

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE - AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT IN PRIMARY TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM

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**Abstract:** Professional Experience is an important and essential activity in primary teacher training programs. This paper presents some conceptions of Professional Experience and its meaning in primary teacher training curriculum. There are two ways for teacher students to do their Professional Experience activities. First, student teachers involve in actual school to give their ideas. Second, student teachers have full-time Professional Experiences at primary school. The paper also introduces some experiences in primary teacher training curriculum in Australia, Japan, and Viet Nam. Some suggestions to improve the effectiveness of Professional Experience are proposed in this article.

**Keywords:** Professional Experience, teacher training curriculum, primary teacher, primary teacher, pedagogy practice.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the educational challenges arising from the demands for teacher training universities is to prepare their graduates for specific occupations and successful and smooth transitions to instances of professional practice. Yet, fulfilling this expectation constitutes a very difficult educational goal because the particular requirements for professional practice can differ quite widely across occupations as do the settings in which practitioners work.

Professional Experience is the component of a teacher training curriculum in which teacher students develop and demonstrate their skills in the classroom. Its purpose is to provide structured opportunities for student teachers to consider and undertake the practice the work of teaching, to relate the practice to knowledge and understanding they are developing in their program, and to demonstrate a positive impact on student learning. It all prepares them for workplace-based learning.

### 2. CONTENT

#### *2.1. Professional Experience Activities in Primary Teachers Training*

Professional Experience is the central component of all pre-service programs. It is the combination of theory and practice. This critical component sees the School of Education and schools working collaboratively to ensure teacher students can demonstrate achievement according to the National Teaching Standards [1].

Primary school teachers need to know how children learn and the social factors which affect their learning. There are two ways for student teachers to do their

Professional Experience activities in primary schools: - Involve in actual school to give their ideas; - full-time Professional Experiences at primary school

#### *2.2. The role of Professional Experience activities*

According to Miguel (1996), the professional experience's aims are to: (a) let students face real professional settings, (b) set up frames of reference to better understand concepts met in academic subject matter studies, (c) let students become conscious of their needs, strong points and weaknesses, to recognise aptitudes and abilities (especially those concerning interpersonal relationship), (d) have them reflect on the contents of practice periods, keeping logs and writing reports, (e) further reflecting on their own reports, through the "reconstruction of scholastic experience", to perceive the difference between pupils' and teachers' standpoints [2].

There are four areas students can develop through Professional Experience activities: Skills - Students learn to do something, for example, to give instructions more clearly; Knowledge - Students learn about something, for example how the sounds of a Vietnamese are produced; Awareness - Students learn how to use their eyes and ears better to find out what happens when Students teach; Attitude - Students learn about their assumptions about teaching, learning, themselves, their learners and the culture.

Primary school teaching differs from teaching in higher education because, among other things, "*the teacher cannot assume that her pupils are on the same mental wavelength as herself*" [3]. One of the reasons is that teachers in higher education can find their students

know and understand in ways which are similar to their own, but not like primary teachers. “*Children at primary school are still at the stage of acquiring the basic skills, of literacy, numeracy, and oracy and may appear to interpret and understand their world in different ways from adults*’ [3]. It is during the formative years in primary school that children’s mental capacities ‘develop’. Therefore, it is necessary to equip primary teacher students professional skills to meet the requirements above.

After finishing the fourth year Professional Experience, teacher students at the University of Wollongong are expected to:

- Complete an intensive period of in-school experience that effectively inducts them into the nature, structure, and organization of schools and the work, roles and responsibilities of teachers;
- Accept responsibility for an independent teaching position;
- Display effective interpersonal communication skills and interact professionally with staff, learners, and broader school community;
- Develop awareness, understanding, and competencies in the specific roles and responsibilities of a primary school teacher and, as far as possible, effectively participate in these roles and responsibilities;
- Understand, through an intensive experience, the nature of schools as workplaces and their associated values, routines, and cultures;
- Further develop and refine their skills and competencies for classroom teaching, including those involving student management, student welfare and developing relationships with parents / guardians and the wider community;
- Develop an awareness of and respect other people in the school and the community whose work supports the classroom teacher, and their roles and responsibilities;
- Demonstrate the ability to plan, implement, and evaluate effective teaching and learning strategies that are well grounded in educational research, state, and system policy frameworks;
- Demonstrate the ability to assess and report on student achievement;
- Display professional and ethical practices;
- Contribute positively to the school community beyond the classroom;
- Demonstrate, by the end of the Internship, the practical consolidation of the Graduate teacher level of

the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers [1].

Professional Experience can be started with the observation followed by a specified number of days of teaching experience. Observation of lessons enables pre-service teachers to see various teaching styles and strategies and to get to know the school and the students he/she will teach. By observing teachers of these classes, the pre-service teachers will become familiar with the management, planning, and sequencing of lessons in those classes. During this period, pre-service teachers should also gain an understanding of the range of activities that occur both inside and outside the classroom, and the roles of the teaching and non-teaching staff within the school. Observation of lessons must continue throughout Professional Experience after the formal observation period is complete.

### ***2.3. The Professional Experience activities of Primary Teacher students - A comparison between the case study of Viet Nam and Australia***

#### ***2.3.1. Involving in actual school to give their ideas***

In Australia, student teachers when graduated are appointed to a Primary School. By using their knowledge and skills, they plan and give ideas suitable for this. The teacher training curriculum of the University of Wollongong is an example. In the subject of Teaching Gifted Learners, the student teacher is supposed as a graduate teacher. On his arrival at the Wunderbar Primary School, the principal informs him that one of his responsibilities is to be the gifted education coordinator for the school. What strategies would he prioritize implementing in order to meet the needs of the children who are gifted in the school? He will discuss a minimum of three strategies and provide evidence to support the implementation of these strategies in an essay. Besides, the student is about to develop 4 lessons for the gifted learners and to select a particular stage and topic for the gifted learners, and to incorporate activities in his lessons that both the gifted and other students will be completing. Then, they will provide an explanation that indicates how the activities for the gifted are more cognitively complex than the activities for the rest of the class [4].

In Thai Nguyen University of Education, when a student teacher is sent to primary school to do his pedagogy practice activity in the subject of Methodology of Teaching Primary Mathematics, he is required to do an observation about classroom organization and supervising teacher - pupil interaction and behavior management strategies. After that, the student teacher is suggested to be supposed have a role as the supervisor teacher who does the lesson and gives his own ideas [5].

In Japan, student teachers work in small groups to collaborate with one another, meeting to discuss learning goals and planning an actual classroom lesson. Some children in local can be invited to the university and take part in a small classroom organized by teacher students with or without the help of lecturer. There, student teachers observe how their ideas work in lessons with children, and then they do the lesson study, report on the results so that other partners can benefit from it. Lesson study is a “widespread professional development practice” [5]. Student teachers do professional practice in subject from the first year to the fourth year depending on the subject they learn. From observation in classroom, teacher students also “demonstrate good conflict management skills, and they shared that some modules related to this topic have been included during their training programme”. Student teachers must bring out their caring qualities to counsel and reassure the children, reinforce his or her self-confidence and composure while cultivating understanding and tolerance in classroom. The student teachers also learn the storytelling teaching method to describe the inner world of emotions of children with special needs to increase empathy and understanding in other children. Student teachers also provide models of the right behavior and attitudes among peers as a concrete example for the student with special needs to emulate, especially to learn about the social conventions and how to respond to the reactions of others [6].

### 2.3.2. Full-time Professional Experiences at primary school

In Thai Nguyen University of Education, student teachers spend 3 weeks at the primary school in the third year. They go to school to join extracurricular activities and visit classes. They also have to submit the Professional Experience report. In the fourth year, they spend 7 weeks to work as pre-teachers at primary school. They plan and implement the lesson and study lessons after that with the help of supervising teacher at primary school.

In the University of Wollongong, the first year student teachers work in pairs during 19 days to complete the Professional Experience and then submit their report to satisfy attendance requirements. They need to experience the culture of schools and gain an understanding of how schools and classrooms operate. They also plan and implement a minimum 6 hours of teaching in week one and 8 hours of teaching in week two with activities that focus on individuals, small groups and whole class in week one. By the end of week two, student teachers needs to plan and teach full session involving class organisation and / or consecutive lessons.

In the second year, student teachers spend three

weeks at primary school. Lesson plans must be written for every lesson and presented to the supervising teacher in advance. They plan and implement 8 hours in week one and 8 hours in week two, 15 hours in week three of teaching.

In the third year, student teachers have four weeks to work with the supervising teacher to develop a two-week teaching program and day book. Day books show lesson notes, preparation (including specific examples to be taught) anecdotal notes, and teaching / learning reflections. They also should teach a minimum of two or three teaching blocks per day in week one and two. In week three and four, teacher students should teach a full teaching load (program and day book) and complete a minimum of one lesson reflection form per day when teaching.

In the last year, student teachers work in the primary school in 6 week block. There is a strong emphasis on the planning and development of a sequence of lessons that constitute one or more units of work with classes taught. Unit plans and daybook notes should be discussed with the cooperating teacher well before lessons / units are implemented.

The following table compares the professional experience (PEX) activities between primary teacher students of The University of Wollongong, Australia and Thai Nguyen University of Education, Viet Nam:

Thai Nguyen University of Education, Viet Nam		The University of Wollongong, Australia	
Time	PEX activities	Time	PEX activities
1 <sup>st</sup> year	No activities	1 <sup>st</sup> year: 2 weeks (= 10 days)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct an observation to know about the culture of schools and gain an understanding of how schools and classrooms operate;</li> <li>- Submit the lesson plans to the supervising teacher</li> <li>- Plan and implement a minimum of 6 hours of teaching in week one and 8 hours of teaching in week two</li> <li>- Complete PEX report.</li> </ul>
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	No activities	2 <sup>nd</sup> year:	- Submit the

		3 weeks (= 15 days)	Lesson Plans to the Supervising Teacher - Plan and implement a minimum of 8 hours of teaching whole lessons in week one, 10 hours of teaching in Week Two and 15 hours of teaching, and complete at least 3 full days of teaching in Week Three. - Complete PEX report.
3 <sup>rd</sup> year: 3 weeks (=15 days)	- Conduct an observation to know about the culture of schools and gain an understanding of how schools and classrooms operate; - Visit class and do the lesson to study the link between theory and practical - Take part in and organise some extracurricular activities - Complete PEX report.	3 <sup>rd</sup> year: 4 weeks (= 20 days)	- Teach a minimum of 2-3 teaching blocks per day from the classroom teacher's planned program in week one and two - Work with the Supervising Teacher to develop a two-week teaching program and day book - Teach a full teaching load in week three and four.
4 <sup>th</sup> year: 7 weeks (=35 days)	- Conduct an observation to know about the culture of schools and gain an understanding of how schools and classrooms operate; - Take part in and organise some extracurricular activities - Submit lesson plans to the supervising teacher - Teach a minimum of 7 lessons approved	4 <sup>th</sup> year: 6 weeks (= 30 days)	- Teach with a reduced weekly teaching load in Week One - Teach with full allocation from week two to six

	by supervising teacher and discuss and study lesson after teaching. - Complete PEX report.		
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The above table shows the differences between the PEX activities of primary teacher students in Australian and Vietnamese. Student teachers in Vietnam start their PEXs in the third year while Australian students go to primary school from the first year. The Australian teacher training curriculum also spends more time in PEX activities than Vietnamese. This means that Australian pedagogy students will have more opportunities to train and develop their professional skills than Vietnamese students.

#### 2.4. Some suggestions

In order to develop primary teacher training curriculum, pedagogical skills must be trained and professional competencies in necessary should be developed for student teachers in all subjects of the curriculum in order to satisfy the increasing demand of the society. At the same time, knowledge and skills which do not serve much for teaching practices in primary school should be also removed from the curriculum.

Although the basic knowledge such as the formation of sets of number, the operations and the nature of the operations, signs of divisible or the way of approaching to the concept of fractions are provided with basic science modules like Mathematics Foundations, Vietnamese, Social Science, Natural Science, etc. but student teachers have not yet linked it to primary program. Therefore, it is necessary to determine that this is a task of lecturers who teach fundamental subjects. They have to clarify the relationship and connect what they teach to the content of subjects at primary level.

The formation of necessary professional competency for student teachers is not only the task of the methodology lecturers but also the foundational lecturers. So students need to form a conscious and professional capacity right from the first year. For example, student teachers can develop their communicative competence, ability to express a problem, the capacity of solving problem, written and presentation skills by learning each subject in the curriculum.

It is also necessary to organize annual activities for teacher students such as designing teaching tools at primary schools; professional pedagogical competition;

calligraphy contest, etc. to encourage and motivate students to form and develop their professional skills.

Furthermore, it is essential to foster pedagogy skills for all lecturers. They must study by themselves to improve their knowledge, skills and professional qualifications regularly. Lecturers must go to primary school to study the actual teaching and learning process by visiting and taking part in a class. They also have to regularly update the latest changes of primary education to help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to suit the development of primary education.

Next, coordinating with local primary schools by visiting the class, studying lessons, taking part in professional seminars and this task must be considered as one of the requirements to develop profession for lecturers, especially, methodology lecturers.

Also, students and teachers should actively coordinate with primary school teachers. Scientific research results must be shared and transferred to the primary schools through professional seminars.

Regularly survey, receive feedback from primary schools about teacher students, particularly professional capacities of students to supplement and adjust the content of each subject in primary teacher training curriculum.

Some of the experienced teachers should be invited to the university to participate in teaching methodology subjects, and to work as practice teachers in order to deliver parts of the lesson and compare with the theoretical knowledge that students are provided.

Both student teachers and lecturers should go to primary schools to plan and implement educational activities. After that, student teachers are required to write a report about the lesson they gain through these activities.

Primary Education Faculty should support schools in regular teacher training, update the new teaching methodology, and the training content can be adapted based on the requirements of the primary school.

In particular, it is necessary for primary school to involve in the teacher training process right from the first year to help students learn more about the actual school activities and to get acquainted with the primary environment, learn to work as a baby sister and organize extracurricular activities for primary students. To accomplish this requires, the university should establish good communication between the in-school coordinator, supervising teacher, and student teachers so as to understand and support their development.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The formation of the student teachers' professional competencies through training process at the university is a guarantee for the adaptability and professional development after graduation. So, the development of competency-based teacher training model is an urgent requirement at present and it is indispensable to propose the solutions and specific direction.

Primary teachers should be provided with the necessary professional knowledge and professional competency. Thus, in order to contribute to the quality of vocational training for student teachers in primary education faculty, the university has to cooperate more closely with the primary schools so that the students could have comprehensive theoretical and practical knowledge and experience before they commence their teaching career.

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