of content and analysis or prediction in terms of thinking skills. Assessment would include the fortnightly cross year level test and she would collect the work books every week to see what progress was being made. They would go through experiment results in class and write up their conclusions for homework.

The unit plan looked good when Q finished it mid afternoon but she had become aware of a feeling like impending disaster weighing her down. This is probably how the animals felt before the Tsunami she thought, that’s why they ran to safety…what is this telling me? Am I up to this? What have I done wrong? Q rang her mum for solace (it was nice to be so much closer and on a similar time line) but she wasn’t answering so she grabbed an apple and went for a walk to clear her head. As always she ended up on the foreshore and sat on the rocks watching the patterns of the light breeze play on the surface of the otherwise still, aqua blue sea. Feeling more relaxed she turned to go and noticed a figure walking towards her.

“How’s the practicum going?” her lecturer asked.

“Fine! Just taking a break from lesson preparation.”

“Well don’t work too hard.” The lecturer laughed, as her dog pulled her further down the path. “And don’t forget, it’s about the kids, not you.” And she disappeared behind the bushes and down onto the beach.

Damn, damn, damn thought Q. She had forgotten. It wasn’t about her, what a good lesson she could prepare and deliver or what a good show she could put on for her mentor. It was supposed to be about student learning. As she walked back to the flat she began to realise what had been bothering her. She had fallen into the old ‘transmission’ tradition her lecturers had warned about at uni, with the teacher as central and the students as empty vessels just waiting to be filled. Fortunately it wasn’t too late, just a few minor adjustments to the unit plan focussing more on the needs of the students, their current knowledge, their interests… where would she get all this information?
Immediately she walked inside she consulted her observation sheets and then thought about her journal. She had left it in her bag, it was something she had been recommended to keep while on prac and had been writing in it when she found herself alone at school or in the staff room with a whole lot of staff members she didn’t know. Sometimes it was easier to pretend she was busy than to feel like a peripheral ‘listener’. She hadn’t even bothered to read what she had written all week so this could be interesting.

The reflections in the journal were remarkably frank and insightful and Q was surprised. It was interesting how the same issues seemed to come up in different classrooms. Students’ enjoyment of Sue’s stories came up many times and so did the observation that about a third of the class had really done nothing all week, other than avoid work. Some didn’t even bring pens and paper to class, some didn’t seem to speak much English and others didn’t even look comfortable in front of the computer. One student only attended on Friday and there seemed to be between three and five of the twenty-eight missing every day. That’s about fifteen percent she calculated. How do you teach when so many of them are missing every day?

Reading on, Q began to realise why it was important to focus on student needs and the particular context of her classroom. She felt guilty that she hadn’t been taking more notes and really getting to know the students. She had seen them as a class and not as individuals within the classroom with their individual needs, ideas, backgrounds, interests and talents. Now she was going to need to make huge assumptions about them to organise a curriculum that would be purposeful and worthwhile for them. Q resolved to make amends on Monday, she would try getting to know the students and she would talk to them in Home Group rather than talking to the teacher. She would chat with them when she was on yard duty and before school when walking from the bus, instead of avoiding them as she had been doing.

Suffice to say that Q did spend the weekend preparing and turned up early on Monday with two unit plans and lesson plans for two days. She was really nervous and even though she had walked through the lessons several times in her mind she knew there were several gaps that the whole class might fall through. She hoped her mentors would be prepared to rescue her if things fell apart. She went straight to the science lab and wrote the lesson sequence on the white board (as much for her own reference as for the students) then started to prepare the room. Textbooks, graph paper, scales, springs, a bag of apples, a range of fabrics she had cut into strips (even cutting up some of her old clothing to get the stretch jersey) and anything else in the storeroom that the students could weigh or stretch. She even prepared some spare biros and pencils and paper for those who might arrive without them and was ready to go when the bell rang for Home Group. Remembering her resolution to talk to the students she rushed off to the other side of the school, still nervous but feeling more organised.
Her first lesson was about to begin and the students were looking at her expectantly and her mentor handed her the roll then tucked herself somewhat reluctantly it seemed into the back corner of the room. The names seemed to dance in front of Q’s eyes and she realised she had paid no attention during roll call and had no idea how to pronounce this strange array of names. She hadn’t realised what a multi-cultural classroom she had. How many didn’t have English as their first language? Had she accounted for this in her lesson plan? Her mentor hadn’t made any comment. A hush fell on the class and she looked up, she knew her hand was shaking because the paper was flapping, so she quickly placed it on the lab table and glanced at her lesson plan.

“Turn to page 23,” she said. “And start reading the introduction to the chapter.” No one moved.

“We don’t have any books, miss,” said someone down the front. “Do you want me to hand them out?”

Q quickly picked up the textbooks, murmuring, “Yes, please. Suzie, can you help too?” So the books were distributed while she collected her thoughts then started again.

“Turn to page 23. Peter will you read from under the word ‘introduction’ please?”

As Peter read, she looked again at the roll hoping to recognise another name.

“Thanks, Peter. Louise can you read on please?”

They reached the bottom of the page and she directed their attention to the white board. “As you can see, we are starting a new unit on Push/Pull Forces. I want you to copy this table into your exercise books then go on reading the experiment from your books while I mark the roll.”

The lesson proceeded and although some students were chatting, most seemed to be writing in their books. Q stood behind the desk and read through her lesson plan again. The noise level was creeping up so she asked them to put their hand up if they were finished drawing the table. No one responded so she busied herself rearranging the apparatus and re-reading what she had written on the white board. She caught movement out of the corner of her eye. The mentor teacher was walking down the aisle, pointing at the textbook for some students and the exercise book of others as she walked past. Q realised that was what she should be doing, so moved from the safety of the front of the room and wandered towards the isle closest to her. The two boys at the front had not even opened their exercise books and didn’t appear to have anything to write with so she retrieved some pens from the front desk and handed them out. Next she walked to the back of the room. To her relief her mentor was sitting down reading some paperwork she had brought, so she turned and walked down the
middle isle. About half of the students seemed to be progressing well, a couple of them were even reading the text but the noise level was now becoming confronting.

“Please finish off quickly and read page 24,” she said, her voice sounding thin against the buzz in the room. She repeated her request a little louder, but it was still obvious no one was listening, even if they could hear her over the noise.

Q walked to the middle of the room, took a deep breath and said quite loudly, “Pens down and look at the board.” The talking subsided as she walked to the board and pointed to the next step. As she talked faces and eyes began to look her way so she kept talking. She went through step one, step two and step three, then realised she had been talking too long and asked them to find a partner and collect the apparatus they needed for step one. There was mass movement to the front of the room and the apparatus from all three trolleys was collected. She had meant them to only collect the apparatus for step one! Never mind they had it now. The noise level was rising again and she felt herself losing control of the class. “Every-one stop and look at the board again,” she said. To her surprise they did. “Lets look at step one again. That refers to the experiment on page 24. Read the experiment carefully and then take your apparatus to the benches on the side of the room and conduct your experiment filling your answers into your table. Then we will look at step two.”

The students complied, they were a bit chatty but they seemed to be following the experiment. Q wandered between the pairs answering questions and endeavouring to keep them on task. They were having fun weighing everything in sight with the spring balances. Even the boys down the front were weighing their collection of items though they weren’t putting their answers on the chart. Q allowed the students ample time then asked them to return the apparatus for step one and make sure they had what they needed for step two. She had to repeat the instructions a couple of times as she walked from group to group but she felt that was OK. “Step two experiment isn’t in your text,” she told them, “we are going to compare the stretch in all these fabrics and make suggestions on the work sheet I am handing out as to what clothing might be made from such fabrics and why. We might even think about designing some clothing.” She added this for the group of girls who she had observed the previous week with the fashion magazines. Was it her imagination or was there a discernable shift in enthusiasm of these girls? Q was sure she saw a look of appreciation when she mentioned design.

“Eva, read step two from the board please.”

As Eva read, Q glanced at her new watch. A watch had been recommended at uni and she had found a cheap one at the market. Five minutes to the bell – she couldn’t believe it and glanced at her mentor who also pointed at her watch. She walked to the front of the room.
“I’m sorry, we seem to have run out of time,” she apologised. “Could you please bring your apparatus for steps two and three back to the front trolleys and Mark could you please collect the texts? When everyone is sitting back down I will explain your homework.”

Most of the class moved quickly and were sitting back at their seats just as the bell went. As soon as they heard the sound they pushed back their seats, grabbed their bags and made for the door. Q just stood there, feeling helpless. She had watched this exodus in every classroom since her arrival and knew it was part of the culture of the school and there was no stopping them. She turned to the board and started cleaning off her writing. The trolleys were a bit untidy but she would deal with that later, lucky she didn’t have another lesson until after lunch. How do these teachers with a full teaching load cope?

Sue walked up and smiled, “It went well,” she said. “I’ve written a few comments on the feedback sheet you gave me; add your reflections and I’ll meet up with you in period 3.” Q smiled her agreement, just glad she had survived her first lesson. She would complete her tidy up and reflections before going for a well-earned coffee. Looking at her watch she couldn’t believe it, only mid-morning and she felt like it was time to go home.

Sue had a fair bit to say about the lesson when they met but nothing that Q hadn’t already listed as areas to work on. Sue wanted her to be more assertive in getting attention and more directive in terms of step-by-step instructions. Q couldn’t really see herself as that sort of teacher but tried hard to show her appreciation of the feedback. Sue warned her that she was in the honeymoon period and it would get a lot worse unless she came down hard straight away. She explained that she needed to spend less time talking, her lesson shouldn’t be so teacher centred. That seemed to be a contradiction but Q just nodded and made notes, thinking about the lessons last week where Sue had hardly stopped talking. Sue told her she needed to move around the room more and not stay behind the safety of the desk, and of course there was the time management issue, all quite predictable really, but why hadn’t Sue told her she had planned too much when she showed her the lesson plan? Had she actually looked at it?

As Sue went on about getting the respect of the students and letting them know who was boss, Q just thought about the relieved and appreciative look she received from the group of girls when she mentioned clothing design. They went through the unit plan together and Sue commented that there would be a year level test on the unit during the Friday lesson in the second week. That was all, nothing about the activities planned, resources sourced or the details presented. Nothing mentioned about those great ideas, making the students central, meeting them where they were. As Sue rushed off to deal with the never-ending array of
pressing issues teachers seemed to face she said over her shoulder, “just stick to the text, then you’ll be safe.”

Q didn’t have time to ponder for long; she too had photocopying to do for her SOSE lesson after lunch. She had put a copy of the unit and lesson plans in Bill’s pigeonhole earlier but could see they were still sitting there. She was actually quite looking forward to these little year 8s who had so much fun in their ties and hats in the mock parliament on Friday. She was also looking forward to telling them about the wave simulators that she was going to link to the Tsunami disasters and the El Nino information she had collected from her undergraduate studies. It was getting a bit old but she would update it from the Internet before she presented it to the class. Today’s lesson was really just a ‘taster’ for the students, just setting the scene with lots of little activities and they would research the answers together over the next few weeks. By using the ‘Problem Solving Information Process’ she had been introduced to at university the students should develop their research skills and collaborative skills while they focused on a number of group and individual tasks. Lots of variety and activities would be introduced to meet the needs of a wide range of leaning styles. Q thought these students would enjoy the process.

After looking for Bill all lunchtime Q eventually went to the office to ask if anyone knew where he was. Someone told her that he rang in sick and didn’t she see his name on the board in the staff room? (She felt like saying if she had seen his name she wouldn’t be asking, but held her tongue). “What board, where in the staff room?” she said to herself (because no one else seemed to care), as she strode back through the door.

“Oh there you are,” called the assistant principal as Q walked past her office. Q backtracked. “I’ve been meaning to catch you”. The assistant principal took off her glasses and rubbed her eyes. She looked very concerned. “Bill’s baby is sick and he had to go to the hospital. Poor little thing, he has had so many problems. Bill told me that you would be fine today, just to send a relief teacher. It was a bit hard with such short notice and six staff away so I’m afraid it will have to be me. Sorry about that. I don’t know much about SOSE but I’m sure you’re on top of it. See you next lesson.” With that she picked up the phone and Q picked up her jaw and wandered like a creature possessed into the staff room.

She felt like walking straight through, out the other door and straight home. How could they do this to her, and with such nonchalance, as if it was an every day event? This was her first ever Studies of Society and Environment lesson in her life! She was going to be observed by the assistant principal. She had no one to go through the lesson with, she didn’t even know the students names and she didn’t know where Bill kept the roll or his white board markers. Nor did she have a key to the classroom…
Q didn’t walk through the door and straight home but sought comfort with one of the other preservice teachers she found in the staff annex. She was assured she would be fine.

“Just think, you can do anything and your mentor won’t be there to comment,” she was told.

“I bet the assistant principal will bring her paperwork with her and won’t raise her eyes. And the kids will be so well behaved with her in the room!”

Q hadn’t thought of that and began to feel better. She needed to find a key and some markers and the roll, she thought. She excused herself and headed for the faculty office, hoping someone there would help her out.

The SOSE faculty were more than helpful. They rallied around her immediately, gave her keys and rolls and lots of apologies for not having let her know earlier. That was the trouble with working in two faculties on such a large campus. They assured her it was a lovely little class and the assistant principal was really supportive and it would be fine, not to worry. They looked at her unit plan and lesson plans and the worksheets she had photocopied, offered a few suggestions and told her she had done a great job. Some of them even asked her for a copy of her unit plan and offered her copies of theirs. All too soon, however, the bell went and they all rushed off and Q found herself outside her SOSE classroom waiting for the students who arrived full of questions.

“We got you today miss? Good.”

“What are we going to do?”

“Can we go to the drama room? That was cool.”

There were a number of other affirming statements that made her feel like a real teacher and Q squeezed her folders tight and thought it might be ok after all. She waited for the assistant principal to arrive, remembering the stories from uni about not being in the class alone with the students. She unlocked the door as she saw the AP coming around the corner.

The lesson did go well, she felt more relaxed than she had in science and the class seemed interested in the topic. They asked lots of questions that Q felt she was able to answer and in no time were working in groups brainstorming research topics. Q kept a close eye on her watch, calling them together with fifteen minutes to go she gave them their homework. They then went outside and sat in a big circle on the lawn. Q emptied a large packet of smarties on a plate and explained that these represented the entire resources of the earth. She then numbered the students off as first generation, second generation, third generation, fourth generation and fifth generation. She then invited the first generation to have a share of the earth’s resources, followed by the second, then the third… The earth’s resources dwindled fast. Some of the students from the first generation (who hadn’t managed to eat all their
resources) offered to put some back. This created a debate as to whether that was possible. They decided it wasn’t. By the time they reached the fifth generation some of the students missed out despite the fourth generation only taking one each. There was a deathly hush over the group. The realisation was palatable. They looked at each other… and the bell went.

“Think about it tonight,” she said. “We’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

Most of the students wandered off to the next lesson but a couple of them walked with her towards the SOSE office.

“That was cool miss,” they said.

It was enough. Q decided right then that she had made the right choice. She wanted to be a teacher. There was a lot she felt she could do to help make a difference in the lives of these young people.

The assistant principal came up behind her as she flopped down in a seat.

“I don’t need to tell you that went well, do I?” she said handing over the feedback sheet. “It was great.”

“Thanks,” said Q, with tears in her eyes.

“It makes it all worthwhile, doesn’t it?”

“Sure does.” The assistant principal left Q to gather her thoughts.

Part 2

Buoyed by her success Q went looking for the other preservice teachers to report her survival. Unable to find any of them in the staff room she sat down to re-work her science lessons and amend her unit plan. She was already realising the advantage of careful planning. It did make things so much easier. She re-read Sue’s comments and her own notes after the science lesson and tried to imagine what she would do differently next time. She reached for her timetable to check when she would be teaching her next class and her stomach lurched, she was supposed to be observing a biology class. Sweeping all her papers together she rushed off as quickly as she dared to the science wing and crept into the back of the classroom. The teacher didn’t seem to notice, he was demonstrating safety issues related to the practical and the class were spread around the room in pairs with their apparatus ready.

Q had really enjoyed the biology lessons she had managed to observe the previous week. This teacher was so much like her own senior school biology teacher, untidy, disorganised but related well to the students. The contrast between the year 11 class and the junior classes
had been quite stark and Q was already looking forward to her second prac where she would
Teach senior classes. She watched while Jim demonstrated how to remove the hot beaker
From the tripod with the tongs and place it on the heat mat just before it boiled. This would
Ensure the boiling liquid that retained its heat after removal due to the chemical reactions
Would not splash all over the Bunsen burner and the bench. He kept the beaker at arms
Length at all times explaining the dangers of the extreme heat due to the reactions. Just as he
Unclipped the tongs from the beaker there was a loud crack and the beaker fell apart, the
Liquid running over the mat and across the bench. There was a stunned silence. Q watched
With interest. Jim laughed.

“Sorry folks,” he said. “Hope you can do a better job than me. Who can tell me why the
Beaker cracked?”

The class made a range of suggestions, no hands up, just calling out but they were respectful
Of each other. Jim followed up on some of the ideas with more probing questions. Students
came back with more thoughtful answers. The discussion continued for some time, with
Almost everyone involved due to Jim’s strategies of questioning and valuing all ideas. By
The time Jim had mopped up the mess and removed the glass they had covered chemical
Reactions, the structure of glass, safety when disposing of liquids and the importance of
Checking equipment carefully. Jim used his little disaster to open up a number of problem
Solving activities and didn’t seem at all worried that he had ‘messed up’. It was obvious that
When the class moved into their own experiments they were not only meticulous about
Checking their equipment, they were respectful of the way Jim had handled the situation. Q
Wrote all this on her observation sheet wondering if this was the sort of ‘critical incident’ she
 Might use to demonstrate her learning about teaching and learning.

The practical lesson progressed and Q found herself getting quite sleepy up the back of the
Room. No wonder, she had been working pretty hard. She decided to wander around the lab
And see whether the students were interested in talking to her. Until now the class had more
Or less ignored her and she had been quite glad to sit up the back and write on her
Observation sheets or in her journal. As she stopped near a pair still measuring their
Chemicals into the beaker they turned to her.

“Miss, can you convert fl.oz to mls?” she was asked.

“One fluid ounce is equivalent to 28.4 millilitres,” she was able to answer, but she didn’t
Seem to impress the students.

“No, miss, the other way round, how many fl.oz in a millilitre. We have an old pipette that
Only measures fl.oz and we need 10 millilitres.”
“One millilitre is about zero point zero three five of a fluid ounce. So ten will be, ‘em what? Can you work that out?”

“Sure Miss, zero point three five. Thanks, you’re a legend. How do you remember those sorts of things? You teachers are all the same. Your heads must be full, I never remember anything.”

Q smiled and walked over to the next group, that’s twice today that the students thought she was a teacher! A real teacher, that is. Things were looking up. Lucky she had worked in that lab in London or she wouldn’t have known the answer either. She stuck around after the lesson and helped Jim put the gear away. The students were off as soon as the bell went and Jim apologised for not having set a good example by making sure they all cleaned up.

“They have part-time jobs, buses to catch or sports training. I remember what it was like for me in high school and kids today seem to have even more on their plates. I’d rather use the time for learning and spend my own time on clean up providing they work hard during the lesson. They know that if they waste time I will expect them to stay after school so they’re usually pretty good.”

Q told Jim she had been impressed with the results they had come up with and how well they had worked. She had been amazed at how much discussion Jim had instigated between the pairs and how he had moved around the room and seemed to be always on hand when he was needed. The students had chatted comfortably with him, just like she was now, and she made a mental note to write down how approachable he was.

“I saw you talking to Sam and Pete up the back,” Jim went on in his easy style. “Smart cookies those two. Sam looks after his twin sisters who are in year three. Dad doesn’t seem to be around and mum isn’t at all well. My wife works at the primary school and Sam gets them there on time every day, all spit and polish and with a cut lunch. He’s been doing it for a couple of years. He then gets himself to school and leaves in a rush as soon as the bell goes. He never has any money for excursions or books but we have a slush fund here at school just for situations like this. Can you imagine what it would be like? I was a spoiled brat in comparison.”

“He seems like a nice kid,” Q responded. “It doesn’t seem fair, does it?”

“Life’s not fair,” Jim responded. “That’s why we are here. We are the ones who will make a difference in the lives of these kids. We can give them some chance to really make the most of their talents. Sam has one of the quickest scientific and problem-solving minds I’ve seen for a while. We just need to make it as easy as possible for him to be here so he doesn’t drop out to get a job. Some of the staff get upset when he’s late and stuff like that, I just beg them
to cool it, give him a break, and treat him differently to give him the same chances. Sounds like a contradiction but it isn’t. That’s what being fair is all about.

With that he smiled knowingly, grabbed his bag and computer and headed for the door.

“Got a meeting. Thanks for the chat. Catch you later.”

Q decided it wasn’t that different from uni after all. Same ideology just different expressions.

By the time Q arrived home she was exhausted but forced herself to finish her planning for the next day. The science lesson was fine. In fact she had enough for three days in that first lesson. She tweaked it a little but until she knew the class better she would need to just roll with it. SOSE was another story. She really didn’t have much idea on how to progress and the principal had made that promise to drop in and see the wave motion simulator. Q had no idea how it worked. Bill had missed her first lesson and the feedback from the assistant principal was reassuring but not specific enough. She was scheduled for a biology observation in lesson one then was free until after lunch. She would need to wait until the morning to catch Bill.

Jim had told the class to write up their prac and try to answer the questions for homework, so Q was expecting a fairly mundane prac discussion. She was astonished by the inspiring interactions during the lesson. Jim didn’t appear to be surprised that very few of the students had completed the homework exercises but he certainly made them work in class. Jim turned ‘questioning’ into an art form. He started with fairly open questions and through connecting questions and answers wove a web of interest and intrigue around the chemical reactions in the beakers, relating them to the development of life on earth. His questions were clarifying, exposing but never undermining of the students confidence to be ‘creative’ or have a guess. He would frequently change activities. For example he would suddenly ask the students to turn to the person next to them and tell them what an answer might be, argue it out then come back with a decision in two minutes.

Jim was never the centre of the lesson but orchestrated student learning, involving everyone either directly or in pair or group discussions. There was no doubt the students trusted him and respected him. After an exhausting twenty minutes or so of questions, challenges, diagrams on the board, pair discussions, student explanations, student diagrams on the board, problem solving, some laughter, opportunities for ‘science fiction’ style explanations, knowledge building and a real sense of making meaning, the class was asked to write for ten minutes to reflect on what they had learned about the development of life related to temperature and chemical reactions.

Most of the students were soon hard at work, although one girl who Q had not seen in class before was looking out the window. She had been carried along by the enthusiasm of the
class during the discussion but now seemed to retreat into her own world. Jim seemed aware of her actions but spent his time between writing some of the key ideas on the board and labelling and organising some of the diagrams that had been placed there during their discussions. He also wrote a couple of equations that Q noticed he left unbalanced and he used a couple of incorrect terms in his notes and lists. This surprised Q as he didn’t seem like the sort of teacher who would get things wrong.

As the time went on and the students began to run out of steam they looked up and gained inspiration from the board and would start writing again. Often they would put their hand up and Jim would go to their desk. They would point out something he had done wrong on the board and he would sometimes just go and change it but sometimes he would disturb the class and announce that the student had challenged his term or diagram and ask the class to vote or comment. There were a few brief lively debates and Q immediately noticed that the students copied Jim’s style of questioning, using their own clarifying and challenging questions but very seldom did they directly contradict each other. The girl who had retreated from the writing was always involved in these lively discussions. With about 5 minutes to go Jim stopped the class and asked if anyone would mind giving the visiting teacher their work to read. There were a few volunteers.

“Names on the top please and give them either to me or to our visitor on the way out. In the meantime, who is going to win the footy this weekend? I haven’t done my tips yet, I’m really stuck this week.” There was more lively debate with both the males and females involved which surprised Q. She had no interest in football. When the bell went they were still arguing and Jim had to shoo them off to their next lesson.

“Can’t talk now,” he apologised. “I’ve got my stage 2 class. But I’ll try to catch you at lunch.” And he was off. Flat out like everyone else in the school. Q realised now why she was never able to catch them on the phone.

Q went searching for Bill. According to her timetable he should be free in period 2. She found him in his office and one look at him stopped her in her tracks. He looked so tired and haggard and she had almost decided not to interrupt him when he looked up sensing she was there.

“I heard you taught a top lesson yesterday. Sorry I wasn’t there. Maybe I should get your home number and try to give you some warning next time. We’re not coping too well with all this I’m afraid. We thought he was coming good but he had a huge relapse over the weekend.”

That was about all Bill could manage, he averted his eyes and started going through some papers on his desk. He seemed to eventually find what he was looking for and tried again.
“Lesson and unit plan look good, but I honestly haven’t been able to concentrate on them. Maybe we need to talk to the assistant principal and get you someone else to work with. I’m not going to be much chop I’m afraid.”

Q didn’t know what to say. She really liked the year 8 class and had really enjoyed her lesson the day before. And wasn’t it a bit late to get to know another class?

“What do you reckon?” Bill went on. “I can’t even guarantee being here every day.”

Q heard herself say that she’d like to stay with the class, she really liked them, and maybe she would be a help. She searched Bill’s face for a glimmer of affirmation but he was so distraught that nothing showed. He picked up the phone and when it answered said, “Hi, Bill here. Can I come to see you?” He then turned to Q, “We’ll let the assistant principal decide.”

Q really appreciated the way the assistant principal and Bill involved her in the discussion. There were no secrets; she was treated as an equal. They had a problem and they needed to solve it together. What kept coming up was student learning. What would be best for them?

Q offered again to stay with the class but admitted the wave simulation was a concern. Bill said he’d look after that but stressed that he would be missing a lot and there would often be relief teachers. He was going to prioritise his senior classes and get into school just as often as he could. In the end they agreed it wasn’t ideal but providing the uni coordinator was happy they would go ahead without making changes. Q wasn’t sure what she wanted. It was now up to the course coordinator.

Bill was obviously busy so Q went back to her lesson plans and did her best to prepare for the rest of the day. She managed to get some help from the SOSE coordinator then went to the science department to make sure her apparatus was ready for the science lesson after lunch. She had just returned to the staffroom for something to eat and a coffee when the uni course coordinator walked in with the AP. She had been briefed on the situation and they spoke for some time about the alternatives. Eventually it was agreed Q would stay with the class and would be relieved from her Home Group responsibilities so that she could spend some time at uni with her SOSE lecturer if things became difficult. In the meantime she was to move her main office to the SOSE department so that she could have more contact with the SOSE staff who had agreed to help out where they could. Bill had been called back to the hospital by this time so the course coordinator agreed to stay to observe her lesson in period six, even though SOSE wasn’t her strength she would be able to give support and guidance where necessary. Q needed to excuse herself to prepare the lab for her science lesson and was soon back in front of the science class feeling much more like a teacher this time.

The rest of the week passed uneventfully in comparison. Everyone was helpful and gave her moral support. The students seemed to hardly notice the teacher changes and as she learned
their names and their differences she began to relax. She spent every free lesson gathering resources, preparing worksheets and lessons or marking papers. Every day she learned something new about how students learn and don’t learn and in the evenings she would try to write her journal and lesson reflections. As she had been warned, she didn’t get much feedback from the relief teachers and was often unsure how to proceed in SOSE. Her science mentor made up for it, however, with pages of comments and suggestions, all of which she took seriously and tried to incorporate into her lessons.

The SOSE class became Q’s favourite because she could be herself and no one seemed to care, while the science mentor seemed to want her to model her own ideas about teaching, and for Q that was not comfortable. Following a textbook seemed too narrow in comparison with her freedom to innovate in SOSE. By happy hour on Friday she was feeling good about her progress and able to relax and listen to the staff unwind and share ideas and stories. They never seemed to tire of talking about their teaching and their students and Q and the other preservice teachers just listened, realising they had a lot to learn. Q also took the opportunity to chat with Jim. This was the first chance since the lesson when the student had refused to write and had spent her time looking through the window. Q had noticed that she was missing for both the doubles Wednesday and Thursday. Jim explained that she was going through a particularly bad time since the death of a friend in a car accident and apart from her counselling sessions was skipping most of her school commitments. The school was doing what it could and Jim was just pleased when she came to class. He seemed to think she was doing some work at home and was keeping up with the class by coming and listening in once or twice a week. Slowly the precarious balance of support and personal resilience would be played out, according to Jim. You just had to wait to see which way things swung and intervene then if you needed to. It would all take time and you could never predict which way it would go.

The second teaching week progressed well but late in the week there was a discernable change in both her classes. They seemed more boisterous, less engaged and more difficult to settle. Q spent more time preparing materials for them and tried to discuss the problem with her mentors. Sue made a number of suggestions; write names on the board, give three warnings then detention, don’t speak until they are quiet, don’t talk over them, don’t be so nice, raise your voice… all of which she tried. It was Jim, at happy hour on Friday who gave her an explanation.

“It’s always like that, even for experienced teachers,” he told her. “They give you a honeymoon period then they push the boundaries to see what you will do. During prac the mentor teachers will sometimes deal with them subtly, you know, the ‘look’, the word in the yard, things like that, but often if they’re not engaged you have to change your pedagogy.
You have to really understand the classroom dynamic, and then shock them by being unpredictable. When they can’t guess what you are going to do they tend to settle again. It’s all part of the game. It’s how you play the game that’s important."

Reflecting on her teaching Q had to admit that she did a fair bit of talking, followed by worksheets or student activities, some copying off the board, a bit of group work and lots of reminding about the test on Friday. She felt a bit embarrassed. She had watched Jim change what he did every lesson. She had seen debates, role-plays, learning circles, peer feedback, self-assessment and had observed demonstrations and lots of participation in pracs. She had watched Jim observe and intervene, change direction, negotiate assessments and activities and had never heard him threaten tests or raise his voice. The students seemed to drive Jim’s lessons whereas she kept tight control of hers.

Despite the inspired start with the fabric and clothes design in science and the smarty activity in SOSE, content and control had become the focus as the weeks had passed. She had been lulled in to a false sense of security and had not been prepared for these class ‘rebellions’. She had thought she was doing well, the classes had been busy and they had covered a lot of content. Q resolved to try to re-engage her classes in the last week by changing her teaching style frequently and not falling back on what appeared ‘natural’ or expected. She would try to work on her questioning and try to involve more students, not just the usual ones who answered everything. As she flicked through her classes in her head it suddenly struck her – she had forgotten again that education was supposed to be about student learning, not about her teaching. There seemed to be so much to think about. Being a teacher was a lot more complex than she had expected. Had she made a difference in anyone’s life these past two weeks or had she just kept them busy in their lessons? Did she maximise their opportunities to learn or was she merely training them to be compliant? Why hadn’t her mentors said anything about the big picture of her as a teacher, they just seemed to comment on the teaching. She would try to spend more time with her mentors in the final week and get them to talk about what it is really like being a teacher.

When Q arrived on Monday she found a note from Sue in her pigeonhole. She would be absent at a conference for three days but had looked through the unit plan and lesson plans she had for Monday and Tuesday and made a few suggestions; and could Q help with Home Group, as the relief probably wouldn’t know the class? Sue had been very thorough in her support and guidance with lesson planning. In fact Q sometimes wondered who was really teaching the class. It was a surprise that she had not mentioned anything on Friday about a conference, presumably she had just forgotten. So much for the long talks she had planned! Then she found a note from Bill who had taken leave for the whole week but promised to write her report by Friday. It looked like she was on her own this week, relief teachers
usually brought their own work to do and seldom raised their heads unless the noise level was too high. Q was a little disappointed, she had hoped to talk more to her mentors about their theories of teaching, about the curriculum framework, about what they were saying at uni and had imagined this week when she was less stressed about her teaching, was going to be a good week to do it. Now she was more or less abandoned.

**Part 3**

Q completed her last week feeling that her teaching was getting worse, not better. She remembered at the last minute that one of her lecturers had recommended they get some feedback on their teaching from the students and that had been enlightening. In fact, that had helped her through those last few days. She was surprised how much the students had remembered. Several had mentioned the ‘smarty’ activity and the dress design group had become great allies. Many of the students seemed genuinely sad to see her go and both Jim and Sue had made a fuss over her the last day. The assistant principal had made a point of thanking her for her care and interest with the SOSE class and commented that they were indebted to her. They now needed to find a contract teacher to replace Bill who had reduced his time by half. Q almost offered to keep coming in, then realised that she had two, week long residentialss coming up and had several assignments to finish. She also needed some part-time work as she was already borrowing from her mum.

University almost seemed like a holiday after five weeks in a school. You could sleep longer in the mornings and drift off in lectures. There was still the pressure of assignments but at least most of your time was your own. The theory seemed to be more meaningful now. You could apply it to what happened in your school or your classroom. At times it appeared that the preservice teachers had more up to date information than their lecturers and there was a sense of resistance in some of the tutorials. They had survived a prac and they knew the theory so why didn’t they just give them their qualification and let them loose? The lecturers kept saying that teachers were lifelong learners and they would be on a steep learning for at least the first five years in the schools. So why not let them make a start and pay them for all the hard work they were doing? Q felt some sympathy for the argument, especially when she thought about the SOSE class. She had accepted total responsibility for the learning of that class and everyone had said it went well. Then a contract teacher had replaced her on full pay!

Planning for the second practicum was immediately underway and Q and the other preservice teachers were asked to make recommendations for their placement. It was supposed to be a quite different experience. Q was secretly hoping for a senior secondary mentor like Jim and SOSE and science mentors who were innovative and gave her lots of
freedom. Unfortunately she hadn’t found the time to visit other schools and it was difficult to get details from the lecturers who were fairly evasive. Some of the students had applied for remote indigenous schools and others had offered to go to the rural areas. She was a city girl and although she hadn’t had time to miss London, she didn’t feel she was ready to go remote. Maybe sometime in the future? It certainly sounded interesting and different. Anyway, earning some money during this semester had become a priority. She was hoping for some tutoring and planned to continue during the practicum if she could.

The second practicum turned out to be quite a contrast for Q. The school was smaller and the students wore uniform. She seemed to clash with everyone from day one. She had hoped for a week to observe and get to know her classes but the best she had been able to negotiate was two days in science and SOSE and one day in biology. They were starting a new topic in biology and her mentor wanted her to have the ‘total experience’ of introducing the unit and teaching it through to completion. The revision programs and practice exams were already scheduled for the week after she returned to uni so there was no time to waste. The unit program had been submitted and it would be appreciated if Q would stick to it. They would use the same assessment tasks and schedule as they had during the last few years because that way all the classes were on the same page. Any other information she needed she could find on the Assessment Board web site.

Q was to have the same year 10 class for both SOSE and science and her mentor was a young teacher, Liz, who was clearly having difficulty with her classes. She was herself fairly new to the school and seemed to be working in survival mode. Right from the start Q felt she resented any suggestions that Q made and didn’t seem to understand the program designed by the faculty for the semester. They were half way through a unit on chemistry and studying media in SOSE. The class had already been promised the opportunity to bring their own favourite movies to watch for media, which was going to restrict Q’s programming ideas. In chemistry Q had been asked to just follow the text. She was to take over from the next page and give them lots of practice with equations. It was obvious to Q that the class was already switched off, the pages and pages of ‘problems’ were not engaging them nor were they completing their homework. Apart from a few students who were sitting at the front answering all the questions very few were achieving anything in class.

“They are year 10 students and responsible for their own learning,” Liz had told Q. “If they want to waste their time then they will fail and won’t be able to continue with chemistry in year 11. I keep telling them that but they don’t seem to get it.”
Q tried to explain that chemistry had been one of her majors at uni and she had worked in the industry for many years. She asked if she could try some ideas she had to perhaps help the students to be more interested. Liz was not receptive. She just wanted Q to teach to the text.

Even the movies in SOSE didn’t seem to interest the students. The whole class seemed to relax quickly and many of them had their heads on their desks. Q saw iPods and various other music devices under desks and in ears while several others seemed to be texting on their mobile phones. Even Liz seemed to fluctuate between almost dozing in front of the movies and making copious notes. Q could see why Liz didn’t want her observing for too long. She wasn’t going to learn very much.

When Q took over the classes she followed her mentor’s directions for the rest of the first week planning time over the weekend to see where she could implement some of her own ideas without upsetting or offending anyone. Her classes had been teacher centred and survival centred. She had kept the students busy with worksheets, copying notes off the board and a fair bit of ‘chalk and talk’. Surprisingly the classes remained quiet and compliant and had been somewhat confused by the teacher change and had usually directed the important questions like, “Can I go to the toilet,” or “Can I go for a drink” to their classroom teacher. Q was quite relieved because she hadn’t had time to familiarise herself with school policy on such things. Being the only preservice teacher at the school she had no one else to rely on for that information. She realised now how much support she had received from the other preservice teachers on her last prac. The university had been quite concerned that she was the only one placed at this school, but she had assured them it was fine. She had been told that one of the preservice teachers from the previous year was there but unfortunately she was on camp with her class during this first week.

Q had all the documentation and weekly plans but felt a lack of ownership and wanted to insert ‘herself’ into the program. She spent the entire weekend trying to make sense of her program. She was also aware that she needed a good report from these mentors and wanted to make a good impression. Her science methods lecturer was also going to make several visits and she was a little nervous about that. Q felt relieved that she had a strong background in the content knowledge for both the SOSE units and was very confident about her chemistry knowledge. Chemistry had played a major part in many of the jobs she had taken overseas and she had always enjoyed it herself. She had been shocked by the poor quality of the chemistry labs and the lack of a lab assistant at this school. In her previous school there had been several lab assistants and they always had the pracs set up for you when you arrived. She wondered if this was why they had so few pracs in the program.
Q’s thoughts were disturbed by her mobile phone. The person on the other end introduced herself as Indra and explained that she was sorry she had been on camp last week, and as she lived close by would Q like a lift to school on Monday.

Indra had chatted on and had seemed really nice. She was professional but hinted that she thought Q might like some support and that she certainly seemed to have an interesting combination of subjects and mentors. Q was greatly relieved that she would have someone to talk to and went back to her preparation with renewed enthusiasm.

Turning very traditional and structured programs into something more interesting, relevant and engaging was not easy. Q turned to the notes and lectures from uni with a renewed interest. They had done a lot more work on pedagogy, planning, transformation and student voice over the last few weeks and it really hadn’t seemed that important at the time. The preservice teachers had complained that what they really wanted was ‘behaviour management’, tips on how to control their classes. The lecturers had appeared a little sanctimonious and deprecating and had told them they preferred to talk about developing productive relationships with their students, control was a functionalist term more suited to education in the past not for the future. They had added that there was no one answer to developing a culture of learning in their classrooms, that every classroom and every teacher was different and that every day could be different. “Watch out for windy days,” they had been told.

Meeting the needs of a range of different personalities, intelligences and dispositions was overwhelming and Q thought about her own schooling. She had been one of those students down the front answering the questions in all her science subjects and up the back passing notes and doodling (they didn’t have mobile phones) during the humanities lessons. Maybe some of the ideas in the readings and some of the things they had talked about in tutorials were right, she mused. Maybe the purpose of education is more than content; maybe we are not just jumping through hoops. Those hoops are oscillating, spinning and swinging and the teachers who are going to make a difference in the lives of their students, like Jim, are really quite philosophical about their role. What did Jim say?

“Life’s not fair. That’s why we’re here. We’re the one’s that will make a difference in the lives of some of these kids. We can give them some chance to really make the most of their talents…treating them differently is about giving them the same chances. In other words we can only give them the same opportunities if we treat them as individuals. ”

Or we can turn them into compliant, unfocused, bored, disengaged, resentful students!
D’s Story

Part 1

There had been an increased interest in indigenous issues during the last decade of the twentieth century when D was at school and she had enjoyed learning about the nomadic and now dispossessed people of Australia. She had drifted into a Bachelor of Arts and Education unsure of the direction she would take but glad to be offered a position thanks to the effort her teachers had put in during her final year. Even then it had been a late offer of her final preference and as D had already been trying to secure jobs in hospitality or fashion and had found out how difficult it was, she accepted the position. She had done it mainly to placate her parents whom she had been avoiding since her results arrived.

D had made things very difficult for her parents by rebelling against their ‘middle class’ values and attitudes, frequently shocking them with outrageous activities and ideas. She enjoyed a lot of independence even while at school, because every time her parents put up barriers, she delighted in destroying them. She chose some unconventional friends and preferred to sit around smoking dope and drinking home brew, rather than go to school. Some of her friends would occasionally bring other drugs to the ‘parties’ but D found that pot and alcohol really did it for her and she didn’t need anything more. She also remembered from drug education that they had been told that quality varied considerably with illegal drugs and she didn’t really want to die or end up in hospital.

The first few years at uni were a bit of a blur but D remembers doing outlandish things and trying to shock her lecturers the same way as she had previously shocked her parents. She had piercings all over her body and quite a few tattoos and most of her clothing came from charity shops. Her most memorable experience had been when she had agreed to help out during a demonstration and they had met backstage in the drama complex. D had come across a box of discarded costumes and had spent the entire meeting dressing up in velvet capes, flowing skirts and strange hats. She had everyone in stitches as she paraded around mimicking her lecturers, old teachers, parents, friends…any one she could think of. By the end of the meeting her audience had convinced her to sign up for some drama units in the following semester and for the first time since she was a child she found herself looking forward to her classes.

Due to a number of fails during her course, D ended up with an eclectic combination of cultural studies units, drama electives and education units in her third year at uni. By the fourth week of semester she was back to her usual tricks, attending only compulsory
tutorials, spending most of her days in bed and her nights smoking pot. In fact she had only just gone to bed when the phone rang and she had answered it more from habit than intent.

“Hi, D, how are you? Bill here. I’ve just been checking my records and it looks like you are going to struggle to meet the 80% attendance and participation requirement of Educational Issues 301. Just wanted to check that you remember that we don’t have exams but the trade-off is that you have to come along to lectures and tutorials.”

D had muttered something about having been unwell but was feeling better, had rolled onto the floor and scraped through her bag until she found her diary. Fortunately she had printed out her timetable and it was tucked somewhere in her diary. She had one hour to get there. If she had found time to think she doubted later that she would have bothered but she was too tired to think so she had brushed her teeth, grabbed her bag and walked out the door.

Most of the tutorial had been students explaining their research topic and why they had chosen it. The group were expected to ask questions and make suggestions and this had kept D awake as she had chanced upon the issue of equity from her cultural studies class and it seemed to please Bill when she brought it up. She really had no idea what she was talking about but everyone seemed to be scribbling down her ideas so she kept raving.

When it was her turn to present (apparently the draft and presentation were worth 20% of the final mark) D discussed the importance of using drama in teaching, especially when dealing with cross-cultural issues. She cited a range of references that she had taken straight from her drama unit guide found in desperation, screwed up in the bottom of her bag. It seemed to convince the group that she was well prepared and on to something important. The tutor took notes and though he looked a little doubtful there hadn’t been time for questions as she was last and they were running late.

“Good luck with your research,” he had said as he disappeared out the door and D had breathed a sign of relief and put her head on her arms and closed her eyes.

She must have dozed immediately because someone shaking her shoulder woke her. “D, there is another session in here. You have to leave,” she heard. Meanwhile someone was packing her papers and pens into her bag and coaxing her out of the room. “Come down to the education computer lab,” she was told. “You won’t get disturbed there.”

D found a corner in the lab and immediately fell asleep again and woke hours later wondering where she was. She had kept her eyes closed after the initial insult of the fluoro lights and heard the door open and close. “Bit smelly in here,” she heard. Then there was silence. “I think she’s asleep. Do you think she is a bag lady or a genuine uni student?”
There were a few snorts and laughs. D pretended she was asleep, although she was desperately thirsty. She heard the door open and close again.

Immediately D confirmed that she was alone she collected her gear and slipped out, avoiding the popular corridors and using the back doors. “Bag lady!” “Smelly!” were going round and round in her head and didn’t stop until she was under the shower. She tried to blame Bill, after all it was his fault that she had been there, but that didn’t really gel. Then she blamed her parents for letting her ‘drift’ but that didn’t gel either. In the back of her head there was an idea that D couldn’t bring to the surface so after her shower she went down stairs, made herself a coffee and some toast and sat on the patio in the warm afternoon sun. She must have fallen asleep again because this time she opened her eyes to see the concerned face of her mother.

“Are you alright?” There was a pause. “Thank God, I thought you had finally done it.”

“Done what?” D had ventured, stretching.

“Well, you know, become a vegetable or something.”

D looked at her mum and noticed the tears in her eyes and also noticed how she had aged. She couldn’t remember when she had last really looked at her mum; she spent most of her life avoiding her. Not knowing what to do next and realising that she was captive in the kitchen area D fell back on the old comment from her childhood, “What’s for tea?”

Her mother looked surprised. “Haven’t you eaten? I always have dinner on the way home when your dad is away. You’re normally not here. I’ll check the fridge.”

They had chatted while Mum made an omelette but didn’t touch on anything too demanding. The price of coffee, mum was getting a new car, how much the palms in the garden had grown – nothing of substance and no questions about uni, grades, money, friends or any of the taboo topics. D had felt a little dissatisfied by the depth of their conversation but realised it had been a long time since they had talked without her taunting her mother and eventually causing an argument which would lead to her stomping out of the house and spending a few days binging on pot or alcohol to pay her mother back. Lately she had ‘binged’ without even speaking to her mother so she guessed she couldn’t blame her mother for that.

“I have to go to bed,” her mother interrupted her thoughts. “I have an early start.”

Before D could even murmur, “But what about me? Don’t you want to know what I do all day, what happens at uni, what is happening in my life?” her mother was gone with a final glance that looked like relief. D wondered if her mother was rejecting or avoiding her
too. Maybe she did stink, look like a bag lady and was boring! Even her own mother doesn’t seem to want to be with her.

Again D was conscious of an idea in her head that wouldn’t come to the surface. Maybe it was all that pot? She began to feel sorry for herself, thinking about all those people who had let her down, when she flashed back to the tutorial and heard herself saying, “But what about those kids who never had books at home or parents to read to them? What about the kids who have never been to a play or a movie? Entertainment to them is TV and video games… obviously they are going to seek other ways of relief from boredom. Don’t we have a responsibility as the ‘privileged’ ones to help them?” Was she just big noting or did she really feel that way? Had she blown her chances or was it still possible that she might someday be a teacher? Did they need smelly ‘bag women’ in classrooms? She smiled, though not convincingly, at her own joke.

It wasn’t quite an epiphany and D didn’t give up smoking pot straight away but she couldn’t stop the voice in her head that began to analyse everything she did. There was no doubt that she made some sort of intuitive leap or realisation. She would be sitting with her friends and the voice would say, “you’ve done all this before, you are all saying the same things you said yesterday.” Sometimes she would go for a walk when the others were smoking a joint and she noticed a lot of kids around the streets who should have been at school. Many of them were indigenous and she remembered reading that ‘truancy’ was very high in the western suburbs. She thought about her friends, most of them had grown up here and hadn’t finished school. They called her ‘Prof’ because she went to uni and in some ways seemed to look up to her though she didn’t feel she deserved it.

The worst voice was the smelly bag lady voice and it rang in her head everyday while she was in the shower. It had annoyed her to the point that she had chopped off her dreadlocks, washed her hair every day and bought some new clothes. Her friends had given her a hard time at first but usually they were too stoned to worry. They didn’t seem to miss her when she wasn’t there either, so she was spending more and more time at uni. She began reading some of the literature collected at lectures and found a spot in the library that no one else used that had a nice view over the hills. Almost everything she needed was on the uni-net so she logged on and began to investigate what she was supposed to be doing this semester. She had already missed deadlines for the first assessment in some units but thought she would be able to retrieve a couple, especially the education one as she hadn’t missed a lecture or tutorial since the phone call from Bill. In fact he had made a point of asking her how her assignment was going whenever they met and had even made some suggestions about readings and staff members she might chase up.
D finished the semester with poor grades again but had been saved by the exams in three of her four units. The readings she had been doing around indigenous issues and drama in education had come in useful for the other units too and though she had passed in a variation of the same essay in three different subjects, even though it didn’t really address the topic in two of them, she scraped though in every unit for the first time in her uni career. She had left her results on the table at home when they arrived, hoping her parents would have a look. Maybe she would ask them for a new laptop as a reward.

Part 2

The experience that really made a difference in D’s life was her first practicum. She had offered to go to a remote school and she had filled out an application for a ‘remote placement bursary’ during one of her tutorials and Bill had recommended her. She knew all the jargon from her cultural studies and sociology units and still had an image of those kids sitting around in the western suburbs when they should have been at school. She wrote about how she would like to see first hand how the remote programs worked and whether the strategies they used would work in the urban setting. She explained how some of her friends were part aboriginal (she didn’t say that it was a very small part) and how they had dropped out of school and couldn’t read and that she would like to help them. She even added that she had been to remote areas before (she had a distant memory of travelling with her parents, dusty roads, bright eyed black faces and lots of bright colours).

There were four preservice teachers selected and they had a briefing at the Department of Education before they left. They had to respect the indigenous culture, wear long pants or skirts below the knee, take enough food for the first week and order the rest from the barge. Definitely no drugs or alcohol, this was a dry Community. The principal of the school would fill them in when they arrived. Someone would meet them when they arrived but they would have a two-hour wait for the commuter plane after they arrived at the first remote landing strip, so they should make sure they had plenty of water and something to eat. They should avoid taking perishables, as their bags would probably sit in the sun while they waited. That was about all the preparation they received and uni had been even less use. There they had been told that the Department briefing would give them all the details they needed.

Their first plane had been late arriving so they began to talk about making their connection and whether all their bags would fit. Everyone seemed a bit nervous and tentative about the experience and before long they were admitting this to each other. They shared some concerns about their accommodation and the availability of fresh food and a few anecdotes about previous travels and difficult experiences. The other three had lived
interesting lives and had all worked in a range of jobs before deciding to become a teacher. Their reasons for teaching varied but on the whole it was a lack of passion for anything else that they had tried that had led them back to uni. They all felt teaching was attractive with a predicted teacher shortage, reasonable salary and good holidays. They also agreed that they wanted to make a unique contribution to the lives of young people and they preferred working with adolescents to working with adults or younger children. D did lots of nodding and agreeing but felt very young and inexperienced. She didn’t want to admit that she was only doing teaching because she didn’t get into her first four preferences and that she hadn’t really thought about what it meant in the long term, like after uni. She had applied for a remote practicum because it had sounded like a fun experience despite what she had written on her application. She had heard that it was a lot easier in the remote schools with sometimes only a few students turning up to class. She certainly hadn’t felt ready to face up at a city school with classes of thirty and some not much younger than her.

When they eventually arrived at their destination, a small shed that served as an airport, it was deserted save a large man sitting behind a desk checking off the boxes that had arrived with them. Eventually he looked up, saw them all standing there somewhat bewildered and asked who was picking them up. He had laughed when they told him the principal of the school.

“Johno left this morning on the first flight, won’t be back for six weeks. Got leave owin’ I guess. Them dam’d teachers are always on leave. Best you grab a ride in the mail van when it arrives, if it arrives. Old Mac sometimes forgets to meet the planes and the meat goes off before it gets to the store. Sometimes Bill from the store’ll come down in case Mac forgets, so ‘e might give yous a ride in the back of the ute. If not yous can always walk, it ain’t far. Where’re ya staying?”

It seemed now that he had started talking he wasn’t going to stop. They looked at each other and shrugged. They actually didn’t know where they were staying; they had assumed that ‘Johno’ had all that under control.

“We don’t have any lodgin’s,” he continued. “Probably be at the meatworks, that’s where they put up all them health workers and them people that check the kids’ ears. They used to kill the beasts but it’s been closed now for months and the truck’s broke. I’ve heard them teachers are living three or four to a house, so I doubt there will be room for yous, unless you’ve brought a tent?” With that he chuckled and disappeared into a small office and didn’t reappear.

They looked at each other. Eventually someone ventured, “Should we walk?” They started to collect their gear but quickly realised that they had too much to carry so sat down
again looking down the road. They watched in silence as a cloud of dust came closer and
closer. Then they could hear an engine. The truck pulled up right next to them covering them
with dust.

“Boss said I should pick you up and take you to his place. Jump in.” They threw
their gear in the back of the truck and struggled in themselves almost falling out again when
the truck took off very fast and followed the route they had previously watched the cloud of
dust take. They couldn’t talk with the wind and the dust but D could tell that they were all
feeling like her. Hot, thirsty and concerned.

As they unpacked the truck they were told that the boss was away but they were to
use his house. “I’ll collect you at eight in the morning,” their saviour yelled over the engine
as he slammed the door and took off in another cloud of dust. D was exhausted and not in the
mood to argue, so she picked up one of her bags and climbed the stairs. The door was open
and they were greeted by a small dog that seemed pleased to see them. There was a note on
the kitchen bench.

Make yourselves at home. There is clean linen in the cupboard behind the door. Leave the
double bed for the relief principal who will arrive next week. Ask for Nan when you get to
school Monday. She is expecting you.
Please feed the dog and make sure she has water. Her name is Bluey.
Johno

In the morning they asked the office staff for Nan but she was busy so they
wandered around the school. The other two girls were sharing a room and walked together so
D wandered off with Mark. They looked through windows into classrooms because all the
doors were locked. They eventually found the library but no one was there, though it was
open and cool inside. They had a look through the shelves and D found herself counting
computers, maybe she had learned something at uni? There was shouting outside and they
went out and were almost knocked over by some barefoot kids running after each other.
They had bags on their backs and were obviously ready for school. Still no staff, there had to
be an explanation. D stopped one of the kids by putting up her hand like a policeman.
“Where are the teachers?” she asked.

“You a new teacher, Miss? Where you come from? Teachers all in meeting over
there,” and with that he ran to join the others who had stopped and were observing the
interaction with grins on their faces. There was much slapping and laughing as he rejoined
his friends and Mark and D went looking for their peers. They saw them heading for the
same building so guessed they had gone through the same procedure.

There was a sudden hush as they opened the door and all faces turned their way.

“Hi, we’re the preservice teachers”, Mark was first to find his voice.
Simultaneously all heads now turned somewhat accusingly to the tired looking lady who was standing at the front of the room. Her expression slowly changed from bewilderment to realisation and she flicked through a folder and took out a sheet of paper. She appeared to scan it. “Mark, Shona, Christine and D from the University. Welcome to the fresh faces from the uni.” They were interrupted by the bell and there was quite a bit of discussion as the teachers filed out of the room glancing their way with worried looks.

“Hi, I’m Nan. To be honest I forgot you were coming. Johno did tell me but we’ve all been pretty busy.”

Nan had to rush off too, but promised to be back soon. She invited them to help themselves to tea or coffee but there wouldn’t be any milk until the plane arrived – unless they were happy with UHT. They wandered around the staff room reading notice boards, booklets and newspapers that turned out to be weeks old. Eventually Nan returned. She was much more composed and explained how she had allocated them to different year levels but they should feel free to visit as many classrooms as they liked. D had been allocated the year 7s and was soon settled into the back of the classroom while they watched a video of ‘Quantum’ from the previous week.

“We’re doing a unit on extinct species and this program on carbon dating was really interesting,” the teacher had explained. The students didn’t seem to think so, they spent most of their time turning around and looking at her and giggling. D felt embarrassed that she had disturbed the class and would be glad when the video ended and she could be introduced. She recognised the boy she had stopped in the yard and assumed that the word would have travelled around by now that she was a new teacher. She had better put them straight.

During the first week Clint, the class teacher, had continued to teach his program and D just helped out where she could and spent time getting to know the students and the classroom. What became immediately apparent was the varied attendance of the students, some were there most days and others were there for a part of most days, some she saw only once in the first week, others were on the roll but she didn’t see them at all. Depending on the mix of students in the class at any one time a climate of learning might be established but on other occasions the entire session would consist of behaviour management. Clint seemed to believe that the battle to impose white, imperialist school codes of behaviour before beginning every lesson was part of his role as a teacher and he used what sounded to D like more appropriate learning activities as bribes. (D had learned about these attitudes during cultural studies units.)

“If you can remain quiet and complete your worksheets,” he told them, “we will go onto the oval and measure the diameter and the circumference.”
D had read about the two-way system where the additional language (English) and the social codes that underlined the curriculum were taught through the local language and culture, not instead of it. She was also aware of the hearing difficulties of a large percentage of indigenous children due to middle ear infections (otitis media) and the implications that had for student learning – especially in a foreign language. She saw little indication that Clint knew the local language or respected the theories that indigenous knowledges should underpin the activities in his classroom.

As the days progressed D had lots of time to examine the classroom and the equipment. The drone of the air conditioner and the whirring of the fans were often even louder than the buzz from the students and it would be a relief sometimes when the diesel generator cut out and everything stopped. Unfortunately it also meant that they couldn’t stay in the classroom for long, they were upstairs and it became very hot, very quickly. She found that her relief was replicated by the students. They also cheered when the generator died, as they knew that meant they would soon be outside doing something different.

There was a significant array of equipment related to hearing issues in the cupboard at the back of the room. When asked Clint explained that years ago every classroom was wired so that students with hearing difficulties could sit in ‘hub’ areas and receive amplified sound depending on their range of hearing loss. He admitted however that he had no idea how that process worked and that he was also quite new to the school. He had asked about it when he arrived but not one teacher left had been at the school when the equipment was installed. There was some anecdotal evidence that it had never worked very well due to the air conditioner noises.

This was the first of many indications to D that the frequent staff changes in these remote schools militate against effective learning almost as much as the ‘disengagement’ of the students. A climate of dislocation seemed to pervade this school community. The strategies, belief system, attitudes and skills learned at university or in urban schools were quite useless in this remote school, and rather than learn from the indigenous community, most of the teachers seemed to hold even more strongly to their own cultural identity. Indeed those that really made an effort to incorporate indigenous ways of knowing, and get to know more about the community by getting involved in community events, were looked upon with concern. D was to experience this first hand when she tried to establish a drama program at the local community centre. Some teachers in the school became very hostile and the acting principal and the university coordinator had needed to intervene. At one stage she had been accused of interfering with the established cultural understandings, and it had been suggested that she leave the practicum community placement and return to the city. Fortunately this had not happened, but she had learned a great deal from the experience.
In the evenings the four preservice teachers were able to talk to each other about their experiences, although they all remained a little guarded in what they said, not wanting to sound like they were having trouble or were dissatisfied. Shona had been chosen to go to the Homeland School for three weeks and was looking forward to it. They would drive out on Mondays and return on Fridays. One group of staff were already out there and the group that Shona was working with were due to go out the following week. They had just spent two weeks preparing materials, assessing previous work and generally getting organised. They slept in swags and had to take their own food so Shona had been preparing frozen meals and borrowing what equipment she could. The coordinating teacher was herself indigenous and though she seldom went to the Homelands, she supported the staff who did the travelling and coordinated the two programs. Shona recommended that D spend some time with this indigenous teacher, as she was a truly amazing person who had a wealth of knowledge about the local cultural groups.

Meanwhile D spent most of her time in the Year 7 classroom where Clint began to rely on her more and more. By Friday of the first week he was leaving the classroom for large periods of time and D became very concerned. The minute he was out of the room some of the class members would start wandering around the room annoying those who continued to work. D wasn’t sure if she was ‘in charge’ or not, so would reprimand them but with only minimal conviction – which the students picked up on immediately. She worried that this was going to undermine her strategies when she took over the class the following week. It had been agreed that they were going to work towards a performance at assembly and they had an ambitious plan to write the script, compose and play the music and design and make the sets and costumes. D felt that she needed to establish from the start that the class would have ownership of the process and here she was already playing the power games of the traditional white classroom.

D planned that her drama program with the year 7s would lead to an after-hours program at the community centre for students who were not attending school. She hoped that the students would introduce her to their families at the community centre and they would all play a part in developing the production. Part of the uni course centred on being an ‘agent of transformation or change in the community’ and her proposal had been based on developing a drama program in a remote school that would reach out into the community. Only time would tell if this was possible.

The four house mates were chatting after dinner one evening when D dropped her guard momentarily and confided in the others that she felt really out of her depth with the literacy demands of her teaching. The others had exchanged what looked to D like knowing glances. D’s old insecurities immediately surfaced, she had missed something as usual and
they all knew something she didn’t know. As she was thinking what this might be Mark interrupted her thoughts.

“We talked about this at lunch time today when you were on yard duty. We thought you were on top of it all. Clint is always raving about how well you are doing. Apparently he has asked to go to a couple of conferences because he reckons you can take over the class easily.”

D received this with a mixture of delight and despair. They thought she knew what she was doing? They were so far from the truth.

The four of them talked for a long time about the inadequacies of their preparation for the practicum placement. Uni seemed to expect the Department of Education to prepare them and the Department seemed unfamiliar with the setting. Maybe it was different on other remote communities? They had read in the media that more and more aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were completing year 12 but it was only a very small program here, hardly big enough to support even two preservice teachers and certainly not four. None of the older students came to school regularly enough and there were few teachers qualified or experienced enough to help them with year 12 studies. When they did come many of the girls brought their babies to school with them, and then half the boys left because of kinship rules. It was very complicated. Some of the older children (and some of their younger siblings or cousins) were living at home on their own, while parents performed duties far from the home, related to cultural events and burials. It appeared that frequently when this happened fresh food had not been ordered in advance from the barge so they survived on take-away, if they had money. The bush tucker around the community wasn’t very plentiful so students were coming to school very tired from either late nights or lack of food or both. School breakfasts helped but frequently they didn’t arrive on time to benefit from them. It was a cycle of failure, of needs not being met, whichever culture was calling the shots.

They all agreed that not being able to speak the local language made things very difficult. They had learned that teaching was about interpersonal relationships and learning was about constructing new knowledge, building on what the learner already knew. Teachers helped this learning by introducing or building scaffolds or links and connections between what the students already know/can do and the problem they are trying to solve. That way the learner interacts with ideas and knowledge and makes it their own, storing it in relevant and accessible ways. Here they didn’t understand the language or the culture. How could they possibly make the necessary connections? Only Christine had ever completed any literacy units and that was in her undergraduate degree a long time ago. She remembered there were two systems of learning to read – phonics and whole word recognition. The most
important thing, she recalled, was that the material being read had to be meaningful to the reader.

“The students in my class are filling in words beginning with different letters,” Christine had added. “But they are words like spinning top, yacht, wardrobe when they should be snake trap, yabby and … and…."

“Wurlie-wurlie,” Mark added. They all laughed. They spent the next ten minutes going through the alphabet trying to find culturally appropriate words in English, acutely aware that finding them in the local languages was beyond them. Only Shona was quiet, she sat there hugging the dog. Again it was Mark who noticed. He picked up a cushion and threw it at her.

“Cat got your tongue?”

Shona’s eyes filled with tears. “I’m really scared about the Homeland School,” she ventured. “And I won’t have you guys to fall back on.”

D realised at that point how well they were getting on and how she too would have felt pretty overwhelmed had she been chosen for the Homelands. She had thought that Shona had taken it in her stride and had felt a great deal of respect for her, thinking that being a bit older might make all the difference. Now she realised that they were all feeling quite dispossessed and alienated by their inability to really understand the issues and sensed that their current superficial understanding was not going to serve them well. The real issues lay deep in the gulf between the cultures and the long history of western ways of knowing and colonisation mindsets. Mark was quite an authority on the recent work of anthropologists and social scientists and explained how it wasn’t until he actually came to the remote school that he understood the sense of dislocation and ‘whiteness’ the teachers must have felt. Not only had many of them devoted their lives to working with the indigenous people but they were also continually bombarded with the ‘popular’ view of the dominant culture that considers their quest futile.

“It must make them question the value of their own lives and ‘fresh faces from the university’ must threaten them somewhat,” Mark had explained. “There is no way we could really understand the politics and culture of the school in the short time that we’re here, so generally they just ignore us believing that spending their already heavily committed time on us would be a waste. They would rather work for their students.”

As they prepared for bed that night they were all very quiet. What had begun as an adventure was turning into a huge challenge. They would need to start looking at things from the point of view of the teachers in the classes and the students they were teaching. As preservice teachers they were rather unimportant and as adults they would need to negotiate
their own learning in the tiny spaces that were going to be available to them. D went to sleep wondering if she was up to the demands of the situation. Maybe she should pull out now, did she really want to be a teacher and have so much stress and responsibility? Was she able to really understand the issues and could she work productively within the culture or was she just going to cause more work and more difficulties for her mentor?

The demands of daily planning, marking, teaching, cooking, washing, learning and trying to really understand how their actions either supported learning or detracted from cultural understanding were exhausting and the four preservice teachers didn’t get a chance to sit down together until the following weekend. Shona was able to report that life in the Homeland was tiring but nothing like she expected. The students who came to school were happy, friendly, mature and keen to learn. Their indigenous teacher spoke their language and translated almost continually so that Shona could present her lessons. Sometimes they would work in English and it was surprising how the class would support each other and move seamlessly from Aboriginal English to Australian English to their own languages. They seemed to know several languages and would laugh and correct each other, their bright eyes flashing and their whole faces smiling. There seemed to be less hearing problems on the homeland, though many of the other issues of nutrition and attendance were obvious.

Mark and Christine had been working together with the senior students. Some days they only had a handful but on ‘roll check day’, the one day every three weeks that they had to be there, almost twenty had turned up. Mark and Christine had abandoned their planned lesson and had taken single sex groups to different parts of the school as recommended by their mentors. The three most regular attendees, three girls, were being ‘tutored’ to sit for year 12 exams. They were using a combination of ‘School of the Air’ style connections with the Open Learning Centre teachers and Internet connections with teachers in other secondary schools. Mark’s mentor was mainly working with them while Christine’s mentor took all of the other senior students. The ‘academic’ girls were very quiet and very compliant while the teacher was very loud and active, supporting, cajoling and focusing the girls and preparing them for their hook-ups with their distant teachers. The Director of the Education Department and a local politician had already visited them and the excitement of having their first year 12 students could be felt throughout the school. The principal, who was now on secondment to Head Office (and not on leave), had even been interviewed on national radio.

D on the other hand had between fifteen and twenty-five in her year 7 class. Although she was planning to teach Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) and Drama if she qualified, she spent most of her time working with these students on numeracy and literacy tasks. She tried to make it interesting and included drama activities, which they loved, though she had so little experience and her mentor had even less. Her plan of a
‘drama’ program like the one she had been preparing in her ‘Methods’ classes at uni seemed to be completely out of the question and her attempt to establish drama activities at the Community Centre had been a disaster. At first it had been fine. She had arranged to meet some of the senior girls and one of the other teachers from the school had been asked to go with her and introduce her to the elders and the Community Centre coordinator. The centre had been buzzing with young people, several of whom she had never seen at school and there had been a lot of interest in her sessions that were a combination of mime and dance. They had met on the Tuesday after school, then on the Thursday, but she had turned up alone on the following Tuesday because Liz had gone to the Homelands to cover for the regular teacher who was unwell. She immediately felt less welcome by the coordinator but ran her session anyway. As they progressed they were interrupted continually and each time someone would murmur to her “I have to go” and would run off with whoever had arrived to collect them. By the end there were only three participants left.

With time on her hands when the last three slipped away very quickly, D decided to look in the storeroom for props and equipment that they might be able to use for their ‘performance’. It was nearly dark when she left the community centre to walk up the hill to the principal’s house. She knew immediately she was being followed but didn’t know what to do so just walked as fast as she could, hoping that someone would be home. Her heart was really pounding when she opened the front door and walked straight into a stranger. She had screamed several times and burst into tears when she realised Mark and Christine were there too. The stranger introduced himself as Jack and he was the acting principal and had been detained until now at one of the other remote schools.

As D had been so distressed it hadn’t taken them long to find out that she felt she had been followed home from the community centre and there had been a problem with almost everyone being taken from her class. The principal explained that with Liz there she was accepted but going on her own must have caused a concern within the community and word would have been quickly passed around. The local people are very choosy about who has access to their children, he had told her. He agreed to see what he could do to salvage her project but didn’t look very optimistic. D had gone to bed that night feeling quite desolate. Jack suspected his first major chore would involve a meeting with the Council Elders in the early hours of the morning.

Despite the traumas and complications of teaching in this remote community D did make it to the third week of teaching but had begun to run out of ideas. She asked her mentor for some help and he had pointed to a cupboard by the door that had always been locked. “Try the resource cupboard,” he had said. “The key is in the top drawer.”
The cupboard was almost full but neatly presented and well organised. There were boxes of activities prepared by the “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational support group.” They were packaged in plastic folders, had teaching notes, work sheets, transparencies, audio cassettes and some videos. One box contained a number of indigenous musical instruments and instructions on how to make them from local resources and another was full of powder paints with charts to show how to mix the vivid colours like ochre loved by the indigenous people. She found books about ‘two-ways’ education and how to teach English conversation as well as handwritten notes that listed about fifty common expressions and what looked like their translation into two of the local language. D had already picked up a few words and she thought she recognised them. This cupboard was an absolute treasure trove! A lifetime of work now locked away and beginning to get dusty.

The next morning D had excitedly rushed up to Clint to tell him about the cupboard. He was a little wary of her enthusiasm and admitted that he had never opened it. Clint explained that when he had arrived it had been half way through the term and all he was told was that the previous year 7 teacher had been much loved and had been there for years. She had been taken to hospital in town and wasn’t expected to return.

Clint went on to tell D that during his first day the class had been noisy and wouldn’t settle, then he had caught one of the ‘rascals’ with his hand in the desk drawer and had bellowed at him, accusing him of theft. At that point the whole class had sat down quietly, looked at him and he had very little trouble from that time on. It was much later that he had been told that the class should virtually run itself, the previous teacher had ‘monitors’ and ‘partners’ for every student and they knew how to get the equipment and resources out, how to follow the program and how to stack it all away. He had been told that the previous teacher would never have been able to continue for as long as she did had this not been the case. When she finally collapsed the doctors said she was lucky to be alive. They had been surprised that she had managed to teach she had been so unwell.

One night after school Clint had tried the key. He knew that it fitted but he had never been able to bring himself to open it after accusing his student of theft. The young lad’s face still haunted him, he admitted.

“We didn’t have a good start,” he confessed. “It took ages for the class to produce any work at all and to be honest I was glad when the year finished and they moved on. I always felt like an interloper and the numbers dropped considerably by the end of the year. If the principal hadn’t been so busy on other projects I’m sure I would have been taken aside and asked to explain.”
Clint walked to the cupboard and opened the door and stood for some time just looking inside.

“I hated it here at first, everyone seems to be so busy and hardly anyone talked to me except the support workers and ground staff.”

It had been like opening the floodgates! Clint obviously hadn’t confided in anyone else and seemed relieved to be able to explain himself. D felt quite sorry for him and realised how lonely it must be for him, most of the other teachers being females.

The whole experience must have been quite cathartic for Clint because his whole demeanour changed from that day on and he was helpful and supportive in the classroom. They worked together as a team and shared the class, the problems and even a couple of meals under the guise of planning lessons. For a very brief period D felt that teaching wasn’t a chore, a battle, a game about staying on top but a learning experience for everyone in the classroom. The class had been very forgiving and adapted very quickly to their new way of sharing the teaching and everyone seemed to have so much more energy for games and drama activities in the afternoons. By the end of the final week they had twenty-eight students, even more than were printed on the official roll. Jack, the acting principal, praised her highly when they caught up. D couldn’t keep the smile off her face and was genuinely sad when she had to say good-bye. The class had asked her if she would come back again when she had finished practising and became a real teacher. It had been touching and even Clint had told her it would be a good idea. He had also asked if they could catch up when he came to town. The class hadn’t yet produced a thank you card and he was sure they would like to do that. He was also producing a video of the joint community and class drama performance they had presented at assembly.

The four preservice teachers who sat on the flight back towards the lives they had left five weeks before were quite different people from those on the inward flight. They probably hadn’t made huge advances in their teaching but had new insights about who they were as the teacher.
**V’s Story**

**Part 1**

V had a clear idea where his life was NOT heading. He was not planning to work the long hours his parents had worked ever since he could remember. They always seemed tired and tense and he learned from a very young age not to argue or confront them and generally they would believe what he told them, usually give him the benefit of the doubt, and on the whole take the least line of resistance.

This wasn’t to say that they hadn’t been doting parents; he had been given almost everything he asked for as he grew up and he had never missed out on social, cultural or educational experiences. He played sport, learned a musical instrument, joined a book club and as a family they always had the latest computer, software and digital technology. He had been first in his group of friends to have an iPod and mobile phone (and the first to have a massive phone bill, which had caused some angst but eventually his parents had paid it).

When V’s parents parted during his final year of school, life had actually become more peaceful. V stayed with his mum in the family home because his parents decided that would be less disruptive. Mum was hardly ever there, so he had watched a lot of TV, forged a number of diary notes for incomplete work and was usually on the computer when mum arrived home exhausted and happy to believe that he was completing homework assignments. When his results weren’t that good V was happy to agree that it had been a tough year with mum and dad splitting and he had found it hard to concentrate. Maybe this was true but V felt a little guilty when mum took the blame. It wasn’t until his friends started to get jobs, apprenticeships or talk about uni that V realised that if he went back to school, as he assumed he would, he would be all alone with the kids in the group below. He hated school. Not so much the work or the people but what it stood for. He hated being told he had to do anything without a good reason. He hated the power games.

The truth was V suddenly panicked – he had no intention of being an apprentice or working in an office or shop, he had imagined a life of fun, travel, sun and sand, lots of friends around, status, suits, red wine, golf, and fast cars…like his dad, he guessed. Did he need to go through the humiliation of going back to school to achieve all this or was there another way? It wasn’t like he failed or anything, he just didn’t pass well.

The universities were running open days early in January so V was easily convinced by his mum to go along, hoping that he wouldn’t see anyone he knew. Mum seemed to know how to negotiate her way around the complex course and application information and work out what he could reasonably apply for with his low score. She kept asking him what he was
interested in but V just shrugged. He was interested in going to uni because he didn’t want to go to work. Throughout the ordeal V just nodded and grunted imagining a life at uni, no teachers to get on his case, sleep in the mornings, lectures in the afternoons and fun at night.

“A double degree sounds like a good idea,” he heard mum say. “It’s a new course and hasn’t had many applications; Bachelor of Middle School Education and Bachelor of Arts. You’ve always liked playing with your younger cousins, it sounds perfect.” What mum didn’t make clear was that the course was at a regional campus, he’d have to leave home and his friends – or maybe that was part of mum’s plan?

V took several years to settle into university study. He had felt the same about uni as he had about school at first and hadn’t been happy away from home. He had spent more time and money than he could afford travelling home at weekends and hadn’t managed to get the grades to transfer his course back to the city campus. Eventually he met more people and started staying at uni over the weekends and realised how short the semesters really were. When working in the semester breaks for various business associates of his dad, he began to understand his dad’s business life a little better and realised that it wasn’t for him either. Life in the regional townships was much more relaxed and even the air in the city began to depress him.

Gradually the pass grades mounted up as V developed the knack of presenting assignments on time and discussing his assessment tasks with other students and tutors. He even began to spend less time surfing and achieved the occasional higher grade which indicated that if he did the reading, followed the guidelines, attended lectures and tutorials and put in some effort he could fulfil the requirements of the units with a limited amount of stress. In fact uni students were rewarded for thinking for themselves and their ideas were valued. As he progressed through the years there seemed to be less and less of the power games he loathed or the mandatory tasks. Study became much more self-directed.

The course structure eventually dictated that V could no longer avoid the education units that included school observations and practicum. He had thought about converting to just an Arts degree but now he had such a huge debt from deferring his fees and had passed a number of the core education units. He heard from other students that there was more group work, contact time, workshops, intensives and ‘surveillance’ in the practicum units and the time on prac was pretty demanding. He had observed friends and acquaintances disappear for months on end to attend city, rural or remote practica and return with a range of stories about school kids, school teachers and school culture. He probably should have been more attentive – but then he had never really intended becoming a teacher.
The first school experience came up quite quickly. They had spent about eight weeks in lectures and tutorials learning about who the teacher is, what they do, who the student is, how they learn…and learned how to observe classrooms and write journals. V had slipped back into bad habits of ‘going through the motions’ – he was pretty convinced that he knew what schools were like… hadn’t he been at school for twelve years, half his life? Anyway he still had a feeling that he was going to be saved from all this, maybe a rich uncle would die and leave him a fortune or he would win the lottery?

Mum had remarried and moved interstate and dad was hardly ever around so V decided to choose a small country town near the coast for his first practicum. He was to spend two weeks in a primary school and two weeks in a secondary school basically to observe the classroom culture and how teaching varied as the students grew older. This was also designed to help him make the decision about which age groups he would prefer to teach.

The primary school was on the outskirts of town and V had been offered a room in a granny flat by the principal who lived on site. He had even been told he could stay there when he moved to the secondary school in the centre of town. There was a good hotel only a few blocks away and V spent his days at the school and his evenings at the hotel. He became very friendly with the waitress who delivered his meals and always seemed interested in chatting about what he was doing. He explained he was writing up lessons, which made it sound like he was a teacher. Towards the end of his second week V invited the waitress back to his room at the end of her shift.

Their liaison had been fairly furtive. They had agreed to meet around the corner, which had seemed a little strange but then V hadn’t had much experience with country girls. They had also arranged to go to the beach at the weekend and V had been quite disappointed when his new friend later cancelled due to family commitments. He had gone surfing instead.

Buoyed by a good weekend in the surf and sun, V was in good spirits when he arrived at the secondary school on Monday morning. He was allocated a mentor teacher and was welcomed to the school by the principal at the Monday morning staff meeting. He had commented how good it was to have a preservice teacher in their school for the first time in many years. After visiting a range of classes V was beginning to feel quite comfortable and wondering if maybe he would be a teacher after all. He then walked into his first year 10 SOSE class - and straight into Jen, his waitress friend – who looked at him as if she had seen a ghost. She then went red, raised her hand and asked her teacher to be excused. V’s stomach churned, she had looked so much older in the pub. Why hadn’t she told him? Then he hadn’t
asked and he had told her he was working at the primary school. He had sort of big noted himself and hadn’t admitted that he was only a student teacher. Hadn’t they been told at uni to imagine that they were a teacher?

   Somehow V survived the lesson and immediately rang his lecturer at uni, not knowing what else to do. She had actually taken it quite calmly, suggesting he immediately go and speak to the assistant principal who had organised his timetable and seek his advice. It was her opinion that he would probably not be able to stay at the school; in fact he would probably need to get out of town. The assistant principal would know best. His lecturer outlined several strategies that included completing the practicum at the end of semester in a different location. V was relieved that she didn’t say he would need to withdraw from the course.

   During subsequent practica V was much more careful, but the experience, which was potentially career-threatening as well as costly in terms of extra time at the end of semester, made him think much more clearly about who the teacher really was and the role they played in the community. Despite a slightly raised eyebrow the assistant principal had dealt with the dilemma professionally and sensitively and hadn’t made V feel like the idiot he obviously was. The principal had also shown genuine disappointment that he was leaving so quickly and wished him all the best in his teaching career. V wasn’t sure what would happen to his friend and felt like a bit of a coward running away but was assured that there were strategies in place and it was better for everyone if he just disappeared quietly. He was told that there was fault on both sides and Jen was a good student and her studies would not be jeopardised.

**Part 2**

   V was never to know just how much paperwork and discussion his actions caused at the school and Department level as well as at the university, though he did get a sense of the effort necessary to prepare teachers. As it turned out the episode had a number of positives. V had spent a great deal of time with his lecturer while they tried to secure another placement and though he had frequently commented that maybe he wasn’t cut out to be a teacher, his lecturer seemed to think otherwise.

   “Trust me,” she had said. “You have many of the traits and dispositions of an excellent teacher. I appreciate your honesty in this situation and the way you took responsibility for your actions and didn’t try to blame anyone else.” She had added that she had been impressed by his insight and leadership during tutorials and wished that all preservice teachers were able to show the initiative and high-level problem solving skills that
he had demonstrated. This had certainly made V think and take his studies much more seriously.

When the first major teaching block arrived V felt confident and was looking forward to actually teaching classes. He had observed a number of music and maths classes and hoped he had enough knowledge to provide enjoyable and informative lessons for these middle school classes. He was aware that he might need to teach out of his ‘learning areas’ and engage with integrated studies classes in the middle school and was surprised how much knowledge of ICT, history, geography, communication and media he had built during his early years at uni, his own schooling and of course the travel in Asia and Europe with his parent in his early teens. He realised that all the F grades on his transcript were not a complete waste, he had actually learned a great deal; he just hadn’t known how (or was too lazy) to provide the evidence of his learning.

Living on campus with an array of international students had also improved his knowledge of the world and his respect for a range of cultures. His love of sport and outdoor activities had resulted in a reasonable understanding of the environment – especially of tidal movement, rips and wave action. He silently thanked his parents for the opportunities his fairly privileged upbringing had afforded him and began to appreciate the huge variations in terms of background and socio-economic status in Australia.

V’s first lesson at a large high school in a regional city was a year 9 music class and they were scheduled to study drumming in a number of world cultures. His mentor had given him ‘carte blanche’. The class had just completed a theory unit and V had only been able to observe revision lessons and a unit test, so had little idea how the class would respond during practical sessions – especially drumming. He had collected a number of drums from around the school and had searched the second hand shops looking for anything with a skin that the students could beat. There was already a full drum set in the music classroom and some loose timpanis around the room. V had planned to show the class on a map of the world where the different drums had originated and then discuss why different drumming styles had developed. He wanted them to write about their own experience with drums or drumming and would follow that up with each class member choosing a drum. They would beat out some simple rhythms from a range of different music styles. V assumed the fourteen year olds would know the basic ‘pop’ and ‘rock’ styles but wondered if they knew about the syncopated rhythm of jazz? They would use their hands at first and then he would teach them how to hold the drum sticks, how to position their arms, relax their shoulders and adjust their torso. V had done a great deal of research for this lesson and had been quite fascinated by the complexity of drumming. As a brass player he had always thought the drummers had it easy but had changed his opinion. He had spent all weekend beating out different rhythms on
tabletops, bed frames and window ledges. He felt he had acquired the knack and would be able to survive his first drumming lesson.

As he climbed the stairs to the music room V was immediately aware of the noise, and was struck by the quality of the drumming. He assumed that the year 12 music students or the music tutors were practising on the drums he had set up. He felt a little annoyed and hoped that they had not rearranged anything. His annoyance turned to surprise as he entered the room to find the quiet, bored class from the week before either watching enthralled or drumming in a most professional way.

“They were early so I let them in,” his mentor explained. “I knew you had to come from your Home Group on the other side of the school.”

V didn’t know what to do — his lesson planning had just gone down the drain, these students would be able to teach him! He stood and listened for some time, trying to re-plan his lesson in his head, watching these students whose dark skins were already glistening with sweat. He looked around the room and not one of the students could be recognised as the disengaged almost contrite group from the previous week. He had made the mistake of constructing these young people as novices, as empty vessels waiting to be filled, forgetting that they too had lives outside of the school.

Gradually the drummers noticed he was there and one by one reduced the ferocity of their drumming and almost as if it had been staged, became quieter and quieter, until they stopped altogether leaving one student on the timpani to complete a solo. He stopped with his fingers still resting on the skins and his eyes, like everyone else’s, on V.

Glancing at his mentor who was also looking at him expectantly, V swallowed, cleared his throat and began to talk, not really knowing what he was going to say.

“Good morning year 9. As you can see we are beginning a unit on drumming. Firstly we are going to ask Hojat, Sharon, Chris and the other drummers to tell us how they learned to drum so well and what they know about the drums they are using.”

V couldn’t believe that he almost sounded convincing, as if this was all part of his plan. The class turned expectantly towards the drummers. Little by little, somewhat reluctantly, some of the group began to explain that they had been working together as an African Drumming Group as part of the city council program called “Grind” set up for kids to perform their music. They had actually played over the weekend at a local festival and some of the class had heard their performance.

“They were tops,” added one of the class members.

“They should have won”. Another gave his opinion.
“Mark and Sam are great too. They have their own band and play at lots of parties.” This comment came from the front of the room and V wasn’t sure who said it.

As the practicum proceeded, helped by the patient guidance of his mentors, V slowly developed the art of questioning in ways that resulted in more than yes or no answers. On this first day the rather stilted discussion took a while to develop into meaningful conversations. Eventually other class members joined in, posing their own questions asking how the drummers learned to keep the beat, how the drums made the different sounds and how they managed to use their hands and feet with different rhythms. As Hojat gradually gained more confidence he explained that black people seemed to have the beat born into them but white people could learn it. He explained that some of the best drummers of all time were white. V quickly glanced around the room worried that the reference to white and black might result in some racist comments but was relieved to only see nods of agreement. Even his mentor seemed surprised by the turn of events, asking his own questions about how long they had been working together and where their instruments came from.

The discussion gradually waned, it seemed all the questions had been asked, so V tried to visualise his lesson plan wondering how to proceed. He was really scared that everyone would be looking at him for direction and he wouldn’t know what to do or say.

“Sir, can we show you how we get everyone in the audience beating a rhythm?” Hojat interrupted his thoughts addressing his question to V’s mentor teacher, who motioned to V indicating that it was over to him.

“What a good idea,” V responded. “We should distribute the drums and drum sticks around the room.”

There was a quick shuffle and some excited chatter as the class rearranged themselves around drums, drum kit, xylophones and anything else that looked like it might make a melodious sound. Every student in the class appeared mesmerised by Hojat’s unusual enthusiasm and confidence. He was a patient and perceptive ‘teacher’, able to relate to his classmates with empathy and understanding.

At times V needed to fill gaps, make suggestions and ask clarifying questions but the lesson time flew and suddenly he noticed new faces at the door and realised that they had missed the bell. He quickly stopped the lesson, thanked the class and sent them on their way, packing up the equipment as they filed out and then rushing off himself to his next class.

As he prepared his lesson plans that night V reflected on the music lesson and tried to think of ways he could capitalise on the momentum that had been built. He hated to think what might have happened if he had launched into his planned lesson, and reprimanded himself for not being mindful that the students might already have knowledges and skills that
they bring to the classroom. He checked his original plan and was able to tick off the student learning outcomes as being achieved despite the tangent they had taken. His unit rationale, which was based on the place and value of the performing arts for personal and community development, was now even more meaningful and he mused about the changes in group dynamics that this unit might instigate. Hojat and his friends had previously appeared to be on the ‘outer’ in the class, struggling with the theory notation and at times not even bothering to bring a pencil or paper to class. V wondered what other talents and skills lay hidden in that classroom and resolved to find out as soon as possible.

V had rushed from the music lesson to a maths lesson and had been very conscious of the contrast in terms of enthusiasm and engagement. His own rather sparse mathematical knowledge and failure to engage with his maths education beyond achieving a bare pass didn’t help. Fortunately (or unfortunately for the students) his mentor teacher had little more knowledge than he had. He had read at uni about the shortage of maths teachers and indeed the shortage of maths graduates across the world. The style of thinking that leads to success in mathematics is seldom cultured or valued during the formative years. Transmission and didactic teaching tends to work against that particular intelligence and most young people never recover. They try to rely on memory when they work with numbers yet it is the problem solving and the understanding of the processes that are more important – apart from the basic skills. A very persuasive assistant principal had convinced his mentor that this small class would be easy to teach and that the maths coordinator would provide her with common work sheets and assessments. All she had to do was follow the textbook.

More than eight ethnic groups were represented in the class and several of the students were still struggling with written and spoken English. Some days a support teacher sat with the students who struggled with English language skills. V had not been introduced to this person and it wasn’t clear what he actually did. At times he stirred up a bit of noise that added to the distractions in the classroom. V had observed the previous week that most of the students just copied the answers off the board and didn’t engage with solving the maths problems themselves. Some answers were in the back of the book and that was about the only time the students found the answer before the teacher. Some lessons would pass with several students not even opening their books, spending their time etching their rulers or erasers and designing what looked like skateboard ramps or tattoo like figures. He had observed two girls looking out of the window for about five minutes trying to disturb the birds in the tree by tapping on the glass. Half the boys wore their caps in the classroom and one girl put her head on the desk and kept the sleep-like repose for the entire lesson every day during his observation week. The teacher spent much of the time with her back to the class writing solutions on the board from a sheet she kept on the desk, or trying to focus the
noisier students in the front row completely ignoring those silently staring from the corners of the room. V had read somewhere that students who wanted to avoid the teacher could sit in certain parts of the room and they would hardly be noticed. That seemed to be what was happening. Occasionally the teacher would stop the class and go through a problem but even her voice lacked conviction.

Generally the noise level in the room was fairly low but it would crescendo from time to time as students became particularly bored and seemed to need to let off steam. Usually about this time there would be a range of requests from students to borrow erasers or rulers from the teacher, even though the person sitting next to them had the said item. The teacher would sometimes raise her voice above the noise and threaten detention though she seldom carried it through. As the week progressed the students would arrive later and later and their teacher seldom commented, she would just repeat what she had just said. Last Friday V counted that the students who arrived on time heard the introductory information five times. No wonder they were bored and started doodling, texting on their mobile phones under their desks or even thumping each other.

V had sat with various students and tried to help them but they were only interested in getting the answer, not how to get it. He began to feel quite dejected and wondered what he could do to increase student interest. He had discussed a few ideas with his mentor teacher but had been firmly told that they needed to follow the unit plan and textbook or the students would fall behind and fail Friday’s common assessment. She admitted that most of them failed anyway but it was their own fault. At least she had gone through the work with them. She added that she wouldn’t get talked into teaching out of her area of expertise again.

After the lack of interest in his new ideas V had proceeded to follow her example and write solutions on the board with the occasional reminder to “be on task” and “remember the test on Friday.” His lesson was no better but possibly no worse than his mentor’s had been the previous week though he did feel quite guilty. After all the work he had put into his music lesson he could not justify his lack of preparation and this boring lesson. V resolved to talk to his mentor again about trying to connect more with the students. If she didn’t listen perhaps he could talk to the coordinator. He wondered what the reaction might be if his uni lecturers happened to observe his maths lessons. He felt sure they would fail him straight away. He would try that logic with his mentor or the coordinator.

When he arrived the next day V was totally unprepared for the message he found in his pigeonhole. An obviously very angry teacher accused him of arrogance and lack of sensitivity for dismissing his music class late and causing them to be late for a test. Apparently he had jeopardised their learning in her subject and inferred by his actions that
her subject was less important than his. They had missed half her lesson and long after they arrived they were still unsettled and talking about their music lesson. Furthermore there had been no apology though she had waited all day and finally she wondered what it was they taught them at university, it certainly wasn’t good manners!

After a cup of tea to allow him time to ingest this note and plan a strategy to manage his frustration, V collected his folder and walked slowly to Home Group. Fortunately he was only observing during morning activities and still had about twenty minutes to prepare himself for the maths lesson. His enthusiasm had waned and he was beginning to wonder whether this was really what he wanted in life. How could she be so insensitive? Why hadn’t his mentor warned him? What was the big deal anyway, the class had obviously enjoyed his lesson more than hers and it hadn’t been that late when he had dismissed them? He remembered that he had arrived at maths only a few minutes late. Silly old…V was allowing himself to get angry and knew that would have implications for his maths lesson. He had better settle his mood. After spending hours last night trying to make the examples in the textbook relevant to the students, he didn’t want to waste the effort. He had converted the textbook language to twenty-first century kids’ talk. Ten horses had become ten iPods and a pallet of bricks became a carton of iced coffee. The textbook had been first published in 1986, just after he was born.

Still feeling rather tight in the chest, V soon found himself in front of the maths class. The students were arriving slowly and without enthusiasm. He spent the time walking around the room, encouraging students to open their workbooks and get their pencils, erasers and rulers ready. He left the tray of calculators on the teacher’s desk planning to pass them out when everyone had arrived. He understood the seriousness of not having all of the calculators returned at the end of the lesson and wanted to make sure he was methodical about their distribution. Right now he didn’t need to be hauled over the coals about anything else.

At first the class was quiet and some of the students seemed to enjoy his updated language and ideas on the worksheets. He tried, with limited success, to encourage the window gazers and eraser sculptors to try the problems. Their behaviour patterns were fairly firmly established. The two boys who spent most of the previous week making loud comments and had been unable to keep their hands off each other were no worse than usual. V soldiered on. He had a ‘fun’ activity up his sleeve, something his maths methods lecturer had shown them. He wanted to hold off for as long as he could and try to get to the end of the worksheet. He completed the first five problems on the board and could see about half the class copying them. Then he spied a hand in the air. He knew it would be the inevitable
request to go to the bathroom. Immediately he consented another hand went up. He asked the second girl to wait until the previous one returned.

“I might pee my pants,” was the response. She then looked around the room with a grin and there were a few giggles that V chose to ignore, but the distraction was enough that there was now hardly a student working.

V’s quick circuit of the room confirmed that very little had been achieved. A few students pretended to work by staring at their worksheets as he walked by but he could see that the most advanced had only completed question five, which he already had on the board. V tried the Friday test threat.

“Don’t forget you have a test on Friday. If you are having any problems let’s deal with them now.”

There was no response. If anything the noise level increased and one of the students began actually banging on the desk to create even more noise. The mentor teacher moved over and stood next to him, but other than that offered no support.

“There are ten more questions and what you don’t finish in class you will need to do for homework.” He had promised himself he would never use the homework threat. He despised it when he was at school.

A student threw a pen in the air at the back of the room refocusing V’s attention. He realised he needed to do something before there was a riot.

“Pens down and eyes this way.”

He waited for what seemed like an eternity but eventually he could see eighteen pairs of eyes looking his way.

The distribution of the fun activity worksheet gave the class a further excuse to make noise. It was actually only about half the class that was noisy but the other half didn’t seem to know what was going on. The support teacher collected the extra sheets and brought them back to the front of the room. He mimicked a funny walk as he returned to his seat and the class burst into laughter. This is just what I need, a clown to distract them even more, bemoaned V to himself. He made a mental note to get someone to explain the advantage of having these support teachers in the classroom. He hadn’t seen him do anything useful yet.

Swallowing his frustration V addressed the class again. “Let’s read through the instructions together.”
Gradually the noise reduced and the students looked at the sheet. It was immediately apparent that they were interested. It would have been a complete surprise if they hadn’t been. This was a pretty amazing activity designed to motivate the most disengaged students.

The rest of the lesson went smoothly and even the students who didn’t understand English well were soon colouring squares and filling out answers. There were so many hands going up to share results (as this was part of the exercise) that the support teacher and mentor teacher were soon involved. When there was a brief lull in the activity, V stopped the class and paired them up so that they could share results. He changed the pairs every two minutes and the class were so quick to swap and get back into the activity that there was little time for the usual tomfoolery that happened whenever a student left their desk. No one asked for rulers or erasers and no one left to go to the toilet.

Just before the bell V stopped the class and collected the papers. “We’ll go on with this tomorrow after you finish your worksheet,” was all he said. The students understood, packed up and waited for the bell.

“That was neat, sir,” one of the ‘punching’ boys remarked as he walked past the desk.

Even one of the quiet girls from the back who wore a headscarf and was obviously new to the class came to the desk and with a heavy accent said, “Thank you. Was good.”

Immediately they left V felt the nagging tightness in his chest and jaw return. Now he needed to deal with the music incident. The music teacher was only in the school Monday, Wednesday and Friday so he would need to discuss it with the Arts coordinator who was a fine art, not a performing art specialist. V had heard that there was little love lost between art and music. Judging by the lack of resources and financial support for music in the school he suspected it was true. He waved distractedly to his mentor who didn’t seem to have time to discuss the lesson with him. He was preoccupied anyway. His mind was racing.

Maybe there was someone else? He wished there had been another preservice teacher allocated to this school. The closest one was miles away. V remembered again what he hated about schools when he was a student; the confines of the rules, the lack of freedom in general, the narrow-minded academic focus and the self-righteous teachers and administration. It made you want to fight it, rebel, just because it was so godforsaken full of its self-importance and power. He wanted to just stick his chest out and say, “I’m not a nobody like you said I’d be if I didn’t follow your silly rules. I made my way without kowtowing to your power games, grovelling and complying because you said! I don’t think your thoughts because you tell me to…and you can’t think mine. I am my own person, leave me alone.”
V was sitting in the staffroom obviously looking quite forlorn or maybe even a little angry when Jed walked in to check his pigeonhole. Jed had been teaching for nearly 40 years and coordinated the middle school. He had established the new integrated studies units that were being trialled with half the year 8 students and V was observing some of his classes. Jed had a keen sense of humour and a relaxed style with the students yet they respected him and really seemed to be learning in his lessons. He worked long hours and V had spent very little time with him because he always seemed to be so busy. On a couple of occasions V had felt that Jed was watching him as he worked with individual students in the middle school wing but whenever he turned around Jed was busy elsewhere. It had been difficult getting involved as some of the integrated studies classes clashed with his maths and music, so his visits had been rather ad hoc.

“You look like the cat that lost its milk,” joked Jed. But his keen eye was searching V’s face.

“That’s about it,” V responded not looking up.

“Want to talk about it?”

“Er…maybe.”

“If I was to guess, that’s as close to yes as I’m likely to get. Shall we grab a coffee and go out to the barn? I need to check the horses.”

V had no idea what he was talking about but followed him to the coffee machine.

“Are you coming to join us after recess?” Jed made small talk aware that V wasn’t yet ready to open up. “The groups are going to present their PowerPoint presentations and it should be interesting. Thanks for your help by the way; it has been great to have another pair of hands in the classroom. I honestly believe that if we had two teachers in every classroom, seventy percent of the students would meet seventy percent more learning outcomes in about half the time. But that’s a story for another day. I’ll show you the barn.”

They left the staffroom and walked across the oval towards a wooden frame with a thatched roof. Jed explained that it was a favourite haunt for the smokers and the staff made periodic checks during their free lessons. It was also a good place to go when you felt like kicking the cat. Jed was so relaxed and friendly that in no time V was telling him that it was difficult not having any other preservice teachers around. Eventually he asked his advice about the music episode, not mentioning any names but watching for any hint of recognition.

Jed was very professional and tried to help V develop some strategies for dealing with both his disappointment and the need to respond to the staff member in a way that would allow a professional relationship to be maintained – a win/win as Jed put it. V
remembered that they had discussed conflict resolution in one of his units at uni. Generally you needed to problem solve like he and Jed were doing but he remembered the little test they did had indicated that he preferred to ‘avoid’. Sometimes he would pretend that a conflict didn’t happen, other times he would try to smooth things over. He wasn’t very good at confronting and he had managed to walk away from the waitress situation in his first prac with others doing the entire problem solving for him. Perhaps this time he should deal with it carefully, research it thoroughly and get as much help to plan his tactics as he could.

They didn’t have much time; Jed had some phone calls to parents that needed to be made without too much delay, though he admitted to V that he wasn’t looking forward to them.

“Why don’t you come to my place for a drink after work,” he had suggested. “You must feel a bit isolated out here on your own. You might even be able to stay for dinner depending on what plans we have. I’d need to check with my wife – she’s my social secretary. I’d just do school work all the time if it wasn’t for her. Be careful mate, it can consume all your waking hours if you let it.”

They agreed to finalise their plans after the observation lesson and V went back to the staff room to collect his gear. He had been hoping that after the first few years, teaching would get a lot easier but was beginning to wonder. He did, however, feel a lot better and was looking forward to talking with Jed again.

V had heard that there were many ‘Middle Schools’ throughout the state but often they were about school structure and not about pedagogy. There had been significant research both in Australia and overseas demonstrating that the disjunction in traditional primary-secondary transitions was responsible for many disengaged young people. Students tended to go backwards in their learning and interest in their studies could disappear during the early years of secondary school, as they became more focussed on dealing with a whole range of personal issues related to their developing identity and their physical capacities. According to his lecturers, there had been a significant drive for over twenty years to change the way that students were being managed and organised in the middle years of schooling. The structure of schools, subjects, disciplines and resistance to change in an aging teaching force were considered as partly responsible for mixed success. Political machinations and a conservative backlash reinforcing a system of education that no longer met the needs of the society it serves were also suggested as possible reasons for the slow development of change in schools.

The university study guide for the practicum unit suggested that the focus of our education system should be improving life’s chances for all students, through learning that is
accessible, meaningful, purposeful and just. This would give hope for framing a future where citizens are lifelong learners who can contribute to society and cope with the complexities and challenges of both the global and socio-cultural environment. V remembered in particular a quote from Cochran-Smith related to what young people learn during schooling making a difference; “the richest possible conception of teaching, learning and education is important” (Cochran-Smith, 2002). This meant equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be discriminating and self-reliant participants in the community.

It had all seemed to make sense in the lectures and the tutorials. Teachers need to ensure that ideas and knowledge are constructed in accessible ways. V had no doubt that all learning needs to make sense to the learner. Relationships had been another major focus at uni. Teachers need to establish meaningful relationships with their students to help connect them to their learning environment. This also had unanimous support in tutorials. The preservice teachers had been looking forward to making connections with, and for, young people in the schools during their practicum. The final area of ‘high expectations’ had elicited the greatest division within the tutorial group. Several of the preservice teachers claimed they didn’t understand how this worked. What if you set the standards too high and students were not able to achieve them? How did you know what students were capable of? The tutors suggested that if you provide for a wide range of individualised learning opportunities and negotiation of learning outcomes with students, you should be able to develop realistic expectations. They went on to suggest that if teachers and those responsible for the education of young people really understood their practice, then schools were more likely to meet the needs of the students. It was recommended that middle schooling pedagogies were more likely to engage young people.

Concepts of integrated curriculum, collaborative and productive pedagogies, articulation of content and transformative knowledge communities were seen as the major differences between the current experience for many 10 to 15 year olds and what educational researchers believed middle schooling pedagogies and frameworks could offer. V had already seen how the ‘integrated studies’ unit was working at this school under Jed’s careful direction and was interested to see the ‘culminating’ projects for the unit on ancient history, that were to be presented in today’s lesson. He had tried hard to benefit from his observations in this class but there hardly seemed to be any students to observe. They were either in the computer room, in the library or the media centre, in the discussion rooms or deep in conversation with Jed or the other middle school staff. Sometimes they seemed to be more interested in socialising than working and some sat in front of the computers with their iPods on their laps and their earphones on. Jed had given approval for this providing it wasn’t so loud that he could hear it escaping from the earphones. He had explained to a
doubtful V that some students worked better that way; they had an infinite appetite for distractions and anything that reduced the chance of interruptions was a bonus.

Fortunately, early on, one group had asked V questions about what he was doing in their middle school and he had steered the conversation to their learning task. They had been quite happy to discuss the PowerPoint that they were developing and explained how they were streaming video and audio from the Internet into their presentation. One of their group had taken their DVD home to work on the titles, as he had more recent software at home, but he was absent on that particular day so they were really just killing time. V had been able to show them how to prepare their bibliography and they had made good use of their lesson in the end. The following day the group had been keen to show him their progress and asked his advice on the best way to present what the different group members had contributed. V had been impressed by the way they had shared out the tasks and negotiated their outcomes. This had led to another group requesting his advice and he had become quite involved during the lessons he was able to attend towards the end of the first week. Although he had not managed to observe much teaching he was benefiting from making the connections with the students and facilitating their learning.

The Middle Schooling course at the uni was still very much in its infancy and they were still waiting for a suitable text that brought together the Australian research. According to the lecturers some schools were still resistant to middle schooling and some senior secondary teachers were concerned that students would not develop the necessary levels of cognitive understanding or operations to complete final year subjects. Although learning theory research was demonstrating that many of the assumptions previously held about recall and application as indicators of learning were unsustainable, the necessary changes in attitude and how young people are constructed in the classroom seems to be only progressing slowly. If students were to learn to think critically and creatively and learn to interrogate and solve complex problems, rather than develop routine skills, teachers would need to be accomplished in communicating with them on many levels. If the gap in the lifeworlds of the student and the teacher remained a chasm and student views were continually silenced, then their perceptions of communication outcomes would continue to be quite different. This would maintain the current communication gap. The middle schooling units were designed to prepare teachers for Middle Schools though there appeared to be little agreement on middle schooling structure.

Even the concept of pedagogy seemed to be contested and V had spent some time not only trying to understanding the concept but learning to use it seamlessly and confidently. He had a huge list of different pedagogies prepared by one of his lecturers. He kept it in the front of his teaching folder and consulted it frequently while preparing his
lessons and writing his observations. He was starting to understand how content, process and environment intersected in the classroom. He could now see that context, culture, attitude and purpose were as important as strategies and methods. What a teacher knows and what they value was just as important as what they do. He was also starting to appreciate the importance of preparing students for future trends and change. These young people were going to live and work in quite a different world from the current one and needed to be equipped with strategies to adapt to changes.

When he arrived at the middle school classroom V was surprised to see how many students were present. The room was almost full. The groups were sitting together and deep in conversation while Jed marked the roll and some of the students were setting up the data beam and screen. Jed asked the class if they wanted to draw straws or if they would like to volunteer the order of their presentations. Immediately one of the groups offered to go first and then someone at the back volunteered their group to be second.

The level of confidence of these year 8 students and the quality of the material they presented was a revelation for V. They had started with an open question related to Ancient Greece or Egypt and had developed their own research questions and completed self directed research either in groups or in pairs. As the class was an integrated humanities ‘domain’ (literacy, literature, social and community issues and information communication technology) there were a wide range of student learning outcomes to cover. These had been mapped against a ‘knowledge’ taxonomy based on Bloom’s work but revised to include some later research. Viewing the grid it was quite easy to locate the ‘type’ of understanding and skills the students brought to their presentation.

Despite their sophistication in some areas, the students were quite naïve in others, and generally admitted or made it very obvious if they had not contributed at the expected level. Jed and the other middle school teachers had been evaluating the progress of the students through continuous discussion and feedback and were fully aware of their levels of effort and development. V wished he had been able to timetable more time with this class and made a note to speak to Jed about more involvement later. Perhaps their Maths/Science/Technology Studies ‘domain’ warranted a few observations too?

Part 3

V spent a wonderful evening with Jed and his wife, Jill. They spent the evening discussing a mixture of teaching philosophies and the advantages of country life. The cockatoos had screeched overhead just before sunset and had initiated considerable reminiscence about the days when they had a young family and the children would never go
to bed until they heard the cockatoos. Now they were all in the city working but their youngest, just a little younger than V, was keen to return to the country.

“You should meet her,” commented Jed. “You have a lot in common.” She loves the beach and the surf and plays several instruments. She had her own band when she was here at the high school.”

And so the conversation moved to the unpleasant note from Prue that had caused V to wonder whether he wanted to be a teacher after all. Jill had been able to throw some light on the matter.

“Prue has had some personal difficulties this term, you’re not the first person to have suffered her wrath,” she consoled. “Though I’m not making excuses for her. She is an experienced teacher and should know that her note was unacceptable especially when directed at a preservice teacher.”

“She probably regrets it already,” added Jed. “I wonder if you should just ignore it?”

“No”

“No”

Jill and V spoke almost in unison.

“I think it would be good for me to speak to her. I’m always avoiding issues,” continued V. Immediately the words were out of his mouth he felt the tension return to his shoulders. He really did despise confrontation or even argument. He even found it hard to give feedback to students unless it was very positive and supportive.

“It is very Australian to avoid altercation or conflict,” Jed added to comfort him. “It took me years to learn how to give worthwhile and constructive feedback when it could be construed as criticism or a little hard or negative. Sometimes we need to do it though, and in the end I think everyone benefits. It doesn’t help kids …or student teachers …or even peers to always get watered down and not honest, useful feedback.”

“It’s a bit like ‘tough love’, I think,” added Jill. “Be cruel to be kind!”

They talked for some time about power hierarchies and whether V should admit that he had discussed the note with Jed. It was decided that V would sleep on it but maybe keep the discussions as low key and uncomplicated as he could. He would apologise, explain that they hadn’t finished that late and that he would certainly reprimand the recalcitrant students during the next lesson. He would offer some time from his abutting lesson the following week to make up for the lost time. After that he would see what transpired. If Prue continued to be unpleasant or unreasonable then he would excuse himself immediately as it was not
acceptable for her to rebuke him and then he would need to discuss it further either with Jed or an assistant principal.

After an uncomfortable night V arrived at school early and went searching for Prue. He found her in the room where she held Home Group as Jed had suggested. The desks were in neat rows and the walls were covered in learning posters and student work. The whiteboard was carefully ruled in columns and the date was displayed in neat and bold script. The teacher’s desk was clear except for a neat pile of exercise books. Prue was writing a list of student names on the board when V entered.

“Er…excuse me. Prue?” he managed in a fairly confident manner.

Prue turned and looked over her glasses. “Yes?”

“Hi, I’m V. I’ve come to talk to you about the note you left in my pigeon hole. I’m the music preservice teacher.”

Prue didn’t seem that pleased.

“I’ve come to apologise. I had no idea we were running so late. It was my first lesson and I missed the bell. I think it was the drums.” V was beginning to sound less confident. “Em…they should only have been a few minutes late. I’m sorry. I will speak to them in my lesson later today. Would you like to have some of my lesson time next Monday to make up for it?”

“That won’t be necessary. We have completed the work now.”

V tried again. “Could you give me some idea what I might say to them? My music mentor is only in the school three days a week and we don’t get much chance to talk. He doesn’t even know that this has happened and I won’t have time to get his advice before the next lesson.”

Prue seemed to relax a little. “It’s those scoundrels who pretend they don’t understand English. They try to get out of doing anything in my lessons. Just come down hard on them if they cause you any trouble.”

V couldn’t tell her that they had been so involved in his lesson that they had actually run it. “Sure,” he responded. “Any other suggestions?” He was beginning to relax a little. This wasn’t really his problem after all. He had just been the unlucky one to upset Prue.

Prue recommended writing names on the board if the students were off task and asked V if he had been given copies of the detention sheets. When he looked uncertain she handed him a green sheet with her eyebrows raised.
“Like this. You fill them in and send the students to the time-out room. They should have given them to you when you arrived. When I was in charge of student teachers I made sure they were fully informed from day one.”

Unable to think what else to say V asked to keep the detention sheet and if Prue had any more advice. “I can’t think of anything else at the moment,” she responded looking pleased. I’ll chase you up or put a note in your pigeon hole if I think of anything else.”

Prue turned back to the board so V made for the door. Just as he was leaving he heard. “Thanks, see you later,” to which he mumbled a reply.

So that was it. Prue used to look after the student teachers. She had obviously been a bit miffed that she hadn’t been asked again. The assistant principal had told him it must have been ages since they had anyone from the uni because he had been there for more than five years and had never even had a letter of request. V resolved to let him know that Prue might be able to help him out. He was feeling quite pleased with the outcome, it hadn’t been as bad as he had expected though he had been sweating profusely. There was actually a spring in his step until he entered the maths faculty office and he immediately knew that his troubles were not over. His maths mentor glanced his way then looked at the coordinator and made for the door.

“Can we have a chat?” the coordinator requested.

What a silly question thought V, amid joint emotions of sinking heart and desolation. Do I have an option? What now?

They spoke for some time about the difficulties of getting maths teachers and the inexperience of his mentor. The crux was that she was not comfortable as a maths mentor, had not wanted to take on the role and now wanted to pull out. Thoughts of another end of semester prac went coasting through V’s mind. Not again. And he was just getting to know the class. V looked through the window to slow his rising frustration. There, right in front of him was the new middle school building. With sudden inspiration he asked if he could join the maths/science domain in the middle school. He already knew the class; he observed them for the literacy domain. Maybe Jed would let him take their Maths?

The coordinator looked doubtful but agreed to immediately talk to Jed. V went straight to the computer to have a look at the timetable for the maths/science domain. There didn’t appear to be too many clashes with his music class and to be honest, V found the prospect of working more closely with Jed quite appealing. He would have a much higher load than was expected for the first practicum but felt sure that he could convince the university that it was a good alternative. This would be true middle school teaching; he would have a great opportunity to really connect with the learning needs of the students. He
would also be part of a middle school trial and he could write about that for his major practicum assignment on innovations. Things might be looking up.

Jed agreed that V could join the middle school almost full time. The only lessons elsewhere were in the music department. V attended daily planning meetings and accepted a number of teaching responsibilities including the music across the middle school. Sometimes it was very confusing. Students would suddenly disappear for PE or Languages, Home Economics or Tech. Studies. Planned lessons were abandoned and re-scheduled. The students coped better with these changes than the teachers, they seemed to enjoy the unpredictability and they also particularly enjoyed the opportunity to work for longer periods of time on their tasks and projects. Frequently they would work through parts of their lunch hour and Jed would often come around at recess and chase them out of the building.

“We need a break even if you don’t,” he would joke with the students.

Although there seemed to be less need for detention or reprimand, there were several students who took advantage of the freedom of the middle school. Jed’s attitude was that the students didn’t fail, the school failed to meet the needs of the students and he worked very hard to negotiate work contracts with them. A couple had transferred across to the mainstream year 8 group since the trial started but were not having any more success in the more traditional structure.

“We don’t have all the answers, and we’ll never meet the needs of every student all of the time,” Jed had admitted. “But we really seem to have a structure that allows the students to make more decisions for themselves as well as make sense of the synergy between the traditional subject areas. We won’t really know until they hit the senior school whether we can make this work for them. Even then the traditional academic curriculum could undermine the advantages of independent and critical thinking.”

V realised that there was no one solution to preparing young people for life in a complex and challenging twenty-first century. What he learned in the middle school was that the best solution was to keep looking. The teachers who were continually trying new strategies and learning activities and who were aware that their practice and their theory intersected in a maze of values and relationships were the teachers who were making the most difference in the life of the young people they taught. Occasionally someone would return from a conference or meeting with new ideas to share and would spend hours of their own time supporting and guiding their peers. However, their best teachers, they told V, were their students.

“You watch, you listen, you read their work and their body language, then you make your suggestions,” he was told.
It was also explained to V that teachers needed to ensure that the classroom dynamic was focussed on the students. It wasn’t about imposing adult views, from their sense of the world, onto young people. Teachers should not be claiming the authority over what students should do, where they should be, what they should wear, where they should sit, when they should stand – and according to them ‘what they should say’. That was a recipe for disaster with some students contesting it, or turning off, every time.

V began to recognise that in a successful middle schooling program students understand and respect the right of other students to learn. They are also allowed the spaces to become involved in projects and processes that they see as worthwhile and enjoyable. When adults continue to make decisions for young people they only learn to be compliant or to stop meeting challenges and never learn how to make their own decisions.

Prue became one of V’s best allies in the school. He would frequently ask her view when Jed was just too busy or too close to the issue. She was also a great cook and would bring cakes and biscuits for morning tea. V realised later it was her way of forcing him out of the middle school at recess so that he could spend some time with the other school staff. He made some good friends that way and when he was appointed to the middle school the following year as a neophyte teacher, he already had strong bonds with several of the mainstream staff that frequently proved priceless.
Chapter 7 Reading the Spin

Data Analysis

Introduction

Margot comments ‘could other researchers have discovered different categories and themes from the same data?’ Yes. And this would probably happen. The important process here is to be able to explain one’s reasoning for whatever one created. (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997: 206-7)

Such statements give me heart. I acknowledge that my data could have been treated in many different ways, yet at this moment in time, when reflecting on the questions that initiated this research, I believe that the multi-layered analysis I have created does uncover an ‘essence of the data’ (Ely, Vinz, Downing, Anzul, 1997: 208) in ways that are both accessible and add to the knowledge in the field in important ways. It is interesting how some of the ideas that initially seemed important have retreated to the shadows while others have been thrust to the centre of the discussion. Stories can be a powerful heuristic for lifting some tentative ideas, impressions and beliefs into the world of readers, and in this project preservice teachers, mentor teachers, secondary teachers and teacher educators have read and responded in their own way to the stories. This has allowed ideas to be expressed that have previously been difficult to present in the public arena. By then analysing and critiquing the themes that emerged from the comments and annotations of these readers from the education community, and abstracting these ideas beyond the particular stories, a new understanding of practicum learning is revealed. Admittedly these interpretations of the responses of the readers are filtered through the researchers own theoretical perspective, her world, her orientation and her experience (Kincheloe, 2004: 53) and are influenced by how she can express the thoughts of others.

I use narrative to engage, confront and interact with my readers so that together we can make sense of the extremely complex process of the secondary preservice practicum. I have written into being and given form to what I perceive are the most significant issues of the secondary practicum. In the telling and scripting of the stories I have sorted and interpreted the original field notes and through the plots, dialogue, characterisation and descriptions in my stories, have organised, analysed and interpreted this original data for the second time. The data is then acted on a third time, where the perspectives of readers and their reactions to the stories, are sorted in meaningful ways to make sense beyond the author’s view. In this way these reader/respondents (the readers who not only agreed to read my stories but also responded to their reading with annotations and comments) and author/researcher’s ideas can later be connected with a wider knowledge about schools, teaching, learning and the
practicum (Chapter 8 and 9). These layers of analysis build on each other to expose and illuminate the data.

Table 1 Layered Analysis

| Layer 1 | Observation in classrooms by researcher/teacher educator |
| Layer 2 | The researcher/teacher educator writes stories drawing on the observations in the classrooms, the views of preservice teachers, mentor teachers and secondary school students from the pilot study and discussions with teachers educators, preservice teachers and teachers. |
| Layer 3 | The stories are read by preservice teachers, teachers, mentors, teacher educators and ‘others’ who offer to comment on them. These comments are sorted and analysed through their connections with the orienting questions. |
| Layer 4 | Patterns, themes and meaning concepts that emerge from comments and annotations of preservice teachers, teachers, mentors and teacher educators and others, are acted upon by the critical cycle to uncover a new view. |
| Outcome | Tentative practicum learning statements are designed to help articulate practicum learning outcomes more clearly and highlighting a new view of the practicum |

What we perceive and the ideas and constructs that orient our thinking, filtered through our sense of the world, provide a scaffold for connecting new ideas. Because there will always be other aspects of situations of which we are not aware, any understandings we have will be partial and selective. We only ‘take notice of’ or turn our attention to activities, incidents, processes and structures when they fit within our understanding of a ‘reality’ that is a product of our biography, culture and politics. This is what I mean by perspective. It is about the position from which we allow ourselves to read the world. These can be both conscious and unconscious lenses. In this study I uncover my own perspectives or partial views, as well as the perspectives of others involved in teacher education. By offering the opportunity to
question the ‘naturalised’ view of the practicum and by analysing the responses of readers to my own perspectives of the teaching practice and professional relationships of the preservice teacher and mentor teachers during the practicum, new ideas and theories emerge that help us better understand what is really happening, why it is happening and what we can do about it. But only if we ask the right questions. Kincheloe (2004) has a similar sense of things when he writes

A thicker, more complex, more textured, self-conscious form of empirical knowledge takes into account the situatedness of the researcher and the researched – where they are standing or are placed in the social, cultural, historical, philosophical, economic, political, and psychological web of reality. Such insight respects the complexity of the interpretive dimension of empirical knowledge production. (Kincheloe, 2004: 53)

In this study the ‘sense making’ or ‘theory building’ process has a moral goal. It aims to make a difference to the learning of preservice teachers, who will in turn make a difference in the lives of young people into the future. This purpose, which is imbued with the politics of possibility, has as its foundation transformative learning theories. I believe that change is created through non-linear, interrogative processes that poke holes in comfortable and complacent arrangements. It does not happen by imposition of policy decisions, mere chance or natural progression; it needs the actions of inquiry, interrogation and confrontation. The stories that I created are an attempt to present lived experience, as authentically as I possibly can, from my observations, experiences, discussions and perceptions. I have a sense that the practicum does not deliver what it promises yet we have been deceived into believing it does. For a clear view I need to contest that ‘settlement’ and harness the situated understanding of the respondents who read and annotate the text to express their reactions and perspectives of my view. The stories are about preservice teachers who feel confused, powerless and alienated and who refer to the practicum as ‘just another hoop to jump through’. They are also about mentor teachers and teacher educators who are not clear about the practicum processes and outcomes. In contrast I also present engaging teachers, relevant pedagogy and inclusive curriculum that inspire preservice teacher learning, enlighten and inform preservice teachers, increase their self-knowledge and change some of their firmly held beliefs about teaching. What I am really asking is which story should be the story of the practicum? Can clearer understanding of practicum learning emerge from a new and shared reading of the struggles and complexities of the characters in the stories and an unsettling of the hegemony?

**Checking the second layer of data**

Firstly it is important to find out what ideas and themes in the stories are the most robust, whether there are recurrent ideas or patterns and if the stories present a balanced reading of the practicum. Once I had finished writing the six individual stories, I re-read the entire
narrative as a bigger story and using a content analysis approach, listed the different ‘meaning units’ or ‘constituent parts’ as they appeared to me during my reading (Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul, 1997: 162). I also noted the frequency that each meaning unit was mentioned (see shaded meaning units appendix 9). One hundred meaning units were identified. These were then printed and cut into strips with one meaning unit on each strip and these strips were sorted into meaningful/related groups or ‘meaning concepts’ according to their connections with each other. They fell quite readily into eleven different ‘meaning concepts’ and I named them to reflect their connected meanings. A small number of meaning units fitted within several meaning concepts or across these groups. In these cases they were either copied and placed in all groups or placed with best fit.

The eleven meaning concepts were then sorted according to underpinning ideas or meanings that they had in common. From this process, three key themes emerged that made broad sense of the meaning concepts and lifted the understanding beyond the specifics, yet ensured that the emergent themes were still grounded in the data. I named these themes (unremarkably) ‘The World of Schools’, ‘Learning for Preservice Teachers’ and ‘Overarching Concepts’. Five meaning concepts nested in the first two themes and one in the third.

The next step was to collate the number of mentions each meaning unit received in my reading of the stories to identify the diversity of topics and the most robust ideas. ‘The World of Schools’ as a key theme had 224 mentions in the stories, followed closely by ‘Related to Learning for Preservice Teachers’, with 174 mentions and finally ‘Overarching Concepts’ with 22 mentions. Table 2 displays the results of this first content analysis. Presenting the results as a table helps to manage the data and allows it to be viewed in different ways (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997: 194). Tables and charts can also offer easier access to the methods used to make sense of the data. I present my tables as both an efficient presentation of data and an opportunity to stimulate unexpected or revealing results through different approaches to reasoning and different ways of data presentation. The data are not analysed statistically beyond simple percentages that provide easier access to consistencies and inconsistencies and a sense of analytical integrity. The most important ‘data’ for this study are still the narratives and the thoughts and feelings that the stories provoke.

The column in Table 2 headed ‘Meaning units and ideas’ provides a brush stroke of the connected metaphors and ideas that were sorted into the listed ‘meaning concepts’. The more detailed meaning unit descriptions can be found in appendix 9 (shaded section). Table 3, on the other hand, displays the more robust individual meaning units across all meaning concepts within the themes. Those with less than seven responses can also be found in
As can be see from Table 2 the meaning concepts with the greatest number of meaning unit mentions within the theme ‘The World of Schools’, were ‘mentoring issues’ with 66 mentions, ‘school student issues’ with 59 mentions and ‘teaching/school culture’ with 56 mentions. ‘Classroom issues’ (24 mentions) and ‘school metaphors’ (19 mentions) complete this theme. The meaning concepts that connected to build the second emergent theme ‘Related to Learning for Preservice Teachers’ were ‘knowledge, skills and disposition of
preservice teachers’ (47 mentions), ‘deficit issues’ (39 mentions), ‘context’ (38 mentions), ‘understanding, learning and change’ (29 mentions) and ‘preparation at uni’ (21 mentions).

The third and final theme ‘Over-Arching Concepts’ only had one meaning concept, ‘big picture issues and theories’ and within this meaning concept there are 22 meaning unit mentions. These are spread evenly with only ‘outdated methods’ attracting more than a few mentions (see appendix 9).

Table 3 takes the analysis a little deeper and displays the individual ideas or ‘meaning units’ that have the most mentions. ‘Context’ (30 mentions), ‘the need to know and understand the students and their lifeworlds’ (21 mentions), ‘observation as learning’ (18 mentions), ‘relevance of uni’ (15 mentions), ‘presence of other preservice teachers in the school’ (12 mentions) and the differences between student reaction to preservice teachers (11 mentions) are the most robust.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Meaning units</th>
<th>Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The world of schools</td>
<td>The need to know and understand the students and their lifeworlds</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The differences between student reaction to preservice teachers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality of mentoring</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The complexity and messiness of schools</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variation in teacher ideology</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The level of absorption of teachers in their work</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student variations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The bell metaphor</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preservice teachers as a burden</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The outdated nature of the texts</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to Learning for</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservice Teachers’</td>
<td>Observation as learning</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relevance of uni</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of other preservice teachers in the school</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inordinate amount of time spent on preparation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-Arching Concepts</td>
<td>Outdated methods</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How does this analysis inform our understandings?**

The preponderance of meaning units relating to ‘The World of Schools’ (53 per cent of the total) and to ‘Learning for Preservice Teachers’ (41 per cent of the total) clearly reflects the genesis of the stories that were created from observations in classrooms and reflections from teacher education. The much lower number of mentions of ‘Overarching Concepts’ (6 per cent of the total) suggests that the author’s reading of the stories identified more contextual
and practical topics than abstract theories and ideas. It may also reflect that the researcher/author was not merely pouring her own theories into the stories but allowing the ideas to emerge from the field notes. The meaning concept ‘mentoring issues’ had the highest number of mentions across the stories (16 per cent of the total), which is also consistent with the origin of the stories. ‘Issues of teaching/school culture’ (14 per cent of the total), ‘school student issues’ (13 per cent of the total) and the meaning units related to the ‘knowledge, skills and dispositions of the preservice teacher’ (11 per cent of the total), follow in terms of significant attention. This also reflects the genesis of the stories and suggests that they are both an honest representation of the practicum as it was observed by the researcher/teacher educator and a potential resource for preservice teachers and their mentors to read and confront to develop a better understanding of practicum learning.

This initial analysis left me confident that the stories covered the wide range and complexity of issues related to schools, mentors, teacher education and preservice teachers, with an underlying acknowledgement of the role of the overarching theories and concepts. No one aspect dominated and there was an even spread of ‘mentions’ across a diverse range of ideas and concepts. There would be no value in presenting stories of the practicum that were biased, focussed on only a narrow range of issues or massaged to highlight particular themes. This analysis demonstrates that this is not the case.

**Collecting and processing the results from the readers**

The intent was to collect and analyse the perspectives and comments of the readers to check the validity and verisimilitude of the stories. Where our perspectives differed I had planned to re-write (co-author) the stories to better reflect the views of the readers. Although most of the readers who responded were extremely generous with their responses, (there were literally thousands of written messages, comments, additions and annotations that varied from sweeps of the pen, arrows, erasures, circles, ticks, crosses, highlighting, sticky notes and question marks), their responses were not quite what I had expected. As I collated their responses against the hundred meaning units that had already emerged from my reading, I realised that these readers had ‘noticed’ a large number of issues and ideas of which I had not been aware, despite the fact that I wrote the stories. This added another 137 meaning units to the list (see appendix 9 –unshaded section) taking the initial 100 meaning units to 237. It also became obvious that despite the diversity of ideas the majority of the comments and annotations were supportive of the stories as representing a sense of the practicum, affirming the narrative as accurate, true and realistic with comments that indicated that the readers were really engaging with the story and empathising with the characters. There was very little call from the readers for changes in the stories. It appeared we were reading the
practicum experiences of preservice teachers in similar ways. I had not anticipated this outcome and it became clear that re-writing the stories would not be necessary.

Ely and her associates (1997) remind us that we should never lose sight of the purpose of our research, so I return to the research questions to help manage the data collected from the responses of the readers.

What are the learning experiences that the practicum should deliver?

How can this best be achieved?

Can a theory of practicum learning be developed to facilitate this process?

Are the current theories robust enough to support preservice teachers in the practicum?

How does this work during the practicum?

Who guides it?

There are also questions related to the wider application of the research.

Do the stories engage the readers and illuminate the practicum?

Can we re-vision practicum learning through better understanding?

What new meanings of the practicum can we build from the junction of the readers’ perspectives and the author’s stories?

Does this new information help construct explicit statements of practicum learning?

Other questions also needed to be asked of the data to establish its verity.

Who responded to the stories?

How did they respond?

What are the similarities and differences between the perspectives of the different ‘groups’ of respondents?

Are my interpretations considered fair, rigorous, consistent, meaningful, ethical, trustworthy, valid and recognisable as truly conceivable experiences?

Having previously almost obliterated the voice of the co-authors in the pilot study of this research project with too much interference of the researcher in the stories, it was important that this new design and third layer of analysis allowed significant space for the voice and perspectives of the reader/respondents. (From this point onwards I will refer to the readers who not only agreed to read my stories but also responded to their reading with annotations and comments as reader/respondents.)
The project was designed to be sensitive to the complex and busy lives of the readers, avoiding as much as possible adding to the stresses of these lives so their voice would be authentic, not rushed or resentful. This issue of educators being ‘time poor’ is difficult to manage. Teachers and teacher educators are notoriously reluctant to divert time from their students, yet to include the necessary complexity and development of the lifeworlds of preservice teachers, mentor teachers and school students necessary for this study, as well as a wide range of classroom and school cultures, the themes and characters in the stories needed to be more dense and complex than the critical incidents (Tripp, 1993), problem based scenarios and case-studies that teachers and preservice teachers have previously been asked to respond to. The stories needed to be engaging and meaningful enough to convince the readers to invest the necessary time to read the more dense and complex narrative. I am aware from my own research and reflection that real change is a product of much effort and experiences beyond what is comfortable or easy, and attempted to make this clear when introducing my project to prospective reader/respondents.

The booklets of stories were distributed at the beginning of the school and academic year (January/February in Australia). I wanted to distribute them when educators were fresh and in a position to prioritise their time. Some initial responses suggested that this was ‘such a busy time’ but on clarification most agreed there is no time that is not busy for teachers or teacher educators. I believe it was better to put the task on the agenda early in the year rather than wait until assignment marking, exams or end of term exhaustion set in. This is all part of the complexity of research within schools or universities.

The majority of reader/respondents commented on all stories but some were selective. One respondent made 271 annotations, another 217, and a third 210. One managed only 10, but read only one story while another read all the stories, made a few editorial corrections and made comment only by email during her reading; ‘Am more than half way through the stories. Am enjoying the experience…’ (experienced teacher, female, over 50 years, booklet 20). This variety in the procedure followed by the reader/respondents is clearly a result of my reluctance to be specific about the response process in the advice to readers (see cover letter chapter 6). As already mentioned, this was a deliberate move to ensure that readers responded in their own way, not believing that I expected a particular reaction or style or frequency of response.

The number of responses from the readers is often connected to the total number of stories they commented on. Many readers, however, did not make it clear how many stories they read, I judge this only by the comments in the booklet. Some added that they read all the stories but felt the need to comment on only some of them. The important revelation here is that the readers did respond frequently and were effusive with their enthusiasm and support.
for the stories as authentic and enjoyable. It is the unpacking of these responses that will now
direct the ongoing ‘layered’ analysis and underscore the value of this research project. The
total number of annotations by the reader/respondents is 2,878, although I acknowledge that
other ways of reading the responses as data would have resulted in a different total. For
example I collated a √ (tick) as affirming, a highlighted phrase or sentence as important
information and a line through an idea or a cross as disagreement. These are the conventions
of evaluation within teaching/learning circles. Comments and annotations were carefully
interpreted for both their message and their underlying meaning. This was then either
matched with previously identified meaning units or used to created new meaning units.

Of the 58 booklets that reached the readers in a timely fashion, 40 were returned, although
only 35 of these were annotated or had comments attached (refer to Table 4). This is a
particularly high return and response rate considering the demands of the task (70,000
words). Teacher educators had the greatest annotated return rate (80 per cent) with 54 per
cent of experienced teachers and 52 per cent of preservice/neophyte teachers returning
annotated booklets. In the group designated ‘other’, all booklets were returned with
comments, though this group only included three readers. The annotated booklets of 13
experienced teachers, 11 neophyte/preservice teachers, eight teacher educators and three
‘others’ were returned and analysed (see Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4 Reader/Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booklets distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booklets returned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including blank returns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booklets returned annotated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total reader/respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several readers sent emails of apology for lateness but did not return booklets during the
research process, so these have been collated in the ‘not returned’ group. Interestingly, seven
reader/respondents claimed by email to have returned their booklets and at least four of these appear to have gone missing in the mail (one from India, one from North Western Australia, one from remote NT and one from Darwin). The others have not responded to my emails explaining that their booklets have not arrived so perhaps they did not send them after all! These have also been collated in the ‘not returned’ group. Eight booklets did not appear to reach the intended readers, mainly due to change of address or school, although some seemed to genuinely just disappear in the process of being distributed either through the university system or through the postal system. One turned up months later but too late to be valuable to the study. These I have considered ‘not distributed’. Some intended recipients did not respond to subsequent emails and did not return booklets. Most of these have been collated as ‘not returned’; although in two cases I suspect the prospective readers did not receive their booklets and do not currently receive their emails (one is volunteering in Africa, the other is somewhere in America). These were collated as ‘not delivered’.

At times it was difficult to categorise reader/respondents and their self-selection into categories was sometimes not enlightening. Some belonged to more than one group (teacher educators and experienced teacher or experienced teacher, teacher educator but now ‘other’…). Generally I placed them in the category of best fit related to my sense of the position they took most frequently while annotating the booklet.

As can be seen in Table 4, neophyte and preservice teachers consisted of 31.5 per cent of total reader/respondents and made 38 per cent of the collated responses, experienced teachers were 37 per cent of total reader/respondents and made 37 per cent of total responses and teacher educators were 23 per cent and made 23 per cent of total responses. The group designated as ‘others’ were 8.5 per cent of the total but made very few specific responses other than ‘enjoyed the stories’, ‘appears to be an accurate representation’ and similar comments (2 per cent of total comment). Interpreting these percentages I would suggest that the preservice and neophyte group are slightly more inclined to comment than the other groups. The high number of booklets returned across all teaching and age groups and from both sexes, supports the research method and provides a significant amount of data to analyse.

It is also important to ascertain whether the sex or age of reader/respondents have an effect on the incidence, topic or content of the annotations made in the story booklets. Table 4 indicates that only 17 per cent of the respondents were under thirty years old, yet they made 21.75 per cent of the total responses, 43 per cent were between the age of 30 and 49 and they made 50.7 per cent of the total responses, while reader/respondents older than 50, comprised 40 per cent of those who returned annotated booklets, but made up only 27.6 per cent of the responses. These percentages were consistent when responses were collated across all five
questions, the 30-49 year old group being significantly above the others, making around half of the responses except those collated in question 4, where they still made the most responses but only 41.8 per cent of the total.

There was very little difference in the response rate for males and females when this was corrected in terms of the total number of each sex who returned booklets. Twenty-six per cent of the booklets were distributed to males and 74 per cent to females. Twenty-eight point five per cent of the returned and annotated booklets came from males, 71.5 per cent came from females. Both had a return rate of around sixty-eight per cent but all of the returned booklets from males were annotated while five of the booklets from female were blank.

Twenty-nine per cent of the responses collated into meaning units came from males and 71 per cent from females indicating virtually no difference in their proclivity to respond. There was also little difference across the different themes or questions. Comments collated into Questions 1 and 4 had identical response rates for females and males, 72 and 28 per cent respectively, while those collated into questions 2 had a slightly greater response rate for males (32 per cent) and question 3 a slightly reduced rate (24 per cent). The most significant differences between the response rates for the two sexes were related to addressing the bigger picture issues. Individual meaning units of ‘who should be responsible for the induction of preservice teachers into the school’, ‘what was the purpose of the prac’ and ‘what is the purpose of education in general’ each had a higher than average response rate from males.

Overall the response rate was within half a percentage point of the ratio of males to females, so it can be assumed that sex has had little affect on the responses to the stories apart for the few meaning units already mentioned. Several reader/respondents from both sex admitted that a number of the ideas introduced in the stories had caused them to reflect on their own practice, making comments like; ‘You’ve given me something to think about here’ and ‘great idea, I am going to use this’.

**The third layer analysis**

The ‘find’ capacity of the computer software was invaluable for identifying words or phrases on the meaning units’ template (appendix 9) and facilitated the analysis immensely. As the booklets were returned from the reader/respondents I collated the comments, annotations and suggestions, adding to the list of meaning units on the meaning unit template when necessary. Of particular note, 34 of the 35 reader/respondents made a total of 480 affirmative statements collated against meaning unit ‘true, realistic, covered everything’ (meaning unit 105). They use a range of comments like ‘common’, ‘insightful’, ‘I agree’, ‘that’s how I remember it’, ‘agree totally’, ‘a familiar scene’, ‘spot on!’, ‘I’ve heard of many similar
stories’, ‘seen similar’ and ‘I had to learn this too’. Similarly, when I became aware that there were many exclamations with no particular topic and the main purpose of the annotation seemed to be just to empathise with the story character, I added the meaning unit that was named ‘empathy’ (meaning unit 148). Comments like ‘sad’, ‘a pity’, ‘not fair!’, ‘I can relate to that’, ‘this guy is nuts!’, ‘No, no, no, no!’, ‘wish there was another way!’ emerged throughout the booklets. There were 188 instances of such empathy. A third meaning unit (153; ‘really engage with the story’) was added and received a total of 315 responses from booklet seven onwards. Comments like ‘yes’, ‘good’, ‘so true!’, ‘good move’, ‘fat chance’, ‘crucial’, ‘the plot thickens!’, ‘networking!’, ‘I laugh’, ‘Interesting!’ , ‘this is great’, ‘brilliant’ and a huge number of ticks and much underlining and highlighting related to the experiences of the characters within the stories, suggested that the readers were engaging with the text, although the actual meaning of their engagement was not clear enough to collate against any specific meaning unit already identified. I will group these three ‘not specific’ meaning units as ‘affective’ responses when I refer to them in future discussions.

One hundred and thirty-seven new meaning units were progressively added to the list (see appendix 9, non-shaded section), although many of these were only relevant to the reader/respondent for whom they were added. For example I added ‘hated this story’ for one respondent and it was interesting to note that responses in a later booklet suggested that it was the most important story in the booklet! On a similar note the final story produced an array of opinion. One reader found it ‘too philosophical’, another found it ‘not as deep and connected as the others’ while a third really engaged with V’s story because it gave ‘lots of information about the theory of teaching’ (this person was a teacher educator). A fourth wrote ‘V is me all over!’. Similarly, one person disliked the term ‘jock’, while another agreed that it was an important gender issue. This pattern of contrasting views was to continue throughout the analysis of the reader responses and is a recurrent theme in the study. It provides evidence of the multiple perspectives that need to be acknowledged as we make meaning of the practicum.

Some other individual meaning units that had a higher response rate than the rest are worth highlighting. This will create a sense of the data and what is being uncovered, especially in relation to the complexity of the reader responses and their high level of engagement with many issues. In the final analysis, however, the data is interpreted through meaning ‘concepts’ or connected ideas rather than individual meaning units that are too influenced by language and context and uncover very little of the complex inter-relationships, connections and contradictions in the data. Thirty-four per cent of the total annotations were related to the group of ‘affective’ responses listed above. The next most frequent response was related to
the ‘quality of mentoring/remain involved/supportive mentor’ (meaning unit 26) with 96 responses by 18 of the reader/respondents, ‘burden/too busy for preservice teachers’ (meaning unit 20) with 54 responses from 20 reader/respondents, ‘big picture issues’ (meaning unit 91), with 53 responses from 17 reader/respondents, ‘poor preparation for culture/context/induction...’ (meaning unit 68), with 51 responses from 16 reader/respondents, ‘good pedagogy by mentor’ (meaning unit 9) with 50 response from 15 reader/respondents, ‘self doubt/vulnerability’ (meaning unit 6), with 49 responses from 18 reader/respondents and ‘Who the teacher is, important’ (meaning unit 2) that had 48 responses from 18 reader/respondents. Further detail can be found in appendix 9.

It is important to consider the number of reader/respondents who mention a meaning unit as well as the total number of responses. There is considerable consistency in this across the meaning units presented above. Apart from the ‘affective’ responses that included almost every reader/respondent, the seven meaning units just highlighted had between 49 and 96 responses from a very consistent 15 to 20 reader/respondents. This makes these responses reasonably significant, as around half of the reader/respondents commented. If only two or three reader/respondents had commented but the total of responses was the same, then the meaning unit would have less importance, as it would not be uncovering a sense of the reader/respondents’ reactions but only those of a minority group. On the other hand, 18 respondents referred to meaning unit 7, ‘importance of other preservice teachers in the school’. Although the total number of responses was only 28 it is worth noting that this idea was highlighted by over half of the reader/respondents. It is also important to note that in the author/researcher’s reading of the stories this idea was mentioned 18 times. The importance that I placed on different issues in the writing of the narratives can be compared for the first 100 meaning units. This information is also available in appendix 9 (highlighted section), where the number of mentions by the author in the story is aligned with the number of the reader/respondents mentions of the same meaning unit.

To illustrate further important support for my method of organising the data to make them manageable, other examples of reader/respondents saying the same things or working with the same ideas but expressing themselves in different ways are presented below. It becomes clear that both graphic representation in tables and organising the data through content analysis is critical to finding the connections and meanings of this complex information. For example there were meaning units named as ‘good pedagogy by mentors’ (meaning unit 9), ‘quality of mentoring/supportive mentor’ (meaning unit 26), ‘feedback from mentor’ (meaning unit 50), ‘role models’ (meaning unit 65), ‘innovative teaching by mentors’ (meaning unit 77), ‘do as I say- not role model’ (meaning unit 83), ‘inspiring teaching’ (meaning unit 88), ‘quality mentoring and good pedagogy ’ (meaning unit 116), ‘models
good pedagogy/strategies’ (meaning unit 137), ‘relationship between preservice teacher and mentor important’ (meaning unit 143), ‘team teaching with mentor ideal’ (meaning unit 162), ‘written feedback is important’ (meaning unit 172), ‘poor/no mentoring; unprofessional’ (meaning unit 201) and ‘mixed messages from mentor’ (meaning unit 219).

When this data are sorted into meaning ‘concepts’ each of these meaning units are connected in the one group called ‘quality of mentoring’ as in many respects the ideas are the same or closely connected, they are merely expressed in different ways.

Similar patterns emerged elsewhere. The meaning units sorted later into the meaning concept named ‘How? Learning theories, constructivism, student learning central’, is another clear example. The meaning units ‘variations between students’ (meaning unit 14), ‘empty vessel/light fire metaphor’ (meaning unit 21), ‘confusion/resistance by students’ (meaning unit 25), ‘student life worlds, need to develop an understanding’ (meaning unit 28), ‘one to one’ (meaning unit 30), ‘like young people’ (meaning unit 35), ‘patterns’ (meaning unit 40), ‘need to understand young people’ (meaning unit 41), ‘get to know your students names/lifeworlds’ (meaning unit 43), ‘students involved in different ways’ (meaning unit 44), ‘it’s about student learning, not about you/the hump (meaning unit 48), ‘blame else where/not over the hump (meaning unit 57), ‘infinite appetite for distractions (meaning unit 61), ‘construct young people’ (meaning unit 67), ‘learning theory, young people learn in different ways’ (meaning unit 76), ‘getting over the hump (meaning unit 85), ‘being fair, treating differently’ (meaning unit 87), ‘make student learning central’ (meaning unit 89), ‘takes time to understand students’ (meaning unit 107), ‘teacher priority is students’ (meaning unit 167), ‘[need]more time with young people’ (meaning unit 168), ‘many contemporary ideas take time’ (meaning unit 187), ‘relate/engage with students important’ (meaning unit 217), ‘students can work/learn together (meaning unit 220) and ‘schools not set up for constructivist approach’ (meaning unit 222), are clearly all suggesting that the theories about how we teach are important yet the reader/respondents have expressed this in 25 different ways (see Table 5 for meaning concepts aligned to orienting questions).

Another example of the importance of content analysis is reflected in the result that demonstrates that several of my original meaning units had only one response recorded against them. This was sometimes due to the terminology used (for example the ‘getting over the hump’ metaphor (meaning unit 85)). This particular idea is expressed elsewhere as ‘it’s about student learning, not about you’ (meaning unit 48) where there are 24 responses from 12 reader/respondents and ‘making student learning central’ (meaning unit 89) that had 13 responses from eight reader/respondents. Clearly, although worded differently, these comments are very similar and were grouped together in one meaning concept for the more holistic analysis (Question 1 characteristic (f) column 4 in Table 5). This pattern of meaning
units with only one response but clearly connecting with other meaning units was repeated several times. As already intimated, meaning concepts or emergent themes are a more sound foundation for analysis than meaning units, and the interrogation of the data that follows in chapter 8 and 9 is based on meaning concepts and emergent themes.

**Returning to the research questions**

The purpose of seeking the perspectives of the reader/respondents who were also preservice teachers, mentors, teachers or teacher educators is two fold. Firstly, to check the trustworthiness, verity, vitality and verisimilitude of my stories of the practicum and secondly to build an agreed understanding or ‘theory’ of practicum learning. Only after reflecting on and interrogating the responses of the reader/respondents will the answers to the research questions begin to emerge. This is why I return to the orienting questions of the research problem to sort the meaning units and concepts further (Table 5).

Ely and her Associates (1997:206) recommend that we choose the themes that are most salient or relevant to the story we want to interrogate from the myriad of themes that could emerge from such a complex research project. Smyth recommends that we mine where the terrain is richest (personal communication 2004). If we probe with the right questions then we can illuminate our data in new and interesting ways. Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul (1997) claim that content analysis can lift the message or meaning into another realm beyond the specifics, giving a more holistic view of the data. They add that emergent themes can deepen understanding and cast it in a wider context.

To begin this process I once again printed the (now) 237 meaning units, cut them up and sorted them according to best fit and connection to the orienting research questions, then grouped the meaning units within the questions according to their connections and similarities. This produced a number of meaning concepts within each question. To check the process I repeated the steps, but this time sorted into groups according to the connections between the meaning units, and then aligned these meaning concepts with the orienting questions. A few of the meaning units proved problematic, connected with one group when the process was completed one way, and another group when it was completed the second time. In the end I placed these meaning units in both positions, and some remained in both while others were later re-sorted when new understandings were uncovered. The framework is presented in Table 5, and due to the double positioning of some of the meaning units the total adds up to more than the total 2, 878 responses.
Table 5 Analysis of Reader Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orienting Questions</th>
<th>No. of Meaning units</th>
<th>List of meaning units</th>
<th>Characteristics of meaning concepts as they relate to the questions</th>
<th>Total responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1. Are the theories and understandings of social critical constructivist and transformative learning and productive pedagogies that underpin and drive teacher education at university, robust enough to support the preservice teachers as they move into the practicum?</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>[a] 1, 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 38, 60, 95, 96, 106, 141, 180, 196, 231</td>
<td>Theories that support learning, [a] Who is the preservice teacher? Sense of ‘being’ a teacher, who the teacher is, self doubt, vulnerability</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[c] 5, 37, 51, 55, 70, 170, 175, 218</td>
<td>[c] What teach? Content/complexity</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[d] 158, 198, 179, 197</td>
<td>[d] Where? School culture,</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[e] 23, 45, 152, 171</td>
<td>[e] Power issues (critical)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Total 436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2 How can preservice teachers be given the ‘space’ and opportunities to apply their understandings during the practicum?</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>[a] 19, 42, 82, 93, 97, 98, 16, 27, 29, 31, 46, 69, 52, 54, 56, 58, 62, 84, 74, 75, 78, 79, 84, 94, 100, 119, 121, 128, 145, 160, 188, 189, 190, 194, 202, 209, 210, 211, 224, 225, 226, 230, 235, 237</td>
<td>Spaces, opportunities in the practicum. What are they learning? [a] Practicing (pedagogy)</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[b] 8, 223, 204</td>
<td>[b] Observing</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[c] 10, 12, 18, 47, 49, 63, 81, 84, 86, 122, 164, 186, 192, 193, 199, 200, 215,</td>
<td>[c] Understanding teachers work</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Total 409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3 What support and guidance from the school and mentors best leads towards the sense of ‘becoming’ a teacher?</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>[a] 17, 25, 32, 34, 39, 53, 66, 68, 71, 72, 93, 94, 115, 118, 127, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 139, 146, 147, 149, 154, 165, 166, 173, 174, 181, 182, 183, 185, 216, 221, 227, 233, 234, 236,</td>
<td>Support, guidance, mentors, school culture, useful, not useful [a] School culture of receptivity is imp</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[b] 9, 26, 50, 65, 77, 83, 88, 116, 137, 143, 162, 172, 201, 219,</td>
<td>[b] Quality of mentoring</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Total 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Total 644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Total 644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4 Can stories of a ‘sense of’ the practicum build a shared view of the process of practicum learning that resonates with a wide range of those who participate in preservice teacher education? Can the sharing of stories of the practicum ‘re-vision’ the practicum in the eyes of preservice teachers, mentors, teachers and teacher educators and thus benefit preservice teacher learning about professional practice?</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>[a] 102, 103, 104, 105, 108, 109, 111, 112, 113, 117, 123, 124, 125, 126, 134, 135, 136, 138, 142, 144, 148, 150, 153, 155, 157, 159, 161, 163, 176, 177, 184, 169, 207, 212, 213, 229</td>
<td>Narrative, inform, revision [a] Narrative as inquiry and information</td>
<td>1260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[b] 22, 24, 33, 90, 101, 178, 206, 208, 228,</td>
<td>[b] Silenced issues highlighted</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Total 1325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=45</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Making meaning

Making sense of the data is an effortful process and relies on asking questions of the data so that new ideas, or new views on old ideas, emerge. Tacit understandings and the purpose of the study are important aspects in managing the data yet the overwhelming consideration is to let the data speak and allow ideas to be illuminated beyond what we already know and accept as reality. The value of the findings of this study to the research community and to the education of preservice teachers should continually be reflected on, as the data are theorised in rigorous, ethical and trustworthy ways. Ely and her associates warn that we should not expect meaning to emerge from our data ‘like Venus on the half shell’ (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997: 205-6) but suggests that understanding ‘reside[s] in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them’. As mentioned in Chapter 2, I see my data as articulating their meaning through actions that describe, inform, confront and reconstruct the unseen forces and practices that have until now positioned the practicum as ‘natural’ and immutable (Smyth, 1989: 486; Smyth 1992). By uncovering and challenging ‘taken for granted’ beliefs and actions that currently position the practicum, new theories of practicum learning might emerge.

Smyth (1987) warns in his earlier ‘critical’ work where he draws on a number of his contemporaries (Day, 1985; Apple 1975; Giroux 1981) that

None of this is to suggest that reflecting on the common place nature of what is normally taken for granted is not an unnerving experience, particularly when entrenched and even cherished beliefs about [teaching] are being subjected to scrutiny and challenged. (Smyth 1987:20)

He goes on to suggest that it is the very act of critique as critical questioning that enables us ‘to acquire a capacity for self-understanding, and of the political struggles involved in bringing about changes’ (Smyth 1987:21). More recently other researchers support this need for the researcher to first make sense of their own ‘unconscious lenses’ (Apple 1975:127) and come to terms with their own unique positioning within the research landscape (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Cochran-Smith 2002b, 2004; Gore 1995, 2001; Martinez & Mackay, 2002). When a critical approach is taken, the traditional ‘what’ questions about learning that have served previous generations of educators are found to be wanting in terms of understanding ‘why’ and ‘how’ things really happen. Where the practicum is recognised as part of a political, social, cultural and gendered struggle that positions learning and learners in unclear ways, the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions become more important than the ‘what’. Framing and connecting the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions provides the link between the confusing, contradictory and complex descriptions of the problem and the reflective and reconstructive possibilities of counter hegemonic practices. As Smyth suggests ‘then they will have a basis upon which to engage in dialogue with one another so as to see how their consciousness was formed and how it might be changed’ (Smyth, 1992: 296).
Returning to the ‘critical cycle’ and its use in this analysis, it is important to follow the development of critical theory in education, and the writings of Smyth from 1987 offer a window into how ‘theory’ or ‘analysis and critique’ can turn a fresh lens on old problems. Smyth’s work throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s honed the reflective questions as they related to schools, teachers, classrooms, teaching and the learning of young people in schools. With origins in the work of Foucault (1980, 1984, 1992) who claimed that normalising is more insidious than authoritarianism in supporting the dominance of those who lack an emancipatory vision, and Freire (1970) who suggested that action that was not based on a carefully designed reflective process was mere activism and would not benefit the powerless in society, Smyth develops and applies a critical cycle based on four questions for action.

It is not my intention here to reproduce the work of Smyth who develops and strongly positions his arguments for the critical cycle in a number of arenas (Smyth, 1987, 1989, 1992) and later applies them as a ‘socially, culturally, and politically reflective approach’ (Smyth, McInerney, Hattam & Lawson, 1999a; Smyth, McInerney, Hattam & Lawson, 1999b). In chapter 8 and 9 I use this socially, culturally and politically reflective approach to focus a clarifying lens on the practicum by constructing a better understanding of the way things are, how they came to be that way, what this means, and how they can be re-visioned when we step back and look afresh. Issues of power and control in teaching and teacher education, coupled with beliefs in transformation and different possible futures, lead me to challenge the stagnation and hegemony of current practicum processes and the beliefs that guide them. By thinking about the data and acting upon it on four levels; 1) Describe – what do I do? 2) Inform – what does this mean? 3) Confront – how did I come to be like this? and 4) Reconstruct – how might I do things differently (Smyth, 1992:295), new understandings emerge.

**Summary**

The data collected in this research project are presented and analysed in ‘layers’. The first ‘layer’ is the field notes from over 200 hours of practicum observations. Here the very act of ‘noticing’ and ‘not-noticing’ renders the data as partial from ‘unconscious lenses’ that sort and interpret them. The second ‘layer’ of data are presented as six stories of the practicum. Again the data are organised and massaged by the researcher/author from her view of the world. A third ‘layer’ of data are the annotations and perspectives of 35 reader/respondents who make 2,878 responses from their view of the world, while reading the stories. The data are presented here in both text and tables and this chapter explains the method and methodology of preparation of the data for the next stage of analysis. The final step is the
engagement in four forms of action characterised by the questions of the reflective cycle, where the perspectives of the reader/respondents and their connections with the ideas in the stories, will be uncovered and rubbed against some of the current literature in the area to build theories of practicum learning.
Chapter 8 Reflecting On The Hoops

Introduction

The focus now returns to the data that has been analysed in several layers and is now aligned with the orienting questions (Table 5). Complex ideas about the practicum and what it looks like have been collected from observations in classrooms and responses from 35 reader/respondents to the author/researcher’s six stories about these observations. Partial understandings by the author/researcher are connected with the understanding of the reader/respondents to develop more general abstractions. These themes will now be acted upon to make sense of the non-sense of many of the practicum beliefs, actions and inactions.

In this chapter the relationships, connections, inconsistencies and silences in current practice are described to begin to uncover the understandings, beliefs, attitudes or habits that make things the way they are in the practicum. In the next chapter these will be re-viewed, or viewed with fresh eyes, so these previously ‘habitual’ actions or ‘uncontested’ beliefs around practicum practices can be re-fashioned or re-experienced in different ways. This will uncover why we do what we do. Smyth’s (1989) third ‘moment’, an act of confrontation – ‘How did it come to be this way?’ then leads us to confront whether what we do is legitimate, reasonable, informed, innocent or just, who benefits or who is disadvantaged by these actions and what are the assumptions on which we base our decisions about practice. Smyth draws on Freire’s (1972) term ‘problematising’ or situating the problem within its social, cultural, gendered and political context. It is only with this understanding that the final ‘moment’ in this critical cycle, a moment of reconstruction and change, can begin. Smyth (1987a) suggests that such act of critical reflection deny the artificially constructed separation of thought from action and theory from practice, an idea important to this research project.

Applying the critical questions

The data that is theorised here is also displayed in Table 5 in the previous chapter.

Orienting Question 1

Are the theories and understandings of socially critical constructivist and transformative learning and productive pedagogies that underpin and drive teacher education at university, robust enough to support the preservice teachers as they move into the practicum?
Six meaning concepts and 60 meaning units relate to this question about the vigour of the theories that support preservice teachers in the schools. There are 436 responses (15 per cent of total responses) from readers directly related to these theories of learning.

(a) Who is the preservice teacher?

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

This meaning concept is the result of the connection of 15 meaning units and 191 different responses (44 per cent of total within this question). Ideas about identity, sense of ‘being’ a teacher and questions about who the teacher is, are clearly identified. Each of the stories has a detailed introduction where the fictitious preservice teacher, their background and disposition are introduced to the reader. A sense of uncertainty about their practicum and preparation at university as well as the immense demands of other aspects of their lives is presented. It is here that the ‘jumping through hoops’ metaphor is introduced. One reader/respondent extends this theme, writing ‘Grab the hoop and walk through it. Become so agile and adept to whatever way it spins so that you can always get through it’ (experienced teacher, male, over 50 years, booklet 7), reflecting his attitude towards facing the challenges of being a teacher. There are many moments of self-doubt, vulnerability and resignation as well as self-realisation and personal epiphany reported in the stories. Reader/respondents frequently comment that they literally laughed and cried with the preservice teachers while reading the stories, recognising the emotions, irony and complexity of the personal experiences. Indeed empathy and concern about the levels of anxiety and vulnerability (meaning unit 5) are the most frequent reactions from reader/respondents sorted into this meaning concept.

Generally readers purport to appreciate and engage with the brief biography of the preservice teachers offered at the beginning of each story, although three think this makes the stories too long. One reader/respondent comments, ‘it isn’t all doom and gloom, some of us were really looking forward to the practicum, teaching is something we really wanted to do’ (neophyte, male, under 30 years, booklet 30) and another ‘this is very familiar and maybe we need to better understand where these [preservice teachers] are coming from’ (teacher educator, female, over 50 years, booklet 11).

The outcomes of the practica for the six preservice teachers in the narratives are very different. Three of the six do not complete their first practicum and although some readers voice disappointment when R chooses not to continue, most are relieved when B decides to reduce his load. V on the other hand is young and really not committed to his course but he does learn a great deal from the experience and this is reflected as he participates in his
second practicum. Even when the preservice teachers complete the practica there can be an undercurrent of resentment and resistance after the practicum and this is recognised by several of the reader/respondents. Indeed it is obvious from the annotations that reader/respondents feel a sense of connection with many of the stories and frequently mention that they see themselves or a colleague reflected in the typically complex array of ‘teacher’ characters.

The stories highlight the variation in the backgrounds, dispositions, education and experience of the preservice teacher candidates as well as their reasons for choosing (or as it turned out, failing to choose) to be a teacher. They also expose a wide range of teacher personalities, abilities and dispositions in schools. The question of whether teaching is a profession, a career, a vocation or a calling has a different answer for different teachers (often at different times in their lives) but what the stories and responses do point out clearly is that teaching is not for everyone, no matter how much they might want to teach or how much knowledge about their subject matter they might have. Not one of the reader/respondents in the study challenged this view related to the huge variation in teacher attributes and style or the choice by some of the candidates to withdraw from the practicum.

T’s story provides an example of the variation in teacher disposition, attitude and pedagogy. Firstly there is his principal mentor Steve, who seems to do very little teaching but conducts a complex range of very valuable extra-curricular sports programs and the infamous breakfast project. In contrast Sue develops a brilliant example of cross-curricular studies with an arid region garden research activity that engages her year 8 class in ways that involves them in inquiry based learning, where they make choices and take responsibility for their learning across a number of learning areas. Yet Sue is the first out the gate after school and the last to arrive in the morning due to her two small children in childcare. Finally T was also allocated to observe Dave, who is faculty senior and an experienced and inspiring teacher. Dave’s gymnastic lessons are an example of high expectation and student-centred pedagogy, where all of his students seemed to be enthusiastic, engaged and conscious of their own role in collaborative learning. Several reader/respondents asked why Dave had not offered to mentor T, but no one suggested that this scenario was not authentic. Without Steve’s willingness to accept the placement, whatever his reasoning, T would not have been able to be allocated to the school in the first place, as practicum placement allocations are becoming difficult to find.

**Critical Question 2: Inform—what does this mean?**

Reader/respondents relate to issues of vulnerability and uncertainty as complex and important issues that need to be made transparent during the practicum. *Who the teacher is*
appears to be seen as an influential theme throughout the stories and how the individual teachers (both preservice teachers and mentors) see themselves, clearly informs their actions and attitudes. What also comes across strongly is the need to acknowledge and value the variety of backgrounds, beliefs and dispositions that define both prospective teachers and teachers in schools. Equally, the frustration of jumping through spinning hoops when the pathways to ‘becoming’ a teacher are not clearly defined reflects a gap between expectation and reality in the practicum.

Beliefs about the personal qualities of teachers are also a salient issue. The terms ‘resilient’, ‘hardworking’, ‘distracted by their workload’, ‘moral’, ‘intelligent’, ‘connected’, ‘in tune with their students’, ‘caring’ and ‘socially critical’ are frequently mentioned in the stories and supported by the reader/respondents during this project. Yet it appears that it is this very array of qualities that is also responsible for the feelings of inadequacy and alienation reported by preservice teachers as they navigate the practicum, especially for the first time. They do not feel able to replicate the skills and abilities of their mentors. Although it is apparent from the responses that some teachers believe this is part of the learning experience and preservice teachers will benefit from facing these challenges and learning more about themselves, drawing strength from adversity, it looks as if this might be expecting too much of preservice teachers. Other reader/respondents do recognise that their mentees need more support, guidance and time to engage with the sense of ‘becoming’ a teacher and comment that they often have great difficulty just ‘finding the time’. Examining these responses makes it clear that opening up the conversation about who the teacher is means that both the preservice teacher and their mentor can develop a new confidence about their identity and the role they can play. They can begin to dispel the fears and unreasonable expectations that undermine their self-efficacy, as they begin to understand how they have been positioned by processes and beliefs that are disempowering.

(b) Why teach?

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

This meaning concept includes ideas around the purpose of teaching and aspirations to ‘make a difference’ in the lives of young people. Although there are only three meaning units sorted here, there are still 81 responses. These are the ‘big picture’ issues that address the motivations that led the characters in the stories to choose teaching as a career. It is clearly established in the stories that there is huge diversity in the reasons for studying education. Some prospective teachers want to make a difference while others just want to go to university or buy time before they make a decision about their future. One preservice
teacher needed to convert a qualification gained in another country and another just wanted
to get out of a rut.

After reading the incident in T’s story where his stolen wallet is returned to him virtually
untouched, a young neophyte teacher (male, booklet 30) comments, ‘this is why we become
teachers!’ Several others focussed on what they call ‘worthwhile moments’, incidents in the
stories that establish close interpersonal relationships with students or one-on-one
connections, where teachers learn to respect the potential of their students. In Q’s story Jim
comments

Life’s not fair… That’s why we are here. We are the ones who will make a difference in the lives
of these kids. We can give them some chance to really make the most of their talents. Sam has one
of the quickest scientific and problem-solving minds I’ve seen for a while. We just need to make it
as easy as possible for him to be here so he doesn’t drop out to get a job. Some of the staff get
upset when he’s late and stuff like that, I just beg them to cool it, give him a break, and treat him
differently to give him the same chances. Sounds like a contradiction but it isn’t. That’s what
being fair is all about. (Story booklet, p. 119)

Respondent booklets 7, 11, 15, 16, 17, 23 and 26 all comment directly about this paragraph;
‘very heartening to read…’, ‘great to have a mentor…’, ‘great advice …’, ‘agree totally!’,
‘this is so true…we can make a difference’, ‘absolutely’ and ‘only if we are good enough to
realise this is our role!’ adding weight to the idea that teachers have an important role to
increase life’s chances for their students.

Many reader/respondents comment on ‘the challenges of having a life outside of teaching’
and provide a multitude of warnings about not devoting every waking hour to teaching. Most
are intensely aware of the demands on those who do wish to really connect with young
people and dedicate themselves to making a difference. One reader/respondents comments,
‘boys need more male teachers’. Although this is an issue worth pursuing in educational
circles, in this particular project it serves to remind us of the diversity of opinion and the
wide range of matters that may influence why we teach.

Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?

The most robust connections revealed here seem to be the belief that teachers have in the
potential of young people. This is what inspires them to continue amidst the struggles,
disappointments, complexity, chaos, surprises, demands and untidiness that are part of the
‘jungle’ of teaching. The adage ‘to make a difference in the lives of young people’ appears
to be a mantra that encourages teachers and gives them hope.

The focus on the concern that preservice teachers must weigh carefully the immense
invasion into personal life that teaching entails is an interesting attitude. There seems to be
some de-stabilising of teacher beliefs or doubts that they are really making a difference with
their high workload and immense interpersonal demands. This uncertainty about achieving
their lofty goals is revisited on many occasions by the reader/respondents suggesting some previously silenced issues need to be addressed in terms of keeping these goals in perspective.

(c) What do we teach?

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

Here there are nine meaning units and 60 responses. The complexities added to teaching by the knowledge and information technology ‘explosion’, and the accompanying arguments about transmissive or transformative teaching methods, are described. Over half of the preservice teacher reader/respondents comment about the difficulties of translating the knowledge they have learned at university into meaningful learning for students with a wide range of learning needs and within an ever-changing classroom dynamic. Several of the experienced teacher reader/respondents have a similar concern in terms of the mismatch between their own theories of teaching and their ability to meet the needs of their students and the demands of the curriculum. Furthermore, the difficulties of managing, organising and pre-planning for someone else’s class without sufficient knowledge about the students, adds to the ‘messiness’ for preservice teachers. As one reader/respondent suggests ‘nothing can prepare you for the devastation you feel when you realise you just don’t know enough about the topic you have been assigned to teach’ (neophyte, female, 30-49 years, booklet 2), while others acknowledge that teaching ‘how to learn’ is more important. Most agree it is not easy being a teacher and that it is no surprise that the demands are overwhelming for preservice teachers. One reader/respondent adds that the demands are also ‘frequently overwhelming for experienced teachers but they have learned not to panic, and tomorrow is always another day!’ Questions around what can be done at university to prepare for the quite different demands of specific key learning areas are also included here.

The notions that emerge with the most force are related to the complexity and untidiness of the whole disarming experience of the practicum in relation to what is taught and what is learned and the appreciation that a situation that has continued unchallenged for years is finally being addressed.

Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?

Postmodern and critical ways of thinking appear to cause trouble for a system of knowledge transmission set up with power structures that rely on a dominance/compliance dichotomy and didactic methods. Beliefs that there is a lack of clarity around what is taught in schools and a lack of consistency between the theory and the practice of teacher education are expressed. There seems to be an overpowering sense of inadequacy and lack of control over
what to teach and this works against worthwhile experiences in our secondary school practica. It appears essential that the preservice teacher begins to making sense of the gap between teacher knowledge and student learning needs, but clearly this learning should be planned for and scaffolded, it cannot be left to chance. It looks as if both teacher educators and mentor teachers need to better understand the learning needs of preservice teachers and the school and classroom culture, if they are to play a role in revealing ways of connecting knowledge, teaching and learning. Establishing how this important dynamic and partnership will occur is crucial.

(d) Where?

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

This meaning concept relating to school culture has only four meaning units with one response each, all introduced by reader/respondents. Comments that relate to the specific context of the school are sorted into Question 2 (school context) and generate much more interest. There are very few mentions of the differences between remote, country and urban schools, or state and private institutions, despite the former driving strong themes in two of the stories. D’s story is set in a remote aboriginal community and V’s university and practica schools are in non-urban centres. Most of the reader/respondents admit to having very little concept of remote or regional settings and merely comment (often apologetically) that reading the story was a learning experience for them. Those who do have prior knowledge support these stories about differences between culture and setting as accurate and sensitivity written. There is only one comment about differences in culture between state and private schools.

Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?

Reader/respondents appear to accept that variations between schools are often quite dramatic and context plays a huge part in the practicum experience of the preservice teacher. What is particularly interesting is that there is no surprise shown by any of the reader/respondents despite the huge contrasts between schools. Some even add that there are obvious variations between systems or regions but the difference between adjoining classrooms can be just as great. The strongest impression given is the belief that variation and diversity in context are to be both expected and accommodated by the teacher as part of the terrain of teaching. It would appear that the majority of reader/respondents have built a thorough understanding of a very limited range of school cultures and are unapologetically happy to ensure that they remain within the ‘ecology’ that they know. Different abilities, skills and understandings are necessary depending on the students, curriculum and school culture and teachers avoid
mismatches between their own beliefs and abilities and those of their workplace. The longer they spend in a school the more likely it is that they can ensure classes and curriculum that suit their skills and disposition. This is not possible (and possibly not desirable) when practicum placements are organised, yet it appears that this should be made more transparent as part of the practicum preparation and mentoring process.

(e) Power issues

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

The critical issues of inclusive practices, trust, morality and resistance are uncovered here but there are only four meaning units and 24 responses collated. Space was created in the stories for responses related to issues around freedom and compliance but only one reader responds to this. A sense of ‘hierarchy’ in schools and ‘discriminatory practices’ at university emerge both in the stories and from the comments of the reader/respondents. The stories generally have a positive flavour with underlying issues of power and the reader/respondents appear to be comfortable with this. There is a sense that neither the university course nor the practicum empowers the preservice teacher, despite the universities lofty claims to inclusive and democratic pedagogy. There are traditions of dominant groups and practices in both institutions that control behaviour by exerting power over the preservice teachers’ future through systems of assessment and misleading or mis-information. The frequent references to ‘jumping through hoops’ and ‘failing practicum’ provide evidence for this. The poor induction process and claims by the preservice teachers that they are refused access to keys and other important resources or information, are further examples. Even their feelings of ‘alienation’, ‘awe’, ‘being overwhelmed’ and ‘continually assessed and observed’, are issues of power. No one denies that this is the case.

Power inequities that result in preservice teachers acquiescing and accepting responsibility for classes, units of work and extra-curricular activities are present in every story. Q offered to replace her mentor who took leave due to a seriously ill child, T took responsibility for the ‘sex education’ unit (and the breakfast program), D found the community involvement expectations set her up for cultural conflict and R might have continued her practicum had she not mis-read or made assumptions about internal politics of the maths faculty. In V’s story, where Prue ‘bullied’ him, the experience is balanced by Jed’s support and although a few reader/respondents acknowledge that teachers’ stress levels sometimes cause them to behave in unacceptable ways, most do not even comment. Even the situation where a neophyte teacher is convinced by a senior teacher to work with a maths class, although she had no background in maths, receives little comment apart from being seen as ‘just one of those things that happen due to staffing issues’ and the advice is that she should ‘put it down
to experience’. No one is surprised that this could happen, although one reader/respondent comments that it should not.

Over half of the responses related to the politics of the workplace are around gender issues. B’s sexist attitude towards the lecturers and school librarian receives some comment, but usually in terms of the cultural gender differences. Most readers brush over this. The phrase in the R’s story, ‘It must be difficult to be the youngest teacher on the staff and a female to boot’ (Story booklet p. 58) also creates space for discussions of discriminatory practices but receives only two comments. Several readers do point out that it is essential when teaching in Australian schools that prospective teachers develop a good understanding of Australian culture. The introduction of the tall black mentor (Jai) was designed to balance the issues around B being unable to adjust to the culture of Australian schools. Jai is well respected throughout the school and it was the author’s intent here to instigate conversations around ‘otherness’, but there is very little comment even when Jai very sensitively explains that B needs to recognise that he is ‘different’.

And while we are on the topic, the students might feel more comfortable with your jacket and tie off. Like more relaxed. As I said some of them don’t do difference really well and we would like to help you achieve a seamless transition into your teaching. You can do what you like once they know you but they tend to be a bit suspicious at first. (Story booklet, p. 52)

**Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?**

Although culture, race, gender and power issues are introduced in the stories and are recognised by some of the reader/respondents, the most significant outcome here is the apparent lack of willingness by readers to tangle with such issues. This occurrence is not unusual in relation to cultural issues (Ford, 2005). On the surface most readers are not tolerant of unjust cultural and racialised practices but in this study avoid deeper conversations around the issue. Comments on gender differentiation are generally more acceptable discussion topics but little discourse emerges here either. Although inclusive practices are an important aspect of contemporary teaching ideology, discriminatory practices linger just under the surface and there appears to be little interest in contesting the hegemony. Issues of unequal power relations appear to be normalised as ‘one of those things’ that is to be expected and tolerated, or seem to be rationalised as un-contestable or ‘given’ aspects in teaching lives. It does not appear to be generally understood that these too are human and social constructions, both transformative and mutable.

Misleading information and lack of consistent expectations during the practicum are further examples of misuse of power. Although these appear to generally be an unconscious outcome, this strongly suggests the need for more robust measures of articulating clear principles and processes for practicum learning. Even then there are so many subtle ways
that power issues are played out in the teacher/learner and knowledge/power dialectic. For instance the role of the author/researcher and the act of interpreting or responding to the stories of the practicum can be political acts. This will be discussed further in chapter 10.

(f) How we teach

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

There are a very significant 25 meaning units and 176 responses related to theories of teaching and learning that are sorted into this meaning concept. Most responses draw attention to the need to make student learning central, especially in relation to focussing on young peoples’ learning and not the teachers’ teaching. Meaning units named ‘variations between students’ (meaning unit 14), ‘need to understand students’ life worlds’ (meaning unit 28), ‘need time to understand students’ (meaning unit 107), ‘patterns emerge - classroom’ (meaning unit 40), ‘it’s about student learning, not about you’ (meaning unit 48), young people learn in different ways’ (meaning unit 76), ‘being fair, treating differently’ (meaning unit 87), and ‘construct young people?’ (meaning unit 67) are examples of ideas that individually had high responses rates and when considered together reflect a strong focus on student centred teaching. Much of the attention of reader/respondents is related to knowing their students, their names and their lifeworlds and recognising their differences. Furthermore reader/respondents readily acknowledge the patterns that develop in the classrooms and the role of the teacher in the classroom dynamic. The immense time and effort it takes to construct engaging learning environments and create worthwhile learning experiences is also highlighted.

There is much attention to learning theories that support a constructivist view of student learning written into the stories (as in the quotations below), but there is limited response from reader/respondents.

Crucial to this theme is the belief that students learn in different ways and that quality teachers are able to accommodate this. They had learned that teaching was about interpersonal relationships and learning was about constructing new knowledge, building on what the learner already knew. Teachers helped this learning by introducing or building scaffolds or links and connections between what the students already know/can do and the problem they are trying to solve. That way the learner interacts with ideas and knowledge and makes it their own, storing it in relevant and accessible ways. (D’s story p. 146)

He had made the mistake of constructing these young people as novices, as empty vessels waiting to be filled, forgetting that they too had lives outside of the school. (V’s story p. 160)

Although learning theory research was demonstrating that many of the assumptions previously held about recall and application as indicators of learning were unsustainable, the necessary changes in attitude and how young people are constructed in the classroom seems to be only progressing slowly. If students were to learn to think critically and creatively and learn to interrogate and solve complex problems rather than develop routine skills, teachers would need to be accomplished in communicating with them on many levels. If the gap in the lifeworlds of the student and the teacher remained a chasm and student views were continually silenced then the
perceptions of communication outcomes would continue to be quite different. This would maintain
the current communication gap. (V’s story p. 173)

Basically the lecturers were saying the same things, knowledge was constructed by learners
building on what they already knew and it was the job of the teacher to engage students in this
process by using progressive and productive pedagogies. However they all had their own spin on
how that could be done and it was increasingly difficult to navigate those ideas and position
oneself clearly in the role of the teacher. Q believed the impending practicum would answer some
of her questions and was looking forward to the experience. (Q’s story p. 97)

Neophyte and preservice teacher reader/respondents are particularly supportive of the
productive and inquiry learning styles while teacher educators show appreciation of the
explicit description of the application of progressive theories of learning in the stories, with
comments like, ‘this section has enlightened me on middle schooling as much as V’ (teacher
educator, 30-49 years, female, booklet 10), ‘it delivers the theory through the lens of
practice’ (teacher educator, 30-49 years, female, booklet 6). There is virtually no response
from experienced teacher reader/respondents in relation to contemporary learning theories.

The ‘light the fire, not fill the pot’ metaphor is introduced eight times in the stories, to
describe constructivist processes, but it is commented on by only seven reader/respondents.
One neophyte teacher respondent comments ‘the schools are not set up for constructivist
teaching’ and ‘schools are not ready for this style of teaching’ (30-49, female, booklet 26)
and another that ‘these contemporary ideas take too much time’ (Neophyte, 30-49, male
booklet 8). Otherwise there is very little response to how ideas around constructivist theory
are transformed into practice.

**Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?**

Student centred pedagogy is clearly embraced by those participating in this study. They
recognise the need to ‘know their students’, ‘understand young people’s lifeworlds’ and that
students ‘learn in different ways’. They are comfortable discussing how their own practice
reflects a better understanding of the needs and diversity of students but are quick to point
out the amount of time it takes to maintain this inclusive and democratic stance, inferring
that they really do not have the time. It would appear that our current education system and
school curricular structure works against inclusive pedagogies.

However contemporary learning theories of how students learn and the pedagogies that
support them do not appear to have leapt the theory/practice gap to be accepted as important
driving forces in teaching. They still seem to be considered ‘the theory they learn at
university’ and it is this poor nexus that appears responsible for many of the tensions around
the practicum. There are limited responses in the booklets related to constructivist learning
theories and their productive and transformative pedagogies. There appears to be some
reluctance by teachers to discuss issues around constructivist views of teaching although
they do seem to be aware that the conversations at university are rather different now than
they were when most of the teachers were ‘trained’ (‘Things have changed’). It looks as if the more experienced reader/respondent teachers even react against the language and concepts referring to them as ‘jargon’. Teachers appear to be wary of ‘new’ theories of learning although there is no doubt that they do recognise where examples of fertile questioning and scaffolded learning, engage and inspire young people in the stories. The silence around these learning strategies by experienced teacher reader/respondents is concerning.

Preservice and neophyte teacher reader/respondents on the other hand seem to demonstrate a real commitment to transformative and constructivist theories of learning and progressive and critical pedagogies. Unfortunately, it appears that the practicum process fails to offer the opportunities to either observe or engage with these pedagogies and learning theories, an issue that certainly adds to the claim that there is a gap between the reality of the schools and the theories that preservice teachers are being encouraged by their teacher educators to embrace.

**Orienting Question 2**

**How can preservice teachers be given the ‘space’ and opportunities to apply their understandings during the practicum?**

Four meaning concepts, a total of 74 meaning units and 409 responses are registered here. Of the total 2,878 responses, 14 per cent relate to this research question, which is the lowest of the four, though only one percentage point below question one. The annotation rate is eight per cent below question three and 32 per cent below question 4.

**(a) Practising/pedagogy**

**Critical Question 1: Describe- what does current practice look like?**

This meaning concept evolved from 44 meaning units, which is the greatest number of meaning units sorted into any one meaning concept. Twenty-four were added from my reading of the booklets and 20 from reader/respondents annotations in the returned booklets. The large numbers of responses (269) add up to nearly 66 per cent of the total responses for this question. Wide ranging aspects of learning about teaching practice are uncovered, including ideas about lesson planning and preparation, organization, journaling and reflecting, classroom dynamics, school approval, indigenous knowledges and learning environments. In terms of pedagogy a range of ‘outdated methods’, questioning techniques, outcomes, application of theories of cognition and the need to be explicit, are introduced. There are also a number of annotations sorted here that relate to creating space for preservice
teachers to learn. Hardships, inconsistencies, the need to be successful and the importance of voice during the practicum are also highlighted by reader/respondents.

Half (22) of the meaning units relate to ideas around learning about the ‘world of teaching’. Issues as disparate as the importance of initiative, feedback from students, lack of time, the demands of preparation and the array of complexities and inconsistencies that preservice teacher needs to address, are located here. Where-as the meaning concept of how to teach in the orienting question above is related to theories of teaching and learning, here there are an array of practical issues like student mobile phones, absentees, homework, timetables, noise, pressure, limited computers, personal emails, limited subject knowledge, surprises, disappointments, interferences, successes, racial issues and the variety in both teacher and student lifeworlds, highlighted by reader/respondents. The reality of engaging students who have ‘an infinite appetite for distractions’ as well as the complexity of interpersonal relationships and socio-cultural and political positionings within the school, appears to resonate with a number of the reader/respondents, particularly the preservice/neophyte teachers.

Comments around preservice teacher pedagogy also feature strongly. The potential of middle schooling pedagogies, examples of both successful and unsuccessful teaching by the preservice teacher, the effect of old texts and didactic strategies, the importance of content knowledge, the role of critical reflection, questioning techniques and an array of general comments on teaching methods are prominent in the stories and are identified as important issues by the reader/respondents. Q, for example, learns a great deal about the disadvantages of being too ‘willing’, but not well enough prepared when she took charge of a SOSE class in her first practicum (because her mentor teacher was absent due to a family emergency). She has lots of opportunity to ‘practise’ but little guidance or support and realises, when she reflects on why the class suddenly became so unsettled, that she had resorted to traditional and controlling pedagogy to manage the learning environment. Jim, a senior teacher with whom she had developed a collegial relationship through observing his classes, explains that the ‘honeymoon is over’ and she needs to confront her pedagogy and focus on directing and orchestrating student learning instead of trying to control the class. Q’s second practicum experience reveals a stressed and less receptive culture where she is actually told what to teach and how to teach it. Despite questioning the wisdom of the requests, Q is unable to achieve the space she needs to advance her learning. Q found she needed to adapt to a school culture and attitude to preservice teachers that were quite different in her second school experience.

As a consequence of his newly discovered determination to meet and not avoid challenges, and a fresh confidence in himself as a person, V has a range of experiences to reflect on
when his second practicum is much more successful than his first (which had resulted in an experience that could have ended his career before it had begun). T, on the other hand, seems to learn more about pedagogy from teachers other than his principal mentor. He also learns a great deal about the needs of students outside the classroom and the strengths of teachers beyond the curriculum. D is forced to confront a wide range of contradictions as well as resource and cultural issues, and through this learns more about herself and the importance of collegial relationships that support sound teaching.

There are several other ideas introduced in the stories that can be related to preservice teacher pedagogy or practice within the context of their particular learning environment. Most have only one or two responses from reader/respondents but together make a strong argument for the need for preservice teachers to have more opportunities to engage with, and learn from, the young people in their classes. It is also recognised that much thought, knowledge, skill and reflection are needed to ensure that the practicum experience is productive and positive but also ensure that preservice teachers are not excluded from the administrative realities of teachers’ work. There are several comments by preservice and neophyte teachers around feeling of abandonment and being left to their own devices, amid claims that they would rather feel supported to take risks and make the sort of mistakes that they can learn from. Many reader/respondents suggest that the practicum has great potential for learning beyond ‘enculturation’ into the profession, yet providing those opportunities is time consuming and they felt under-prepared for the task.

It appears from the responses of preservice and neophyte teachers that the issue of the ‘teaching report’, another idea that was sorted into this meaning concept but could equally have been positioned under ‘power issues’, is all-important to some preservice teachers while others see school and staff approval as being central. There was very little comment on the ‘report’ from the more experienced teachers and mentors, though one reflected that he found it ‘difficult and time-consuming’. Individual abilities and dispositions of the preservice teachers were more likely to be highlighted by the experienced teachers who responded to the stories. Willingness by preservice teachers to adapt, accommodate and enable seamless transition for student learning from mentor teacher to preservice teacher was highlighted by many reader/respondents, turning the focus towards the learning of the school students and away from the learning of the preservice teacher. The issue of beliefs around the purpose of education and the role of the teacher tend to muddy the terrain here. Teachers who believe that their teaching results in student learning, rather than that students learn through enabling activities and processes, tend to insist that preservice teacher copy their teaching style. Not one reader/respondent commented on the opportunity to catch up on
marking or administrative matters afforded by a preservice teacher teaching their classes, though this was observed on many occasions.

**Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?**

There appears to be little consensus around the practicum processes that allow space for preservice teachers to apply their understandings about pedagogy and the purpose of classroom teaching. What emerges most strongly are the immense differences in both the potential for learning and the school and classroom experiences made available to preservice teachers during the practicum. It looks as if, for some preservice teachers, this leads not to the question ‘what am I doing?’ but ‘what am I doing here?’ This begins to explain the feelings of resentment and frustration that are frequently directed to teacher educators after the practicum and those at the university responsible for the practicum placements.

It is apparent when trying to make sense of the attitudes and beliefs of mentor teachers in relation to the opportunities they afford their preservice teachers, that the disparity between school cultures, student cohorts, mentor teachers, classroom dynamics, teaching resources and learning environments makes a huge difference. Through analysing the information presented in the stories and the reader/respondent annotations, a distinct lack of consistency or clarity of practicum outcomes and expectations are exposed. How the preservice teacher learns about teaching is interpreted quite differently by different schools, different mentors and even different preservice teachers.

As well as the disparity of practical and environmental issues, it looks as if there are considerable differences between the personal abilities, knowledges and dispositions of both the preservice teachers and mentor teachers. This adds to the inconsistencies of learning opportunities and can have significant influence on the quality of the professional relationships that develop and thus the entire practicum experience. There appears to be considerable uncertainty and confusion about how space can be created to enable preservice teacher learning. It looks like learning during the practicum will depend on the quality of the negotiation between the preservice teacher and their mentor and their respective understanding of the educative process. Unfortunately there appear to be no processes that can pre-determine a productive collegial relationship so in many ways outcomes are merely left to ‘chance’. It looks as if this is not made transparent in relation to the practicum placement process and preservice teachers expect more. Indeed they appear to expect carefully managed learning environments where they are the focus and their learning needs are met. They are not prepared for the shifting sands of the reality of schooling.

It also looks as if the very purpose of school placements is differently understood. The mentor teachers frequently appear to hold the view that they are providing a ‘professional
experience’ to enculture the preservice teacher while the universities describe the practicum as a learning and developmental experience. While our university names the practicum unit ‘Preservice Teacher Learning in the Practicum’ other universities still use the term ‘professional experience’ and ‘student teaching experience’ neither of which clearly reflects ‘learning and practicing pedagogy’ as an important outcome.

This lack of clarity, both in the schools and the universities around how learning in the practicum is best achieved, comes some way in explaining the tensions and confusion around the practicum and why preservice teachers complain that often they feel that the huge commitment to time in schools does not deliver what they expected in terms of having a chance to develop their pedagogy through applying their fledgling theories and skills.

(b) Observing

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

Observation as learning is a belief that underpins the practicum as it is currently conceived and I introduce the concept 18 times into the stories but only just over one third of the reader/respondents comment on this. Some point out that at times preservice teachers are learning what not to do, though a few do see the connections between observation, journaling and reflection as important. Some ask how well the relationship between observation and ‘noticing’ is understood and there is concern voiced by both preservice teachers and mentors about the confidentiality of the observation notes. Neither teachers nor preservice teachers appear to enjoy being observed, they complain of feelings of vulnerability and lack of confidence.

B would have benefited from more observation before he started his teaching and although his observation skills are quite advanced, he resists reflecting on these to assist in his learning. Q’s story also advances the observation theme to demonstrate the advantages of watching (and noticing) a range of teaching practices, and as a committed learner Q makes the most of her chances, especially in Jim’s class. T benefits from observing both Dave’s inclusive and democratic classroom and Sue’s cross-curricular, inquiry based, student centred garden Science/English/Technology and Design project. T is able to observe engaging pedagogy that enables student learning. V also begins to notice below the surface and recognises the subtle changes in the middle schooling classrooms and the differences between both the engagement and learning outcomes of students in the traditional maths classroom as compared with the student driven constructive learning community in the middle school. However on reading V’s story one reader/respondent points out that the amount of noticing may not be realistic and the ‘wishful’ voice of the author may be
overpowering here (teacher educator, over 50 years, female, booklet 22). Never-the-less it is an important point that observation of learning is as necessary for the preservice teacher as observation of teaching.

A sense of the impositional nature of ‘observation’ is apparent in several of the reader/respondent comments. In support of B’s decision to miss an observation session, one reader/respondent points out that time is at a premium on practicum and infers that observation time should be more judiciously allocated. ‘I skipped sessions where the class were just doing silent reading or individual research projects’ (neophyte teacher, under 30 years, male, booklet 33).

The role of the teacher educator in observing the teaching of the preservice teachers did not garner much interest, either in the stories or in the comments by the reader/respondents. There was one comment in rather disparaging terms about the ‘bag lady’ who regularly appears at one school to observe the preservice teachers, and a sense of imposition in the tone of two other rather oblique comments around the usefulness of the liaison lecturer. B mentions ringing his liaison lecturer but all other mentions in the stories of connections with the university are through the ‘course coordinator’. The lack of comment in the stories around the liaison lecturer or the teacher educator and their role in school visits is surprising as the researcher/author is herself a teacher educator, liaison lecturer and course coordinator. The only other mentions of the university are two comments by preservice teacher reader/respondents about mixed messages referring to the differing advice from mentors and teacher educators.

**Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?**

It looks as if ‘observation as learning’ has very little support from the reader/respondents despite its huge role in current practicum processes. No one seems to be clear exactly what preservice teachers should be observing and teachers do not seem to be convinced they want to be observed. Being observed appears to be stressful for mentors and teachers although it is a convenient practice with little demand on resources from the point of view of teacher education institutions. Sadly the views and experiences described above casts doubt on the value of observation as it is currently conceived. The resentment and sense of vulnerability uncovered by reader/respondents reflects both the stress of being observed as a teacher and the dubious value in relation to the time commitment expected from the preservice teacher. There is a sense that there is little ‘teaching’ to observe, as good pedagogy no longer involves didactic methods but is more a ‘behind the scenes’ approach. The concept of observing learning not teaching seems to have had little impact and none of the examples of this in the stories appeared to resonate with reader/respondents.
The importance of ‘noticing’ while observing is an important idea and we need to ask what one should ‘notice’ while they observe and whether noticing does indeed lead to learning? It would appear that ‘noticing’ is more likely to occur where the preservice teacher has established a relationship with the class and this provides further support the idea of ‘sharing the classroom’ introduced under quality of mentoring in the next orienting question. The current practice of just ‘observing’ appears to have very little support and may in fact cause more harm to the university/school relationships than benefits to preservice teacher learning.

Issues of concern are also uncovered in relation to the practice of being observed by a university representative or liaison lecturer. There appears to be more disadvantages than benefits mentioned here too. Indeed the silence around the role of liaison lecturers and course coordinator in the stories speaks a great deal about how the author positions these roles and the forces and principles that unconsciously underpin the author/researcher’s own beliefs. There appears to be some firmly held views around hierarchical positioning within the university roles that point to the need for clarification of the liaison lecturers’ role and status within the practicum process.

(c) Understanding teachers’ work

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

Seventeen meaning units relate to this meaning concept with most having a few responses registered against them, but over all the numbers are not large with only 47 comments or annotations. A sense of the difficulties, challenges and variable expectations of a teacher’s role is very much apparent. While many reader/respondents suggest that the teacher is a community worker, a role model, a counsellor, a facilitator, a resource and a motivator there appears to be uncertainty about what aspects of their role are the most important for preservice teachers to understand during the practicum.

Other ideas covered here relate to how preservice teachers begin to understand the work of teachers. Ideas of practising, talking, listening, collaborating, watching, sharing, and just ‘being there’ are introduced. Feeling tired, frustrated, alienated, ignored, resented, inadequate and overwhelmed are mixed with feelings of realisation, expectation, appreciation and respect. It is no wonder that preservice teachers report that they are unsure of what they are supposed to understand about teachers’ work. The idea of not dwelling on incidents but learning by reflecting on them is supported by several reader/respondents and it is made clear in the stories and the responses by reader/respondents that school students are keen to move on and seldom return to a negative interaction. This is recommended for teachers too. However there are references to hundreds of other aspects of teachers’ work
and it is difficult to distil any particular aspects that can be safely identified as important for all preservice teachers to learn.

As one reader/respondent comments

‘Teaching is like a roller-coaster, you can be up one minute and down the next. Reflect on incidents, learn from them and then move on’. (experienced teacher, 30-49 years, female, booklet 16)

Reader/respondents of this research make it clear that teachers’ lives are intense and time-poor and one minute you can be sure your students are engaged and learning only to be dashed by a student question. Often it is not until the preservice teacher spends time in the school that they begin to ‘appreciate the interferences and inconsistencies that make teachers’ lives so difficult’ (Neophyte, 30-49 years, female, booklet 26). The effects of the information communication technology changes on both pedagogy and curriculum, as well as the increasing impact of welfare and social issues on the school as a community of practice, are indications of changing times that demand changes in process and attitude. This is all part of the learning experience and the opinion of reader/respondents seems to be that care must be taken that we do not assume that preservice teachers understand this from the start. They are still learning too.

**Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?**

It appears that the preservice teachers are looking for solutions and that they would like a directory and kit bag (or an easy way) but it becomes clear that teaching is too complex and too varied for this. In fact, it is not ‘quite what [they] expect' and they are very quick to look for excuses. There are problems caused by the unexpected, the stresses of continuous interpersonal interactions and the challenge of the ‘bricoleur’ role of the teacher here. The sense that teachers’ work involves such a wide array of skills, knowledges, understandings and abilities appears to be daunting for the preservice teachers who are not yet cognisant of the continued learning that will occur throughout their teaching careers. Indeed they appear to measure themselves against the most able and inspiring teachers they see, and find themselves wanting. Their mentors also seem to have a mystical view of the ‘perfect’ preservice teacher, an image that is difficult to deflect. Preservice teachers need time and guidance to develop a teaching style that takes advantage of their personal attributes, strengths and knowledge in their learning areas, as well as clear understandings about the learning process and classroom culture of learning. Changing expectations of the work of teachers call for changing methods and structures in both university teacher education and the practicum, but these do not seem to be happening in concert, resulting in much confusion, tension, anxiety and resentment.
(d) School context

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

The reader/respondents introduce all but three of the 11 meaning units here. Of the 62 responses, over half stress the importance of understanding the social context of the school, how school and classroom culture can be fluid and changing and that there are continuous pressures from the community, parents, policy makers and student cohort that demand flexibility from both the university and the school. There is also some discussion around whether the preservice teacher is a teacher and their position within the school and a few comments about the structure of the practicum.

However, only four comments from reader/respondents relate to changes in pedagogy or ideology that acknowledge a changing context, despite over fifteen references identified in the author’s reading of the stories. D’s story introduces the idea of the teacher as an ‘agent of transformation or change in the community’ (story booklet p. 144) and in B’s story Jai explains that

[d]ramatic and continuous change were the only things that were certain in the future lives of these young people… and it was important that they learned to manage change and understand their role in productive and transformative learning’. (Story booklet, p 61)

V’s story adds

…according to his lecturers, there had been a significant drive for over twenty years to change the way that students were being managed and organised in the middle years of schooling. (Story booklet, p 137)

and

…he was also starting to appreciate the importance of preparing students for future trends and change. These young people were going to live and work in quite a different world from the current one and needed to be equipped with strategies to adapt to changes. (Story booklet p. 139)

There are two other major passages stressing the author’s views on change, yet still very little response from the reader/respondents.

Political machinations and a conservative backlash reinforcing a system of education that no longer met the needs of the society it serves were also suggested as possible reasons for the slow development of change in schools. (Story booklet p. 137)

and

Although learning theory research was demonstrating that many of the assumptions previously held about recall and application as indicators of learning were unsustainable, the necessary changes in attitude and how young people are constructed in the classroom seems to be only progressing slowly. (Story booklet p. 139)

In terms of changes at university or desired changes in university courses there are only a few comments from reader/respondents; ‘harder now for preservice teachers’, ‘structure of prac needs to change’, and ‘schools/university have changed’.
Critical Question 2: Inform - what does this mean?

It appears that the author/researcher’s view of changing expectations from the community, the frequency of changes in policy directions and a resultant need for change in the preparation of preservice teachers and the expectations of the practicum are not shared by the reader/respondents. It looks as if the practicum is seen as a ‘given’, school structures are seen as unproblematic and when reader/respondents do focus on change the inference is that the university teachings are attempting to drive changes that cannot be sustained in the structure and traditions of the ‘real world of teaching’. Context and school culture appear to be seen as the driving forces for pedagogy, rather than the changed learning needs of students who will live and work in a society that has already changed. Most reader/respondents seem to view the dynamic of the schools, universities and the practicum process through very old and scratched lenses with little acknowledgement that as a result of the huge changes in society and young people, teacher preparation and the practicum are in transition and many issues of power and blame are blurring the lenses of those involved.

Orienting Question 3

What support and guidance from the school and mentors best leads towards the sense of ‘becoming’ a teacher?

There is an almost fifty per cent increase in the annotation rate from reader/respondents related to this question when compared with the first two questions discussed above. With the exception of the comments relating to orienting question four (following) that support storying as a resource for teacher education (1,325 responses), meaning units related to this question receives the most comment (644 comments or annotations, 22 per cent of total responses).

(a) School culture of receptivity is important

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

This meaning concept houses the highest number of responses about the mentoring role (351 in total, 54.5 per cent). It is generally agreed by reader/respondents that it is imperative that the nature of a schools’ receptivity towards the preservice teachers is critical. Certainly there is much agreement that there are attempts at the administrative level to ensure the appearance of bona fide interest, planning and welcome. One reader comments that as assistant principal responsible for the coordination of preservice teachers she ‘work[s] hard to impress upon the staff that they all play a part in ‘mentoring’ the preservice teachers’ (experienced teacher, over 50, female, booklet 14). Unfortunately this comment is more the
exception and readers are more likely to offer examples that show that ‘schools are trying to accommodate preservice teachers at the administration and public level’ but that this often does not filter down to the level of the classroom teachers who are more likely to have the preservice teacher ‘thrust’ upon them (29 comments by 11 respondents). There are several comments in the stories around resentment and the intensification of teachers’ work that do not augur well for preservice teacher placement. There is considerable agreement and further comment from both neophyte and experienced teachers on this issue.

There are many instances recorded where schools are considered as non-receptive environments by the preservice teacher. ‘Abandoned’, ‘unpaid assistants’, ‘absence of mentor teachers’, ‘not wanted’, ‘not trusted with keys’, ‘alienated’ and ‘invisible’ are examples of sentiments expressed by neophyte and preservice teacher reader/respondents. A range of contentious issues raised by experienced teachers are also uncovered under the headings of ‘solutions offered’, ‘a burden’, ‘can’t rely on good will’, ‘mentors need incentives’ ‘attacking of the uni’ and ‘excuses for unprofessional behaviour’. Although no one issue dominates there are so many similar comments expressing these sentiments that they cannot be ignored. Unfortunately there are very few comments that could be considered salutations.

As the group most recently affected, neophyte teachers were quick to notice examples in the stories where school cultures were receptive towards preservice teachers (‘that sounds luxurious’). The large number of comments about the ‘switched on’ mentors in B’s story where Jai and Chris had participated in a mentor professional development program does indicate that readers recognise quality mentoring is both possible and desirable. The majority of reader/respondents highlight the different mentoring styles within the schools and agree that many of them are not productive. The problems that result from poor induction processes are closely linked to the confusion around mentoring skills and also create much comment especially in relation to whose responsibility a more seamless transition might be. Some claim the university is accountable here while others blame the school administration. Most resentfully confess it is yet another responsibility of the mentor teacher.

In terms of the role of the preservice teacher, reader/respondents applaud traits of initiative, insight, resourcefulness, empathy, effort and honesty from the preservice teachers. Signs of dependency, giving up, laziness, selfishness, disorganisation, lack of planning or blaming others are not tolerated. Several suggest, ‘the message is…you’re on your own/find out for yourself’, while others deplore the traditional practice where preservice teachers are expected to just take over the classes despite the nature of the class or the ability of the preservice teacher.
Critical Question 2: Inform. What does this mean?

What is most worrying here is that there seems to be so many examples of a breakdown in the collaboration or communication between the university and the schools. Although the stories provide a balance between welcoming and less welcoming school cultures, reader/respondents seem to be more likely to recognise and relate to the less receptive school cultures. What’s more, it appears from the responses that neither the schools, the teachers nor the teacher educators wish to accept responsibility for the induction process, both groups asking why preservice teachers were not fully briefed but left confused or abandoned to their own devices. It looks as if the warm welcome by most school administration is not followed up in the reality of the day-to-day school interactions. The status of the preservice teacher as neither a student nor a teacher allows them to fall through the gap in terms of ‘duty of care’ or ‘being someone’ within the school. It looks as if attitudes around the burden that preservice teachers present to busy and stretched teachers are also disempowering. ‘Finding time for the preservice teacher’ and balancing their needs within the diversity of the continuing demands of students, curriculum, marking and administrative and interpersonal demands, leads to comments like ‘teachers always put their own students’ learning and their own relationship with these school students first’. If we reflect on this in terms of teacher positioning, it is understandable that teachers prioritise the needs of their own students in the same way that teacher educators protect the interests of the preservice teachers. The evidence presented here suggests that the views of teachers, preservice teachers and teacher educators are based on quite different principles and theories about how schools can appear receptive towards preservice teachers and thus empower their learning experience.

(b) Quality of the mentoring

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

There are only 15 meaning units but a considerable 244 different responses recorded here (38 per cent). Ideas around the mentor teacher remaining involved or sharing the classroom so that they can offer immediate ‘hands on’ support, especially early in the practicum, are the most frequent. The balance can be difficult to achieve but when it is, the outcome has considerable benefit for the preservice teacher. Sue is able to share the learning environment with T, but occasionally takes over and T finds this affects his confidence. Jed, on the other hand, did not appear to be observing V in the middle school ‘classroom’ but it is later made clear to both V and the reader, that he has been facilitating V’s learning in subtle ways and continually evaluating his effectiveness and initiative. Jai shared the classroom in quite different ways. He allowed B to take responsibility for the class yet carefully monitored the dynamic and intervened in very clever and effective ways by focusing attention on particular
students who were leaders in the class. Chris, on the other hand, provided B with extensive background knowledge about her students and their learning styles as she considered this as the basis of success when working with students who did not understand English. Examples of adequate and timely feedback are also highlighted, as is the importance of supportive interpersonal relationships between the mentor and preservice teacher. Some perceive mentoring of preservice teachers as the ‘professional responsibility of teachers’ and many recognise and support the examples in the story where productive and innovative pedagogy and inspiring teaching are demonstrated by mentors. Others admit there are ‘some poor pedagogy out there’ suggesting that allocation of preservice teachers should be made with great care.

Concerns about the role of the school in the practicum emerge frequently, with some reader/respondents still believing that the practicum is a testing ground for preservice teachers. Views that they will either ‘sink or swim’ or ‘it is the responsibility of the mentor to turn the preservice teacher into a teacher in four or five weeks’, abound. There is much uncertainty around the purpose of the ‘practising’ in the classroom. Several reader/respondents acknowledge that preservice teachers should not be expected to be a ‘clone’ but should be supported in finding their own style, though there are several examples presented where preservice teachers are being expected to teach the mentors’ lessons in the mentors’ way.

There are frequent questions about the role of the school as opposed to the role of the university in monitoring the quality of mentoring. Most recognise that the issue is complex and multi-faceted and that perceptions of the success of the mentoring relationship can be subjective. What is generally agreed, however, is that the process is unclear and very demanding and few teachers relish the responsibility. There are a significant number of comments that recognise that frequently mentors are unable, or do not find the time, to support the preservice teacher adequately. Mixed messages, poor and no mentoring, absent teachers and unprofessional behaviour are noted. The ‘fictional’ mentors in the stories vary considerably in terms of quality, effort, ability, feedback, interest and preparation, yet their portrayal appears to have been balanced and representative as despite the very large response rate related to mentoring quality, there was not one comment by reader/respondents of unfairness or disbelief related to how mentors were depicted in the stories.

**Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?**

It looks as if there is little consensus around the conception of quality of mentoring and much evidence that points to a frequent failure of the mentoring culture. There appears to be unanimous recognition of the need for preservice teachers to spend time in schools, yet there
is no strong sense of how schools can ensure that quality mentors are available to guide and support them. Indeed there appears to be little understanding of how quality mentors evolve, what theories and understandings inform their actions or how the necessary advice and feedback to preservice teachers can be achieved in a timely and effective fashion. Indeed, it is unclear whether the expectations of the practicum are at all realistic in the common classroom structure. It appears that settings like the middle schooling classroom and more flexible teaching arrangements provide a more appropriate context for effective mentoring relationships. Here the more productive and constructive pedagogy that drives the university theories about learning is supported and observed. Considerable uncertainty remains about who is ultimately responsible for the success of the monitoring process and this creates even more pressure on the practicum as a valuable process.

(c) Class management issue

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

Only three reader/respondents mentioned issues of class or behaviour management although there was significant space in the stories for the issues to be raised. In one case a reader responded, ‘you have not provided a realistic challenging classroom’ and then added ‘oops, here it is, good, not enough information is provided about this at university’.

Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?

It is surprising that there are so few comments about class management issues. It looks as if when these issues are seen in context in the stories it becomes apparent that classroom student behaviour is less a case of control and management and more a case of pedagogy and relationships. This is an extremely important outcome and provides evidence counter to the policy and media push to ‘control’ students and modify their behaviour. When the teachers, preservice teachers and students are ‘real’, complex and ‘human’ it seems those involved are less likely to demand coercion or discipline where there are difficulties in the classroom. It seems to be recognised that students’ decisions and actions are a product of their individual differences and environment and that student challenges and questioning of procedures are to be expected and catered for with a range of pedagogical actions.

This lack of focus on discipline and behaviour modification is a reassuring outcome and could suggest that the understandings of productive classroom relationships that have been developing over the last thirty years are becoming more accepted by teachers as a part of a changed school culture. A recently reported study by Bullough and associates (2004) noted the same outcome though his study was focused on elementary classrooms.
(d) Mentor preparation

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

There was little comment related to formal preparation of mentors. Only seven of the reader/respondents mentioned the need for mentor preparation despite this being a major focus in B’s story. His mentors Chris and Jai

…had been attending mentoring workshops at the uni… had been briefed on the current teachings at the uni and could see that some of the things they used to do were rather counter-productive. In the past they had modelled their own mentoring on how they had been ‘supervised’ as student teachers, a bit of a sink or swim model, and could see that it hadn’t been ideal. Now they had been introduced to some new ideas and wanted to try them out, if it was ok with B. (Story booklet p. 64)

Although the point is not laboured, it is clearly established and Chris and Jai’s mentoring styles throughout are very supportive, although they do have high expectations of B.
Reader/respondents in all groups appear to recognise quality mentoring and mentor role models who are inspiring, innovative, engaging and effective teachers but very few comment about the need for mentor professional development. One experienced teacher suggests that they should have professional development workshops for mentors at her school, while three others disclose they would personally like to have them to update their own knowledge. One neophyte teacher also comments that they are a good idea and two teacher educators respond that they should be part of all practicum programs. Otherwise the idea is totally ignored.

Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?

It appears that teachers are reluctant to enter into a conversation around formal mentor preparation despite clearly establishing that they are impressed by the mentoring styles of Jai and Chris who had attended such workshops. It looks as if teachers might have reasons for avoiding this issue and it is interesting that three of the four experienced teachers who supported mentor professional development saw it as beneficial for them to update, not necessarily to benefit the preservice teachers they might mentor. What we seem to have uncovered here is a reluctant teacher culture towards mentoring. It seems as if they really do not want the responsibility for the preservice teachers and they still see the university as ultimately responsible.

(e) Other preservice teachers for support

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

The idea of other preservice teachers in the school for support is picked up emphatically by just over half of the reader/respondents and was mentioned twelve times in the stories. Many reader/respondents stress the importance of the peer mentoring and collegiality that others
who are sharing the experience can offer. ‘It was an important time to de-brief’ and ‘I always knew where I could find a sympathetic ear’ are the sorts of ideas that reader/respondents are expressing. A few are not quite so sure. One experienced male teacher comments that T ‘should worry about himself, he was not responsible for Anna’ (booklet 7), and another comments ‘there will always be someone within the school that you can turn to’ (neophyte, under 30, male, booklet 30). Most are keen that preservice teachers find the right balance between reliance on their peers and developing relationships within the school community. Reader/respondents who are teachers in schools make it quite clear that they are looking for initiative, resilience and resourcefulness from the preservice teacher, and if the placement of other preservice teachers interfered with this, then their presence was not an advantage.

In D’s story set in a remote indigenous school it eventuates that peer support is essential, although it took a while for the group to develop the necessary trust. All felt vulnerable but thought the others were much more confident. A number of reader/respondents relate to this and reflect on their own need for peer support or collaborative relationships. V, on the other hand, has no support from peers at either school but develops some strong relationships with staff. Again reader/respondents appear to see this as a realistic and important outcome.

**Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?**

It looks as if in general the reader/respondents are cognisant of the important peer-support role other preservice teachers in the school can play, as well as the advantages in seeking a critical friend or confidant from within the staff. The complexity of the practicum placement process calls for a better understanding of both the disposition and ability of the preservice teacher and the culture of mentoring within the school. Some preservice teachers need considerable guidance from a wide range of colleagues, teacher educators and mentors in their journey to ‘becoming’ a teacher, while others are able to focus on their own initiative and resourcefulness and appear to need very little support. It appears that the number of practica previously attended, the closeness to graduation, the receptivity of the school and the disposition of the preservice teacher, all influence attitudes around the role of peer support during the practicum.

**Orienting Question 4**

Can stories of a ‘sense of’ the practicum build a shared view of the process of practicum learning that resonates with a wide range of those who participate in preservice teacher education? Can the sharing of stories of the practicum ‘re-vision’ the practicum in the eyes of preservice teachers, mentors, teachers and teacher educators and thus benefit preservice teacher learning about professional practice?
Forty-six per cent of the total 2,878 responses relate to the 45 meaning units relevant to this research question. The reader/respondents themselves introduce thirty-five of these meaning units.

(a) Narrative as inquiry and information

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

There were 1,260 responses sorted into this meaning concept. As already mentioned 34 of the 35 reader/respondents who returned annotated booklets comment that the stories are ‘true, realistic, covered everything’ and use a range of comments like ‘common’, ‘insightful’ ‘I agree’, ‘that’s how I remember it’, ‘agree total’, ‘a familiar scene’, ‘I’ve heard of many similar stories’, ‘seen similar’ and ‘I had to learn this too’. Reader/respondents also resonate with the text in other ways, demonstrating empathy with the stories; ‘sad’, ‘a pity’, ‘not fair!’, ‘I can relate to that’, ‘No, no, no, no!’, ‘wish there was another way’ and engagement ‘I can relate to that’, ‘yes’, ‘good’, ‘so true!’, ‘good move’, ‘fat chance’, crucial’, ‘the plot thickens!’, ‘networking!’, ‘I laugh’, ‘Interesting!’, ‘this is great’, ‘brilliant’.

Other indications of the appeal of narrative to explain the practicum include ‘enjoyed reading, well written’ (about 60 per cent make this response), ‘would be good to give to preservice teachers’, ‘would be good to give to mentors’, ‘I learned something here’, ‘would be good professional development for teachers’ and ‘some good ideas and strategies’. Of course not all the comments are so positive. There are a few reflections and comments that question aspects of the story; ‘Too much philosophy/authors voice’, ‘concepts/words not understood or jargon’ (the words ‘constructed,’ ‘interrogate’, ‘innovative’, ‘pedagogy’, ‘machinations’ were highlighted), ‘unrealistic, what about…?’, ‘too long/introductions too long’ and a few suggestions to update language or story line are also present. These emphasise the willingness of the readers to comment throughout the stories and the extremely low number of negative comments around the process of reading the stories further supports the verisimilitude of the narrative.

Suggestions made related to updating the story include; ‘how do you give them strategies to cope?’, ‘perhaps more examples here could support the theory’, ‘perhaps emails to schools are a better option to phone calls’, ‘I would like to know more about what happened here’, ‘confused that there are two ‘Sue’s in this story’ (I have now changed one to Prue), ‘mentor should have checked the lesson plan’ (I have now added this), ‘the word hankie dates the author’ (this has been changed), and ‘what about behaviour management?’ These suggestions have now been woven into the appropriate story, although they are all quite minor changes.
Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?

This overwhelming endorsement of the stories and the evidence that they resonate convincingly with the readers seems to suggest support for narrative as an effective tool for opening up the practicum experience of preservice teachers. The stories appear to be accepted by the readers as vibrant, dense and authentic representations of the practicum experience. The reader/respondents seem to enjoy the opportunity to be truly involved as ‘insider’ researchers and as active consumers of the stories rather than mere spectators. The stories were so well received by the readers and were annotated with so much supporting documentation and reflection that the initial plan to re-write the stories to include the reader/respondents views of the world of the practicum (that is ‘co-author’ new stories as part of the analysis) was not deemed necessary as so few changes were recommended.

The stories appear to ring true for the readers as both intellectually honest and demanding. The blend of the particular with the general in a way that extends their value across a wide range of situations seems to be supported by the reader/respondents. According to the comments and annotations from readers, the stories appear to communicate their messages powerfully yet are enjoyable, enriching, challenging and insightful. The privacy and dignity of those who were observed during both the pilot and the research phases of practicum classroom observation seem to have been carefully protected, yet as biographical composites the stories resonate as realistic experiences providing an honest sense of the practicum. It looks as if the stories are accepted as truly conceivable experiences and this allows for a wider application and audience for the sorts of things the stories are saying.

(b) Silenced issues highlighted

Critical Question 1: Describe – what does current practice look like?

A wide range of controversial and problematic issues emerged from reading across the stories. Ideas revealing pressures of ‘survival’, ‘impossible demands’, ‘student resistance to preservice teacher’, ‘school politics or dysfunctional practices’, ‘cultural differences at a global level’, ‘alienation’, ‘abandonment’, ‘difference’, ‘surface deep support’, ‘variations between teachers’, ‘absenteeism’, ‘differences between preservice teachers’, ‘university liaison lecturers role’, ‘differences between schools’, ‘classroom culture differences’, ‘mentoring difference’, ‘lack of clarity of outcomes’ and ‘untheorised purpose of the practicum’ have been given little voice in the extant literature yet are recognised and highlighted by the readers. As already mentioned the comments like ‘yes!’, ‘spot on!’, ‘I recognise this’, ‘I’ve heard similar’, ‘this could be me!’, ‘nice to know I’m not the only one’ emphasise the ability of narrative to deconstruct vexed and silenced issues. Furthermore
many of the readers were prepared to admit that ‘I have learned something here’, ‘what a good idea’, ‘I’m going to try that’ and ‘finally an understandable explanation of…’, identifying a role for such stories in uncovering attitudes, relationships, inconsistencies and silences across the education community.

It is generally acknowledged that there are tensions between teachers and teacher educators so it was interesting to analyse the responses or teachers to stories that were authored by a teacher educator/researcher. Some reader/respondents did admit they began reading very sceptically, almost aggressively, but this soon evaporated as they began to see the lives of their colleagues and their own life reflected in the stories. The change of tone of several reader/respondents is quite marked beyond the first few pages of the stories. Some reader/respondents also admit that many of their own ‘secret’ fears are exposed as widely held concerns and this has allowed them to address their concerns and realise that they can be explained by issues beyond their personal competence. This, they claim, has renewed their confidence in their teaching and many noted their appreciation of the opportunity to address these issues in a cover letter or addendum to the stories. Several preservice and neophyte teachers were so taken by the power of narrative that they responded by suggesting they would like to write their own story. Some have already sent me draft copies that could form the basis of further co-authored stories.

**Critical Question 2: Inform- what does this mean?**

Many of the plots and themes in the stories and the responses of the readers were previously silenced issues. The fictional composites appear to be an effective way to bring to light such issues in an ethical and blameless manner. It looks as if reader/respondents are relieved that many controversial and worrying issues have been brought into the open in sensitive ways, yet are grounded in the real experiences of the players in the field, valuing the role of all participant groups and the complex nature of teachers’ work. There seems to be significant support in the comments of reader/respondents of the need to tangle with the wide array of uncontested issues highlighted by this research project, especially in relation to pre- and misconceptions underlying ‘local’ theories and questions about process and positioning.

**Summary**

By describing the current landscape of the secondary practicum and the practices that are explained by the teachers, preservice teachers, mentors and teacher educators who read and responded to the stories of the practicum, many relationships, connections, inconsistencies and silences have been uncovered. These have been presented in terms of the current beliefs, attitudes and traditions that inform the actions of those involved in the practicum learning experience. The next step will be to re-view these ‘uncontested practices’ to re-experience
them in different ways to uncover why things are the way they have been described, how we come to hold these theories in the first place, and what can be done about it.
Chapter 9 Stepping Back from the Hoops

Introduction

In this chapter I will confront and reconstruct the relationships, connections, inconsistencies and silences uncovered in Chapter 8, by re-viewing, or viewing with fresh eyes, the beliefs, attitudes and understandings that appear to underpin the practicum experience for preservice teachers and their mentors. By acting upon the information in this way, by stepping back and asking why things are the way they are, in whose interest has the practicum developed in its current form and what can be done about it, tentative theories of practicum learning emerge. Through these final acts of the reflective cycle I will build nine practicum learning statements that begin to provoke new ways of thinking about practicum learning.

In Chapter 10 a fictional story of teacher education at the university will demonstrate how the stories of the practicum and these practicum learning statements can be used to support ‘learning about teaching and teaching about teaching’ (Loughran, 2006: 5). By once again using narrative I seek to assist readers to engage with the process as lived experience, as I use the understandings uncovered in this research project to inform how the experiences of the practicum can connect with new theories of teaching.

Orienting Question 1

Are the theories and understandings of socially critical constructivist and transformative learning and productive pedagogies that underpin and drive teacher education at university, robust enough to support the preservice teachers as they move into the practicum?

Critical Question 3: Confront- how did the practicum come to be like this?

When we confront the beliefs and understandings around this question about the relevance and robustness of the theories that guide the university teaching about teaching and learning, it becomes clear that there has been insufficient focused discussion within the educational community around the practicum. There is little agreement about what aspects of the practicum helps preservice teachers make sense of the theories that guide our understanding of education in the twenty first century. There is a gap between the theories that inform and make meaning for teaching practice and the processes and procedures that are followed in schools. This gap is highlighted during the practicum, resulting in the tensions and frustrations that the preservice teachers report. Loughran (2006), Bullough, Young and Draper (2004) and Kincheloe (2004) also discuss this ‘gap’ between the theories that guide
learning about teaching and what happens in practice. Jordell (2005: 1) in a review of the literature on learning to teach and more specifically on ‘which theories of learning are used as a basis for understanding the process of learning to teach’, concludes that ‘the state of theory with regard to teacher learning is weak’ (p. 6) and not clearly understood. He too recommends that a ‘theory of learning to teach’ (p. 1) is necessary.

So we have preservice teachers still struggling to make sense of the theories and understandings of teaching and learning introduced at university, placed in a school for four to eight weeks where these theories are at best difficult to recognised, or at worst considered unrealistic and impossible to apply. When we consider the change process this is not surprising. In their study of innovations in education Olafson, Quinn & Hall (2005: 2) claim that researchers of change processes uncover that it takes at least ‘three cycles of use of an innovation before one becomes proficient’. They also remind us of the well-used adage ‘change is a process, not an event’ and could have added that change is effortful, time consuming and stressful. Loughran (2006: 115) suggests that beliefs and knowledge are closely tied and that before we begin to ‘purposefully confront, define, redefine and realign [our] practices’ then we need to consider how our beliefs position us.

It appears that through the slow progress of change, the difficulties of changing ‘beliefs’ and the inconsistencies in the theories of teaching and learning in schools, there is a disjunction between the expectations of the practicum and the reality of current practice in schools that the preservice teacher can learn from. This is when the preservice teachers claim they have been misled by their university learning and frequently report that they are told by the schools to forget the theory they have learned at the university. It seems that long traditions of transmissive and content based learning have developed structures and procedures in the schools that are counter to productive and transformative pedagogies. The focus on such pedagogies by the university without the acknowledgement of the problematic nature of applying innovative theories, and the possible poor receptivity of the school community in relation to these theories, is misleading for preservice teachers. They are confronted with schools and teachers who are at the best tangling with the new theories themselves, against the odds of time and lack of guidance, and at the worst not yet able to relate to theories beyond traditional methods and comfortable strategies that maintain current processes and procedures.

As an example of this Groundwater-Smith & Mockler (2005) tell about huge demands on teachers to use ‘templates and companions [that are] being published to enable [them] to put together strategies to engage students in the kind of higher order thinking advocated as a result of the Queensland productive pedagogies…’, and add that not enough value or support for the capacity of teachers to develop their professional understanding of such things is
given. Indeed the innovations and theories appear to be imposed from above and ‘bear the imprint of power’ (Kincheloe, 2004: 57), and neither the schools nor the universities are blameless here. In this gap between the messages given to the preservice teachers at university and the ‘reality’ in schools, both the schools and the university claim innocence yet are complicit through their inability or unwillingness to contest existing processes. Nor do they work together to invest teachers with the sense of agency necessary to progress practicum learning. Teachers (and preservice teachers) are not powerfully positioned in the educational landscape, despite their important role, and this works against a successful practicum learning relationship.

 Schön (1995) argues that practice is uncertain, changing and unique and Kincheloe (2004: 61) adds that we are dishonest in our pretence that the ‘positivistic epistemology of the contemporary university’ is capable of guiding preservice teachers in their understanding of practical experiences. Indeed the evidence here suggests that preservice teachers are faced with huge diversity in beliefs, attitudes, understandings and practice in all aspects of teaching and the result is variously acquiescence, frustration, confusion, resentment and in the end ‘disempowerment’. New ways need to be found to nurture and guide preservice teachers during the practicum so that they have the opportunity to apply the theories that are beginning to make meaning of the teaching and learning dialectic for them. This needs to be clearly constructed, articulated and scaffolded and can only be achieved if those involved in both the schools and universities let go of the comfort of control and begin to understand and share how their own practices and internal politics imprint the practicum.

Being at the nexus of the power interests of the schools and the university and bringing to this intersection their own positioning and sometimes naïve understandings, it is no wonder that the result for preservice teachers can be disempowering. They are not a homogenous group; they too have a diversity of knowledge, experience, social, cultural and racialised practices that until now have not been sufficiently considered. Although the practicum has a long tradition in teacher education, social, cultural and political changes have not been addressed in practicum processes. The changes in those attracted to teaching, the purpose of education, the culture of schools, our understanding of young people and how their learning is constructed and the dynamics of classrooms have resulted in new expectations of the work of teachers. What has been uncovered in this study is that these changes in teacher roles, classroom pedagogy and learning outcomes call for substantial changes in teacher knowledge, actions and theories about teaching and learning. Classroom practice has changed and the practicum is no longer a time where the ‘how to teach’ and ‘what to teach’ are a ‘given’ that can be observed, internalised and passed on from teacher to teacher. The entire process of practicum learning needs to be reframed. The new breed of teacher is faced
with an array of teacher qualities and dispositions, diversity of schools, differences between classes at the same school and a range of theoretical traditions that guide teachers (who themselves have a range of positions and perspectives about teaching). This can result in more questions than answers. Questions like, why do teachers do what they do? What does learning look like? How do students learn? and ‘What is my role as a teacher in all of this? To begin to answer these questions during the practicum a quite different relationship between the schools and universities, and between the preservice teachers and their mentors, needs to be established. For example the school recognises at the administrative level that they have a responsibility to the profession and a role in the education of preservice teachers. The university is also aware that applied and experiential knowledge are crucial in teaching. However, there is little collaboration occurring at a deeper level where the intersection of the theories that underpin the practice of the teacher and the teaching practice must be played out. It seems that the school based mentor and the teacher educator do not work together to ensure that the teaching environment is illuminated, that teacher knowledge is carefully deconstructed for the preservice teacher or that understandings of teaching and learning are modelled and shared during the practicum. Instead there appears to be an overwhelming array of experiences encountered and teaching practices observed that are not meaningful or seen as worthwhile by novice teachers. Indeed the connection between practice and theory should develop understandings that result in purposeful learning and encourage the preservice teacher to learn from action and reflection of authentic teaching experiences. But this is not the case.

While the schools and universities are content to maintain the status quo or canvas vested interests, and teachers are unable (or unwilling) to expose their own insecurities around their role as ‘mentors’, the practicum cannot deliver experiences that will prepare and inform preservice teacher learning. Until it is recognised that the gaps created by the limited knowledge of some school based teachers around university theories of learning and the limited knowledge of some teacher educators around current classroom dynamics have merged to create an abyss, the preservice teachers will continue to fall through this abyss. Finding a solution for such a dire state of affairs may not be possible given the policy directions and funding cuts in education, yet being aware of the issues does go some way towards reducing the casualties. The ‘stories of the practicum’ together with the practicum principles 1 and 2 are offered here as an opportunity to begin to bridge this void.

The feelings of vulnerability and self-doubt found in this study also need to be viewed in different ways. Bullough’s (2005) report ‘Vulnerability and Teachability: a case study of a mentor and two interns’ grew from previous studies where issues of vulnerability also featured prominently. In his explanation he draws heavily from Dewey’s understandings that
it is the human need for certainty and security that can stimulate change and inspiration and that predictability is not necessarily desirable and can lead to mere acquiescence. If we view issues of vulnerability and self doubt with fresh eyes then the complexity and inconsistencies of issues of teacher identity, purpose and practice (the ‘who am I, what do I do and why do I do it’ questions that underpin quality teaching highlighted in this research project) can be viewed as a necessary step in the process of learning and change. The researcher/author may have been too quick to sympathise with the preservice teachers and judge the schools. The complaints and frustration of preservice teachers may merely be indicators of imbalance and precursors to change. For learning to occur in the practicum it appears imperative that preservice teachers begin to make sense of the way the theories introduced at university intersect with practice to inform the teaching/learning dialectic. Even if this involves frustration and uncertainty, it could still be productive and transformative.

The results of this research project provide evidence that student centred education seems to be embraced by university teaching, classroom practice and many of the reader/respondents. It also underpins the most recent versions of curriculum frameworks in Australia. However constructive, productive and transformative pedagogies are quite a different story and this seems to be responsible for many of the tensions in the preservice teacher/mentor relationships. While preservice teachers have been introduced to transformative practice and constructivist pedagogy as the most successful way found (at this stage) to enable student learning, it appears that not even all of their education lecturers have yet accepted these new views about learning that challenge previous assumptions that inform how young people are constructed (Deiro, 1996; Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid & Shacklock, 2000; Lesko, 2001; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001; Bullough, Young & Draper, 2004; Smyth & Hattam 2004; Donnell & Harper; 2005; Rorrison 2006). Indeed, the teacher learning literature itself is not entirely clear, with many contributions alluding to a variety of approaches but few being explicitly based on the constructivist process (Jordell, 2005). These mixed messages at the university may be responsible, in part, for the claims of inconsistency and frustration by preservice teachers. Their failure to observe the influence of new theories of learning being played out in either the university or school classroom, justifiably leads to questions about whether they have been misinformed or misled. They wonder if perhaps these complex and effortful teaching pedagogies and classroom processes are not possible after all. Admittedly it is sometimes easier to play the victim than to tangle with the effortful process of change, so again there is no simple answer. It is clear, however, that poorly constructed ‘theories’ do not just jump across the ideological gap and real change, where one’s beliefs are re-visioned, takes a great deal of time and struggle to bring about real understanding.
This indicates the essence of another problem between schools and universities that needs to be made transparent. There are many stages of re-orientation and modification necessary in both institutions before the progressive pedagogies that are underpinned by theories of constructive and transformative practice will be generally accepted. The challenge is to find productive and empowering ways to bridge this gap and expel views that blindly accept that the group that more clearly establishes its dominance will be given licence to prove that their theories are the most robust. How can we develop education communities that are truly transformative where the policy writers, decision makers or economic rationalists can have quite different views from those who are working in the schools? We must also be wary of counter-reactions (Kincheloe, 2005: 59) or habits of mind that take the path of least resistance and result in us turning backwards. Research based, evidence based, peer evaluated and carefully conceived and built theories that are interrogated, deconstructed and subjected to the rigorous review of the academic community must drive the education and understanding of preservice teachers. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2005: 3) and Loughran (2006) also warn we should be wary that research is not turned back on itself and used merely as an implementation tool, devoid of the social and educational change that is envisaged.

There are other barriers to change identified in this project. Although space was created in the stories for conversations around gender, culture, race and the social politics of teaching, there was very little comment on this by reader/respondents. It looks as if the intensification of teachers’ work, the close media scrutiny and the plethora of ministerial and parliamentary enquiries have ensured that teachers’ confidence has been undermined and their energy for resistance or challenging the traditional structures, beliefs and processes has been eroded. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2005) also found that research seldom challenges the established policies and existing practices in our schools.

**Critical Question 4: Reconstruct- what could be done differently?**

When we reflect on the themes that emerge from this research question related to the theories offered by the university to support preservice teacher learning in the practicum, it emerges that it is not the ‘robustness’ of the theories that is in question but the failure of the players in the field to harness the potential of the new ideas that are directing thinking about education and schooling. Preservice teachers and their mentors know about the theories and can relate to what logically and ethically could occur in schools but there are indications that there is still doubt about why these critical understandings should be played out in teaching practice. It appears from the analysis of the responses of the readers of the ‘stories of the practicum’ that teacher professional development may be providing teachers with the tools
for applying new curricula and processes, but there appears to be little evidence of the deeper more reflective moments that change beliefs and ideology and that result in making sense of the theories in light of personal practice. Likewise, teacher educators need to make transparent the theories of learning and productive and transformative pedagogies in their own teaching if they are to establish credibility for their theories. Loughran (2006) discusses this issue in his most recent publication and stresses that teacher educators need to better understand what they do if they are going to teach teachers. It is necessary that those who purport to ‘teach teachers’ have a clear understanding of the complexity of how teaching and learning are played out in a learning relationship. If clearly articulated ‘theories of secondary practicum learning’ that are cognisant of the needs and current understandings of preservice teachers and their mentors could guide this experience, then we could begin to offer a practicum that can deliver what it promises.

My recommendations for doing things differently are presented in the framing of ‘practicum learning principles’ or tentative theories about how we might enhance consciousness to provide some answers for the frustrating and confusing issues around the research problem that asks:

*What are the learning experiences that the practicum should deliver? How can this best be achieved? Can a ‘theory of practicum learning’ be developed that reaches beyond the individual schools or universities schools of education, to give a voice in education reform, policy and community education to those currently silenced?*

The first of the orienting questions adds:

*Are the theories and understandings of socially critical constructivist and transformative learning and productive pedagogies that underpin and drive teacher education at university, robust enough to support the preservice teachers as they move into the practicum?*

The evidence uncovered in this study in relation to this question leads to the construction of two theory ‘statements’ around theories of learning and university teaching practice. They also relate to the need for a shared understanding of outcomes. The naming of these proposals or tentative standards or principles has resulted in much reflection. At first I named them practicum learning ‘statements’ but in end decided the word ‘statement’ was too definitive and authoritative. They are, after all, propositions or theories that result from the research. I finally decided on the term practicum learning ‘principles’ though I am still searching for a term that will clearly articulate the tentative and partial nature of recommendations in view of the critical nature of the research.
Practicum Learning Principle 1: Productive and transformative pedagogies linked to transparent and robust theories of learning should be clearly constructed, and the related teaching experiences carefully scaffolded, for preservice teacher learning during the practicum.

Practicum Learning Principle 2: Collaborative relationships between schools and university schools of education should be underpinned by a shared understanding of how theory and practice intersect to inform secondary teachers about engaging students in quality learning that will prepare them for a future of change, challenge and authentic learning.

Orienting Question 2

How can preservice teachers be given the ‘space’ and opportunities to apply their understandings during the practicum?

Critical Question 3: Confront- how did the practicum come to be like this?

There is a general acceptance of the sorts of things the stories are saying about what the preservice teachers are actually able to ‘do’ and ‘learn’ while in the schools. They do get a chance to teach someone else’s classes, frequently using the approach of the mentor, and they do get a chance to observe other teachers but it would appear that how or what preservice teachers learn is not central in either of these experiences. Real opportunities for learning seem to be dependent very much on the quality of the mentoring culture in the school. Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst (2000: 267-291) identify a range of school cultures that point to the highly contested nature of the struggle in schools around the effort of dominant groups to establish a dominant culture. They identify three archetypes of school culture: ‘aggressive’, ‘passive’ and ‘active’, and though they are quick to point out that all can be present in the same school and they are not definitive, the dimensions they identify are recognizable and do give a sense of differences between schools and within schools. While Smyth and his associates concluded that the Average high school tends to be characterized by dimensions that position it more towards the aggressive/passive categories, while the re-entry high school showed features positioning it more towards the active categories (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst, 2000: 273) they were interpreting the voices of school students (and those who had recently left school), not teachers. What I am suggesting here is that these same dimensions could be applied to the schools in relation to practicum experiences. A dimension of ‘professional attitude/receptivity to preservice teachers’ could justifiably be added to their descriptions of the ‘cultural geography of the school around early school leaving’ (p. 273) as attitudes of ‘enculturation’ into the profession that appear to drive the practicum on many occasions are
also related to the culture of a school. Clearly, the practices and belief systems around the ‘active’ school, characterized by openness, democratic processes, student voice, negotiated curriculum, respect and relevance to current needs, would also lead to a more worthwhile experience for the learning of the novice teacher. But herein lies the dilemma. If preservice teachers are placed in a setting most suitable for their own learning, then how do they learn about teaching in the ‘passive’ or ‘aggressive’ climates that Smyth and his associates claim are more common in the high school? The pedagogy and theories that underpin preservice teacher learning about learning are directed towards the ‘active’ school climate, so careful guidance is needed in applying these in a less ‘democratic’ setting. Likewise, teachers generally conform to or deliberately match their own beliefs with the dominant beliefs of their workplace, so preservice teachers may frequently find a mis-match between the university teachings and the views of the teachers around them. This is why it is necessary to provide support from the university during the practicum and preferably also from other preservice teachers at the school. It is also reassuring that middle schools seem better able to provide this more ‘active’ climate as reflected in T’s story, though it is not the middle school structure that determines the climate per se but the attitude and pedagogy of the teachers. Sue, for example, was able to offer a negotiated, trusting, open, respectful and meaningful climate within a traditional high school setting.

The role and outcomes of ‘observation’ are also a vexed issue. Not only is observation stressful for even the most confident and competent teacher, the findings here challenge the previously held beliefs of observation as learning. The ability of preservice teachers to ‘notice’ learning outcomes below the surface is questioned and the recognition that learning is a long term process that cannot be judged in isolation from its temporal, social, cultural and political dimensions, is introduced. Observing a daily lesson in maths or English does not expose the ‘big picture’ of student learning.

In relation to preservice teacher practice during the practicum, which is the essence of this question, the uncertainty appears to be due to lack of clarity as to the roles and expectations around teaching practice both in university teachings and the practice in schools. If there was a clearer understanding of the purpose of the practicum then the inconsistencies and differently interpreted outcomes could be addressed. This would in turn reduce the tensions around the variety of expectations and mixed messages complained about by reader/respondents. Clarification of the role of both observation and classroom teaching during the practicum would give preservice teachers a better sense of purpose and more ‘space’ and opportunities to critically reflect and learn from their teaching practice. Although the beliefs and disposition of both the preservice teacher and the mentor would still have a huge effect on practicum relationships and experiences, a more transparent purpose and
process could reduce the levels of frustration and resentment. By explicitly acknowledging the effect of school culture, teacher and student diversity and the impact this has on the learning experiences of the preservice teacher, a more productive practicum would result.

The intensification of teachers’ work is seldom acknowledged in the public arena with the media in particular being much more likely to denigrate and criticise teachers. The popular media have established a culture of belief around teachers having an easy life, many holidays and short working hours. The reality of the stresses of the continuous interpersonal interactions and the demands of meeting the needs of young people surface repeatedly in this study. Reader/respondents were consistent in their requests for more acknowledgement of the difficulties and complexities of teaching and their concerns related to how it takes over their lives. Although more closely related to the next question that focuses on mentoring, the themes that emerged here around teachers’ work highlight the stresses of trying to balance the demands of community, parents, politicians and administration with the needs of the students in their classes. The added responsibility of mentoring preservice teachers (and the visits by teacher educators) appears to be too much to contemplate.

In previous research (Rorrison, 2001) I conclude that teachers are often their own worst enemy and they collude in their own oppression. Research reveals that frequently their dedication to their students and the isolating nature of their work prevents them from fighting for their own rights or relating to counter-hegemonic processes. Drawing on this the stories in this study expose ‘busy’, ‘distracted’, ‘frantic’, ‘absorbed’ and ‘exploited’ teachers. Despite the now considerable literature highlighting the intensification of teachers’ work and the cultural politics of teaching, and frequent calls to act against devolution and the de-skilling of teachers, there is still a long way to go (Apple, 2001, 2003; Smyth, 2001, 2003a, 2003b). It remains difficult to distil the aspects of teachers’ work that preservice teachers should learn in the same way, as it is difficult to provide a learning environment that supports the theories that drive the university teaching.

**Critical Question 4: Reconstruct- what could be done differently?**

In terms of giving the preservice teacher the ‘space’ and opportunities to apply their understandings during the practicum it appears we need to do things differently. The very experiences that render the practicum as problematic should to be seen as part of the learning tapestry. The multiple roles of the teacher and the mentor, the variety of reactions from the school students, the unequal power relations, the lack of consensus around what makes a good teacher, the range of school cultures, the receptivity of the setting and the deconstruction of observation as a learning opportunity, can all be turned to advantage learning. Indeed, the diversity and complexity highlights the possibilities inherent in the
practicum. Preservice teachers will benefit most from school experience if they are able to problematise its situated nature and learn from it. Questions of why schools are the way they are, what leads us to construct school students the way we do, how teacher identity is developed and played out and how the presence of a preservice teacher impinges on the school and classroom culture, need to be addressed. A distillation of these inquiries will help demystify some of the issues around the purpose and outcomes of the practicum and may reduce the tensions in the setting. Preservice teachers, like all learners, should be engaged in experiences that are purposeful, meaningful and self directed so that they can construct new ideas and make connections with their current practice. I believe this was part of Diero’s (1996) call for a significant level of autonomy for preservice teachers and Loughran’s (2006: 33) suggestion that ‘affirming personal autonomy [is] crucial to understanding teaching as professional practice’. Loughran goes on to support the use of case studies to ‘help to frame the problematic as liberating; the possibility for learning more about teaching emerges through the diversity of others’ experiences’ (34). As indicated earlier, this is precisely my intention. The purpose of the ‘stories of the practicum’ is to offer lived experience to be deconstructed and reconstructed by teacher educators, mentors and preservice teachers to help them inform their practice. By critiquing lived experience I hope to unveil the inconsistencies, connections and silences and use this new understanding to inform teacher education knowledge and practice. I believe I have uncovered that this can occur, despite and because of the challenges and diversities of setting.

To progress this idea I recommend a workshop process based on the ‘stories of the practicum’ prior to the practicum for preservice teachers and during mentor preparation for secondary school teachers. In the stories we have trustworthy evidence of the sorts of things that are happening during the practicum. One of the reader/respondents (teacher educator, over 50 years, female, booklet 22) recommends use of the stories to ‘challenge students to write their own stories…’ and ‘use over and over again, after each practicum, to highlight the new and different understandings they gain’. Ennie, who is a teacher educator in Holland, also recommends a key words index so that preservice teachers can refer back to scenarios when they experience similar incidents to help them during their reflections. A preservice teacher in Adelaide, Australia shares this sentiment. Her mentor shared T’s story with her, as he believed it highlighted many of the issues that she would need to address during the practicum. She has since requested a copy to refer to, to refresh her about incidents and issues that will support her learning. These are the ways I suggest the stories and the developing principles of practicum learning can open up conversations to progress practicum learning and help preservice teachers understand the complexity and uncertainty of teaching.
How can preservice teachers be given the ‘space’ and opportunities to apply their understandings during the practicum?

If we revisit this second orienting question in light of these new understandings, previously uncontested practicum practices around the opportunities provided for preservice teachers to apply their learning about teaching in diverse classroom settings, are questioned. To support my assertion that we can learn to do things differently, I propose two further practicum learning principles.

**Practicum Learning Principle 3:** The different learning needs of preservice teachers must be recognised and they should be given the space at university and in the schools to learn about teachers’ work in ways that are empowering and transformative for their practice.

**Practicum Learning Principle 4:** Worthwhile outcomes must be established and clearly articulated for any observation and teaching experience during the practicum. The diverse cultural, socio-political and learning contexts of practicum settings should be transparent, valued and shared as part of learning about teaching.

**Orienting Question 3**

What support and guidance from the school and mentors best leads towards the sense of ‘becoming’ a teacher?

**Critical Question 3:** Confront- how did the practicum come to be like this?

The research again uncovers much uncertainty and confusion related to the support and guidance of preservice teachers by teacher educators and mentors, and what it is that preservice teachers need to learn about teachers’ work. Poor communication and lack of clarity in terms of both processes and outcomes are revealed as part of the problem. The wide range of contexts, personalities, abilities, ideologies and traditions accentuate these issues. As we interrogate question 3 it emerges that more explicit information and support is needed in the classroom, while better understanding and greater acceptance of the responsibility for preservice teacher learning is necessary at both the school and university level. Currently too much is left to chance. The belief that ‘becoming’ a teacher is about ‘enculturation’ into the profession rather than the development of a clear understanding of what teachers ‘do’ is effectively debunked by the findings of this research.

If the practicum experience cannot provide opportunities for the preservice teacher to learn the necessary skills and understandings to develop their sense of ‘becoming’ a teacher, due to lack of support, guidance, interest or clarity around the mentoring process, then the time dedicated to the practicum is wasted. Preservice teachers are not placed in schools to copy, clone, follow, act as a teachers’ aide or learn a ‘bag of tricks’. They need to be able to apply
their own (naïve) theories about teaching and learning under the guidance and support of committed and inspiring mentor teachers within a school culture that is receptive and prepared to share and interrogate their understanding of teaching. Only then will preservice teachers be able to immerse themselves in the work of teachers and experience the consequences as their theories rub against their actions. From reflecting on the outcomes of this process they will construct their own knowledge about the how and why of teaching.

There is significant evidence revealed in this study that although mentors could recognise quality and effective mentoring (as well as ‘unprofessional’ behaviour), they often remained ambivalent to the needs of preservice teachers and were reluctant to accept responsibility for the guidance and support necessary for their development as teachers. They clearly see their primary role as teacher of secondary students. This is a particularly important result and stresses further the need for an explicit practicum learning agreement between universities and schools. It also explains the lack of commitment to the practicum beyond the ‘welcoming and accommodation at the public level’ by administration, and the lack of engagement with the concept of mentors learning more about the mentoring process. Loughran’s (2006: 177) concluding call for ‘better articulating, informing and shaping a pedagogy of teacher education’ applies equally to the secondary practicum. A better articulated, informed and shaped understanding of the practicum learning experience is crucial and as teacher educators we cannot afford to bury these issues any longer.

**Critical Question 4: Reconstruct- what could be done differently?**

A completely new attitude to the preparation and selection of mentors and placement of preservice teachers in schools is indicated here. If preservice teachers are going to be able to ‘practise’, succeed, struggle, discuss, reflect and try again, they must be supported and guided by mentors from both the university and the schools who can empathise with the challenges they face. By remaining involved in the classroom learning process, both teacher educators and mentors can better support and progress preservice teacher development as a teacher coming to understand teachers’ work. By thinking about the practicum classroom as a learning experience rather than a testing ‘tool’, preservice teacher learning becomes the central focus of the practicum. Both the universities and the schools need to ensure that those involved with the practicum are quality educators, reflective practitioners and committed mentors who can relate to the preservice teacher, collaborate with other teachers and teacher educators and engage with a range of theories of learning while representing the profession in a moral and informed way. It appears that we need to find ways of sustaining interest in teaching and mentoring preservice teachers both in the universities and in the schools. Consistency and agreed processes within the practicum should be developed from frank
discussions and research designed to uncover ‘the way things are’ and ‘what might be done about it’. When it is recognised that quality mentoring is a shared responsibility of the university and the schools and the purpose of the role is not ‘enculturation’ or ‘testing’ but instead a 'futures focused' application of contemporary theories, then the practicum is more likely to deliver what it promises.

Two more principles of practicum learning are added in relation to orienting question three that asks:

*What support and guidance from the school and mentors best leads towards the sense of ‘becoming’ a teacher?*

These begin to focus on the roles of the teacher educator and the mentor teacher.

**Practicum Learning Principle 5:** Universities, schools, teachers and teacher educators collaboratively share the responsibility for informing preservice teachers about the changing nature of school culture, classroom dynamics and student needs and how these render the practicum as problematic.

**Practicum Learning Principle 6:** It is the responsibility of teacher educators, as committed and informed teachers, to support classroom teachers to maintain a focus on preservice teacher learning while remaining involved in the practicum classroom. As joint mentors they will foster successful teaching and learning relationships while their mentees develop appropriate and effective pedagogy and sense of ‘self’ as a teacher.

**Orienting Question 4**

Can stories of a ‘sense of’ the practicum build a shared view of the process of practicum learning that resonates with a wide range of those who participate in preservice teacher education? Can the sharing of stories of the practicum ‘re-vision’ the practicum in the eyes of preservice teachers, mentors, teachers and teacher educators and thus benefit preservice teacher learning about professional practice?

**Critical Question 3:** Confront- how did the practicum come to be like this?

There is little doubt from the responses by the readers that the ‘stories of the practicum’ are accepted as accurate representations of the way lives are played out during the preservice practicum. Narrative form also received overwhelming support as a way of reaching into ‘lived’ experiences and making them accessible to others. This issue of access and understanding is closely related to issues of knowledge and power within the entire field of education and the effect of postmodern research projects such as this rest on tangling with these moral, political and ethical issues that are frequently silenced.
As a result of the willingness of readers to comment and annotate the stories, new understanding about the learning experiences that can be delivered through tentative theories of the practicum have emerged to inform future ‘teaching about teaching’ programs. There does however remain the dilemma around whose voice is being heard and what interests of power undergird studies where the responses, comments and annotations of reader/respondents are interpreted by another. Yates’ (1999: 9) warning that we must …continue to ask questions about whether the research is adequate to its questions and its purposes, or we are in danger of being seen as having nothing to offer other than our political values is always on my mind. How open have I been to the ideas that have emerged that are discordant or discrepant? What have I missed? How much of my own ideology is invested in the study despite the rigorously (self) applied criteria of research quality? What is also missing in this final analysis is the voice of the students in the classrooms. Although their voice was clearly heard during the pilot study and their ideas were written into existence in the stories, this group has not been consulted since the final stories were written, and a future study needs to rectify this.

Critical Question 4: Reconstruct- what could be done differently?

The results of this research project point not only to the value of narrative but the potential of this narrative inquiry to uncover new understandings and deepen our knowledge around the practicum. Not only are a range of previously silenced issues given voice but also a number of previously ‘naturalised’ issues have been viewed with fresh eyes. Kincheloe (2004: 62) calls for more sophisticated ways of thinking about practice, warning as I have, that the purpose of the practicum ‘is not to indoctrinate practitioners to operate in a particular manner’ but to encourage preservice teachers to reflect and examine a wide range of theories and understandings about how theory and practice inform each other. Loughran (2006) also calls for a better understanding of the practical aspects of teacher education though, in my reading, apart from presenting student crafted anecdotes from the practicum, fails to position the practicum adequately in his otherwise inspiring view of the potential of ‘teaching teachers’. Only through really understanding the relationship of the practicum experience and how it is located within the university teachings, can teacher preparation claim the relevance and transformative learning it promises. Teacher educators also need to understand their role in relationships of power within the practicum settlement, and how lack of clarity frequently results in the outcomes being left purely to ‘chance’, a disempowering experience for prospective teachers.

The stories of the practicum experiences of the fictional yet authentic preservice teachers provide honest and trustworthy examples of the confusing and unpredictable nature of
everyday teaching practice. It becomes clear that there is no certainty in a democratic learning environment and what is exposed is the need for teacher education to reflect on, harness and learn from the complexities of the practicum. With little evidence in the literature to support the secondary practicum and much anecdote that doubted its effectiveness, I was tempted before this study to suggest, as others have done, that we replace the directionless and time consuming ‘institution’ with more worthwhile culminating experiences for preservice teachers. This was why I asked the question:

*What are the learning experiences that the practicum should deliver? How can this best be achieved? Can a ‘theory of practicum learning’ be developed that reaches beyond the individual schools or universities schools of education, to give a voice in education reform, policy and community education to those currently silenced?*

I realise now that I too missed the point. The practicum sits within a very full and demanding teacher education course structure and on the periphery of a complex and only partially understood education system. What is needed are better understandings of the attitudes, beliefs and practices of those involved so that changes in attitudes and ways of conducting the practicum relationships become possible. By situating understandings within tentative new theories of the practicum learning process, teacher educators and preservice teachers can together uncover the issues, interruptions and inconsistencies that have previously worked to disempower these novice teachers. With a refined sense of teacher identity and an awareness of the role of context, culture and the socio-political dimensions of learning to teach during the practicum, preservice teachers, supported by their teacher educators and enabled by their school based mentors, will begin to understand why the hoops spin as they do and take pleasure in *spinning them anew*.

The final three practicum learning principles relate to the orienting questions

*Can stories of a ‘sense of’ the practicum build a shared view of the process of practicum learning that resonates with a wide range of those who participate in preservice teacher education? Can the sharing of stories of the practicum ‘re-vision’ practicum learning in the eyes of preservice teachers, mentors, teachers and teacher educators?*

Principles 7 and 8 focus on the use of the stories of the practicum while principle 9 reintroduces the concept of mentor professional development.

**Practicum Learning Principle 7:** Conversations about the practicum learning experience can prepare preservice teachers to look with a fresh lens on contentious and previously silenced issues. Narrative grounded in ‘truly conceivable experience’ and explicit principles about the practicum process are valuable teacher education resources.
Practicum Learning Principle 8: Carefully constructed ‘fertile’ questions and learning circles workshopping productive and transformative pedagogies can enable critical, reflective, professional and ethical learning conversations around practicum teaching experiences that will prepare preservice teachers with a more holistic and collegial view of teaching.

Practicum Learning Principle 9: Preservice teacher mentor workshops focussing on the practicum learning principles will develop collaborative relationships between teacher educators and mentors and provide both with a better understanding of the practicum learning process.

Summary

The nine principles of practicum learning, distilled from acting upon the original research problem and four orienting research questions in critical and reflective ways, are really the ‘findings’ of this research project. They are now offered as a reconstruction of the practicum learning process to help us do things differently. The following chapter will demonstrate, in narrative, how these might be used as a resource in teacher education. These ‘principles of practicum learning’ are not intended as prescriptive learning outcomes or step by step didactic principles but as tentative transitional support for a fledgling theory of the practicum and as part of a developing ‘pedagogy of teacher education’ (Loughran; 2006).

Practicum Learning Principle 1: Productive and transformative pedagogies linked to transparent and robust theories of learning should be clearly constructed and the related teaching experiences carefully scaffolded for preservice teacher learning during the practicum.

Practicum Learning Principle 2: Collaborative relationships between schools and university schools of education should be underpinned by a shared understanding of how theory and practice intersect to inform secondary teachers about engaging students in quality learning that will prepare them for a future of change, challenge and authentic learning.

Practicum Learning Principle 3: The different learning needs of preservice teachers must be recognised and they should be given the space at university and in the schools to learn about teachers’ work in ways that are empowering and transformative for their practice.

Practicum Learning Principle 4: Worthwhile outcomes must be established and clearly articulated for any observation and teaching experience during the practicum. The diverse cultural, socio-political and learning contexts of practicum settings should be transparent, valued and shared as part of learning about teaching.
**Practicum Learning Principle 5:** Universities, schools, teachers and teacher educators collaboratively share the responsibility for informing preservice teachers about the changing nature of school culture, classroom dynamics and student needs and how these render the practicum as problematic.

**Practicum Learning Principle 6:** It is the responsibility of teacher educators, as committed and informed teachers, to support classroom teachers to maintain a focus on preservice teacher learning while remaining involved in the practicum classroom. As joint mentors they will foster successful teaching and learning relationships while their mentees develop appropriate and effective pedagogy and sense of ‘self’ as a teacher.

**Practicum Learning Principle 7:** Conversations about the practicum learning experience can prepare preservice teachers to look with a fresh lens on contentious and previously silenced issues. Narrative grounded in ‘truly conceivable experience’ and explicit principles about the practicum process are valuable teacher education resources.

**Practicum Learning Principle 8:** Carefully constructed ‘fertile’ questions and learning circles workshopping productive and transformative pedagogies can enable critical, reflective, professional and ethical learning conversations around practicum teaching experiences that will prepare preservice teachers with a more holistic and collegial view of teaching.

**Practicum Learning Principle 9:** Preservice teacher mentor workshops focussing on the practicum learning principles will develop collaborative relationships between teacher educators and mentors and provide both with a better understanding of the practicum learning process.
Chapter 10 Spinning the Hoops Anew

Back to the beginning

What are the learning experiences that the practicum should deliver? How can this best be achieved? Can a ‘theory of practicum learning’ be developed that reaches beyond individual schools or university schools of education, to allow those currently silenced a transformative voice in education reform, policy and secondary education?

This research project grew out of concerns that the practicum in preservice secondary teacher education was failing to offer what it promised. As a teacher educator I struggled to make sense of the disparate views of practicum learning voiced by those involved in universities and schools as well as the opinions and attitudes of those not involved, but seemingly attempting to direct the process of practicum learning. As a result of working in teacher education for several years I had developed considerable tacit knowledge about the secondary practicum and this influenced, both consciously and unconsciously, my actions and beliefs when teaching, guiding and supporting preservice teachers. I was aware however that not everyone shared my beliefs and I began to question what this meant. There was so much knowledge and so many opinions but very little attempt to share ideas or interrogate why things were the way they were. My project was designed to observe the players in the field, write about the practicum experience of preservice teachers in assessable ways, check my understandings with those who have an interest in the secondary practicum by encouraging them to voice their own perspectives, and then ask questions about what this means and how it came to be like this. I also hoped to provide some ideas from my research about how things might be done differently based on a better understanding rather than expedient ‘solution’.

Developing a resource for teacher education.

In the end my search to make sense of the practicum was not alone. Kincheloe (2004), Bullough (2005), Groundwater-Smith & Gereige-Hinson et al., (2005), Groundwater-Smith & Mockler (2005), Jordell (2005) and Kalantzis (2005) have begun to ask similar questions and a recent publication by John Loughran, Developing a Pedagogy of Teacher Education: Understanding teaching about learning and learning about teaching (2006) offers substantial support to the findings of this research project. Although Loughran’s publication does not actually deliver a ‘pedagogy of teacher education’ it does represent a new ‘turn’ where the teaching of teaching becomes the focus of the inquiry in the school of education at Monash University, Australia. Loughran’s own research over the last few years is presented in his publication with a summary of the theses of a wide range of current Australian and
international researchers in the area of teaching, learning, pedagogy and teacher education, many of whom I have also referred to and quoted throughout this paper. Clearly, Loughran is writing for an academic audience (teacher educators) and he uncovers how teacher education pedagogy impacts on how preservice teachers as students, learn about teaching. His observations and relationships with schools of education in universities have led him to many similar conclusions as myself. Loughran (2006: 2) focuses on ‘the practices employed in presenting the subject matter – the pedagogical turn’ a term borrowed from Russell (1997), and he makes a number of suggestions throughout his book about how the pedagogy of teacher education must be continually interrogated. As this is the essence of my final orienting research question that looks at ‘stories of the practicum’ as pedagogy, I am affirmed that not only does Loughran support narrative but also uses narrative in his own teaching and to support many of the arguments in his book.

It has become clear from the research analysis in the previous three chapters that the longer and more dense stories I have created have great potential to re-view the ‘spinning hoops’ and uncover new understandings around the practicum. By exploring teacher and preservice teacher identity, context and practice in depth in the more complex narrative of the stories, the lives of others is opened up and the traditional and dominant university practicum processes challenged. Through focusing on clearly articulated principles of practicum learning that reflect what is learned from this research project, a more successful teaching/learning relationship might be designed from the complex exchange that involves the competing agendas of ‘learning about the specific content being taught, leaning about learning, and learning about teaching’ (Loughran, 2006: 5).

Loughran’s (2006) publication is a timely and important contribution and also challenges my own taken for granted attitude to teaching in the university as I come to the end of this research project. As an experienced secondary school teacher I had positioned myself as a quality teacher who was capable of meeting the needs of my students and model good pedagogy, yet Loughran has brought my ideas into sharp relief. Although I have already undertaken the ‘self-study’ he so strongly recommends (Rorrison, 2001), and I have also presented my own philosophies and beliefs in a transparent manner in both that paper and this dissertation, I regret that my own students may frequently not fully understand ‘where I am coming from’. I have not reflected sufficiently on my own practice and suspect that I treat the socially critical theories that underpin my views as ‘self evident’. I now realise that they may not be evident to my students until much later in their learning journey, if at all. Indeed, the gap between their understandings and mine often results in a power imbalance that I have not fully acknowledged, and might itself disempower the preservice teachers and
even add to the feelings of confusion and inadequacy that I have been so concerned about. This is something I see now I need to address.

It is imperative that prospective teachers learn about how to teach, how students learn, why we teach, what teaching is and what influences what we teach and how we learn (research orienting question 1). This includes the need to be attentive to the cognitive, affective, physical and socio-political domains of pedagogy. For this to happen, preservice teachers should be deeply immersed in learning while the connections between their experience and their understanding are carefully scaffolded by quality teaching (Practicum Learning Principle 1). This is also confirmed by a recent paper by Groundwater-Smith & Gereige-Hinson et al., (2005) who support the need for active construction of learning by using narrative. Too often the learning of adult learners such as preservice teachers is left to chance due to poorly conceived pedagogy and outcomes. Loughran (2006: 5) agrees that we need to re-view these practices if we are going to engage and teach the teacher in meaningful ways. He supports Nicol’s call (1997: 97-8) to

…develop instructional moves, activities, tasks and problems which will encourage and open prospective teachers to asking questions, analysing, taking new perspectives, and considering alternatives…[and] to be investigating genuine pedagogical problems through which they might develop reasoned arguments about problems and dilemmas of practice. (Loughran, 2006: 5)

Kincheloe (2004) also recommends we make more visible the role of ‘experiential’ or practical knowledge about teaching for those who are learning to teach. My own project answers this call by providing both narrative in the form of ‘stories of the practicum’ and explicit ‘Practicum Learning Principles’ that offer these opportunities for problem solving, questioning and meaningful learning while being explicit about both the ‘practice’ of the practicum and the outcomes that we might expect. This will enable teacher education to reach beyond individual schools or individual preservice teacher practicum experience to learn from the interrogation of the way things are, why they are that way and how they can be transformed to do things differently or differently nuanced. My stories and practicum learning principles may provide ways to ‘purposely link the manner in which [preservice teachers’] learn in a given situation with the nature of teaching itself’ (Loughran, 2006: 4) and, in so doing, prepare teachers who can engage in critical conversations and think in a deeper and more reflexive way. As a result they will have more potential to make a difference in the lives of young people.

**A story of workshops and learning circles**

To complete the research project I have now created a story about using the ‘stories of the practicum’ and Practicum Learning Principles as a resource for teacher education. Again, by
using narrative, I hope to open up the teaching/learning relationship in teacher education to further interrogation.

What does it look like?

Week 1

We’ve just begun a new semester and during the introductory session I asked the preservice teachers (as I now suggest they should see themselves) to read the booklet of practicum stories before they attend their first tutorial. Although the stories are quite long they are engaging and easy to read and should take from 4-6 hours of concentrated effort.

“Just get a sense of the stories”, I tell them. “You’ll need to read them in more detail later.”

They grumble as they always do, and I do sympathise. Many of them have been forced into a position of working long hours to support themselves and find the combination of work and university quite exhausting. Very few have the luxury of living at home and being supported by parents, indeed many have families of their own. The global economy and the shrinking job market has forced the majority of them to re-assess their future prospects and led them back into the university as mature age students. Though, in my experience, many of them seriously do believe they want to teach young people, their understanding of teaching is very much about transmissive, content driven teaching and uncontested white middle-class curriculum. They see themselves as having served their ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie, 1975) and have still to face the complexity and challenges of being on the other side of the desk in a different time and place. Issues of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ and tensions between multiple identities of being part student and part teacher are still ahead of them. As Britzman suggests

The circumstances of student teaching…provide the contextual arena wherein the student teacher, part student, part teacher, has the delicate work of educating others while being educated, and of attempting unification in an already contradictory role. (Britzman, 1994: 55)

This contradictory role, as Britzman observes, is partly a result of the traditional structures and processes of university teaching that have seen little change over the years. Teaching how to teach young people, however, involves a number of moral and ethical considerations around issues of trust, responsibility and purpose in addition to knowledge and understanding about teaching, which adds an additional responsibility to the role of teacher educators. This is also now being addressed at a professional level with the registration of all teachers and the accreditation of teacher education courses. Clear standards of professional engagement, professional knowledge and professional practice have now been identified as minimum requirements for teachers and this needs to be reflected in quality teacher education course outcomes. A quality teacher educator should also understand that enabling
understandings about the moral responsibilities of the teacher is part of their teaching role. This in itself adds to the complexity of teacher education. Can the productive and inclusive pedagogies that underpin collaborative practices of communities of learners and constructivist and student centred ideologies be understood within the culture of traditional structures and dominant power relationships within universities? The management of the large groups of prospective teacher education students in week one of semester makes me very aware of the limitations of our university system and the unproblematic acceptance of the issues of power inherent in the university processes. I am also very conscious that education courses are offering less and less time for their preservice teachers to engage with these issues.

**A story of teaching teachers**

At the beginning of the first workshop I introduce the preservice teachers to the activity ‘people bingo’ that T uses during his first Human Relationships lesson (story booklet p. 34). Not only is it a good icebreaker it is also extremely useful for ‘getting to know your students’. I created twenty questions ensuring as I did, that I included information I had already gleaned about the class members to facilitate the process. I heard someone talking about her dog before the introductory session and I saw one of the class members getting out of a red car similar to mine, so that was a good start. Most of the other questions are fairly generic; find someone who jogs in the morning, someone who has the same colour eyes, someone who was born overseas… nothing too demanding, though I do slip in a few questions about why they have chosen to become teachers, just to start them thinking.

“The idea is to move around the class asking the different questions and the first person to match up a name with every space is the winner”.

They are a bit slow to start so I ask the young man from the car park if he has a red car, quickly write down his name and move on to find someone who has the same number of siblings as I do. The noise level increases and class members begin to move around the room so I stand back a little to check that everyone is being included. Whenever I see someone on the outer I move over and ask them a question and attempt to draw them back into the group. It seems they can’t find anyone who was born overseas, but no one has asked me. Several preservice teachers seem to be nearly completed so I concentrate on them, asking lots of questions to fill in my spaces. Finally one of them replies,

“What about you, were you born overseas?”

“Yes.”

“Bingo,” he yells.
“What’s the prize?” someone asks, as the class move back to their tables that I have arranged in a large circle.

“Glad you brought that up.” I smile in appreciation. “What do you think it should be?”

Awarding prizes to the winners can be an interesting discussion in itself and I’m always pleased when it comes up. (I have other critical questions based on oral language/diction, spelling and teacher dress that can also result in preservice teachers becoming quite animated in discussion in ways that uncover their current positioning on issues or power and inclusion. I have them on hand in case they are needed). Initially the idea of a prize appears unproblematic.

“Chocolate.”

“Better grades.”

“And early minute.”

The suggestions keep coming as I hand a white board marker to the winner, Jeff. I know at least fifteen names and if I keep my bingo sheet nearby I should be able to use them during the remainder of the session. Jeff seems happy with his prize; though I will point out later that these markers would not be a good prize for younger students (some schools have even banned felt-tipped pens, as well as ‘white-out’, ink and any other potential graffiti items).

“Tell us why you suggested chocolate, Amy?” I venture.

“Everyone loves chocolate, that’s what my teachers used to bribe us with.”

“My brother is allergic to chocolate.” This came from the back of the room.

And so the discussion continues. I use the occasional focusing question to return the conversation to the idea of ‘rewards’ and ‘bribes’ and use a few of the names I learned to bring different class members into the discussion (and to consolidate the names). In the end no agreement is achieved but the legal implications of early minutes and extra marks and the power issues of bribes and rewards have been uncovered. When I suggest we move on, most of the group have begun to recognise the complexity of the issue and the need to interrogate rather than solve as there is no definitive answer. Some are already beginning to realise that some issues look different from the other side of the desk!

“There are several instances in the stories that point towards the importance of establishing workshop or class rules to ensure everyone knows how to de-personalise and remain ethical in their discussions,” I continue. “Unless someone has just thought of something else they need to share, I think we might move on to negotiating class rules. Can anyone suggest how we might go about this?”
Some of the group refer to their story booklet and others make suggestions. I call this process ‘learning circles’ and the premise I use is based on respectful recognition and acknowledgement of the current knowledge, skills and understandings of the class members. Learners are more likely to engage if they sense that their current knowledge is both appreciated and connected to the learning activities. Groups can develop a dynamic where the outcome is a great deal more than just an amalgam of ideas, if group work is based on learning circles that lead to the synthesis of shared ideas or concepts. I have learned from both research and experience that if I value the knowledge and understandings that different individuals bring to the group, cognisant of their positioning and sometimes naïve consciousness, the energy of the group is more likely to be productive through those involved feeling more empowered. It is the processes of ‘learning about learning’ and ‘learning how to learn’ that becomes important here. Collaborative learning relationships are important in all learning communities (Practicum Learning Principle 2) and are a reflection of reducing power inequalities. This is a critical learning outcome for the preservice teachers (Practicum Learning Principle 3) who are also more likely to relate to the process as meaningful and worthwhile if their learning is scaffolded or constructed in meaningful ways (Practicum Learning Principle 1).

If time allows it is worth discussing ideas around productive group dynamics and the various stages that groups should progress through if they are going to be collaborative and effective, not passive and expectant of transmissive teaching based on traditional power relationships. This relates to the whole class group as well as any sub-groups created during the workshops. It is worth having some handouts or web links prepared for the group to peruse (I find connection to the internet and intranet a huge advantage during workshops but it is not always possible due to room allocations) and reflective conversations around constructive group learning and communities of practice can be reintroduced at any point in the future when the group is not working as an integrated and collaborative entity (Harpaz & Lefstein, 2000; Engeström, 2001; Harpaz, 2003). Discussions around resolving both group and personal conflicts are also a worthwhile exercise and certainly need to be addressed at some stage in the personal development of preservice teachers. Understanding one’s preferred mode of dealing with conflict is critical for teachers. This is discussed briefly in both T’s story and V’s story. Appendix 12 includes some resources I have developed to help preservice teachers to reflect on their own preferred modes of dealing with conflict as well as practice in ‘problem solving’ rather than avoiding, confronting or merely smoothing over issues. This is related to Practicum Learning Principle 3.

Returning to the booklets of stories, I ask the open or fertile (Harpaz, 2003) question, “What is the purpose of the practicum?” to instigate a group discussion around the issues that
emerged from the first reading of the stories. Harpaz’ (2003) pedagogical model of a ‘Community of Thinking’ sees the fertile question as central in the teaching/learning process. He recommends questions that are rich and dense and encourage further inquiry-based questions. Such questions should be open (no definitive answer), critical (challenge the hegemony), constructed to highlight connections, and must be ethical (Harpaz & Lefstein, 2000). I recommend to the class that they work in groups to discuss the question in light of their own experiences and their reading of the six stories. Sometimes, if I know the class I will use this knowledge to arrange the groups according to who is most likely to have read the stories and who is more likely to take leadership of a group in the initial stages. In Q’s story, Sue arranges her groups to best ensure a learning experience for all class members and this can be referred to. Forming the groups can also be arranged through a classroom activity or preservice teachers can self-select their own groups.

Today I allow the class to self select and watch carefully to ensure that everyone is included. I do some re-arranging as the group sizes are not consistent and because I can see a few individuals are looking uncomfortable. I use the excuse that I have only prepared seven work stations to create a manageable number of groups as I distribute butcher paper and felt tipped pens to each group. I have already drawn the outline of a person on each sheet of butcher paper encouraging the groups to think about the mind, the heart, the physical body, the environment, the context and socio-political issues as they brainstorm their answers to the question. This is to initiate thinking about learning as a physical, affective, cognitive and socio-cultural experience. Meanwhile I write the question “What is the purpose of the practicum?” in clear and reasonably large letters on the white board in a central position. Although I know my displays get very untidy be the end of sessions I do try to model sound habits for the prospective teachers. (Board displays is another topic that is worth discussing when time allows, hopefully it will come up during the deconstruction of one of the stories).

When the group work is completed the annotated drawings are posted around the room and class members are encouraged to view them. I ask the groups to collectively explain their ideas and encourage questions and suggestions so we can identify the most powerful concepts. These concepts are mapped onto the white board around the orienting question. As connections between ideas emerge they are linked through arrows and circles as we develop a shared understanding and language of the practicum, at this point in time. This will provide a foundation for future weeks when a more in-depth analysis and interrogation of the ideas and themes that arise from the individual stories will be connected to the concept map to reflect growing and transforming understandings.

At this stage I present the class with a brief synopsis of the stories (appendix 10) as a reminder of their content and refer them to the nine Practicum Learning Principles that have
resulted from my research. I encourage them to read the synopsis then as a group collaborate and recommend an order in which the stories will be discussed. While they read the synopsis and begin to discuss the positioning of the stories in relation to the themes that have emerged, I copy the concept map to distribute later. I find concept maps useful as some learners are much more visual and this facilitates the connections for them. This ‘map’ will be checked at the end of each session to clarify the progress of the learning, the story order and whether the orienting themes are still appropriate to the developing discussions.

Offering the white board marker to the class I ask for a volunteer to lead the discussion about the order of the stories as they relate to the concept map, suggesting it is good to practise writing on the white board, listen to class responses and talk at the same time. I treat the matter lightly and eventually someone rises to the challenge.

“OK, guys.” Andy begins. “I didn’t read all the stories, so I’ll need some help here. We’ve agreed that ‘supports the decision to become a teacher’ is really important, which story covers that best?”

“I think Q.”

“Me too.”

“Not V or T …or D or B, they didn’t really decide.”

“R would be interesting, but maybe she decided for the wrong reasons…?”

And so the conversation continued. The class are taking it fairly seriously and some even refer to their booklets.

“Let’s put both Q and R next to this and move on,” Andy suggests.

“What about ‘practising’ teaching?”

“Definitely Q.”

“I agree.”

“Yes, me too.” There is some discussion and Andy is getting the hang of this and writes ‘Q’ on the white board and points to another circle on the concept map. “Kids?” he asks.

“All of them.”

“Yes, let’s leave that ‘til last.” There is general agreement.

Andy makes a big show of reading the board and scratching his head.

“What about environment…I mean con… er… context?” suggests someone down the front glancing at me.
“Got to be D,” suggests the preservice teacher next to her.

“I think we should leave D for ‘diversity in culture’,” someone else adds.

“I think B would be better for that.”


Further discussion ensues around the room in small groups while Andy just stands there, glancing at his synopsis and looking a little lost.

“What about this one?” he finally ventures. “Teachers’ work?” He points at the white board but there is so much noise that he gets no response. I walk to the front of the room and reorganise my papers, the class looks up and Andy takes advantage of the lull.

“What about this one. Teachers’ work?” he repeats pointing to the board.

There is some general discussion.

“We reckon T. There is a lot of stuff going on in that school that isn’t in the classroom.”

“Yes, but what about all that middle school stuff in V’s story?”

“We reckon use V’s story for that one about uni theory and school ‘reality’.” This is again suggested by the preservice teacher down the front. She certainly seemed to have read the stories thoroughly.

Andy writes T and V against the respective circles and is about to sit down when I remind him that we need to decide on the weekly order. There is very little response. There appears to be little interest or concern about that. I decide that maybe that will come later, so recommend they just start at the beginning of the booklet with T’s story. Andy is happy with that, writes number one on the board next to T, circles it and does a ‘funny walk’ back to his seat. The class erupts in laughter but Andy looks a bit confused.

“Wait until you read the last story,” someone offers. “The ‘funny walk’ is exactly what happened in that class”.

Capturing the moment I encourage the group to re-read T’s story for the next tutorial taking particular note of the concept of teachers work but also keeping in mind the other themes that emerged. I ask them to also read the Practicum Learning Principles and try to use them to make some sense of the complex and contradictory issues highlighted in the story. Then, modelling good pedagogy, I offer a brief summary of what we have accomplished during the session, encouraging comments and additions from the group. I use probing and clarifying questions to help the group articulate their learning and build ownership of the outcomes. I give them the opportunity to check their perceptions and interpretations and connect these to
the future activities. I read Practicum Learning Principles 7 and 8 to emphasise the role of the stories in the learning process. I try not to rush this important step but I can see the class is anticipating freedom and are impatient to move on. Finally I write the word ‘pedagogy’ on the board and begin to list a range of activities we have participated in during the lesson. Group work, concept mapping, discussions, brainstorming, summarising, clarifying questions, probing questions, learning circles, modelling… I ask for other ideas and refer them to the pedagogy lists at the back of their booklet (appendix 11). I ask them to highlight those we have employed and add to the list if they can before the next workshop. Again I am conscious of the structured learning climate where the next ‘dose’ of learning about teaching is a week away!

**Following weeks**

As the weeks progress I use a different manner of introducing the workshop each time, frequently using a pedagogy or teaching/learning strategy from within the particular story or stories that the group had decided to read in preparation for the next workshop. For example T’s story includes mind mapping, discovery learning, peer teaching, group work, inquiry based learning, an icebreaker, brainstorming and fertile questions. R’s story discusses networking, constructivism, authentic assessment, reflective journaling and using Information Communication Technology across the curriculum. In B’s story, Jai uses negotiated outcomes, explains scaffolding, high expectations and student centred pedagogy, while Chris focuses on developing trust, working collaboratively and knowing the lifeworlds of her students. Q used her observations to provide connections for her students, sequences her lessons on the board and used a pedagogy called ‘the information process’ for developing research skills. Her mentor, Sue, uses peer feedback, where partners discuss and present an abstract of each other’s work. Sue also relies on her talent for story telling to develop student interest in environmental issues. Bill employs group work and role-plays to engage his year 8 class and Q uses the ‘smarty’ game when she was left to work with his class alone during her first lesson. Jim enables complex cognitive connections for his senior students by using a range of questioning techniques effectively coupled with techniques that challenge his class to be continually probing, reflecting, sharing their knowledge with partners and negotiating activities. V also has a fun mathematical activity that ‘never fails’ to re-focus and motivate students (there are a range of publications with similar activities, most teachers have their favourites) and it is in V’s story that the bullying episode introduces personal responses to conflict and stress. I prepare the conflict resolution activity mentioned earlier to carefully scaffold and encourage inquiry learning and problem solving strategies. V also experiences the connections that can develop between learning domains in middle schooling pedagogies and learns what it means to go with the current and to not fight the
waves. There are many other pedagogies, both successful and unsuccessful, described in the stories and I endeavour to connect the content and understandings of other units in the course to the practicum learning unit, especially the theories of learning and social and historical perspectives, to demonstrate the integrated nature of learning.

During class discussions I attempt to frame my questions to model probing, clarifying, open, reflective and ‘charged’ (Harpaz & Lefstein, 2003) questions and encourage the class to intervene or rework my questions when I fall back into easier and more complacent styles. This encourages preservice teachers to also be transparent about their questioning technique and the purpose of their questions as well as recognise the effort it takes to be continually engaging with student learning opportunities. I encourage constructive disagreements and continually question the underpinning assumptions of their claims and beliefs (Practicum Learning Principle 8).

**Reflection**

I personally reflect on the workshop relationships that develop between me, as teacher educator, and the preservice teachers, as we navigate the terrain towards the first practicum learning experience. I frequently share my reflections with the class though this can be quite challenging as not all of the preservice teachers are operating in a socially critical or transformative paradigm. I sometimes ask them to help me reframe the learning experiences that don’t seem to work and try to make my failures and the complexity of meeting the needs of each of the class members as transparent as possible. I attempt to highlight the moral, ethical, inclusive and political aspects of our conversations and the teaching/learning dialectic. Sometimes I share my own critical journal with them and recommend the writing of reflective journals to them. Some have a negative attitude to journaling as it has been overused in our education system over the last decade, so I am wary, particularly as I am more confident that writing narrative will meet their current needs (Practicum Learning Principle 8). I also introduce the *spinning hoops* metaphor and highlight the range of traditions and educational philosophies that underpin the beliefs of the various characters in the stories. Loughran (2006), Cochran-Smith (2002b, 2004), Kalantzis (2005) and Gore (2001) all stress the importance of understanding the history and background of the various traditions and genealogies that influence the current positioning of educational research and teaching theories, and I frequently introduce discussions around ways of thinking or ‘paradigm’ and interrogate where various ideas come from. I stress continually that I don’t have ‘answers’ but it is the process of continual challenge and inquiry that will support teachers in their quest to provide the very best learning experiences for their students and help them continually learn and develop as quality teachers. I also try to highlight the productive aspects of uncertainty and inconsistency, introducing my own research findings.
around teacher identity and the need to negotiate multiple roles and beliefs (Practicum Learning Principle 5).

**Using the Practicum Learning Principles to build a better understanding**

As already mentioned the Practicum Learning Principles that emerged from my study of the practicum are introduced early in the workshop series and referred to continually as the basis for deconstructing and theorising the six stories as we endeavour to answer the question ‘What is the purpose of the practicum’. The Principles were built from four layers of analysis and interpretation of the practicum classroom (observation, interpretation as narrative, analysis by reader/respondents, theory building from this analysis using the four critical questions – refer to Table 1 in chapter 7) in my own quest to interrogate a similar question, so the topics and themes from the stories link easily to the Principles. I help the preservice teachers abstract their growing understandings beyond the specific incidents and challenges so that they can make connections between professional practice and educational theory (Practicum Learning Principles 7 and 8). In this way I am encouraging the preservice teachers to begin to re-build their own theories of teaching to accommodate ideas around productive pedagogies, constructivist teaching and learning relationships and issues around the building of teacher identity. The time in schools is obviously important here, yet the importance of scaffolding the learning through linking pedagogy, theory and school culture before the practicum is also critical if practicum learning is not going to be merely left to chance (Practicum Learning Principle 1).

The role of observation and reflection also needs to be clearly understood and B’s story in particular highlights this. I also introduce ideas that observation itself can be problematic and the importance of critically appraising the outcomes of the practicum in relation to the diverse cultural, socio-political and learning contexts of the practicum settings (Practicum Learning Principle 4). I stress the need for collegiate and collaborative practice between the universities, schools, teachers, preservice teachers and teacher educators to uncover the changing nature of school culture, classroom dynamics and student needs (Practicum Learning Principle 5) and attempt to empower the preservice teacher to position themselves as active learners in the practicum process, not disenfranchised entities ‘jumping through hoops’. This is also a challenging undertaking.

**After the practicum**

After each practicum placement, preservice teachers should be given the opportunity to critically review their practicum learning experience in productive ways and begin to connect their new understandings with their practice to develop their teacher identity and professional understanding. Again the Practicum Learning Principles should be aligned with
their developing ability to interrogate and unsettle what was previously taken for granted and develop critical understandings about teachers work. One preservice teacher recently reported (Jo, personal communication, October 18, 2006) that her refusal to accept the power relations and lack of clarity in her school had led to a staff meeting and workshops to investigate and find ways of addressing the issue that she had found confronting. This idea is elaborated by Loughran (2006: 133-4) who contrasts the approach taken through ‘a pedagogy of teacher education’ with the ‘common post-practicum teaching approach…to the traditional teaching round debrief’. It is important that preservice teachers are given an opportunity to debrief but this needs to be conducted in productive and ethical ways. There is little value in merely ‘letting off steam’ (refer the Moan Sessions, Campbell and Kane, 1998), nor is there value in filtering preservice teacher experiences through the experiential knowledge of the mentor or teacher educator – they are certainly not the experts when we begin to look at the experiences of the novice teacher. It is preservice teacher voice that should be heard here. This is why I spent considerable effort acquiring the perspectives of preservice and novice teachers when writing the stories of the practicum and developing the Practicum Learning Principles. It is important that lived experiences of the preservice teachers during their practicum can be related to the Practicum Learning Principles in ways that continue their learning by helping them make sense of their experiences. Some preservice teachers will choose to write their own stories in response to the conversations around their practicum and should be encouraged to use the tools of narrative reflectively and creatively, using pseudonyms and preferably fictional composites to avoid unethical disclosure. Disclosure following the practicum is an issue I have struggled with for some time and believe that the narrative model I have designed provides preservice teachers with viable alternative and guiding principles that encourage them to de-personalise and remain ethical in their discussions or writing. By constructing their stories carefully and by adding the perceptions of others they will often begin to view their own experiences with a new lens. Those preservice teachers who do wish to write stories can be encouraged to write poems, draw, paint, write or play music, sculpt, carve, weave…the possibilities for self expression and self discovery through reflection are endless. Other alternatives can include preservice teachers maintaining their relationship with their practicum school through the likes of sports teams, art clubs, camps or homework support and these experiences can also turn a fresh lens and encourage critical reflection as they experience relationships with students in different ways. Developmental learning and change is possible in many ways and depends a great deal on how the attributes and disposition of the learner rub against the learning experiences made possible by the ‘teacher’. Even with the most inspiring and carefully conceived learning environment some preservice teachers fail to engage, change or
let go of their past theories, or acknowledge their own role in their learning. This is why as researchers of teacher education we are continually looking for new ways to interrogate the issues. Again modelling good teaching I negotiate authentic assessment tasks and a range of ways to meet course outcomes with the preservice teachers (Practicum Learning Principle 3).

Re-visiting incidents or themes in the stories and how they relate to both the practicum learning principles and the preservice teacher’s own experiences in a range of schools should continue throughout the practicum learning units during the university course. Practicum Learning Principle 4 calls for a sharing of diverse contexts and events as a learning experience. Preservice teachers will begin to understand and relate to a great deal more of the subtle ideas and themes in the stories as the progress through their own learning journey, issues that were previously too unrelated to their past experiences to be meaningful. Ely and her associates (1997: 228) refer to these as ‘a blurred stream of perception’. It is also important that these novice teachers begin to trust their own intuition and recognise that their teaching behaviours will not always be able to be in line with their beliefs about teaching and learning and that where ever they position themselves there is no dichotomy between effective and unsuccessful teaching behaviour, but instead a continuum (Loughran, 2006: 83). It is the recognition of this continuum and the process of critical reflection that will progress their teaching effectiveness and their sense of teacher identity (Practicum Learning Principle 8).

Sometimes, when the stories are revisited at a later date, preservice teachers will relate to situations and incidents in new ways and be able to discuss them in more general terms. Abstracting from the specific to a wider view without normalising it is an important skill to learn. Preservice teachers may choose to re-write particular stories or incidents or add new chapters or different endings. This can also be designed as a group exercise. I also believe that complete new stories could be created from the perspective of a mentor teacher or a school student to encourage reflectivity. Scripts can be written and mini-dramas acted as culminating activities or collaborative exercises. The success of many of these activities will be dependent on the interpersonal and trust relationships that develop within the group and the outcomes will be as variable as the groups (Practicum Learning Principle 7).

*Is it a journey, spinning hoop or chance?*

This research project has progressed through a number of layers, from developing truly conceivable stories from trustworthy data, through exploring the uncertainty, inconsistencies, struggles, misinformation, tensions and messiness of lived experience in the light of patterns that emerged, to the creation of practicum learning principles that offer a tentative theory and direction for the practicum. The most important elements of a theory that might drive
practicum learning is an acceptance of the view that each situation is quite different, yet there are similarities that can be highlighted to provide powerful new ways of understanding the practicum experience and abstracting the particular to the wider practicum view. By helping preservice teachers to gain complex understandings of teachers’ work in a way that does not focus on teaching as a set of strategies or bag of tricks, but as an holistic knowledge about the physical, cognitive, affective and socio-political domains of learning, they are empowered to see beyond their previous limited conception of what teachers do and their view of ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ a teacher (Practicum Learning Principle 6).

Also central to this new view is the development of a truly collaborative partnership between the schools and university schools of education that is underpinned by shared understandings of well informed theories of education and transformative practice. Such a model allows preservice teachers to develop views that understand theories of learning and practice as integrated and connected, not separate and competing. In this way previous concepts of secondary school practicum ownership and the power struggles that ensue might be dispelled. Policy guidelines and directions that purport to settle for all time our understandings about teaching and learning by pre-packaging teacher education as one size fits all, will be seen as fraudulent. Expedient ‘apprenticeship’ models that rely on the good faith of time poor, unwilling and partially informed classroom teachers who are struggling themselves with the demands of continuous change and increasingly disengaged young people, have little to offer the robust preparation of our teachers. Even the highly acclaimed observation process during the practicum has been challenged by the results of this study. It would appear that teachers frequently do not wish to be observed and preservice teachers need to have more choice around what they observe (Practicum Learning Principle 4).

There are a number of other aspects of teacher education that can be treated differently if we are cognisant of the new understandings that have emerged from this project. In Australia, each university’s school of education works individually with schools and there is very little sharing of ideas at the university level. Indeed, in many ways there is a culture of ‘competition’ rather than cooperation especially as the practicum placements available in schools are becoming more difficult to organise. While policy documents are recommending more days in schools (we await the imminent release of the Australian Senate Inquiry into Teacher Education), mentors are becoming increasingly difficult to find. Different universities are trying different initiatives to reduce the problem. Two Victorian Universities have organised programs in Darwin, much to the chagrin of the local university. Others have sponsored remote placements but, as is indicated in D’s story, they can be quite a complex cultural experience and while not wasted in terms of the personal development of preservice teachers, they do struggle to offer the necessary experiences for urban secondary teachers
who are increasingly being prepared for their role as a teacher in less and less time. With no clearly articulated and agreed ‘theory of practicum learning’ the diversity of practicum experiences appear to be frustrating for preservice teachers who frequently feel they have been unable to achieve the outcomes they expected to meet during their teacher education and practicum. If the practicum learning principles recommended here, as they intersect with the stories of the practicum, are used as a basis for conversations around the practicum, then practicum outcomes (‘the purpose of the practicum’) could be more clearly understood and practices more transparent. A tenth practicum learning principle could be added that relates to the important role of conversations between university teacher educators around the practicum process, based on developing a better understanding, or a tentative theory of the practicum.

There are currently a number of other alternative programs throughout Australia where preservice teachers are placed in ‘after school care’ or support programs for students who have ‘dropped out’ or been excluded from school (Gannon, 2005). A recent media report also mentioned the possibility of placements in ‘government departments and Technical and Further Education sites in addition to schools under a radical proposal to help stem a ‘crisis’ in teaching placements’ (Leung, 2006). It is ironic that the policy makers wish to increase school involvement in the preparation of preservice teachers yet the universities are finding it necessary to design alternative programs through lack of school commitment. Unfortunately there is no mention in the ‘alternative sites’ discussion of the important underpinning theories and knowledges of those who will mentor the preservice teachers, no mention of practicum learning outcomes, and certainly no acknowledgement of the problematic nature of the practicum and its role in developing preservice teacher understanding and identity.

**Spinning the hoops anew**

Some university practicum programs have developed contracts for schools to sign indicating that they will offer particular support and experiences to preservice teachers. Others are developing ‘teaching schools’ and are transferring all responsibility for the practicum to school based mentors. In such cases they are missing the point that it is the complexity of the contexts that inform and support practice, and the limited understandings of the processes and procedures that are possible in schools that have led to the questions of whether the practicum can deliver what it promises. Without an better understanding of the beliefs and practices of those involved, what this means in terms of how practicum learning and preservice teachers are positioned, and how this came to be the way it is, then the possibilities invested in the practicum and the importance of spinning the hoops anew, will
be missed. As so-called ‘experts’ on teaching and learning, teacher educators have been slow to recognise and listen to their own advice when planning for the learning of preservice teachers. They must now find themselves in the position where they advocate strongly for their own role in the practicum, cognisant of how it sits on the periphery of a complex and only partially understood classroom teaching and learning relationship, as they are in danger of losing their influence in the preparation of preservice teachers. It is only through collaboration between schools and universities of education at a deeper level that we will begin to meet the needs of our preservice teachers and the teaching profession. A situation free from vested interest and disempowering posturing, where the theories that underpin the practice of teaching are played out, will allow us to begin to do things differently (Practicum Learning Principle 5 and 6).

**Mentor workshops**

It is essential that mentors and teacher educators are given the space to work together to inform preservice teacher learning during the practicum (Practicum Learning Principles 6). The relationship between the teacher educators and mentors is extremely important. It is clear from this study that the teachers in the classrooms do not want the responsibility of mentoring preservice teachers in the current climate of the intensification of their work and the threats to their autonomy in the classroom. Yet their role is crucial. Teacher educators need to be particularly aware that it is clear to mentor teachers that they should work together in all aspects of practicum learning and the already extensive teacher knowledge about schools, education, teaching, pedagogy, students, classroom dynamics and curriculum is valued. Attitudes change dramatically during mentor workshops when it is stressed that the practicum is a shared endeavour and the purpose of mentoring workshops is for both the mentors and teacher educators to share their understandings and build a valuable learning experience for preservice teachers (Practicum Learning Principles 5, 6 and 9), not replace teacher knowledge with teacher educator knowledge (Rorrison & Sutton, 2005). By workshopping the sorts of experiences that the individual mentors and their schools can offer preservice teachers, partnerships at a deeper level of understanding can be developed, expelling the views that one or the other must hold the key or the ‘right’ way to proceed for preservice teacher practicum learning. The stories of the practicum created as part of this research project and the Practicum Learning Principles that have resulted, can form the basis of a collaborative sharing exercise aimed at recognising and highlighting the complex nature of the field (Practicum Learning Principle 9). It is not the lack of possibilities for learning that is the problem but the failure of those involved to harness the potential of the critical understandings of the teaching and learning process as it is played out in the practicum. Mentoring workshops can begin to address this.
Can this theory of practicum learning be abstracted beyond the Australian secondary classroom?

I have introduced the use of narrative to inform and engage teacher educators, teachers, mentors and preservice teachers in two European schools of education (Lärarhögskolan i Stockholm, Sweden and Windesheim Educatief-ivo, Zwolle, Holland) and it has been well received. Further research is planned with both institutions.

In terms of relevance to primary school classrooms there are a number of issues to consider. Firstly there are certainly a number of differences between the primary and secondary programs and the stories as they are currently presented have relevance only for those involved with middle schooling and secondary pedagogies. Indeed, it was the difference between the primary (or elementary) settings and the secondary school demands that instigated this study. The practicum experience of the primary preservice teacher is quite different in terms of structure and process and another study would need to be undertaken to observe and write about the primary classroom. The Practicum Learning Principles would also need to be interrogated to check their relevance and meaning for the primary setting.

Unexpected turns of the hoop

I realised as I sorted and analysed the data that some of my own beliefs and theories were challenged as unexpected patterns and themes emerged. The theories that make meaning in my life are no more innocent than those that make meaning in the lives of those I research. It astounds me how often my unbridled support for the hegemonic structures that contain teacher education influence my own beliefs and practices. There are still some questions that remain unanswered. What aspects of the practicum are actually silenced by my stories rather than exposed by them? What issues of power, tradition and interpretation have continued to silence some of the voices that the research design was created to uncover? As I became more fully immersed in the data I did lose all sense of directing the analysis in any way, and as a result a number of unexpected connections and ideas emerged that changed the way I now read the ‘spin’ of the hoops. By allowing the spin within this study the freedom to find its own balance and by making this transparent to the players in the field, a transformative project of possibility is created. In the beginning I thought ‘jumping through hoops’ was a concept that undermined the practicum and rendered it unworthy of the role to which it was entrusted. I realise now it is a statement of transformation. The complexity, contextual variations, diversity in positioning and the quest for clarity and a more clear vision are what keep teaching vital and relevant in changing times. We no longer need to pretend that it is organised, consistent, linear or standardised but celebrate and make transparent the moments
of understanding and the eclectic spin that challenges and underpins good teaching practice for teacher educators, teachers in schools and preservice teachers.

Suddenly the spinning stopped
The hoops were still and calm
The peace of understanding struck
The past was left behind
The future stretched before our eyes but then our hearts did jump
For in the distance we could see more spinning hoops in sight!
Appendices

Appendix 1 Letter to Preservice Teachers

August 9 2004

Dear

Your practicum for semester 2 has been confirmed at a Darwin school. This school would be a suitable site for my research. I have attached copies of the letters related to my research and confirmed by the Charles Darwin University Ethics Committee and the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (NTDEET) Planning and Review Services. Depending on who volunteers for involvement I will contact the Independent School principals if I need to seek their approval.

The attached letters are those approved by the relevant ethics committees. The research is focussed on preservice teacher practicum and there is little involved beyond the normal practicum experience. The research project aims to make transparent the perspectives of those involved in the practicum. I will visit your classroom daily when you are teaching a particular class. I will only be observing in the classroom and will then write stories about the learning environment and the learning that is occurring, from a university educator as observer’s perspective. This will be followed by focus groups where I will then ask you, some of your students and your mentor, to comment on the narrative from your own perspectives.

For a classroom to be selected as a site for the pilot, the preservice teacher must volunteer, and then the principal’s permission is sought. If the principal approves then the mentor teacher’s permission is also sought. If they approve, then 5-10 students will be asked to volunteer to spend 5-10 minutes each day discussing or re-writing the narrative. If they and their caregivers give permission, then this will be selected as a possible site.

As making learning central to the practicum is a major focus of the research, this should be a valuable learning experience for all those involved. Not everyone who volunteers will be able to be part of the research because it depends on support from so many different individuals. However, I hope you will consider the experience carefully and feel that this is yet another way you can make a difference to the profession.

If you need further information or would like to volunteer please either telephone, email, drop in or put a note under the door.

Yours sincerely,
Appendix 1b Letter to Preservice Teachers

April 10, 2005

Dear

Your practicum for semester 2 has been confirmed at a Darwin school. This school would be a suitable site for my research. I have attached copies of the letters related to my research and confirmed by the Charles Darwin University Ethics Committee and the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (NTDEET) Planning and Review Services. Depending on who volunteers for involvement I will contact the Independent School principals if I need to seek their approval.

The attached letters are those approved by the relevant ethics committees. The research is focussed on preservice teacher practicum and there is little involved beyond the normal practicum experience. The research project aims to make transparent the perspectives of those involved in the practicum. I will visit you classroom more frequently than is normal for practicum observations. I will only be observing in the classroom and will then write stories about the learning environment and the learning that is occurring, from a university educator as observer’s perspective. These stories will be later fictionalised to develop a record that has a sense of the practicum from many observations in a wide range of settings. No one school, classroom or person will be identifiable. Later these stories will be checked by preservice teachers, teachers and teacher educators, to identify whether they resonate as possible or probable stories of the practicum. It is hoped they will be used in the future as grounded and authentic resources in preservice teacher and mentor professional learning workshops.

For a classroom to be selected as a site for the pilot, the preservice teacher must volunteer, and then the principal’s permission is sought. If the principal approves then the mentor teacher’s permission is sought. If they approve then the project should be explained to the class as a mark of respect.

Not everyone who volunteers will be able to be part of the research because it depends on support from many different individuals. However I hope you will consider the experience carefully and feel that this is yet another way you can make a difference to the profession.

If you need further information please contact me. If you would like to volunteer please complete the attached consent before Friday April 15 and return it to my office.

Yours sincerely,

Doreen Rorrison

PhD Candidate
Appendix 2 Letter of Explanation to Principals

Principal
13 August 2004

Dear

The proposal for the research ‘Co-constructing the Practicum’ from PhD candidate Doreen Rorrison has been accepted by her supervisors and the Director, Postgraduate Research Studies, at the Charles Darwin University. The Ethics Application has been approved by both the University and the Northern Territory Government Department of Employment, Education and Training.

Doreen wishes to conduct research that involves observation of the practicum classroom in a more regular manner than is usual. This will be followed by the writing of brief statements about the learning environment and the learning that is occurring from a university educator as observer’s perspective. These statements will then be discussed and adjusted by the research participants (preservice teacher, students and classroom teacher) during 5-10 minute focus groups, to represent the different perspectives of those involved. The process will continue for several weeks and the statements will gradually build a ‘story’ or a ‘narrative’ about the learning that is happening in the classroom, reflecting the points of view and ‘positioning’ of the preservice teachers, school students, classroom teachers and university liaison lecturers involved. Focus groups will only be convened when the lesson runs into recess, lunch or the end of the day.

A preservice teacher who has been placed at your school for the next practicum has volunteered to be involved in the research project. If you approve (in principle) of the preservice teacher’s involvement during the practicum at your school, then the allocated mentor will be contacted and the project will be discussed. If the mentor also approves then they will be asked to recommend the best way to introduce the project to the class. We hope that 5-10 students will volunteer to stay after class for a 5-10 minute focus group for about four weeks to discuss a story of the learning that is happening in the classroom. Students, teachers and pre-service teachers will be asked to comment on, annotate or discuss the developing story from their particular perspective and it will be changed, developed further and brought back for checking at the next lesson.

By later ‘reaching into’ this story and how it was developed and changed, whose opinions were expressed, how consensus was reached, what the classroom learning looks like and who is listening, talking and silent, Doreen hopes that new perspectives of classroom learning during the practicum will emerge. This will assist in the education of teachers- and ultimately benefit the students in our schools.
Complete anonymity of all participants and schools will be guaranteed in any writings about this project. Participants can withdraw from the project at any time and all ‘data’ in the form of ‘statements, stories and observations’ will be available to all participants and their respective education authorities. Full explanation of the methodology, consent letters and ethics approvals are attached.

The only difference in terms of normal practicum processes will be the more frequent observation by the university liaison lecturer and the 5-10 minute voluntary focus groups where the developing story will be discussed.

Doreen is currently the coordinator of the Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education at the Charles Darwin University, the Practicum Coordinator and the lecturer and unit designer for the practicum unit. She has been visiting Territory schools to support the preservice teachers during the practicum for three years. She chairs the practicum meetings at the university where school principals and university education staff discuss practicum procedure and collaboration. She is also involved with a working party looking at professional development and support for school based mentor teachers.

I have no doubt Doreen is familiar with school protocols and will at all times be aware of the diverse needs and dispositions of the students and teachers in the schools. If you desire further explanation please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Emeritus Professor John Smyth

for

Doreen Rorrison

Phone 8946 6557

Fax 8946 6151
Appendix 2b Letter of Explanation to Principals

10 April 2005

Dear

The proposal for the research ‘Co-constructing the Practicum’ from PhD candidate Doreen Rorrison has been accepted by her supervisors and the Director, Postgraduate Research Studies, at the Charles Darwin University. The University and the Northern Territory Government Department of Employment, Education and Training have approved the Ethics Application.

Doreen wishes to conduct research that involves observation in a wide range of practicum classroom in a more regular manner than is usual. This will be followed by the writing of stories about the learning environment and the learning that is occurring from a university educator as observer’s perspective. These stories will be later fictionalised to develop a record that has a sense of the practicum from many observations in a wide range of settings. No one school, classroom or person will be identifiable. Later these stories will be checked by students, preservice teachers, teachers and teacher educators to identify whether they resonate as possible or probable stories of the practicum. It is hoped they will be used in the future as grounded and authentic resources in preservice teacher and mentor professional learning workshops.

A preservice teacher who has been placed at your school for the next practicum has volunteered to be involved in the research project. If you approve (in principle) of the preservice teacher’s involvement during the practicum at your school, then the allocated mentor will be contacted and the project will be discussed. If the mentor also approves then they will be asked to recommend the best way to introduce the project to the class. This will be as a sign of respect and to inform the class of the role of the observer. Please let me know if you believe parents need to be advised of the research project.

Complete anonymity of all participants and schools will be guaranteed in any writings about this project. Participants can withdraw from the project at any time. All ‘data’ in the form of ‘statements, stories and observations’ will be available to education authorities if required. Full explanation of the methodology, consent letters and ethics approvals are attached.

Doreen is currently the coordinator of the Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education at the Charles Darwin University, the Practicum Coordinator and the lecturer and unit designer for the secondary practicum units. She has been visiting Territory schools to support the preservice teachers during the practicum for three years. She chairs the practicum meetings at the university where school principals and university education staff discuss practicum
procedure and collaboration. She is also involved with a working party looking at teaching standards and is working on a project funded by NTDEET to provide professional learning in mentoring for Territory teachers.

Doreen is familiar with school protocols and will at all times be aware of the diverse needs and dispositions of the students and teachers in the schools. If you desire further explanation please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Professor John Smyth

For

Doreen Rorrison

PhD Candidate
Appendix 3 Letter to Mentor Teachers

3 Sept 2004

Dear

My PhD proposal for the research ‘Co-constructing the Practicum’ has been accepted by my Supervisors and the Director, Postgraduate Research Studies, at the Charles Darwin University. The Ethics Application has been approved by both the University and the Northern Territory Government Department of Employment, Education and Training and your principal has given ‘in principle support’ to the research.

A preservice teacher currently placed with you (………………………………..name) has volunteered to be involved in the research project. As mentor, I would like to discuss gaining your approval for research in your classroom. The research involves observation of the practicum classroom in a more regular manner than is usual. This will be followed by the writing of brief statements about the learning environment and the learning that is occurring from a university educator as observer’s perspective. These statements will then be discussed and adjusted by the research participants (preservice teacher, students and classroom teacher) during 5-10 minute focus groups, to represent the different perspectives of those involved.

The process will continue for several weeks and the statements will gradually build a ‘story’ or a ‘narrative’ about the learning that is happening in the classroom, reflecting the points of view and ‘positioning’ of the preservice teachers, school students, classroom teachers and university liaison lecturers involved. Focus groups will only be convened when the lesson runs into recess, lunch or the end of the day.

Although an important step in the approval process, your support is not the final step- that lies with the students in your class (and their parents/caregivers). We hope that 5-10 students will volunteer to stay after class for a 5-10 minute focus group, two to three times a week for two to four weeks, to discuss a story of the learning that is happening in the classroom.

Students, teachers and preservice teachers will be asked to comment on, annotate or discuss the developing story from their particular perspective and it will be changed, developed further and brought back for checking at a subsequent focus group.

Your advice as to the best way to introduce the project to the class is vital. It is not essential that each student who volunteers attend every focus session though the success of the study will depend on consistent feedback from students as well as mentors and preservice teachers.

By later ‘reaching into’ this story and how it was developed and changed, whose opinions were expressed, how consensus was reached, what the classroom learning looks like and who is listening, talking and silent, I hope that new perspectives of classroom learning
during the practicum will emerge. This will assist in the education of teachers- and ultimately benefit the students in our schools.

Complete anonymity of all participants and schools will be guaranteed in any writings about this project. Participants can withdraw from the project at any time and all ‘data’ in the form of ‘statements, stories and observations’ will be available to all participants and their respective education authorities. Plain language statement and consent letters are attached. The only difference in terms of normal practicum processes will be the more frequent observation by the university liaison lecturer and the 5-10 minute voluntary focus groups where the developing story will be discussed.

I am currently the coordinator of the Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education at the Charles Darwin University, the Practicum Coordinator and the lecturer and unit designer for the practicum unit. I have been visiting Territory schools to support the preservice teachers during the practicum for three years. I chair the practicum meetings at the university where school principals and university education staff discuss practicum procedure and collaboration. I am also involved with a working party looking at professional development and support for school based mentor teachers.

I have taught in Australian schools for 25 years and am familiar with school protocols and will at all times be aware of the diverse needs and dispositions of the students and teachers in the schools. If you desire further explanation please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Doreen Rorrison
Appendix 3b Letter to Mentor Teachers

10 April 2005

Dear

My PhD proposal for the research ‘Co-constructing the Practicum’ has been accepted by my Supervisors and the Director, Postgraduate Research Studies, at the Charles Darwin University. The Ethics Application has been approved by both the University and the Northern Territory Government Department of Employment, Education and Training and your principal has given ‘in principle support’ to the research.

A preservice teacher currently placed with you (………………………..name) has volunteered to be involved in the research project. As mentor, I would like to discuss gaining your approval for research in your classroom. The research involves observation in a wide range of practicum classroom in a more regular manner than is usual. This will be followed by the writing of stories about the learning environment and the learning that is occurring from a university educator as observer’s perspective. These stories will be later fictionalised to develop a record that has a sense of the practicum from many observations in a wide range of settings. No one school, classroom or person will be identifiable. Later these stories will be checked by students, preservice teachers, teachers and teacher educators to identify whether they resonate as possible or probable stories of the practicum. It is hoped they will be used in the future as grounded and authentic resources in preservice teacher and mentor professional learning workshops.

Your advice as to the best way to introduce the project to the class is vital. They should be told why they have an observer in the classroom so frequently.

Complete anonymity of all participants and schools will be guaranteed in any writings about this project. Participants can withdraw from the project at any time. All ‘data’ in the form of ‘statements, stories and observations’ will be available to education authorities if required. A Plain Language Statement and consent letters are attached.

I am currently the coordinator of the Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education at the Charles Darwin University, the Practicum Coordinator and the lecturer and unit designer for the practicum unit. I have been visiting Territory schools to support the preservice teachers during the practicum for three years. I chair the practicum meetings at the university where school principals and university education staff discuss practicum procedure and collaboration. I am also involved with a working party looking at teaching standards and a project funded by NTDEET to provide professional learning in mentoring for Territory teachers.
I taught in Australian schools for 25 years and am familiar with school protocols and will at all times be aware of the diverse needs and dispositions of the students and teachers in the schools. If you desire further explanation please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Doreen Rorrison

PhD Candidate
Appendix 4 Consent Form by Adult

I, ............................................................... of .................................................................

..................................................................................................................

Hereby consent to participate in a study to be undertaken by Doreen Rorrison (Dip.T., Adv.
Dip. T., B.Ed., Grad Cert Teach., M.Teach.)

of Charles Darwin University

and I understand that the purpose of the research is:

To increase understanding of the learning that occurs during the practicum and add to the
knowledge of ways to increase access to that learning for all participants.

I acknowledge that:

• The aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks of the study, have been explained to me by Doreen Rorrison

• I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in such study.

• I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific journals and academic journals.

• Individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation.

• I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

Signature: ............................................................... Date: .................................
Appendix 4b Consent form by adult

CONSENT FORM BY ADULT

I, ............................................................... of ...................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................................................................

Hereby consent to participate in a study to be undertaken by


Of Charles Darwin University

And I understand that the purpose of the research is:

To increase understanding of the learning that occurs during the practicum and add to the knowledge of ways to increase access to that learning for all participants.

I acknowledge that:

- The aims, methods, anticipated benefits and possible risks of the study have been explained to me by Doreen Rorrison
- I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in this study.
- I understand that co-constructed text will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific journals and academic journals.
- Individuals and places will not be identifiable and results that might identify me will be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation.
- I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, at which time my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will be returned to me at my request. Due to the collaborative and fictionalised nature of the narrative that will have developed, I agree that the ‘story’ will remain the possession of the writers unless it contains information that I consider identifies me.

Signature: ................................................................... Date: .................................
Appendix 5 Cover letter to students

Thank you for taking the time to consider being involved in the study “Co-constructing the practicum”. I hope that we can find a way to make sure students’ views are listened to.

As was explained, you will occasionally be asked to remain after class for 5 – 10 minutes over the next few weeks. This will only happen when your lesson runs into recess, lunch or home time. You will be given a ‘story’ to read or listen to that tells my view of the learning that is happening in your classroom. You will then be asked to give your point of view. You can either write this on the story sheet or tell someone else who will write it for you.

You don’t have to come to every session but it will be easier and take less time if you come regularly. You can withdraw from the study at any time just by letting me know.

No one will know what you have added, adjusted, agreed or disagreed with on the story sheet. As the story gets longer I will gradually drop off the beginning when it seems to reflect everyone’s view and we will just work on the new parts of the story.

It could be fun- and I’m sure it will be interesting. All you need to do now is ask your parents/caregivers to read and sign the consent if you are under 18 years of age, and then you sign it too and return it to school tomorrow (or as soon as possible).

Thanks,
Appendix 6 Letter of explanation to parent

6 Sept 2004

Dear Parent/Caregiver

My PhD proposal for the research ‘Co-constructing the Practicum’ has been accepted by my supervisors and the Director, Postgraduate Research Studies, at the Charles Darwin University. The University Ethics Committee, the Northern Territory Government Department of Employment, Education and Training, the school principal and your student’s classroom teacher have given permission for research to be conducted focussing on the learning that occurs in the classroom during the preservice practicum (formally known as student teacher practice).

Your student has volunteered to be part of the research which involves reading a ‘story’ about what I (as researcher) have observed, then commenting on it either on paper or orally. The teacher and preservice teacher will be doing the same and in this way I hope to build a ‘story’ that reflects the views of everyone who is involved in the classroom learning process.

The research will continue for several weeks and your student’s commitment will involve 5-10 minutes of reading and making notes or commenting on the developing story, two to three times a week. These focus groups will only be convened when the lesson runs into recess, lunch or home time, so no lesson time will be lost. Occasional inability to be involved will not affect the results though consistency is important so I hope that once committed your student will attend regularly. However, if at any time your student wishes to withdraw from the research, they will be able to do so freely (see attached plain language statement and approval for a minor or dependent).

By later ‘reaching into’ this story and how it was developed and changed, I hope that new perspectives of classroom learning during the practicum will emerge. This will assist in the education of teachers- and ultimately benefit the students in our schools.

I am currently the coordinator of the Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education at the Charles Darwin University, the Practicum Coordinator and the lecturer and unit designer for the practicum unit. I have been visiting Territory schools to support the preservice teachers during the practicum for three years. I chair the practicum meetings at the university where school principals and university education staff discuss practicum procedure and collaboration. I am also involved with a working party looking at professional development and support for school based mentor teachers.

I have taught in Australian schools for 25 years and am familiar with school protocols and will at all times be aware of the diverse needs and dispositions of the students and teachers in the class. If you desire further explanation please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,
Appendix 7 Consent form on behalf of minor

CONSENT FORM ON BEHALF OF A MINOR OR DEPENDENT PERSON

I, ................................................................... of ..................................................
....................................................................................................................................

Hereby give consent for my son/daughter/dependent
..............................................................................................................................
to participate in a study to be undertaken

of Charles Darwin University

and I understand that the purpose of the research is:

To increase understanding of the learning that occurs during the practicum and add to the
knowledge of ways to increase access to that learning for all participants.

I acknowledge that:

· The aim, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible hazards of the research
  study, have been made available to me

· I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my child's/dependent/s participation in
  such research study

· Aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in
  scientific journals and academic journals.

· Individual results will not be released to any person including medical practitioners,
  except at my request and on my authorisation

· I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my
  child's/dependent's participation in the research study will immediately cease and any
  information obtained will not be used.

Signature: ......................................................... Date: .........................

Student Signature: ........................................................ Date: .....................
### Appendix 8 Plain Language Statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Co-constructing learning in the practicum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant researcher</td>
<td>Doreen Rorrison PhD candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other participants</td>
<td>Schools students, school based mentors, preservice teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the study</td>
<td>You are invited to participate in a research project where you will be involved in checking and rechecking statements about the learning that is occurring and views of learning in the classroom. This type of research is very important to the development of understanding of what is happening in schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of the study</td>
<td>This study will help in the education of teachers and their understanding of classroom learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would be expected of you?</td>
<td>If you decide to take part in this research you would be asked to comment on statements that are written about the classroom where you are located and you will be invited to help make these statements a better reflection of your perspective of the learning that is occurring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomforts/risks</td>
<td>There are no specific risks associated with this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>Full confidentiality of your particular involvement, comments, concerns, feedback will be ensured if that is your wish. You may on the other hand enjoy being involved in open-ended discussion and take ownership of your perspective statements. In the presentation of the research data confidentiality will be assured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your participation</td>
<td>We would be grateful if you did participate in this study but you are free to refuse to participate. Even if you do decide to participate, you may withdraw from the research at any time. This will not affect your other classroom activities in any way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results of the study</td>
<td>The results of the discussions and statement development will be available to you for checking and re-checking continually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons to contact</td>
<td>Doreen Rorrison 89466557 or if there is an emergency or if you have any concerns before commencing, during, or after the project, you are invited to contact the Executive Officer of the University Human Ethics Committee on 8946 7064, who can pass on any concerns to appropriate officers within the University.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8b Plain Language Statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Project:</strong></th>
<th>Co-constructing the practicum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant researcher</strong></td>
<td>Doreen Rorrison PhD candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other participants</strong></td>
<td>Schools students, school based mentors, preservice teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose of the study:</strong></td>
<td>You are invited to participate in a research project where the practicum classroom will be observed and fictional stories written about the learning that occurs during the practicum. This type of research is very important to the development of understanding of what is happening in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits of the study:</strong></td>
<td>This study will help in the education of teachers and their understanding of classroom learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What would be expected of you?</strong></td>
<td>If you decide to take part in this research you will be agreeing that the classroom will be observed during the practicum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discomforts/risks:</strong></td>
<td>There are no specific risks associated with this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidentiality:</strong></td>
<td>Full confidentiality of your involvement, comments, concerns or feedback will be ensured. You will not be expected to do anything different as a result of being observed. You are not required to comment in any way. In the presentation of the research data confidentiality will be assured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your participation:</strong></td>
<td>We would be grateful if you did participate in this study but you are free to refuse to participate. Even if you do decide to participate, you may withdraw from the research at any time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results of the study:</strong></td>
<td>The results of the study will be fictional and will undergo authenticity checks by other teachers, preservice teachers, students and teacher educators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persons to contact:</strong></td>
<td>If you have any questions about the project, please contact the researcher, Doreen Rorrison on ph: 89466557, or email <a href="mailto:Doreen.Rorrison@cdu.edu.au">Doreen.Rorrison@cdu.edu.au</a> If there is an emergency or if you have any concerns before commencing, during, or after the completion of the project, you are invited to contact the Executive Officer of the Northern Territory University Human Ethics Committee on 8946 7064. The Executive Officer can pass on any concerns to appropriate officers within the University.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 9 Analysis Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning unit</th>
<th>From author’s reading</th>
<th>Total annotations</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context/ culture/ 5th citizen</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience/who the teacher is</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insightful</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to be a teacher?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messiness, complexity, untidiness</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self doubt /Thrown in, uncertainty, vulnerable, inadequate</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other preservice teachers in school- important/influence</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation as learning</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good pedagogy by mentors</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as community worker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other lives/jobs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiring, out of routine</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different ideologies</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variations between students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes are happening</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of initiative- use it</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different mentoring styles/School culture of mentoring</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource cupboard metaphor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted a good report</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burden/resent Doing many things at once Threat/ Too busy for them</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty vessel/ Light the fire metaphor. Innovative pedagogy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival/ Trauma of first lesson</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Bell metaphor/ Freedom metaphor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Inordinate amount of time spent in preparation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Students/confusion/Lack of respect/Resentment/ Resistance</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Quality of mentoring Remain involved Supportive mentor/ rescue</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Time, speed of lessons</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Student life worlds, need to develop understanding</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Homework issues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>One to one</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Computers/emails</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Outsider/key issues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>A game for students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Assistant teacher, unpaid, slave lb</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Like young people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Schools have changed University has changed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Uni like a jigsaw/ no answers/too fast paced</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Different teaching styles show early/born and not made</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Schools trying to accommodate at admin level. Unsuccessful.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Patterns</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Need to understand young people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Practicum a learning experience in the true sense (for everyone)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Get to know your students names/ lifeworlds</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Students involved in different ways*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Respect and trust; students/ teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>At first prepare step by step, word by word</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Listen to what your mentors say</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Its about student learning, not about you/ The hump</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Bricoleur</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Chaos theory</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Classroom dynamics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Teacher won’t jeopardise own relationship with the class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Honeymoon period</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Relevance of uni</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Lesson content</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Blame elsewhere, not over the hump</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Talk too much</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Letting go of the theories that worked in the past</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Jumping through hoops metaphor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Infinite appetite for distractions*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Middle Schooling</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Understanding practice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Role models</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>School climate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Construct young people</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Poor preparation for culture and context/induction/whose job?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Handbook? Process?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Poor pedagogy by preservice teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Jungle metaphor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Welcoming on surface</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Humanity in schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Teachers so absorbed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Organisation important</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Need strong content knowledge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Learning theory, young people learn in different ways</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Innovative teaching by mentors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Outdated methods/ text</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>Journaling/ Reflection</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Attendance issues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Noise levels</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>New respect for teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Do as I say not as I do, not role models</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Questioning as pedagogy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Getting over the hump</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Sense of being a teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Being fair, treating differently</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Inspiring teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Making student learning central</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Survival metaphor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Big picture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Abandoning/ Absence of mentor teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Feedback from students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Theory/practice nexus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Resistance at uni after prac</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Purpose of education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>Indigenous Issues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>Hardships in remote settings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Indigenous knowledges</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Impressive preservice teacher</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Typical teacher attitude</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Maybe too switched on?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Author’s voice/philosophy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>True/realistic/covered everything</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>Some don’t realise not suited</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Not enough time to understand students</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>Concepts not understood, jargon?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>Enjoyed reading/well written</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>Harder now for preservice teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>Biographical style effective</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>Made me reflect</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Would be good to give to preservice teacher/ reflection</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>Power imbalance</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115</td>
<td>Invisibility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116</td>
<td>Sounds luxurious (quality mentoring and good pedagogy)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>Giving me some good ideas/strategies</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td>Timing of prac not always ideal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>119</td>
<td>Preservice teacher had not pre-planned</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>Need some way of preparing mentors</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>Purpose of prac?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>Middle-schooling a big ask for preservice teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td>Unrealistic/what about..?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>I learned something here</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125</td>
<td>Too long</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126</td>
<td>Hated this story</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127</td>
<td>Dislike having preservice teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128</td>
<td>Hate the reporting procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td>Bad system but no answers</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130</td>
<td>Uni liaison person useless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131</td>
<td>Collaboration uni and schools imp</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132</td>
<td>More country and difficult schools should be used</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133</td>
<td>Teachers need incentives to have preservice teacher. Time/ cash- not good will</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134</td>
<td>Would be excellent for PD</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>135</td>
<td>Good variation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>Brings the theory to life</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137</td>
<td>Models good pedagogy/strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Could explore complexity further with longer or other stories</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>139</td>
<td>Schools not receptive to preservice teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>School/community/big picture</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>141</td>
<td>Even preservice teacher’s have misconceptions of purpose of prac</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>142</td>
<td>Like ending, really a beginning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143</td>
<td>Relationships between preservice teacher and mentor very important</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>Good that reader and author share experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>145</td>
<td>Outputs rather than inputs/good pedagogy</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td>Defensive, attacking uni courses, mis-understand</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td>Attacking preservice teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td></td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>149</td>
<td>Expect too much of preservice teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>Change of tone as story unfolds</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>Differences between schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>Gender issues</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>Really engage with story</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>154</td>
<td>Expects too much of uni</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>Duplication?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156</td>
<td>Structure of prac needs change</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>Suggestions to update story</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>What about non-govt schools?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>Maybe not constructive for preservice teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160</td>
<td>Similarity between uni courses</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161</td>
<td>Good for uni educators</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162</td>
<td>Team teaching ideal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>Good old stereotypes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>164</td>
<td>Even good teachers may have dependent classes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165</td>
<td>This is no kitbag/roadmap</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td>Important to feel valued –introduced</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167</td>
<td>Teacher priority is students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>More time with young people</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>Tempted to write own story (other different experiences)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>Professional year IS demanding</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>171</td>
<td>IT issues-discriminatory</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>Written feedback is important</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>Is the message ‘find out for yourself?’</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>174</td>
<td>Ok for teachers to have a life but not preservice teacher’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175</td>
<td>Its not easy being a teacher</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>176</td>
<td>Story introductions may not engage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177</td>
<td>Not comfortable with language of..</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178</td>
<td>Frequent staff changes an issue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179</td>
<td>Remote similar to inner city?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180</td>
<td>Maybe vulnerability leads to self-realisation?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181</td>
<td>Need to visit before prac</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182</td>
<td>Costs not reimbursed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>183</td>
<td>Professional responsibility of teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184</td>
<td>A little harsh, teacher do have some time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>Strong commitment from schools necessary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>Lets face it some poor pedagogy out there</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187</td>
<td>Many of contemporary ideas – time?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188</td>
<td>Uni courses need to address this</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189</td>
<td>Need to be explicit</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190</td>
<td>St needs to be successful (l. one)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>191</td>
<td>Need more focus on class management</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192</td>
<td>Not a clone</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>193</td>
<td>Different to what you expect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>194</td>
<td>Consistency important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>195</td>
<td>Boys need more contact with male teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>196</td>
<td>‘Stigma’ if decide to be a teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>197</td>
<td>Numeracy/literacy issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>198</td>
<td>Diff b/w private and state</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>199</td>
<td>Mobile phones a big issue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>What IS the teachers’ role</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td>Poor/no mentoring</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>202</td>
<td>Good pedagogy by preservice teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>203</td>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>204</td>
<td>Poor use of texts in schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>205</td>
<td>Is the preservice teacher a teacher?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206</td>
<td>Better system for subjects than Holland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>207</td>
<td>Preservice teacher’s will learn much, repeat</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>208</td>
<td>A good tool, would use in Holland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209</td>
<td>We learn by doing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210</td>
<td>We learn from the students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>211</td>
<td>Must be unpredictable</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212</td>
<td>Inclusiveness developed well</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>213</td>
<td>Did start to drift off here</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214</td>
<td>Want to feel wanted on prac</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>215</td>
<td>Realise later the stress teachers are under</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>216</td>
<td>School receptivity so important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>Relate/engage with school students important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>218</td>
<td>Makes it worthwhile</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>219</td>
<td>Mixed messages; uni/mentor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220</td>
<td>Students can work/learn together</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>221</td>
<td>Cost for resources preservice teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>222</td>
<td>Schools not set up for ‘constructivist approach’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>223</td>
<td>Just didn’t see the good stuff on prac</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>224</td>
<td>Difficult being a preservice teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>225</td>
<td>Learn from students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>226</td>
<td>Focus on classroom practice in prac</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>227</td>
<td>Happy Hour important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>228</td>
<td>Excitement of prac not impending doom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>229</td>
<td>Brilliant strategy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230</td>
<td>Need space to learn in prac</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>231</td>
<td>Strategy/practical focus units at uni best</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>232</td>
<td>Too few placements/can’t be choosy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>233</td>
<td>Diffs b/w primary and secondary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>234</td>
<td>Where is uni liaison?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>235</td>
<td>Intro course necessary for different cultural groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>236</td>
<td>Have a second support person in case mentor doesn’t work out</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>237</td>
<td>Where is preservice teacher voice in prac?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 10 Synopsis of 6 stories

The first story is about T who a male in his early twenties who entered university straight from school. He came from a poor country family who moved from place to place in his early years and he attended many different schools. T’s passion had been sport for as far back as he can remember. His first practicum in both the Health and Physical Education (HPE) and Science faculties of a large outer metropolitan school included both supportive and ‘laissez faire’ mentoring, but it was other aspects of school culture and politics that had the most influence on his practicum experience.

R is a middle aged female whose learning areas were Business Education, Graphic Design and Maths. She experiences difficulties adapting to the move from the workplace to the university and then her practicum placement was changed at the last minute. This caused her insecurities to re-emerge and she decided to withdraw from her practicum but continues with course units.

As a middle aged male from somewhere in the Indio-Pacific region ‘Dr B’ hopes to teach English and English as a Second Language (ESL) as he did before he arrived in Australia. Unfortunately B doesn’t really have the background knowledge in the English learning area and has no understanding of ‘English’ literature; his qualifications and experience are entirely in the areas of ESL and literacy. He appealed to the authorities and this led to his placement in the course. B’s mentors are hand picked and have recently participated in “mentor preparation workshops” but B tries to hold down a full time job and participate in his practicum at the same time. Eventually he realised he needed more time to fully understand the school culture and engage with his study. He withdraws from the practicum but not the course.

After spending many years in Europe, Q returns to Australia with the view of becoming a teacher. She is qualified to move into both Science and Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE). During her practica she is able to observe and work with some fine teachers but due to her mentor’s family emergency she is left to fend for herself during SOSE lessons in her first practicum.

An evocative example of our ‘Y’ generation D rebelled against everything middle class and enjoyed days of smoking pot and drinking home brew when she was supposed to be at an exclusive girl’s school. Surprisingly, she won a place at university but it wasn’t until her professional education units that she was forced to confront who she was and what she was doing with her life. A remote practicum in the Northern Territory helps her decide that teaching may after all be a worthwhile vocation.

The final story is about V, a young man who finds himself in an Arts/Education degree in a university campus away from the city where he grew up. He had no intention of being a teacher but was amazed by the rapport and respect he felt for the students in his classes. Coupled with the guidance and support he received from dedicated staff at a country school, he completed his practicum well ‘over the hump’, as his university lecturers would explain.

Some of the stories continue through two practica, some barely touch on one. There is an attempt to develop the characters and the context yet there is so much more that could be written. I have left as much space as I could for my readers to add their perspectives. I even invite them to write their own stories, recommend plots for missing stories, and suggest further chapters or alternate endings. I encourage them to ‘circle, underline and mark the text in any way, as well as comment, annotate, re-write, argue, dispute, criticize or affirm my perspective of the practicum’ (Open letter and explanation appendix x). I also explain that “[m]y research highlights how powerful our personal perceptions are and how different they can be to the perspectives of others, despite experiencing the ‘same’ situation’, and that teacher education is no exception. I acknowledge that “[e]veryone (and no-one) has the answers’.
Appendix 11 Pedagogies (and learning activities)

Pedagogy is a contested concept. It challenges definition. It is more than “teaching” or “instruction”. It is derived from the Greek “paidagogos” meaning the teacher of children (MacNeill, Cavanagh, Dellar, & Silcox, 2004). Current use can be conceptual, practical and/or ideological. I have used the term when describing learning experiences and also as an overarching concept as in “middle schooling pedagogies” or “productive pedagogies”. I use the term in an attempt to highlight the intersection of content, process and theories in learning environments. It helps avoid functionalist terms like “instruction”, “craft” or even “art” or “science” of teaching. Certainly the cultural, social, emotional, psychological, developmental and metacognitive aspects of the teaching/learning dialectic are central. Any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another (Christie, 2001), while acknowledging the effect of biography, context and culture, could be considered pedagogy. Pedagogy includes both the intrinsic and the extrinsic curriculum highlighting the full range of experiences and influences on learning.

MacNeill and Associates (2004) performed a literature search and identified five groups of meanings for “pedagogy”. Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2003) clarify its use with refinement and expansion into a mapping instrument for productive pedagogies. Freire (1977), Morton (1991), Smyth (1985) and van Manen (1999) use the term in a socio-ideological context while Britzman (2003) and Gibbs (1995) relate “pedagogy” more closely to social values. The majority of recent research and teacher education publications align it to learning activities, communities of practice and student centred learning outcomes. Here classroom learning activities are linked with the needs, abilities, perceived outcomes and metacognitive demands of the learning situation. This is when practice and theory intersect and the concept of pedagogy starts to move us closer to an understanding of the process of learning to teach or “becoming” a teacher. This “becoming” is a blending of the external and internal processes, neither being possible without the other.

The list below is not exhaustive- it is merely a start to develop the concept of pedagogy and your repertoire of learning activities.

- absorbing
- acknowledge many kinds of intelligences
- acknowledge many kinds of leaning styles
- active listening
- activities in the community
- affective (emotional) focus
- adaptive skills
- address diversity
- analysis
- articulating problems
- ask affective questions before content questions
- “ask three before me”
- assessment by checklist
- attention to emotional nature of learning
- attention to social nature of learning
- bloom’s taxonomy
- brainstorming
- capitalise on interests
- carefully constructed assessment tasks
- caring social agreements (Gibbs, 1995)
- celebrating achievement (Gibbs, 1995)
- challenge (moderate)
- circles of learning
- classroom ethos
- coaching
- co-construct
- cognitive conflict
- cognitive imbalance/insecure
- collaboration
- collective learning
- collective inquiry
- compelling
- concept maps
concluding performances
conflict resolution
conferencing with groups
conferencing with individuals
connecting ideas
connectionist
connections
construct understandings
cooperative activities
cooperative learning groups (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, & Roy, 1982)
creative thinking
critical thinking
culminating performances
debates
deer, dove, lion, fox (Gibbs, 1995)
decision-making
deconstructing task
defining classroom behaviour accurately (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003:54-5)
democratic
demonstration (idealised version of outcomes)
descriptive assessment
developing understanding
developmentally appropriate
differentiation of teaching
discovery learning
discussions
drawing conclusions
editing
effective problem definition
embrace ICT
encourage autonomy of learners
equity
excursions
explicit teaching
exploring
expressing appreciation (Gibbs, 1995)
extend locations of learning
extension work
fair
fashion shows
feedback
dialogue
written responses
comment marking
small groups
plenary sessions
discussions
peer groups
focus groups
field trips
finger on the pulse
“flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)
flow charts
focus groups
foster confidence
foster thinking
free from humiliation
free from judgement
generating hypotheses
generative feedback (Harpaz)
graphic organisers
group goals
group investigation
group processing of expectations
group work
group work on “open” problems
guided learning
habits of mind (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003:68-71)
high expectations
high cohesion groups (Gibbs, 1995)
high quality cognitive strategies
higher order thinking
hot potato
“I” messages
ICT enhanced learning
identifying patterns
identifying problems
imagination
inclusion activities
inclusive practices
independent learning
independent practice
independent research
inductive
information process
initiation into disciplinary knowledge (Harpaz)
inquiry based learning
inspirational
instruction manual writing
integration of idea
interactive learning
interactive computer programs
interesting
“Interview Circle” (Gibbs, 1995)
intrigue
investigative learning
inviting fertile questions (Harpaz)
involved
“Jigsaw” (Gibbs, 1995)
just in time planning
learning centres
learning circles
learning for understanding
learning seen as valued by others
lectures (especially yr 12 for uni preparation (Chittenden, 2003:43))
letter to a friend, politician, principal…
Life Maps (Gibbs, 1995)
life long learning
link learning process and product
listening skills
listing (chalk and talk)
making a difference
making connections
making inferences
making learning central
making meaning
maximum participation
meaningful
mind maps
mock trial
modelling
monitoring
motivating
multiple perspectives
narrative
negotiate
nested systems
novelty
observations
observing and diagnosing
observing and intervening
oral reading
organising information
outcomes based
pair work
participatory classroom
passion
peer assessment
peer feedback
peer learning
peer teaching
peer tutoring
perspectives
plan down (outcome->content->pedagogy)
positive classroom relationships
positive interactions
practicals
practice, reflect, adjust, and try again cycle
practising
predicting
present the collective wisdom of the culture
prior knowledges
problem based learning (PBL)
problem solving
productive education
projects
promote independent learning
purposeful
“Put Yourself on the Line” (argue opposite view) (Gibbs, 1995)
puzzles
question banks (Harpaz)
questions- challenging
questions- charged (Harpaz)
questions- clarifying
questions- connected
questions- creative
questions- exposing
questions -fertile (Harpaz)
questions- open
questions- practical
questions- reflective
quiet time
quizzes
reading workshops
reciprocal learning
reciprocal pair work
reciprocal teaching
reflection
relational focus
relevance
relevance to real life
repeat/reword
research
research teams
respectful
responding to an audience
review
rich conversations
risk taking
role play
role modelling
role reversal
rubric evaluation (transparent)
safe
scaffolding
self monitoring
self-regulation
sense of belonging
sense of possibility
sense of success
shared context
shared history
sharing feedback
sharing outcomes
sharing responsibilities
short-term goals (sometimes)
silent reading
simulation
six thinking hats
small groups
social context
social experiences
social support
SOLO taxonomy (structure of learning outcomes) (Biggs & Collis, 1982)
Speculations
Step by step
story maps
strategies learned
student voice
students as researchers (Hattam & Edwards)
supervised reading
supportive
SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats)
synthesising ideas
teaching for understanding
thematics
thinking constructively (Gibbs, 1995)
Think aloud
Time Out Reflection Cycle (Gibbs, 1995)
Tribes (Gibbs, 1995)
trust relationships
valuing diversity (Gibbs, 1995)
References for Pedagogies


Appendix 12 Building Positive Relationships (or Conflict Resolution)

40% of adults admit they lack confidence in some situation.

Feeling good about your self is the first step towards building good relationships

Developing trust and respect within relationships and groups is important

Clear communication sends messages of trust and respect

Belonging is a strong human need

Rejection is a strong human fear

Accepting responsibility for your actions is a sign of high self-esteem and confidence

Blaming is a sign of low self esteem and lack of confidence

Task 1 ‘Know yourself’

“Who the teacher is can be more important than what the teacher does”.

Complete the following chart- think about your everyday life (then do it again for teaching if you feel that you have a ‘teaching’ persona already.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often do you...</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nag</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrupt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explode</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use warnings (if you..)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persist with a line</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use sarcasm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use revenge (you’ll pay..)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdraw</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking your feelings out on someone else</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declare you are being unfairly treated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk behind someone’s back</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to forget about the problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel ill when emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to avoid hurting others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel depressed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act polite but feel angry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act conciliatory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Task 2 Conflict Resolution

Read the following situations and decide which way you would choose to handle them. Write 5 next to the statement that would be your first choice, 4 next to your second choice and continue until 1 for your last choice. Then do the same for situation 2 and 3.

Situation 1
A student arrives early in class, throws his or her bag on the floor, loudly pushes back a chair and sits back with arms folded.
1. You ignore him/her, complete your white board preparation, and then start the lesson when everyone is ready.
2. You smile towards the student and find a pen and paper just in case he/she will need it.
3. You wait for the class to settle and stand with your arms folded telling the class you are waiting for everyone to get their books and pens out.
4. You decide you will speak to the student immediately after class to see what you can do to help and in the meantime try not to make an issue of it.
5. You quickly finish your board preparation and find some excuse to ask the student to help you sort through some papers on your desk so that you can defuse the situation, show that you have noticed something is wrong and give him/her the option of discussing their issues/problem with you.

Situation 2
You have been preparing your lessons conscientiously; reflecting on your mentor’s feedback and implementing their suggestions and you think everything is going really well. Suddenly they seem to lose interest in what you are doing, make negative comments and take off immediately after the lesson.
6. You search out the teacher at the first opportunity and ask what you have done wrong.
7. You decide you are too busy to worry and you let it slide.
8. You buy a muffin and make a coffee for the teacher and go looking for them.
9. You re-write your lesson plan and leave it in their pigeon hole for their comments.
10. You wait until the next day and catch the teacher when they are alone and ask if you can talk to them about what happened after the previous lesson.

Situation 3
You have been up half the night marking assignments and have worked very hard to be fair, to provide lots of feedback on the assessment criteria sheet and to value the effort and development made by each student. You return the assignment at the end of the lesson and one student very aggressively complains as he/she stands to leave the room, that you haven’t been fair.
11. You search out the class teacher at lunchtime, explain what happened and ask if he/she will give the student a message to see you during home group.
12. You busy yourself with your packing up and pretend you didn’t hear.
13. You ask the student to bring the paper to you and you will see if you have made a mistake.
14. You block the students exit and demand an explanation and apology.
15. You loudly offer the class the opportunity to discuss their papers with you at any time.
Scoring Task 1
Score 3 for a frequently, 2 for a sometimes and 1 for a rarely.

Add up the first 11 scores □ this is your attacking score

Add the last 11 scores □ this is your avoiding score

Scoring Task 2
Next to the numbers in the table below that align with the numbered statements above write the score (from 1-5) that you gave to the statement. Then add up the vertical columns. Try to name the columns ‘avoidance’, ‘confronting’, ‘smoothing’ or ‘productive problem solving’ (you may use other headings).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each style can be appropriate in certain situations though in the big picture some techniques are more pro-active/productive. What can you do to change your ‘natural’ style to a more proactive/productive style?

(Adapted from Conflict Resolution Video Series Peer Power Australia Inc 1998)
Bibliography


Brandenburg, R., & Ryan, J. (2001). From 'Too little too late" to "This is the best part": Students' perceptions of changes to the practicum placement in teaching. Retrieved 13 May, 2003 from www.aare.edu.au/01pap


Campbell, A. (2000). Fictionalising research data as a way of increasing teachers' access to school focused research. Research in Education, 63(May), 81-89.


equation modelling techniques to investigate elementary school classroom learning culture.


Training.


Cushman, K. (2001). *Fires in the bathroom Advice for teachers from high school students*. 
Providence, RI: What Kids Can Do, Inc.
Our Own Words: Students' Perspectives on School (pp. 57-72). Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, Inc.


Gannon, S. (2005). "I'll be a different sort of teacher because of this": Creating the Next Generation. Paper presented at the AARE Conference, Parramatta, NSW.


Hattam, R. (1998). Designing a collaborative research project as a space for the enunciation of the 'subjugated knowledges' of early school leavers. Retrieved 13/05/03


Tuggerah, NSW: Social Science Press.


Osborne, G., Ireland, & Simone. (2000). *Yes, we are listening: Listening to student voice*. Retrieved 13/05/03, from http://www.aare.edu.au/00pap/gro00435.htm


Queensland Board of Teacher Registration. (1994). Learning to Teach, Report of the working party on the practicum in preservice teacher education. Toowong, Q.


Strucker, M., Moise, L., Magee, V., & Kreider, H. (2001). Writing the Wrong: Making Schools Better for Girls. In J. Shultz & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), *In Our Own Words: Students' Perspectives*


