Demystifying Practicum for Preservice Teachers: A 21st Century Approach

Abstract:

This presentation describes the method, and web based technologies being used by a course coordinator in a regional Australian higher education course that has a practicum experience embedded in it. The method attempts to balance the needs of the program leader, the external accrediting body and the students. The presentation will explore academic issues at three levels. From the program leader’s perspective, a course coordinator’s responsibilities for on campus learning and the issues arising from the student assessment when at the school.

Program leaders are responsible for program design and alignment and for placement this has implications for programs that have multiple practicum courses. The course coordinators must work within the developmental continuums of the program to ensure a positive impact on external accrediting procedures. Secondly the issue of what to assess on placement and how to assess this is discussed. Issues such as pass fail or graded courses. What competencies are to be assessed and how course coordinators know what is being assessed? Is what is being assessed in the school aligned to the learning outcomes of the course?

It explores the issues faced by the students and then describes the current practices of the course coordinator in an effort to support and prepare students for practicum assessment. The method empowers the students with knowledge of the assessment process and the competencies that are embedded in the learning outcomes of the placement. It also provides students with the opportunity to act on feedback and to reflect on performance at a time of their choice.

A review of the method is undertaken and is aligned with the needs of the students—allowing for discussion of ongoing formative feedback that guides the students and the course coordinators toward better decision making and more powerful practicum experiences. Further development of reports and communication functions are discussed in light of results of the initial pilot.

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If we are to align our belief that students should get ongoing feedback then as an academic it follows that we want feedback for our students while on placement. This leads us to the third issue for academics; how to know what their students are doing, how they are going on placement and how to monitor and support them.

Student issues will be explored in terms of methods impact on the student experience.

1. The high stakes nature of practicum assessment on student achievement.
2. Meeting the needs of students through increased feedback.
3. Answering the question... How can I improve?
4. Through planning for improvement by seeing my performance gap.