

APCS – Beginning & early career teachers making a difference

Aim

This project, a piece of commissioned work for academic partners to support the teacher learning and development (TLD) of pods of beginning & early career (BEC) teachers, aims to encourage their critical analyses of what it means to be working in a community school and towards improved student achievement, noting their own account of specific issues of concern.

This work is part of a wider research project, *School effects in an Aboriginal school community*. The intention is to take directions from the school review, and community, and work towards quality teaching but linked to school population, including students' individual background characteristics and group characteristics, as well as the community's views on schooling for life chances. Its deeper roots are to be found in critical analyses of school effectiveness and improvement research (SEI), given the importance of context and the limits of school reform when it is undertaken with little regard for the social composition of the student intake and its impact on classroom practices.

Outcomes

- consolidate the APCS-UTS research partnership
- contribute to the APCS review & identity as a learning organisation
- support BEC teachers' learning & development
- initiate a teacher mentoring program
- identify the significance of social composition (eg. ATSI and ses)
- acknowledge community
- use the DET's *Quality Teaching* package
- articulate school effects in relation to pedagogies

Timeline

April 20, 2005 final negotiations with Acting Principal Bob Bruce

Half-day release work with pods of BEC teachers & teacher mentors:

Term 1: Wednesday May 4, June 1, June 29;

Term 2: Wednesday July 27, August 24, September 14;

Term 3: Wednesday October 19, November 16, plus presentation date TBA.

Process

Teaching at APCS presents a challenge to BEC teachers, who are expected to join colleagues working in a community school and making a difference to the lives of a special mix of students - predominantly Aboriginal students but also NESB and low ses students. Our work together – on teacher half-day release and in mentoring groups – is guided by critical thinking about teaching at APCS and Aboriginal education, taking direction from the school review, acknowledging community, reading wider literature on school-based research and school effects, and building what we might call a qualitative account or case story. At issue is a consideration of the BEC teachers' concerns alongside a consideration of the wider social and political context, particularly the

market-based education system and the social composition of the school's intake, and its impact on what can reasonably be done by new staff in terms of student achievement and improving academic attainment. The intention is help BEC teachers develop a research perspective on their efforts in the classroom, which are part of the school's research capacity building and efforts to improve the school's work, but also what is possible in the provision of schooling and education. It is anticipated BEC teachers will identify a number a concerns about classroom work, and the task is to develop their theoretical and practical considerations with a view to embedding the dimensions and elements of the DET's *Quality Teaching* package in classroom practices and contributing to the school's work on developing productive pedagogies. As part of the wider research project, *School effects in an Aboriginal school community*, it is also hoped this TLD work will contribute to critical understandings about social context but also school improvement and what needs to be done to overcome the effects of disadvantage.

Products

- Assistance with the school review (term 2, week 6);
- Work with community;
- Individual teacher portfolios;
- Research data (collected through teacher research but also school and academic partners' research including school documents, classroom and school observations, student work samples, student and staff interviews and questionnaires, and community interviews);
- Data analysis with a particular focus on the details of the ways students' family and social backgrounds finds its effect on student achievement, and how to effect pedagogical change;
- BEC teacher-research presentation to whole school staff;
- Research proposal for an AIATSIS research grant to fund the on-going research project, *School effects in an Aboriginal school community*.

Funding & release arrangements

The following details were approved by Acting Principal Bob Bruce

Term 2, 2005

May 4, June 6, June 29: Lori Beckett & Chris Evans

3 x one half-day meetings with BEC teachers at APCS, at times TBA

Outcome: teacher research workshop with BEC teachers, teacher portfolio (in progress) & follow-up newsletter

Pay: \$2K

Term 3, 2005

July 27, August 28, September 14: Lori Beckett & Chris Evans

3 x one half-day meetings with BEC teachers at APCS, at times TBA

Outcome: teacher research workshop with BEC teachers, teacher portfolio (in progress) & follow-up newsletter

Pay: \$2K

Term 4, 2005

October 10, November 16, & date TBA (staff presentation): Lori Beckett & Chris Evans
2 x one half-day meeting with BEC teachers at APCS, at times TBA

Outcome: teacher research workshop with BEC teachers, teacher portfolio (in progress)
& follow-up newsletter

One meeting with whole staff at APCS, at a time TBA

Outcome: BEC presentation of teachers' portfolios & research findings

Pay: \$2K

Faculty of Education arrangements

Dr Lori Beckett and Ms Chris Evans are working on the project given the APCS-UTS Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) dated June 17, 2004 and signed by Professor Peter Booth and Minister Andrew Refshauge, and the letter dated April 20, 2005 from Acting Principal Bob Bruce confirming their engagement. Professor Andrew Gonczi lent his support to their commitment to work as research partner and research associate (academic partners), and the Faculty TLD Research Group will be their intellectual home and provide administrative support.

Expectations of commissioned work

1. Shared understandings/meanings

A central assumption of this TLD work and the wider research project, *School effects in an Aboriginal school community* is that improving student achievement and academic attainment of the student population at APCS is an important goal for school, community and academic partners. The school review and the teacher and school research effort, co-developed with UTS, are geared to this end, but we are realistic about the possibilities of change, and take seriously the social limits of school reform. We do not buy into the claims of school effectiveness and school improvement research, especially where they fail to adequately acknowledge community, students' family and social background, and the wider social and political context. Rather, we are keen to develop a critical perspective on claims about school reform, and we are keen to learn more about the likely impact on the school's work and student achievement of what is called 'school mix' (Thrupp, 1999). We prefer the term 'social mix' and take this to mean the social composition of our student intake, notably Aboriginality, social class and ethnicity. We are committed to equity and social justice, countering disadvantage and to developing Aboriginal education, co-designed with community.

2. Strategies & structures

The planning group, which meets monthly, will act like a reference group for staff and academic partners working on the TLD project and the wider research project, *School effects in an Aboriginal school community*. The TLD project will engage pods of BEC teachers and teacher-mentors in professional/research development activities. These consist of work with academic partners on teacher release half-days at times to be determined three times a term, in terms 2, 3 & 4, with the third day in term 4 dedicated to academic partners' & BEC teachers' presentations to whole school staff.

Professional/research development activities also continue in the interim, where BEC teachers and teacher-mentors work together on research questions developed from an

interrogation of the nature of the specific problems faced by BEC teachers. The wider research project, *School effects in an Aboriginal school community*, involves academic partners working with the planning group, school executive, teacher-mentors, BEC teachers and community to develop the school's research capacity and a research strategy intended to examine the question of school effects, and what we might do to develop a critical understanding of, and address, the links between social mix, the school's work, and student achievement.

3. Role of BEC teachers

The BEC teachers' role is to work in pods and with teacher-mentors and academic partners. They are to actively participate in the TLD project, do the required reading, develop their teacher portfolios¹, and contribute to the wider research project, *School effects in an Aboriginal school community*.

4. Role of school executive/teacher-mentors

The role of the school executive is to organise the planning group, who will oversee the TLD project and the wider research project, *School effects in an Aboriginal school community*. The school executive will also meet with teacher-mentors and BEC teachers, as well as academic partners and actively participate in the TLD project and the wider research project by providing advice on the fine grain of school life and the ways compositional (school population) effects occur at different levels within the school to form a cumulative compositional effect at the school level. Teacher-mentors will work closely with BEC teachers and academic partners, and actively participate in the TLD project and wider research project by helping to articulate the finer details of social mix effects in the classroom and what can be realistically done by BEC teachers to counter any negative impact and institute the DET's *Quality Teaching* and community supported learning.

5. Role of university staff

The research partners' role is to help the school with the TLD project with pods of BEC teachers, and the wider research project, *School effects in an Aboriginal school community*. The research partners will liaise with the planning group, school staff and community, direct the school to relevant school-based research and related literature, lead the TLD with BEC teachers and help with their presentations to the whole school staff at the end of term 4. The research partners will also help develop the school's research capacity. They will help with the articulation of a school research strategy, particularly the research questions that should be developed from an interrogation of the nature of the specific problems faced by BEC teachers. They will also undertake data collection and analyses, make some conclusions and recommendations, and map future directions for on-going school-based research and teacher learning and development. This includes an AIATSIS research grant application on a school-based project to do with quality teaching and community supported learning.

¹ The teacher portfolios will provide BEC teachers with an individual record of their work on the TLD project, which will double as a professional learning & development journal. It will be progressively developed, and consist of component parts, including journal entries, handouts, worksheets, and additional readings.