



## Setting the scene

Hassiena Marriott (project manager for the ITE CoP) welcomed participants and established the context for this CoP. Most BRIDGE CoPs (e.g. the ECD or Maths and Science CoPs) are widely publicised, and anyone who has an interest in that area can attend. The ITE CoP, however, is a 'closed' community of practice in the sense that it is by invitation only. This is because it focuses specifically on teaching practice/work integrated learning (WIL) for ITE students at universities, and the CoP is aimed at bringing together those who are directly involved in this area of teacher education (at conceptual levels, implementation levels, and decision-making levels).

The proposed outcomes for this CoP are as follows:

### ITE CoP Outcomes

- To enable CoP members to learn from each other about various ITE practices and to spread this good practice to their entire faculty;
- To consider different models and approaches for managing student teachers before, during and after the implementation of teaching practice;
- To share information, tools and resources, successes and challenges; and
- To co-create a Teaching Practice Resource that will help both students and faculty in tracking, monitoring and improving the teaching practice experience. *This resource will emerge from debates around major problem areas and discussion on innovations to address these. The nature of this resource will be determined by the CoP and produced as a shared output.*

In this introductory session some general observations were made:

#### Institutional scope in relation to provision of WIL/ teaching practice.

- UNISA as the largest provider of teaching graduates is a distance education institution, and has students nationally across the country and in other countries. Because of numbers and location, their model relies mainly on appointment of external supervisors rather than deployment of UNISA academic staff.
- TUT is the biggest contact university for teacher education, with about 6 000 education students; WIL also takes place across all provinces except for the Western Cape.
- UJ has about 58 000 students in total, with 4 000 in the Faculty of Education. These attend a range of schools close to their homes (WIL takes place during recess) for their WIL/ teaching practice component. UJ also set up and hosts Funda UJabule on its Soweto campus; this is a fully functioning public school in which students can observe teaching, and practise methodology in the context of various modules in their own curriculum.
- UP deals only with Pretoria schools for WIL placements, using schools between 20-50 Km radius from the campus. This is due to logistical and financial constraints, as all assessors are drawn from faculty staff.

- Wits and NWU attended the first CoP meeting held in September 2018 and part of this CoP, but were unfortunately unable to attend this meeting.
- Private universities such as Embury Institute for Teacher Education, IIE and Varsity College also engage with WIL for teaching degrees, and have both local and cross-provincial spreads. We still need to consider ways of including these institutions.

### **A note on terminology**

Different universities use different terminology to refer to the school-based placement of teachers in the teacher educator programme: these include the terms ‘teaching practice’, ‘practicum’ and ‘teaching experience’. All these terms cover the idea of ‘learning from practice’ (through observation of qualified teachers working in a real context) and ‘learning in practice’ (through supervised delivery by student teachers of lessons in a real school context). MRTEQ uses the term Work Integrated Learning as follows:

#### **7. Work Integrated Learning (WIL):**

7.1 The learning-in-practice, workplace-based component of WIL for teacher education qualifications mostly take place in classroom and school settings, but could also include a small component of service learning in community settings.

*Revised Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) Published by the Minister of Higher Education & Training in Government Gazette No 38487 on 19 February 2015*

It was noted that the term WIL is not exclusive to education and is widely used in technical and vocational training: it is an umbrella term covering concepts such as experiential learning, internships and apprenticeships. It was agreed however that this CoP should use the term for teaching practice, following the policy terminology.



### **What are your criteria for Teaching Practice Schools?**

Participants were asked to think about what is common and what is unique in relation to their approaches to teaching practice schools. The discussion ranged widely over a number of issues, with the main points summarised below.

**Noted that most education faculties have a list of schools developed over time, from which students can select schools which suit their own locations and travel logistics during the WIL placement period.**

#### **School Functionality**

- Both DBE and DHET have developed criteria for establishing the functionality of a school, and universities can draw on these. Some education faculties work with provincial or district authorities in drawing up their lists.
- There is not always agreement about what makes a ‘functional’ school, or what criteria are important in relation to placement for WIL. Some considerations are:
  - Safety issues for students.
  - The school need not show high academic performance as long as there is a context in which practice can link with theoretical learning.

- Quintile 1 schools can still be functional schools which deliver quality learning. CPUT, for example, uses quintile levels to assist in moving students around so that they can experience different types of schools. UJ also looks at exposing students to diverse schools in their different years of WIL, but does not use the quintile levels to distinguish these.
- There is a tension here: from a learning perspective it is better if students go to functional schools where they can be exposed to good practice; however, what are we preparing our students from if they don't have some experience of dysfunctional schools?

### **Attitudes of schools to hosting WIL**

- The availability of sites for WIL is dependent on the goodwill of schools, as schools are not required to take students. This is not defined as an obligation in any policy. This is clearly an issue that DBE and DHET need to address: it is in the interests of the nation as a whole that our future teaching professionals get the best WIL experiences possible.
- High schools are often unwilling to take students because hosting and mentoring them takes up time needed for curriculum coverage.
- Schools sometimes become arenas for universities competing for WIL spaces. There is always the risk of 'teacher fatigue' in schools which are over-utilised.
- Many teachers are unwilling to mentor; a common view is that "Universities don't pay our salaries, DBE does." Other pressures on teachers could relate to fear of being observed or lack of time. In addition, not all teachers are suited to mentoring. While most universities offer some form of mentorship training for teachers, this is voluntary.
- The willingness of a school to host WIL is often dependent on good leadership from the principal or school management team about the benefits and importance of WIL to the school in particular, and professionalism in general.
- WIL placements sometimes have unintended and negative consequences. For example, some schools then employ the student teacher (as SGB appointments) while the student is still studying. The school does this because they can fill HR gaps or get cheap labour; the students see it as an opportunity for themselves. However, they are then trying to study at the same time, and this can have knock on effects in terms of completing their qualifications. The power of education faculties to stop this practice is variable; for example, some universities wanted to make the completion of WIL a pre-requisite for being admitted to fourth year, but home faculty procedures might interfere with this.

'It is all about the end product we send out into schools: they need to make a difference to the country.'

CoP participant

### **Finance and planning for WIL**

- Location of WIL placements has financial implications for students, but also for faculty in terms of deploying lecturers/ assessors/ supervisors/ mentors to undertake site visits. For example:
  - UP uses schools within the 20-50 km radius from the university. While this may raise other issues for discussion (e.g. possible impact on schools nearby; authenticity of assessment), sending UP faculty out beyond that radius not only has cost implications but also impacts on scheduling and teaching time within the institution, as lecturers are then absent from campus. Using external personnel also has cost implication.
  - UJ has limited staff in the Faculty of Education (about 40 lecturers to cover 3000 students). UJ's model is to use the academics who teach methodology in the context of their own subject

matter expertise (SME) to assess the students. Staff have to assess a number of students across Gauteng while still doing their own teaching load; one reason for this is that discrepancies between the lecturer assessments and teacher assessments have been noticed. Delegated assessment is seen as problematic, in relation to both SME and methodology expertise. UJ does bring in external expertise when required, but this does incur costs. Planning for deploying education faculty is also made more difficult by the fact that students and staff have their own home, discipline-specific faculties which have their own schedules. Wits, for example, would not have this particular planning challenge, as all SMEs are in the faculty of education. UNISA's challenges are of a different order, in that delegated observation and assessment is a necessity in the distance education context.

- It was also noted that planning and logistics for WIL is also affected by the way in which programmes are funded and structured. In some instances, WIL stands as a module on its own and students are billed separately, while in others WIL is integrated across the whole programme. Different universities use different costing models, which affect key feature of WIL implementation.

### **Partnerships for WIL**

The fact that different institutions are competing with each other for WIL spaces is a problem. How can universities better collaborate around WIL?

- One participant noted that CPUT in the Western Cape had partnerships with other institutions in the province, such as UCT and Stellenbosch. This meant that there was more transparent communication around student placements for WIL, so that some schools did not get overloaded.
- Communication with district offices appears to vary across different districts and provinces; it seems that relationships are with individual universities; and that government does not play a coordinating role in WIL.
- In some cases, faculty from one university has ended up observing or mentoring students from other universities, but this appears to have happened on an informal or ad hoc basis. Also, different institutions have different approaches to WIL, as well as different assessment tools and reporting protocols.
- North West University led a consortium of seven universities with the aim of collaborating on various aspects of WIL such as mentoring. We should delve more deeply into why this consortium was discontinued. Factors that hamper collaboration are often to do with cost, management, accountability, and attitudes.
- Collaboration and partnerships in WIL could help minimise animosity between students from different universities who find themselves at the same schools, as well as teacher assumptions and attitudes about students from specific universities.



### **How do you ensure that principals prepare their schools and teachers for WIL?**

It is generally agreed that good school leadership, through the school management team (SMT) as well as the principal, has a strong impact on the professionalism of the staff as a whole and the quality of teaching and learning in a school. It is therefore vital that principals buy in to the importance of hosting WIL students, and hold their staff accountable in supporting these students. Most principals delegate the management of WIL placements and WIL implementation to the Academic Head or to HODs on the SMT.

- TUT has a generic letter that they send out prior to placement. The WIL Guidelines are inside student journals, and there is a section which the principals sign when they accept the student. The intention for 2019 is to hold training workshops for all school-based mentors and TUT lecturers, and to get this programme certificated. Schools allocate mentors depending on what they are teaching.
- UJ invites principals from all schools where 4<sup>th</sup> year students have been placed to a meeting to discuss challenges and lessons learned, and to come on board for future placements. This is usually delegated to the Academic Head or an HOD. The same individuals don't necessarily come to these meetings every year. UJ noted that they need to be more targeted in their invitations and build up ongoing relationships with those responsible for WIL in their schools. Principals and others are invited to relevant UJ talks and events.
- UP holds 'stakeholder meetings' to which principals, SACE and DBE are invited. Where possible they try to have sit down meetings with principals when asking for placement. There is a guideline document for schools. UP also uses opportunities for relationship building, such as addressing schools when asked to do so.
- For UNISA it is more difficult to have direct relationships with schools, as they work mainly through the supervisors, who are encouraged to build these relationships and to get buy-in. There is a teaching practice guideline for supervisors and schools.

A common theme here is the importance of cultivating ongoing relationships with schools, and with relevant individuals in schools.



## How do you prepare your students for WIL?

- All students are given guidelines for WIL in their course material, but there seemed to be agreement that 'students don't read' these kinds of texts attentively, and that both their own expectations and what is expected from them need to be mediated. UJ, for example, holds four sessions with students, going through both administrative procedures and academic methodology guidelines.
- UNISA prescribes WIL procedures in the study material and gives guidelines through tutorial letters.
- The Edu Community student body at UP sometimes role-plays aspects of WIL (e.g. professional conduct) with students.
- There have been examples of difficulties with students who don't follow protocols, such as dress codes. However, schools also have a responsibility to undertake induction around school policies and procedures. There are some grey areas in relation to cultural or religious beliefs, and instances when the education faculty needed to go in and mediate at a school. Generally, though, student teachers need to conform to school rules, or get relocated.



## Areas in which ITE CoP members could collaborate

The following possibilities were discussed:

### Sharing lists of schools at which students are placed

- We need to flag the risks here: school and teacher fatigue can become an issue, and schools become resistant when over-used for WIL, even if there are rotations between different universities

- What would be the purpose of a common list? Is it to prevent school fatigue, to build relationships, or as recognition/ prestige for schools? In order to be useful as a planning tool, a different list would have to be compiled every year in relation to dates and subject placements at each school. If it is simply a list of names of schools used by universities for WIL, a clear purpose needs to be defined.

### **Sharing or developing common resources**

Standardised tools or other resources could enable collaboration, and assist universities in working together in relation to WIL.

- Shared resources could include WIL Guidelines for schools or for students; various assessment tools such as observation rubrics or other types of assessments; developmental tools designed for teachers.
- Different universities have different protocols in relation to creative commons licences and open education resources; there may be certain processes that would have to be undertaken.
- There may also be differences in tools used for phases.

It was agreed that the next CoP meeting should be a workshop in which participants have sight of each other's WIL assessment tools in order to consider a process towards standardisation. Hassiena will send out a request to CoP participants about inputs required.

**Closing comments** stressed appreciation for people's openness and honesty in sharing ITE WIL challenges, noted the commonalities between the experiences of different institutions, and supported the need for closer collaboration on WIL practices and implementation.

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