



There's a lot to learn about being a drama teacher: Pre-service drama teachers' experience of stress and vulnerability during an extended practicum



Christina Gray ^{a,*}, Peter Wright ^b, Robin Pascoe ^b

^a Edith Cowan University, Australia

^b Murdoch University, Australia

HIGHLIGHTS

- Practicum is stressful, impacting pre-service teachers' engagement/professional development.
- Pre-service drama teachers experience vulnerability during practicum from a lack of belonging.
- Extra-curricular activities exacerbate pre-service drama teachers' workload stress during practicum.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 February 2017

Received in revised form

25 May 2017

Accepted 17 June 2017

Keywords:

Teacher training

Pre-service teachers

Drama education

Pre-service drama education

Teaching practicum

Practicum stress

ABSTRACT

The practicum is widely considered an integral component of pre-service training and an influential induction into the teaching profession. Yet, the practicum is fraught with challenges and literature identifies it to be overwhelming and stressful for pre-service teachers. Building on the work of Gray, Wright, and Pascoe (2017), this article explores the stressful side of practicum, recognising the way that stress is debilitating, impacting on students' ability to engage, effectively participate in, and grow through the experience. Field study data reveals the vulnerability five pre-service teachers from a Western Australian university experienced during practicum and the consequential lack of belonging and inadequate preparation they reported. These two key features are made more salient in the field of drama teaching where there are strong performative elements including not only the teaching of performance, but performance of the self. This research is key to better understanding the issues and challenges of the practicum so as to improve pre-service drama teachers' experience and induction into the profession, building both solid foundations for practice, and a commitment towards drama teaching as a rewarding career.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The practicum has long been regarded as a significant and influential component of preparing teachers for the profession. Designed and sequenced well, the practicum can provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to acquire professional knowledge, skills and values through observation, practice and reflection on experience (Stuart, Akyeampong, & Croft, 2009). During practicum, a pre-service teacher is typically supported by a mentor teacher who offers modelling, coaching, feedback and

opportunities for observation and practice (Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009). Ideally, a pre-service teacher will use the knowledge gained from their practicum experience to develop their personal teaching style and identity. As Langdon, Alexander, Dinsmore, and Ryde (2012) suggest, "It is only on the job that the intellectual and emotional complexity of teaching becomes a reality, and it is only in context that certain understandings and skills can be developed" (p. 400). Thus, it is consistently reported, that pre-service teachers regard the practicum as the most valuable component of their pre-service education (Anderson, 2002, 2003; Grudnoff, 2011; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Townsend & Bates, 2007).

While there is consensus amongst researchers that practicum is vitally important for pre-service teacher development, there is also

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: c.gray@ecu.edu.au (C. Gray).

consensus amongst researchers that practicum has many inherent challenges and that inconsistencies with the quality of practicum negatively impact upon classroom readiness (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Grudnoff, 2011; Ralf, Walker, & Wimmer, 2008; Tang, 2004; Wyckoff, Grossman, Boyd, Lankford, & Loeb, 2009).

Despite ‘stress’ featuring throughout practicum literature, the unique and individual practicum experiences of pre-service drama teachers has received little attention. Building on the work of Gray, Wright, and Pascoe (2017), this article elaborates on the issue of practicum stress identified in Gray’s (2016) doctoral study where five pre-service drama teachers were tracked during their final teaching practice. This ten-week practicum involved participants teaching around four, one-hour lessons each day, attend meetings and supervision duties, complete planning and assessment tasks and assist with production rehearsals. Through observations of planning and teaching, participant interviews, journals, field notes and evaluations, an insight into the challenges and stressful side of practicum was revealed in the context of preparing pre-service drama teachers for the profession.

2. Literature – the challenges of practicum

2.1. Practicum stress

Research reveals practicum to be an overwhelming and stressful experience for pre-service teachers (Badali, 2008; Caires, Almeida, & Martins, 2010; Murray-Harvey, 2001). Caires, Almeida, and Vieira (2012) highlight the complexity of the practicum experience by explaining that pre-service teachers “make continuous attempts to acknowledge, interpret and give meaning to rules, values, resources and communication patterns in order to gradually integrate into the school ethos” (p. 164). Shifts in sleeping and eating habits, distress and higher levels of vulnerability are experienced by pre-service teachers during practicum (Caires et al., 2010).

Given that teaching is regarded as one of the ‘high stress’ professions (Kyriacou, 2000; Travers & Cooper, 1996) it seems inevitable that pre-service teachers will experience some form of stress while learning to teach in a school setting. However, some situations that pre-service teachers are exposed to during practicum are often more stressful than those experienced by practising teachers (Black-Branch & Lamont, 1998) such as responding to challenging student behaviour without adequate knowledge of students’ background and school policy (Cakir & Cesur, 2014).

Fontana and Abouserie (1993) defined stress as the “demand made upon the adaptive capacities of the mind and body, a demand which, if continue beyond the ability of these capacities to respond, leads to physical and psychological exhaustion and possibly ultimate collapse ...” (p. 261). Kyriacou (2001) also reports that teacher stress can be understood as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher” (p. 28).

The sources of stress experienced by pre-service teachers during practicum have received some attention in the literature. For example, MacDonald (1993) identified that sources of stress were mainly generated by inconsistencies in the way students were evaluated by teachers, varying expectations of student performance, and marked variations in the quality of feedback given to students by their supervising teachers. In the preparation of Arts teachers, Ramanaidu, Wellington, Chew, and Hassan (2014) revealed that pre-service music teachers were stressed about having inadequate content and pedagogical knowledge required to facilitate effective music lessons. Cakir and Cesur (2014) found that pre-service teachers were significantly stressed about being evaluated and dealing with classroom management. Badali (2008)

recognised that the greatest sources of stress experienced by pre-service teachers is caused by their high expectations of their teaching performance, difficulty in obtaining a balance between practicum and personal commitments, managing time, and coping with workload.

The issue of workload has particular implications for pre-service drama teachers and this is also reflected in the literature (Anderson, 2002, 2003; Donelan, 1989; Haseman, 1989; Wales, 1999). While Anderson (2002, 2003) did not specifically address the workload of pre-service drama teachers, his research revealed the implications of a heavy workload for beginning drama teachers, who struggle to manage both curricular and non-curricular responsibilities. This issue of extra-curricular workload being especially significant for drama teachers where there are often responsibilities associated with performance work (Gray, 2016; Lambert, Wright, Currie, & Pascoe, 2016a). Furthermore, Anderson (2002, 2003) highlighted that the demanding workload endured by drama teachers impacted adversely upon the time they had available to effectively mentor a pre-service drama teacher.

It is not surprising that pre-service teachers find practicum to be the most stressful part of pre-service education and are therefore in need of both practical and emotional support during this time. Murray-Harvey (2001) cautioned:

The significance of the need to respond to the problem of student teacher stress lies in the evidence that stress affects teacher behaviour, and this in turn reduces classroom effectiveness, particularly in relation to effects of lower pupil/teacher rapport, reduced pupil achievement, and increased levels of pupil anxiety. (p. 25)

It is this issue of rapport that is key in drama teaching as the work is profoundly relational (Wright, 1999) and pupil anxiety being antagonistic to the creation of ‘safe places’ key to successful drama practice (Lambert, Wright, Currie, & Pascoe, 2016b).

Additionally, while research affirms the stressfulness of the practicum for pre-service teachers, there is also evidence that pre-service teachers have limited coping strategies for dealing with stress (Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007) and may not recognise its symptoms; therefore their stress is often left untreated (Gardner, 2010).

2.2. Lack of belonging

Feelings of loneliness, isolation and a lack of belonging amongst pre-service teachers whilst on practicum are common (Bloomfield, 2010), and finding ways to create supportive learning communities is imperative for their success (Sudeck, Doolittle, & Rattigan, 2008). This is significant in an Australian context where there is a small population spread over a large land mass and feelings of remoteness and isolation are common (Krivokapic-Skoko & Collins, 2016). For pre-service teachers, isolation is often a result of being the only pre-service teacher placed at the practicum school (Murray-Harvey, 2001) and is exacerbated in country school placements where the pre-service teacher is without direct support from family and friends.

Belongingness is also viewed as a fundamental human need (Brendtro & Brokenleg, 2005; Brendtro, 2008; Maslow, 1962). Maslow (1962), for example, argued that the need to belong to or be part of a social network is universal and operates only after lower-order needs such as food and security are met. Educational researchers such as Anderman and Freeman (2004) and Osterman (2000) have also linked belonging to positive academic and social outcomes in students and Rinehart and Blum (1997) revealed that students who felt connected to their school were less likely to

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4941583>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4941583>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)