

For redesign of curriculum to incorporate work-integrated learning and authentic assessment, reflecting a command of the field of teacher education, and inspiring students' learning.

Overview

The nomination showcases my sustained effort as a teacher educator to redesign curriculum and assessment practices within a School of Education. The reforms I have implemented are based on deep engagement and involvement with education professionals and industry representatives in our region developed in my numerous research projects and community work – all focused on improving outcomes for disadvantaged students. Our community faces rapid industrial expansion and an associated skill shortage, low student retention rates to Year 12 and a high proportion of Indigenous students many of whom are currently underachieving. Our teacher education students are mostly local residents and clearly aspire to improve the educational outcomes of the region. Many students are the first in their families to complete tertiary studies. With strong links to the region I am enabled to successfully address one of the major issues confronting teacher educators – the link between theory and practice. As is acknowledged in the 2007 *Top of the Class Report – The inquiry into teacher education*, one of the least successful components of teacher education nationally, is the lack of coherence between university learning and workplace learning as experienced by students in practicum or the school sites.

I have seen first hand the profound frustration students experience when their workplace learning or practicum component is not actively supported by their university study. Since commencing at James Cook University as a teacher educator in 2000, I have had a number of roles including Director of Professional Experience (2002-2004). This role clearly demonstrated to me the need to focus on the development of a coherent student educational experience. Because the connections between theory and practice are critical for students in professional programs, I have worked to ensure that students are supported as they enter local schools. I have determinedly initiated innovative curricula, grounded with a specific aim of enabling students to value and critically utilise theory-informed practices in our local context.

My goal has been to design curriculum and assessment practices that clearly value the practicum component through the development of models of work-integrated learning that engage with regional realities, providing clear insight into ways to improve educational outcomes for our region. To improve students' learning in both university and the workplace I have developed and adopted a more holistic view of curriculum practices – aligning all the elements of the curriculum – the content, pedagogy and assessment. Critically, I have centred the role of assessment in subject design. To enhance student learning, assessment tasks, including portfolio assessment, are strategically designed as catalysts for engaging with regional challenges, while linking theory and practice, and highlighting a clearer coherence between the subject and practicum.

Student enthusiasm for my approach to curriculum design and appreciation for my profound knowledge of the regions' educational challenges is demonstrated by their feedback, successful completion of the subjects, and high levels of engagement. My role as coordinator of subjects within the 'professional development' strand of the undergraduate Bachelor of Education, particularly in the last three years, is the focus for this nomination. My service to student learning is recognised not only by the strong level of student satisfaction, but also by peers in and out of the university, as well as by commendations from my Head of School and Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor.

Criterion 2: Development of curricula and resources that reflect a command of the field

Research-led approaches to curriculum design

Two research frameworks form the basis for the design of my curricula. The first involves exploring approaches to work-integrated learning as a foundation for subject design. To do this effectively it is necessary to design teaching and learning activities, and assessment, that place specific value on work-based experiences, or in the case of teacher education, the practicum. My approaches over the last 8 years have included the incorporation of my research in problem-based learning (Hill & Mackay, 2002) and project-based internships (Board of Teacher Registration, 2004). By intentionally integrating the mandated professional experience or work-based learning component with university based learning, my students

recognise the professional relevance of the content and engage it with purpose and enthusiasm. I have developed ways to actively engage with the totality of the teacher education experience. This is evidenced for example in Student Feedback on Teaching (SFT) where 88% of students noted that “the links developed between theory and practice were” ‘more than acceptable’ (35%) or ‘outstanding’ (53%) and also in formal comments in student feedback below.

- *Finally, the School of Education had someone (Angela) offer learning in a PD subject that was relevant and linked to the professional experience,*
- *The connections made explicit between this subject and our teaching practices*
- *Learning experiences were challenging, interesting and relevant*
- *I feel that after completing this subject I have a strong understanding of current education trends and their implications. I also feel more able to succeed in prac and my first teaching position based on the work covered in this subject.*
- *This subject was of the most benefit and relevance to me. If I had to choose only one education core subject to do this would be it.*

The second research framework prioritised in my curriculum design involves the explicit linking and aligning of learning outcomes, university-based activities, and school-based (practicum) activities with assessment practices. For students, this alignment focus has been transformative. At least 80% of respondents using the Student Feedback System (SFS) over the last three years rating the ‘organisation and structure of the subject’ as ‘more than acceptable’ or ‘outstanding’.

Examples of typical student comments found in SFS over the last three years in relation to the structure and alignment of the subject include the following.

- *Lectures and workshops were very focussed and organised with a view to success in assessment*
- *Angela set a great assessment task and constantly linked this to lectures, tutorials.*
- *Dr Hill's dedication to not only helping the students achieve the aims of the subject, but improve their teaching in general was outstanding. The organisation of the subject (readings, assessment tasks, lectures, workshops and the integration of all these aspects) was outstanding.*
- *Great subject and well taught. The level of scaffolding was good because the assessment items were learning opportunities.*

Consistently demonstrating up-to date knowledge of the field

While work-integrated learning and subject alignment create a coherent educational experience for students, a further significant factor in motivating and engaging students is my modelling of a range of teaching strategies during tutorial activities, again valuing their workplace learning. The value of the theoretical underpinnings of these strategies becomes apparent to students because they are able to observe the theory in ‘action’, and engage the theory in the authentic learning activities and assessment tasks. Having a command of contemporary teaching strategies and an ability to unpack their relationship to students’ developing skills, has proven highly motivating for students, clearly supporting their learning and development as beginning professionals. Attendance at voluntary tutorials has been consistently very high with an average of 90% attendance. The comments from students below provide evidence of the motivating impact these presentation skills have had on student learning:

- *An outstanding subject, academically and practically the highlight of the degree!*
- *Learning different teaching strategies, as well as aspects in our chosen field that will have the biggest impact on us once we have finished our degree. .*
- *I waited 3 1/2 years to get a lecturer like this. This is what I expected of all my lecturers.*
- *This has been the best subject I have studied in my course so far. It was 100% relevant to my development as a teacher!!*
- *Finally a subject where we are taught specific teaching strategies! Thank you for this Angela, I know that personally this is the first time in 3 and a half years of an education degree that I've actually had examples of "how" to teach (i.e., methods) presented to me.*

As further evidence of the impact on student learning, SFS from 2005-2007 as outlined in Table 1, where I was the sole staff member involved in subject delivery, reveals outstanding levels of satisfaction with the learning experience offered.

*Table 1 Average indicators of student satisfaction with the learning experience (2005-2007)
as indicated on 1-5 scale*

Question	Year		
	2005	2006	2007
Quality of the learning experience	4.3	4.4	4.3
The interest level generated by this subject	4	4.3	4.5
The level to which we accomplished the aims of the subject	4.2	4.3	4.2

Student confidence in the relevance of their learning experience is also indicated in the following SFS comments:

- *I feel that after completing this subject I have a strong understanding of current education trends and their implications. I also feel more able to succeed in prac and my first teaching position based on the work covered in this subject.*
- *Angela Hill has not only displayed her strong interest in education, but she has displayed her up-to-date skills. Many lecturers have not kept in touch with the classroom and therefore their teaching is irrelevant, whilst Angela's is extremely relevant*
- *For the first time, a lecturer has modelled. Instead of the approach 'do as I say and not as I do' this person has ensured that she has identified teaching or behaviour management approach as she would expect us to do in a classroom. Furthermore, this person has listened to what the students have had to say and adjusted lectures/tut to meet the needs of the students. I aspire to be like this person.*
- *I feel this subject has contributed the most to my development as a teacher.*

Criterion 3: Approaches to assessment, feedback and learning support that foster independent learning.

Design of integrated and highly relevant assessment tasks

A focus on the design of relevant and authentic assessment has proven to be a further catalyst for enhancing student learning, in particular the development of portfolio assessment. As is promoted in the *JCU Strategic Intent document* (2008), I worked with regional school leaders to ensure the requirements of portfolio tasks reflect contemporary practices as well as critically important contemporary challenges for regional educators. Portfolio tasks are based on practicum requirements, and this active acknowledgement of the value of students' practicum component, has proved to be a catalyst for improved student learning and engagement. Student comments illustrate their satisfaction with the assessment strategies.

- *The portfolio task was an excellent way of getting preservice teachers to engage with a range of issues that will confront them in school life. I liked the way that it used a holistic approach to teaching.*
- *The portfolio assessment was an example of an authentic piece of assessment. Very clear links were made between the assessment and it's real world relevance,*
- *I think the portfolio is one of the best pieces of assessment we have undertaken during this bachelor of ed. course. It is relevant and an excellent display of our work.*
- *Angela is a superb teacher who cares for her students. She makes assessment requirements clear and design assessment to facilitate learning.*
- *Organisation, structure, rich authentic assessment. Angela Hill was outstanding in providing the latest and most relevant information*

The period from 2006-2008 is marked by a significant shift to 'professional standards' across the teaching profession globally, a move that the profession hopes will promote independence in professional learning. Closely following this development, I have worked to visibly incorporate 'professional standards' within assessment criteria. Simultaneous to the introduction of the revised *Queensland College of Teachers' Professional Standards* (2006) I undertook a complete redesign of assessment criteria to ensure explicit links to the professions' newly articulated requirements. Mrs Helen Morris, Regional Principal, (Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting) Education Queensland completed a peer review of my subject design in early 2008, and commended its contemporary relevance and authenticity, and the possibilities of the task promoting independent learning and self-reflection.

The Portfolio Task demonstrates extensive insight into the importance of grounding assessment in authentic contexts (in this case the core teaching work undertaken by pre-service teachers while engaging in practicum) and developing the professional practices of beginning teachers through critical reflection linked to professional research and findings. [...] The emphasis on critical reflection in the course and related assessment tasks mirrors an international commitment of education authorities to ongoing professional learning of teachers. Assessment criteria associated with this course elaborate rigorous standards against which course participants can evaluate developing products and processes and identify strengths and challenges.

Statement of contribution

Since my appointment as a teacher educator, my success in developing curricula and ability to design motivating assessment that reflects a command of the field is further confirmed by peer acknowledgement within the School of Education. The consistently strong demonstration of student satisfaction in my teaching and ability to engage the regional education community, were significant reasons for my appointment to the positions of Director of Professional Experience (2002-2004), Chair of Teaching and Learning within the School (2005-2006) and to my present role as Deputy Head of School (Townsville) responsible for Teaching and Learning. In these roles, I have coordinated numerous staff workshops on curriculum design, most recently with a focus on assessment practices and developing assessment criteria reflecting professional standards.

The Head of School Professor Annette Patterson (2002-2006) gave a high commendation of my commitment and command of the teacher education field, particularly in improving the relationship between practicum and coursework and highlighted the significance of my contribution on the broader education community. Her comments, in 2004, are noted as further evidence in support of my claims for a sustained contribution improving the overall student experience.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your extensive and sustained contribution to teacher education and to the school. You've provided talented and innovative leadership and your vision for an outwardly looking, quality experience has assisted the school to reorient its view of professional experience within teacher education. The schools are unanimous in their praise for your work and you've established a high level of credibility for the School of Education with its industry partners.

University recognition of my work is further evidence of my success in designing innovative curriculum with presentations at the *2006 Teaching and Learning Symposium* and within the Graduate Certificate of Tertiary Teaching Program and a Faculty Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning in 2008. Since 2005 I have actively led and contributed to teaching and learning development grants within the School – most recently with a focus on improving assessment practices across the school. The prestigious journal *Australian Education Researcher* also regularly requests that I review scholarly articles on pedagogy for teacher education.

The curriculum and assessment innovations highlighted in this nomination showcase my command of the teacher education field. The consistently high levels of student satisfaction demonstrate the effectiveness of my design and delivery of a professionally responsive curriculum. Students are motivated to learn and enjoy learning by the relevance of the content, assessment and my commitment to enhance their learning. In turn, I am motivated and assured by the knowledge that students are inspired to respond to our regional educational challenges and are grounded with a strong theoretical basis for their professional work.