Supporting new teachers in Victorian Schools

Making the teacher registration process an opportunity for professional learning

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Elizabeth Kleinhenz (kleinhenz@acer.edu.au)
Lawrence Ingvarson (ingvarson@acer.edu.au)
Jenny Wilkinson (Wilkinson@acer.edu.au)

Australian Council for Educational Research

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Introduction

Before 2004, teachers in Victoria, Australia, were automatically eligible to teach once they had completed an approved university qualification. This started to change when the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), established in 2001 was charged with the responsibility to register (licence) all people who wished to work as teachers in Victorian schools.

Most professions delay registration until a period of internship in workplace settings has been satisfactorily completed. (Ingvarson et al., 2006). After the establishment of the VIT, a teacher's registration also became dependent on successful completion of a period of 'provisional' registration (usually one year) during which the graduate teacher was supported by a mentor. At the end of this period, graduate teachers were expected to provide evidence that their performance met standards of practice for full registration established by the VIT. (These standards comprise three main standards, Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement, each of which has eight elements).

A major immediate effect of introducing this period of provisional registration was that graduate teachers were given more support in the earliest phase of their teaching careers. The VIT registration process was, in effect, a means for ensuring that something was done on a broad scale to implement their recommendation for organized support for new teachers. It was also hoped that the process would have beneficial effects on retention rates for good teachers. The VIT processes also supported the efforts of many school principals and senior teachers who were trying to build professional learning teams and communities in their schools.

The VIT Supporting Provisionally Registered Teachers Program

In 2003, the VIT launched a pilot version of its program for providing full registration for Provisionally Registered Teachers (PRTs). The pilot, which was expanded in following years, had five major components. These components still form the core of current VIT processes for teacher registration. They are:

1. The VIT Standards of Professional Practice for Full Registration, which provide beginning teachers with a clear framework for their professional learning and their discussions with mentors and colleagues over the first year or two of practice.
2. Three structured activities whereby the PRTs provide evidence of their professional practice against all of the standards.

3. Half day seminars for PRTs that provide training in the standards and methods for gathering evidence of their performance.
4. A statewide training and support program for principals, teacher-mentors and mentor coordinators who support PRTs.
5. Guidelines for school based panels that assess the PRTs' evidence and make recommendations to the VIT about whether to grant registration.

Assessing evidence of practice against the VIT standards

The VIT requires that PRTs provide evidence that their practice has met all eight standards. Multiple forms of evidence are required. These are in the form of responses to three tasks or activities. Each activity provides evidence of performance in relation to some of the standards. Together the three types of evidence ensure that all standards are covered. They include:

An Analysis of Teaching and Learning
In this activity, the PRT provides documentation relating to a unit of work or a sequence of learning undertaken with one of their classes, focusing on two activities undertaken by students and reflecting on the learning that has taken place, with a focus on providing detailed evidence of learning in at least two students.

Collegiate Classroom Activities
The PRT participates in three classroom activities in collaboration with their mentor and/or other teachers. They team teach the activities and reflect on the outcomes together. The mentors and the PRTs complete reflection sheets at the conclusion of the activity, using the VIT standards as a framework.

A Documented Commentary of Professional Activities
The PRT provides evidence of engagement in and reflection on a range of activities beyond the classroom in the wider school and education communities. These might include their contributions to professional teaching and learning teams in their school or participation in regional teacher networks.

The recommendation process

PRTs present their Evidence of Professional Practice to a school-based panel consisting of the principal and two teachers, one of whom is a teacher nominated by the PRT (this teacher can be the PRT's mentor). The other teacher must be a mentor trained in VIT processes (who may come from another school). The role of the panel is to assess the three types of evidence described above and make a recommendation to the VIT. The level of professional practice required for each of the standards is that which could reasonably be expected of a teacher following one year of teaching experience, and is articulated in the VIT's *Guide to Competent Practice.* The panel may recommend that the VIT grant full registration or an extension of the period of provisional registration. The recommendation meeting provides the PRTs with an opportunity for collegiate discussion and an affirmation of their developing practice in relation to the standards.

These arrangements for gaining registration as a teacher are unique in Australia. No other state, except Queensland, requires a period of full registration. The Queensland College of Teachers does not determine requirements for assessing the performance of teachers for registration purposes.

ACER's evaluations of the VIT processes for granting full registration for Provisionally Registered Teachers

ACER conducted three evaluations (2003, 2004 and 2005) of the VIT's processes for granting full registration to PRTs. The first evaluated the pilot program in which only 500 PRTs participated. In this evaluation 500 teachers, selected at random, their mentors and principals were surveyed, and case studies of a small number of schools were presented. (Kleinhenz and Ingvarson, 2003). In 2004 and 2005, on the basis of positive results of the evaluation of the pilot program, the processes were extended to all PRTs – about 3000. In the second and third ACER evaluations, all PRTs, and their mentors and principals completed surveys. Case studies were not included in the later evaluations.

The three evaluations focused on two elements:
1. To what extent are new arrangements for assessing PRTs' performance for registration perceived as valid, rigorous and therefore fair?
2. To what extent do these arrangements promote professional learning and improved teaching practices?

Subsidiary questions included the effects of the Program on school culture and professional community, retention of teachers in the profession and the manageability of the process for schools teachers and mentors.

The survey instrument
The survey instrument for the evaluations sought information about:
1. School and teacher information
2. Mentoring and induction experiences
3. Analysis of Teaching and Learning task
4. Collegiate Activities task
5. Professional Activities task
6. Evaluation and recommendation processes
7. General responses

Questions for PRTs, mentors and principals were, in almost all cases, identical. The survey instrument included questions about gender, teacher education course, location of school, level of school, school sector, and a number of other factors such as employment arrangements, support offered and participation in the VIT support program. Response rates were in the order of 35%.

Findings
Mentoring and Induction Experiences
Most PRTs (99%) had been provided with a mentor in their induction year. In the evaluation of the pilot program (2003) it was found that a number of mentors did not

teach in the same subject or year level area as the mentee. This was identified as a problem to be addressed. By 2005 the majority of mentors taught in the same subject area (68 per cent) and/or were members of the same teaching and learning team (64 per cent) .

Principals' support of the program varied. Anecdotal evidence indicated that some principals were dismissive, advising their PRTs not to 'waste' too much of their time on requirements that were essentially 'bureaucratic.' Principals' attendance at the VIT support sessions was, however, high (over 95 per cent in each year of the evaluations). Mentors' attendance at the sessions was also high. Forty-two of the mentors who had participated in the Program in 2005 had also been mentors in 2005, which indicates that the number of experienced mentors is growing. The majority of PRTs had similar attitudes about their mentoring experiences to those of this teacher.

> Overall my school was very supportive and gave my mentor and I (sic) time to work on the process. My mentor was, and continues to be very supportive which I feel made my experience in the process from Provisional to Full Registration relevant and beneficial to my teaching practice.

Eighty-four per cent of PRTs agreed or strongly agreed that they had made significant improvements in their classroom work as a result of guidance and feedback from their mentors and other colleagues. Seventy-three per cent indicated that their mentor used the VIT standards to provide guidance and feedback. Seventy-six per cent of PRTs said they met regularly with their mentor to discuss their progress as a teacher (including developing and gathering evidence). A higher proportion of mentors (89 per cent) said they had met regularly with the PRTs. A large majority of PRTs (86 per cent) thought the choice of their mentor was appropriate, and 83 per cent were satisfied with the mentoring they received. Eighty-six per cent were satisfied with the level of support and encouragement they received from their school leadership team in gathering their evidence.

Several PRTs pointed out the importance of schools taking care to appoint appropriate mentors.

> The mentoring process is a good idea, but it is very important that the mentor is in the same subject area as the provisionally registered teacher. While my mentor was very nice, he was not able to offer me any helpful information as it was outside his area.

Overall there were few changes in the perceptions of the mentoring processes from 2004 to 2005, although a higher proportion of mentors in 2005 (73% compared with 69% in 2004) were reported to be using the VIT standards to provide PRTs with guidance and feedback. In the case studies that were carried out as part of the evaluation of the pilot program in 2003, it was found that when the VIT standards were used in conversations between mentor and mentee the quality of the feedback given to the PRT by the mentor was higher than when the standards were not used. In discussions where the standards were not used, the mentor's comments tended to focus more on useful 'tricks of the trade'

like how to line students up outside the classroom than on improving the PRT's professional knowledge and skills.

In most schools, PRTs appeared to be satisfied with the support they received from mentors, but there was clearly a small group of schools where the quality of mentoring and time allocated to it could be improved.

PRTs in primary schools reported statistically significant higher levels and quality of School Mentoring Support than teachers in secondary schools. PRTs in government and Catholic schools were more likely to agree that their mentors had used the VIT standards as a basis for providing feedback than teachers in independent schools. Mentors who had attended the VIT state-wide training programs were more likely to meet regularly with PRTs and to use the VIT standards to provide feedback to PRTs.

However, more than any of these factors, the nature and extent of leadership support explained the variation in the level of PRT satisfaction with their mentoring, as this comment from a young teacher illustrates.

> I was not happy with the lack of support and guidance I was given with the VIT process in my school during my first year of teaching. I didn't have a mentor and didn't have regular meetings or progress reports with anyone on how I was going, despite having a very heavy teaching load of VCE during my first year. Thankfully, I had supportive staff around me who helped me, but I think the program needs to be taken more seriously by some to support graduate teachers. I can now see why so many graduate teachers leave the profession, when so many demands are placed on us and no support structures are in place in some schools. Despite giving such feedback to my school, I don't believe much has been done.

Mentors also recognised the critical importance of active support from the school leadership team, as this representative comment by one mentor shows:

> The whole process needs to be supported by the school leadership team, principal, vice principal etc. This was sadly lacking in our school. I felt they did not understand the importance and relevance of the process and I felt the prov. registered teacher was sadly left in doubt about the whole process. As a mentor I was not invited to participate or attend the meetings until half way though the year. The choice of mentor was based on convenience, rather than needs, personality, enthusiasm or suitability of the people involved. At first one mentor was chosen for a group of provisionally registered teachers, then it was delegated to a second person. I am glad my provisionally registered teacher got through the process, with no thanks to the leadership (or lack thereof) within our school. Maybe the prov. reg. teacher should have a real say in who the mentor might be and the role needs to be clearly defined right from the start.
> The success or failure of the program seems to depend on how seriously the school takes the task, in terms of allotting time to the task etc... It also relies

> heavily on making a good match between mentor and mentoree. My PRT was in a different KLA and a different staffroom so opportunity for informal discussion and what you might call touching base was impaired.

More primary (91%) than secondary school mentors (83%), were satisfied with the level of leadership support they received

ANALYSIS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING (EVIDENCE COMPONENT 1)

For the Analysis of Teaching and Learning (ATL) PRTs were required to describe and evaluate a unit of work that they had planned and undertaken with a class over several weeks as part of their normal teaching practice. The task essentially asked the PRT to provide evidence that they had promoted learning of worthwhile content and/or skills in their students over a period of time.

The ATL task asked PRTs to describe two activities that students undertook during the unit of work, one early in the learning sequence and another toward the end of the unit of work. PRTs were then asked to provide samples of the work that two of their students had produced as a result of completing these two activities, together with an analysis of what these samples illustrated about these students' development and learning over time and a commentary on its implications for their teaching practice. In preparing this entry for their portfolio, the PRTs also provided a description of the main features of the school context in which they taught.

This component followed the teaching and learning process from planning, through delivery, to assessment and reflection. It was usually about five pages long, with the selection of student work samples as appendices.

The ATL component provided evidence related to six of the eight VIT standards and it was clear from these steps that undertaking the task had the potential to engage teachers in effective forms of professional development and deepen their awareness of individual students.

Perceptions of the Analysis of Teaching and Learning (ATL) component of evidence

The evaluation examined the attitudes of PRTs, mentors and principals to the several aspects of the ATL task.

Respondents generally evaluated the ATL task very positively. Seventy-five per cent of PRTs thought the ATL task had deepened their understanding of the VIT standards, 76 per cent thought that feedback from their mentor had helped them improve their teaching and 69 per cent said that undertaking the task had benefited their teaching. Mentors and principals were even more positive about the impact of the ATL task on PRTs professional learning.

Eighty-three per cent of PRTs thought the task gave them a good chance to show how they met the VIT standards and 84 per cent thought the task provided authentic evidence of their teaching. Seventy-four per cent of PRTs thought the ATL task was an valid way of assessing whether they had met the VIT standards and 69 per cent thought it was a rigorous method of assessing their performance. Mentors and principals, once again, were even more positive in their evaluation of these validity aspects of the ATL task.

The 2005 cohort of PRTs who completed the Analysis of Teaching and Learning consistently rated the impact of the process on their professional learning more highly than did the 2004 cohort. Seventy-five per cent, compared with 69 per cent in 2004, agreed or strongly agreed that completing the ATL task had deepened their understanding of the VIT standards. Seventy-six per cent, compared with 70 per cent thought the mentoring process about the ATL had helped to improve their teaching, an indication that that the VIT's training of mentors was consolidating and paying dividends. Sixty-nine per cent, compared with 54 per cent of the 2004 PRT cohort, agreed or strongly agreed that completing the ATL task had benefited their teaching. This suggested that mentors and PRTs were becoming more adept at ensuring the ATL task provides a useful learning experience.

PRT perceptions of the validity of the ATL task as a method of assessing their performance against the VIT standards had also improved between 2004 and 2005.. Seventy-four percent, compared with 61 per cent of the 2004 cohort, thought the ATL task was a valid way of assessing whether they had met the VIT standards. Sixty-nine per cent, compared with 64 per cent thought it was a rigorous way of assessing their performance. These improvements probably reflected increased familiarity with the task and better implementation, partly as a result of refinements the VIT made to the task guidelines to accommodate the diversity of teaching contexts.

Mentors' and principals' perceptions of the ATL task and its impact on professional learning changed very little and remained very positive from 2004 to 2005. As they were already so positive, there was little room for improvement from 2004 to 2005. The pattern of responses for mentors' and principals' in 2005 was very similar to that obtained in 2004.

The level of School Mentoring Support was the most important factor explaining variation in PRTs' perceptions of the ATL activity. This tended to be higher in primary schools.

Although most PRTs thought that the ATL task provided valid evidence about their teaching and had beneficial effects on their teaching, there were strong comments from some PRTs about other aspects of the task. Some PRTs perceived the ATL task as similar to the type of assignment they had to do in their training:

> I felt like I was back at university doing a university assignment I had done about fifteen times at university already.

Many PRTs saw the ATL task as an addition to their busy workload, rather than something that is part of what most teachers normally do.

> Although there are useful elements to the process, it seems an onerous requirement to be hoisted on people perceived most time-poor. Mentoring and collegiate activities are beneficial, but the current way it is implemented makes it appear like yet more written project work continuing their university experience - even after they have 'graduated'. Beginning teachers would benefit from greater time allocation to preparation - rather than perceive additional 'projects' expected of them.

It surprised us that some teachers in some schools perceived the ATL task as university type assignment, when the VIT's guidelines only asked, in the main, for evidence that a competent teacher would normally gather and record as part of their professional work; in this case, teaching a unit of work and documenting unit aims, activities, assessment methods, and analyses of student work and learning. A key purpose of this task was that PRTs would provide evidence that they could promote learning in their students, something for which all teachers are accountable.

Once again, the factor that related most strongly to the variation in PRT perceptions of the task was the school context, as measured by the variable School Mentoring Support. One teacher, whose mentoring support was apparently inadequate, commented:

> This whole process was exceptionally burdensome and completely unreasonable to expect of a first year teacher. I found that the process created a massive amount of work for me, far more than I feel was even remotely necessary to achieve the goals of the VIT. Prior to my employment as a teacher, I was an attorney, and I can honestly report that I spent more time and effort on the VIT application than I ever did preparing for a major jury trial. The amount of unnecessary and frankly "busy-work" type activities involved in the application was staggering. And yet my sixty eight page application remains gathering dust in the principal's office, unseen by anyone other than those on my panel.

Sixty-eight pages is well beyond VIT guidelines and expectations. This comment points to the need for more clarity about expectations among school leaders responsible for the VIT registration process in their schools.

COLLEGIATE CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES (EVIDENCE COMPONENT 2)

For this component of their Evidence of Professional Practice, provisionally registered teachers were required to participate in three classroom activities in collaboration with their mentor or another teacher. They planned the learning goals and activities jointly with a colleague, team taught the activity and reflected on the outcomes together. Two of the activities took place in the PRT's classroom and one took place in another teacher's classroom. Each of the three Collegiate Classroom Activities provided an opportunity for

mentors to observe the PRTs and to recognise their strengths, affirm their practice and identify areas of practice that need further development.

The activities could occur at any time during the year. For each Collegiate Classroom Activity, mentors provided feedback to PRTs about their teaching in relation to the VIT standards. Both the mentors and the PRTs completed a reflection sheet at the conclusion of the activity, using the VIT standards as a framework. These formed a component of the evidence. Once again, it was clear that undertaking the Collegiate Classroom Activities task had the potential to engage PRTs in valuable forms of professional collaboration and effective forms of reflection and development.

As indicated earlier, the Collegiate Classroom Activities were designed to provide observational evidence related to four of the eight VIT standards. These tasks enabled the mentor to gather first-hand evidence about a PRT's ability to: plan a unit of work with activities and assessments suited to the learning goals; to create a safe and challenging learning environment; to use a range of teaching practice to engage students in effective learning; and to evaluate and reflect realistically on the effectiveness of their teaching. Records from each of the three Collegiate Classroom Activities formed part of the Evidence of Professional Practice for presentation later in the year to their school's recommendation panel.

Perceptions of the Collegiate Classroom Activities component of evidence

PRTs, mentors and principals were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several aspects of the Collegiate Classroom Activities task. These statements asked respondents to evaluate the capacity of the Collegiate Classroom Activities to fulfil their main functions: that is, to promote professional learning and to provide a valid and rigorous measure of teaching performance.

Respondents generally evaluated the Collegiate Classroom Activities very positively. In 2005, 73 per cent of PRTs thought the task had deepened their understanding of the VIT standards and 74 per cent said they had made beneficial changes to their teaching. Once again, mentors and principals were even more positive about the impact of this task on PRTs' professional learning.

PRT attitudes to the Collegiate Classroom Activities were strongly correlated with the quality of mentoring and level of leadership support as measured by School Mentoring Support As one mentor pointed out:

> Whilst I think the process is valid, it is quite rigorous. I am thankful that my school gives the extra time and support to complete the requirements of the portfolio. I would find it very difficult to complete the process, if my provisionally registered teacher and myself were not given this assistance and I wonder how others in other schools, who are not given this time and support can complete it. Simplifying the process significantly would ease the pressure in an already pressured school environment. Having said all of that, all of the

provisionally registered teachers I have worked with, and myself have enjoyed working together through the process.

And a PRT commented:
> The Mentor aspect of the program proved invaluable, and I still liaise and discuss my professional progress with my mentor. This aspect should be encouraged. However, many people I know found that their mentors did not understand the requirements and did not provide enough support. Overall I enjoyed the process, and feel that it demonstrated my development personally and professionally. I feel that it was beneficial, but it needs to be modified for more people to be able to attain their registration in the first year.

DOCUMENTED PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES (EVIDENCE COMPONENT 3)

This purpose of the Documented Professional Activities task was to provide PRTs with a means of providing evidence of their engagement in a range of activities beyond their classroom in the wider school community. For this task, PRTs were required to develop a list of professional activities undertaken beyond the classroom during their induction year. These included activities that contributed to their school team, their school and the profession. They were also asked to include a commentary on how three of these activities helped their professional learning and practice.

This component aimed to affirm and encourage professional engagement. Its central purpose was to provide evidence related to two of the eight VIT standards related to professional engagement. Specifically:
- Teachers reflect on, evaluate and improve their professional knowledge and practice.
- Teachers are active members of their professional community

PRTs were encouraged to develop this component throughout the year, affirming achievements at the end of each term.

Perceptions of the Documented Professional Activities component of evidence

Respondents generally evaluated the Documented Professional Activities positively, though less so than the previous two sets of tasks. Mentors and principals were usually more positive than the PRTs, though again, less so than they were about the Analysis of Learning and Teaching and Collegiate Classroom Activity. Sixty-one per cent of PRTs thought the task had deepened their understanding of the VIT standards and 70 per cent said that the task had had a beneficial effect on the extent to which they collaborated with colleagues and engaged with the profession. Mentors and principals were also positive about the impact of this task on PRTs professional learning and collaboration.

Seventy-nine per cent of PRTs thought the task gave them a good chance to show how they met the VIT standards. Eighty per cent of PRTs thought it was a valid way of

assessing whether their performance met the VIT standards and 69 per cent thought it was a rigorous way of assessing whether they had met the VIT's standards for professional engagement.

Mentors' and principals' perceptions of the Documented Professional Activities task and its impact on professional learning changed very little and remained positive from 2004 to 2005. The pattern of responses for mentors' and principals' in 2005 was a very similar to that obtained in 2004. The one aspect about where a significant proportion of respondents indicated there is room for improvement is in the rigour of the Documented Professional Activities. More than a quarter of mentors and principals had reservations about the rigour of the task in its present form as a method for assessing whether PRTs had met the VIT's standards for Professional Engagement.

There was variation from school to school in PRT, mentor and principal attitudes to the Documented Professional Activities as a method of gathering evidence. This variation was mainly due to variation in the level of leadership and support for the mentoring program from school to school.

RECOMMENDATION PROCESS

Assessment of the three types of Evidence to determine the PRT's eligibility to become fully registered was conducted by a panel consisting of the principal and two teachers, one of whom was a teacher nominated by the PRT (this teacher could be the PRT's mentor). The other teacher must be a mentor trained in the VIT assessment processes. Gaining full registration is contingent upon PRTs demonstrating to this panel that they have met the eight VIT Standards of Professional Practice. The role of the panel is to use the evidence to make a recommendation to the VIT about a PRT's eligibility for full registration.

Perceptions of the Recommendation Process

PRTs, mentors and principals were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several aspects of the process for judging PRTs' Evidence of Professional Practice as implemented in their school.

Most respondents thought the judgment process, as implemented in their school, was fair and valid. Over 90 per cent of PRTs mentors and principals agreed or strongly agreed that the evidence was sufficient for the panel to make a judgment about whether the VIT's standards for registration had been met. Over 90 per cent agreed that panels used the VIT standards in making their judgments and over 95 per cent thought the process was fair. Similarly, most (over 80 per cent) PRTs mentors and principals thought their school allocated sufficient time and resources to carry out the assessment process effectively, but there was significant evidence of variation in the quality of the process across schools.

One PRT reported that:
> I think it should be mandated for all leaders in schools to have knowledge about this program. At my school the Principal and Deputies were unaware of the program, and myself and my mentor had to actively seek information from

other sources. We almost missed out on vital information. Once the Principal saw my presentation she was impressed with the whole idea. However the deputy principal of Teaching and Learning is still relatively unaware of the process.

Once again, there was a strong correlation between PRTs' judgments about the quality of the panel assessment and recommendation process and the quality of School Mentoring as the following comments from a small number of PRTs illustrate:

> The school I worked at was a large school so I did not have to present my registration to a panel. I presented to one vice principal who was overworked and so didn't really pay much attention to what I was doing.

> At the school where I received the registration they took into account more about what they had observed and heard from other teachers. They questioned me on several key points, but did not even look at the documentation. Many graduates here took the option of just having the principal observe a class and then had their registration endorsed without completing any of the appropriate documentation. I believe that unless this is more tightly controlled, then there will always be a differing amount of effort to gain the same result.

> (There is a need) to somehow ensure that the schools are obliging to the registration process and not just the applicant. My school were not aware (and made no effort) of their or my requirements to the registration process. I was not allocated a mentor - who ensures that this occurs and is implemented accordingly.

> After speaking with fellow graduates many of us felt 'ripped off' by our schools who did not uphold their side of the registration process.

Fortunately such experiences were rare. Most school leaders took their responsibilities seriously to ensure that panel assessment and recommendation procedures were implemented in ways that would ensure fairness and rigour and that beginning teachers would receive a valuable opportunity for feedback and fulfil the VIT requirements for entry to the profession

Workload

We were aware of anecdotal evidence that PRTs were finding the workload involved in meeting the VIT's registration processes very onerous - too much of an extra load in their first stressful year of teaching. Similar sentiments were expressed in some comments, of which the following is representative:

> Whilst at the end of it all it appeared to be useful to me as a teacher, the amount of workload required to complete the portfolio was far too much for a graduate teacher. Graduates have a lot to deal with in their first year of teaching and the portfolio only added to that stress and workload'.

Many, however, said that the workload was manageable. Perceptions of workload varied considerably from school to school. Importantly, the workload or stress levels for PRTs was shown in both the qualitative and quantitative data of the evaluations, to be linked with the way in which school leaders, mentors and PRTs interpreted and implemented the VIT requirements. Some PRTs were clearly misled by their principals or mentors about the type and amount of evidence required. This, in some instances led to overlong portfolios that missed the professional learning and other purposes of the Program.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The surveys yielded convincing evidence that the registration process had led to significant professional learning. Some concerns were expressed in comments about some aspects of the process, in particular by a number of PRTs who found the process too stressful and/or too time-consuming. Nevertheless, a substantial majority of PRTs and a larger majority of mentors and principals supported the process.

A number of factors appeared to be contributing to higher or lower engagement with, and acceptance and identification of benefit from the process. The main areas of interest in this respect were the differences in responses between primary and secondary PRT respondents, and the difference in responses between PRTs and mentor/principals. Other general factors to be considered included the time factor (commented on by a number of respondents), the role of the school leadership and the existing level of professional community in a school.

Difference in results between teachers and mentors/principals

The difference in responses between PRTs and mentor/principals was very marked in some of the qualitative responses. These differences were particularly striking in the attitudes to the three tasks. Principals and mentors consistently and significantly saw the PRTs as having gained more from the process than did the PRTs themselves. A number of possible explanations could be offered.

Difference in responses between primary and secondary PRTs

There were clear and frequent differences between primary and secondary respondents. The survey responses indicate that primary PRTs were more satisfied than secondary PRTs with induction processes and general mentoring. They were also are more positive about the portfolio tasks. Differences may relate to the differences in workplace cultures between primary and secondary schools.

Aspects of the VIT processes may need development and refinement, and the higher level of dissatisfaction among secondary PRTs may need to be addressed. However, if the standards program engenders an increase in professional collaboration where it is lowest –and research indicates this is generally among secondary teachers - it can only add to secondary teacher effectiveness. A culture of professional isolation and privacy of practice may be an obstacle to overcome in some instances, and in this respect, the VIT Standards Program should assist.

The time factor

A considerable number of respondents, especially PRTs, commented on the amount of time the process was taking and the additional stress it was causing. This appeared to be a major area of concern. Some PRTs may have been placing extra demands on themselves – for example, by ignoring word limits or by leaving assembly of the portfolio until late in the year– or may have needed more encouragement to avoid becoming overanxious about the process and imposing further stress on themselves.

The nature of the portfolio tasks was the focus of a number of meetings between the ACER project evaluators and the SPLB team before the pilot program commenced in 2003. Charlotte Danielson, a member of the original SPLB team, contended that the tasks should be 'a natural harvest of teachers' work' rather than an intrusive 'add on.' This contention remains very relevant, in particular in relation to teacher concerns about some of the registration requirements being too time-consuming, too stressful or unnecessary.

The role of school leadership and the level of professional community in a school

Research shows that teachers learn more effectively when they learn together. Where the professional community is strong, teachers may be more ready to adapt to innovations and to plan together as a team. Innovations such as the VIT standards program may also facilitate the growth of professional learning and collaboration.

In this respect it is interesting to note the principal responses to survey questions about the impact of the program on themselves and on their schools. A large majority of principals across all sectors and from both primary and secondary levels agreed or strongly agreed that the written information and advice from the VIT provided valuable support for the process in their school; a similar majority agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of their experiences as panel members, their knowledge of the Standards of Professional Practice for Full Registration grew substantially.

Perhaps most important, the program appears to have strengthened the connection of the principals to the core business of a school – the quality of teaching and learning - with a large number agreeing that their experiences of the process had a beneficial effect on their own professional practice. Commitment on the part of the school leadership to a culture of professional learning and collaboration is likely to have marked effect on the attitudes of staff.

Conclusion

The VIT Standards and Professional Learning Project was seen to be leading to improvements in teaching practice across schools and playing a major role in reinforcing and/or establishing a culture of professional collaboration and professional learning in schools. That is likely to lead to improved student outcomes. The role of the school leadership is clearly very important in this as in any other major innovation. Principals and mentors were very positive about the program, and consistently reported higher levels of satisfaction with its implementation than did the Provisionally Registered Teachers. Primary teachers were in general more positive than secondary teachers. Given

the greater pedagogical experience of school leaders, and the generally broader pedagogical knowledge and experience of primary teachers, this may indicate that the program is going to the heart of what matters most in schools: more effective teaching and learning.

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