Project Report

2006 Victorian Equity Projects – An Office of Training and Tertiary Education initiative

Project title: Transition to Employment for Overseas Qualified Teachers
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Project summary

This project involved the delivery of a language, culture and workplace orientation program that aimed to assist overseas qualified teachers to attain the knowledge, skills & experience necessary to enable them to gain employment in Australia.
The project involved the delivery of the course as well as on-going monitoring & feedback for the participants during a 5 week Practical Placement in an educational institution.

The learners

Twenty seven Overseas qualified and experienced Primary and Secondary teachers were enrolled in the course (which started 15 May 2006); all had experienced difficulty in securing on-going employment in Australia.
The participants came from a variety of different countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, China, France, the Ukraine & Japan.
Fifteen of the participants had Victorian Institute of Teaching registration, two were eligible for VIT registration and ten not eligible for Registration (have a Degree, but no Diploma of Education).
Most of the target group had all the required qualifications to work in Australia, the ten non-eligible teachers (no VIT reg.) would be qualified to teach in TAFE by completing the Certificate IV in Training & Assessment (TAA), which we built into the course as an alternative to the Practical Placement.
Fifteen teachers completed 15 weeks of the program (thirteen the entire 20 week program). Attrition was due to child care issues, job offers or personal hardship, making full time study impossible. Two teachers left at week 15 for jobs (one with VIT registration, the other with registration in process) of the remaining thirteen teachers, eight had VIT registration (two had gone from provisional VIT registration to full registration, as a result of the teaching practice) and five non- eligible for VIT registration, who completed the Certificate IV in TAA (built into the course as an alternative to the practical placement in a primary or secondary school), thus qualifying them to teach in the TAFE sector. These five participants completed the teaching practicum requirements of the TAA at Holmesglen TAFE.
The challenge

Transition to Employment.

Holmesglen’s research, in conjunction with the Overseas Qualifications Unit, principals and overseas qualified teachers, discovered that the following barriers to employment were behind the target group’s inability to secure employment in their field:-

Both from the perspective of the O.S. qualified teacher and the schools themselves: language problems; lack of knowledge and experience with local lesson delivery methods, curriculum and class management; lack of familiarity with student & staff behaviours and cultural attitudes; inexperience with employment application techniques and strategies.

This project involved a course that would focus on the knowledge and skills needed by the group to successfully work in an Australian educational institution.

As well as concentrating on language and cultural issues that would facilitate entry to the work force (CV writing & job interview skills), the course also focused on curriculum, assessment practices and classroom management as well as a Practical Placement in a Melbourne school. This was supported by mentors in the host school. This final component enabled participants to have hands-on experience in the workplace, applying what was covered in the course, thus better preparing them to take up future employment in Australia. The challenges for the overseas qualified teachers are to adapt to a new teaching & learning environment – one of the major challenges for them is to be able to learn how to facilitate in a less traditional, more interactive classroom situation, to understand the relationship between teaching & learning in the Australian context and to learn & apply new classroom management strategies.

The other major challenge was to encourage schools to get involved with the Practical Placement. From research conducted, Holmesglen discovered that most often casual relief teachers work in isolation in schools: they complete their appointments with little interaction between other staff and are not incorporated into the school culture. Holmesglen believes that more support is needed for overseas qualified teachers in schools (who often begin their teaching as casual relief teachers) if their integration, acceptance and success in the school is to be achieved.

Holmesglen’s liaison with both state & private Primary & Secondary schools resulted in a committed, consolidated supportive environment for the overseas qualified teachers to work in. Via support from Principals, coordinators and classroom teachers, the participants in our group were able to integrate into the schools through the 3 pre-practicum classroom visits plus the 5 weeks placement, ensuring optimum conditions for a successful, enriching experience.

Your approach

Into an ESL curriculum (Certificate IV in ESL – employment) we imported modules from other training packages that addressed Education in Australia (VBN506, from Frameworks Curriculum 21504VIC) and Work in an Educational Environment (from Certificate III in Education 21484VIC). Apart from focusing on language and cultural awareness, the orientation to work focused on pedagogical issues around teaching & learning (with a specific focus on the Victorian curriculum for primary & secondary schools) assessment practices and classroom management. We also included training in computer skills that would be important for teaching in schools. The essential components of an ESL course were, thus, broadened and tailored to target those areas that would make the participants more work ready – more employable.

The practical placement component was vital for all of the reasons outlined in the previous section. Schools provision of mentor support on the placement was vital to ensure a successful experience
The other part of the pilot was preparing the teachers without VIT registration for work in the TAFE sector. As an alternative to going out into a primary or secondary school for 5 weeks, the non-VIT registered participants (which included 4 teachers and 1 overseas qualified Engineer, who decided a career change into teaching was a great option) completed the Certificate IV In TAA. They also prepared (as did the rest of the group) for a teaching practicum (3 sessions in a classroom with a supervisor: teaching mathematics or science at Holmesglen TAFE) as well as the teaching preparation and practice involved in the TAA itself.

The participation of the qualified Engineer has proven to be an excellent training option for overseas qualified engineers who have not been able to secure on-going work in their field in Australia – to be able to work in the TAFE sector, a Bachelor (or above) degree with the Cert. IV in TAA provides these professionals with another career option. After this experience, we will be offering the course to both graduates from our other professional courses (English for Health Professionals, Engineers, IT & Business) as well as graduates from our other general ESL programs who have degrees from overseas.

**The results**

All aspects of the project were important and worked well. The content covered in class was strongly commended by both participants and school principals and teachers. The introductory visits prior to placement were also significant in that they better prepared the overseas qualified teachers for the actual practical placement. The opportunity to liaise with the teachers, discuss the content they would be covering, meet the students and get a feel for the schools, meet staff, etc. all contributed to laying the grounds for a successful placement.

The placement itself was of utmost importance as it provided some participants with their first “real” teaching experience in Australia. For others, it was a richer teaching experience than their other casual relief teaching (CRT) experiences, as they were given on-site support and were welcomed into the school community.

Some of the tangible results:

For those who completed the course:

* One teacher from the group has been employed on a full time contract to teach VCE Biology in a Melbourne High School (the first time in her two years in Australia and one year in New Zealand, having only had CRT work prior to the pilot course, despite having both overseas qualifications and an MA In Education from Sydney University)

* Three teachers hired for CRT work (two for the first time in Australia) in the school where they completed their placement.

* The principals at the schools where they did the placements have said they would serve as referees for our teachers and would be willing to employ them for CRT when the opportunity arises.

* Four principals will be recommending four teachers, now with provisional VIT registration for full registration. The paperwork is currently in process.

* Five teachers are now qualified to work in the TAFE & Industry sector.
Lessons learned

About the Target Group:

- Frustration due to lack of responses to job applications. Teachers are applying for jobs in Metropolitan Melbourne where the market is extremely difficult – often jobs advertised do not actually reflect a “real vacancy”. The “hidden issue” being jobs are often filled from within, despite being advertised. Thus, the overseas qualified teacher assumes that despite reports of “skills shortages, they are not being considered or “given a chance. It is perhaps a situation that they are applying for jobs that really do not exist. This, however, is causing great frustration for the overseas qualified teacher.

- Flexible, willing to learn, many willing to travel & re-locate (Regional Victoria may well be the answer)

About the course:

- Guest speakers are a valuable component of the course.
- Include practicing teachers as guest speakers.
- Mentors in the schools highly recommended.
- Pre-practical placement visits highly valuable.
- We will aim to increase opportunities to visit & observe practicing teachers during the course.
- Certificate IV in TAA was too stressful for the teachers to be completed in entirety in 5 weeks – will reduce the number of modules, encouraging participants to complete the certificate independently.

Contact details for queries regarding the project

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