

SSAHRI Research Grants 2013/14

Dr Elizabeth White: Experiences of new school-based teacher educators

Summary:

The research investigated the experiences of school-based teacher educators in order to understand the impact that this role has on their teaching and leadership and to develop an awareness of their professional development needs. It will inform HEI's and their partnership schools in planning sustainable models of teacher education.

Progress in completing the research outcomes promised:

Initial findings from questionnaires sent to school-based teacher educators revealed that they embraced the role of teacher mentor for their students, and where they delivering taught sessions too, they did not view these as two separate roles. They did not recognise the term 'teacher educator' but identified themselves as teacher mentors. They found working with a student motivating, giving them new ideas, causing them to reflect on their own practice and to strive to model good practice. They appreciated that this work was opening up opportunities for leadership in school and beyond and there was a realisation that their schools were benefitting from the experience they were having, for example being involved in this way has 'given me a better understanding of school curriculum in a much wider sense, from which my school has gained'.

All of the teachers felt that the beneficial impacts of their involvement, personally and professionally, were unlikely to have occurred, or would have occurred much more slowly if they hadn't had this experience. The teachers who were taking on the most as school-based teacher educators tended to value the university contribution and had a clearer understanding of how both parties were contributing to the partnership to give the students the best experience.

Initial findings from the focus group of students indicated that they valued the interest and passion that the school-based teacher educators had, the time that they gave to their training, their availability and their insightful views into teaching their subject. Like the school-based teacher educators, the students did not see the role of teacher mentor as separate from the role of leading taught sessions. However some of the trainees felt they were having to be proactive in keeping their school-based teacher educators to their commitment because of school pressures.

Initial conclusions suggest that the development of high quality teacher education is about having the right people involved rather than where the taught sessions are taking place or with whether the teacher educators are school-based or HEI-based, as one participant commented 'there are excellent people on all these areas as well as less impressive ones' – so quality assurance is key.

Further, student teachers recognise that for their learning, it is important for them to have supported opportunities to share practice and to transfer learning to their own practice. This type of professional learning can be led by experienced teacher educators, but was not always the case for those new to this role. There is a need for experienced teacher educators to nurture new school-based teacher educators in some of the more nuanced

aspects of the role. The need to address the mentoring of new school-based teacher educators is a developing aspect of the role of HEI's in these partnerships. The research findings have direct messages for the coverage of this mentoring and will be used to inform the Initial Teacher Education programmes at UH, providing opportunities for school based teacher educators to explore and develop their professional knowledge, pedagogy and identity.

These initial findings were presented at the 5th Conference of the Teacher Education Advancement Network in May 2014, and have been submitted to an international peer reviewed journal.

Further findings were presented at the International Professional Development Association Annual Conference in November 2014 and I am currently preparing a paper for submission to an international peer reviewed journal.

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