

Perception of Associate Teachers About Teaching Practicum in Sāmoa

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The core function of teacher training institutions is in their ability to produce quality classroom teachers. As such, the teaching practicum component is critical in the attainment of such a goal. The Faculty of Education at the National University of Samoa, wanted to add its own research findings in keeping its practicum programme up to date and relevant to the needs of its Teacher Trainees and the students for whom they will be teaching. The important role of the Associate Teacher was seen as central to the success of teaching practicum programmes. In taking this into account, the research takes a look at the Associate Teacher's perceptions of the teaching practice programme offered at the National University of Samoa. All areas were examined, that is, the practicum content, student trainee competency levels and, liaison with and input from Associate Teachers, the findings of which will be used to inform and improve the teacher training programme at the Faculty of Education at the National University of Samoa.

INTRODUCTION

In all teacher training institutions, the area of teaching practicum is vital in providing students with an opportunity to implement 'hot off the press' educational theory within classrooms where teachers are viewed as 'experts of classroom teaching, and mentors of up and coming new teachers. The success of Teaching Practicum (TP), being part of the pedagogical courses is thus, a key determinant of any successful teacher training programme.

The Faculty of Education (FoE) at the National University of Samoa (NUS) is the only national provider of both primary and secondary trained teachers. This study evolved out of the regular evaluations of staff and students relating to teaching practicum on issues of validity, reliability and effectiveness. The evaluations were conducted on completion of TP. Within each evaluation period, feedback consistently indicated uncertainty of ATs' roles. The researchers recognised that although Associate Teachers played a major role in the Teaching Practice programme, they had not been part of this evaluative process.

Supervision

"Supervision was understood chiefly as a function and role in public schools aimed at improving the quality of instruction" (Glanz 1998). The education system in Samoa has undergone many changes especially in the last five years. The role of government schools in providing quality education has impacted on the role of teacher educators. In the educational policies 2006-2015 for Samoa, the concepts of equity, quality, relevancy, efficiency and sustainability are seen as the key to quality education. According to the policies, quality has been defined as "... academic achievement, cultural understanding, and social behaviour resulting from a complex interplay of

professional and technical factors, and social cultural practices" (MESC 2009:8). The goals focused on the: formation of active, interactive and creative pedagogies, the establishment of just and partial evaluation assessment methods and, an education system that is holistic (MESC 2009).

The supervision of students is a construct of many influences. Glanz (1998) notes the influence of colonialism on the American educational system. Samoa has also had an association with colonialism that has resulted in the increasingly complex evolution of this culture and society. The notion of bureaucracy and professionalism noted by Glanz and others was introduced to Samoa around 1840 (Gilson 1970) with the establishment of the role of pastor/teacher by the London Missionary Society (LMS). This concept of professionalism hinges on the issue of supervision and takes into account its emergent form from an authoritarian to a more egalitarian type approach.

Associate Teachers need to know right from day one when TTs are allocated to them that "supervision and the specific evaluation process are intended to help [the trainee]" (Robbins and Alvy 1995). In Samoa there are schools who view the programme with scepticism; others see the role of the visiting lecturer as a watchdog and there is also a general misconception about the visiting lecturers and the ATs' supervisory roles. The view that Teacher Trainees are an extra burden to an already overloaded Associate Teacher who is grappling with the multifarious systemic changes is not a new one. On the positive side, there are schools that have come to grips with the dual nature of their job. This involves not only teaching the classes in a full academic year but by mentoring and providing support to TTs in either a three or four-week block. Mentoring and supporting Teacher Trainees involve "risk-taking behaviour that can only flourish in a non-threatening environment" (Robbins and Alvy 1995). Supervision is providing the support so that Teacher Trainees can become even better at what they want to be. Implicit in this is the development and the refinement of practical skills regarding effective teaching and learning.

Cultural Supervision

There is an assumption in the literature that the philosophical concerns in the supervision/mentoring discourses apply across cultures but data gathered in this research project, suggests that it can also be a stumbling block if cultural views and perspectives are overlooked. The fine line that one wishes to cross from one threshold to another is crucial to any successful programme implementation. This could be illustrated in many different ways. As part of the programme the faculty had initially called a meeting of all principals of the associate schools involved to a TP briefing where the faculty and schools could touch base. That was in line with the *fa'asamoa* (Samoan way of life) where the leaders of the school community were acknowledged. This meant the actual teachers who would take the TTs under their wing were not at the meeting. The implications for the programme was great for those schools unrepresented, this meant supervisors would need to do the briefing in the school. In such cases this would only be with the Associate Teachers and not the principal. However, schools whose principals were part of discussions were usually very supportive. In turn the ATs felt empowered if they knew that the principals had been briefed and were fully aware of the programme. However, this practice came to a halt in the early years of the amalgamation.

Where the principals do not come to the meeting and send someone else has not been as fruitful as one would expect. The buzz phrases that 'classroom teachers make a difference' or 'curriculum implementers should be involved in the design and planning phase' or 'making links with the grassroot levels' seem to fall short of the desired target.

Thus, looking for a blend in the values of Western and traditional systems could be an avenue for bringing this about.

Theory and Practice

As illustrated by Glanz (1988) there is always the possibility of a contradiction between theory and practice no matter what the cultural context. He argues that in spite of the presence of egalitarian motifs in American society, as Americans looked to science for answers to the organisation of industry, resistance to egalitarian forms of supervision was noted. In fact Glanz notes that egalitarian supervision "... never came to fruition" (1988). Similar to the Glanz example is the Samoan situation and its authoritarian perspective on relationships, in spite of lip service being paid to more egalitarian ideas in its cultural ethos and at times in its history (cf. Keesing 1930, Davidson 1967). There is a lot of resemblance between what Glanz has said and what is seen in Samoan schools especially in view of its hierarchical structure which not only takes into account what is imposed by management but also its own cultural structure. Much in the area of educational supervision calls for a reassessment of the relationships within and outside the school and how best to utilise them.

Later models of supervision, such as clinical supervision built further upon democratic ideas, introducing the notion of collegiality between supervisors and teachers (Glanz 1998, Goldhammer 1969). This initiative is also full of contradictions and issues (Smyth 1986). In Samoa the idea of collegiality is far from new. The *fa'amatai* (chiefly practices) encourages and nurtures the principles and the values embraced. The *tautua* (service rendered to a chief), the *taule'ale'a* (untitled man), and the *alii'i* (high chief) all have specific roles as part of the *fa'asamoa* which support and complement each other. The difficulty has been in unpacking those components and directing them towards making the supervisory role an effective one.

The fulfilment of social practices dominates life in both the school, home and educational supervisory settings. As Hogan (1983) argues "... people's perceptions of education and of teaching are almost invariably bound up with their own ideologies or undisclosed prejudices. Hogan's argument is supported by Shapiro and Blumberg (1998) who write that "... the social context in any society defines the issues that will be considered, determines the interaction and discussion, and often determines which issues or concerns will not even become conscious matters for consideration. In Samoa this may also be the case. However, while Zeichner and Tabachnik argue that "... a careful self-scrutiny of one's belief system with regard to supervision is a necessary part of a supervisor's education" (Zeichner and Tabachnik 1982:51, cited in Hogan 1983:32), on the surface, the notion of self-examination does not appear to be a dominant one in Samoa in so far as making educational changes or decisions is concerned. Yet on closer examination, there is much historically that attests to the cultural concept of self-analysis. The *tofa lloilo* or the *tofa loloto* or *tomanatu* (self analysis) is embedded in the belief of delaying a decision until careful scrutiny of one's practice and information sources had been verified. This is seen in the *fa'atau* (deliberation) as to who should speak when visitors arrive and in the *Tfoga* (traditional apology) where matters of life and death are deliberated.

To expand the cultural context example somewhat, as Smyth argues "so much of what teachers do in schools appears to be habituated and originates from social conditions over which they are effectively prevented from exercising deliberate control" (Smyth 1986). Again, Smyth could be describing aspects of the Samoan case where teachers feel they have no control over what they can or cannot do. There seems to be a view that is shared by most schools and this infiltrates down to lower echelons, that is,

teachers being allocated TTs for a block feel they cannot refuse even when they are unprepared for it. When Associate Teachers discuss their students' performance or attitude they are reluctant to record limitations or difficulties down in writing. Rather they may discuss teaching weaknesses and then give students an overall satisfactory performance.

Blase and Balse (1995) discuss situational factors that influence supervisor-teacher interaction. One situational factor they refer to is modes of manipulating and defining situations. While this may be a universal aspect of supervision in the West, there is no question for Samoans as to who is expected to define situations. The answer lies with the supervisor who will need to look at the different school, its student population, its environs and social-economic standing to be able to use a particular setting to its advantage. When supervisory models in Samoa are based on Western beliefs this is not always a recipe for success.

The following study of local mentoring and supervisory techniques includes some of these assumptions and is based in part on the literature review and the reactions to it noted above. Although increasingly extensive research had been conducted in the area of teacher supervision none had been undertaken within Samoa. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the area and pave the way for changes that will enhance and support the associate teacher's role in supporting the TT's practical experience.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection was based on a survey and questionnaire. The survey was conducted in 13 schools. A total of nine urban schools (two colleges and seven primary including one special needs centre and four rural schools (two Junior Secondary schools and two Primary schools). The number of ATs interviewed was 37 (13 males, mostly from the secondary and 24 females). All Associate Teachers had at least five years teaching experience and had supervised teacher trainees.

Interviews

Prior to the interviews and the questionnaires that were circulated, the researchers requested permission from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of MESC to visit the selected schools to conduct the research.

The interviews were conducted during the school term. Dictaphones and tape recorders were used during the interviews, with the exception of one rural school where the equipment used for recording failed, all other interviews were taped.

There were two different approaches used for the interview. Awareness of the cultural context and the preference of Samoans to work in groups (NZODA 1993), the first approach was a group interview. The researchers capitalised on the preference for Samoans to work collaboratively and used this method as their initial contact with the teachers. The second approach was the individual interview where the researcher could follow with in-depth questions that were already familiar. In most cases, the researchers' attempts to follow up with a second interview were restricted by time. In Savai'i, previous interviewees were followed through during TP. This was only possible through the researcher being placed in those particular schools. In one other school, due to distance and the time available, the researcher opted to enlist the assistance of the second researcher to take notes rather than postponing the interview for a later date.

Questionnaires

The staff of the Faculty of Education assisted with the distribution and the collection of the questionnaire forms for ATs who were not being interviewed. This covered a further seven Primary schools and two Junior Secondary schools and 30 Associate Teachers. These were delivered at the start and collected at the end of TP. Out of the 100 questionnaires circulated, 33 per cent were returned, mostly from the Primary schools. The questionnaires further consolidated the underlying themes which the researchers focused their discussions on during the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our data collection between April - October 2002, came up with the following findings and interpretations. These will be discussed under the three themes: the nature of Teaching Practicum, the ATs' roles and expectations.

THE TEACHING PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

The Practicum Requirements

Across both primary and secondary teaching practicum, the most frequent responses referred to the practicality of the teaching requirements (which for this section will be referred to as the 'booklet'). In terms of the aims and objectives of the Teaching Practicum requirements, the majority of the Associate Teachers felt that they were adequate and effective in developing good quality teachers. Comments such as "*lelei tele ma lava tapena requirements o lo'o o mai ma tamaiti*" reinforced the idea that the booklet was both relevant and adequate. The ATs viewed Teaching Practicum as "... the preparation of trainees for the classroom ... to practise what they have learnt in theory" and such comments as, "Trainees seemed to be well grounded in theory but lack practice" further supported this. Many Associate Teachers also made mention of the opportunity it gave TTs in observing practising teachers in classrooms "... *o le mafai lea ona fa'ataua i tamaiti le latou iloa ma le matau i galuega fa'afaia'oga.*" Teaching Practicum allowed Teacher Trainees to observe how their ATs approached lesson planning, teaching methods, strategies and classroom management techniques. This was considered by Associate Teachers as an integral part of Teaching Practicum. Comments such as "... *mafuta ma taimiti* [referring to TTs] *ua o mai i tua e fa'ata'ita'i ma va'ava'ai i se fa'alapotopotoga o faia'oga i a latou galuega fai ma galuega fa'atino.*" Translation meaning, when students are out in schools, they are able to observe teachers working with other teachers and see them in action.

Although much fewer in numbers, comments such as "*a tele le requirement e ono musu ai fo'i le student e fa'ataunu'u; a talafeagai mea e aumai e faigofie foi*" indicated that too many requirements affected the motivation of students to complete tasks where as if they were adequately selected without unnecessarily burdening Teacher Trainees, then tasks were achievable. This was further implied with comments such as "*e le lava le taimi*" (there is not enough time for TP). Most Associate Teachers who responded with like comments, were particular in noting the three week TP period (two weeks at the beginning of the school year and one week during the Easter break) was too short to achieve the requirements given the increased level of organisation involved at the start of the school year, particularly with government schools, and the shortened third week due to the Easter holidays.

All schools and most teachers commented that they would be better able to assist and monitor Teacher Trainees had they been better informed of the 'booklet' and specific objectives of Teaching Practice, "*pei o le isi lava lea mea e le o maua ai e tamaiti le fesoasoani a le Associate Teacher ona e le malamalama le AT i requirements lea e o mai ma latou i mea e mana'omia.*" Some non-government schools used different curriculum and Associate Teachers from these schools noted that students found it difficult when the curriculum did not follow that of the Ministry's.

Assessment

The Associate Teacher's report (Appendix 3) and individual comments made to the Teacher Trainee were the two main areas in which ATs constantly referred to. Although there were also many evaluative comments made in relation to the dress code, teacher preparedness, language used and general impression of TTs, these will be discussed in the next section on the Associate Teacher's roles and expectations.

A few responses indicated that when Associate Teachers wrote comments on students lesson plans, they were either never read or Teacher Trainees paid no attention. However, when the comments were given orally, they could see some attempt by the TTs to take on board the AT's suggestions:

... you write comments down, but I think most of the students don't even bother to go through it. ... I remember in the last two years I had a lot of problems with one student. [I asked] were you able to read my comments and she said oh I had forgotten. What she needed was for me to speak to her rather than writing down comments.

One Associate Teacher articulated well the views shared by most respondents with regards to assessment "*ta to te'i lava ua sau le faia'oga mai le FoE e assess le lesona ae le 'i fa'apea ua talanoa mai [le TT] is 'ita mo se fesoasoani*" indicating the Associate Teacher's surprise and disappointment to see the visiting lecturer coming to assess the trainee when they had neither been consulted or requested for assistance from their Teacher Trainee. The message received by Associate Teachers was that their assessment and input was of little consequence in the overall grading of Teaching Practicum performance.

Most Associate Teachers found the AT report inadequate. Comments such as, "It's not enough ... it's just something you have to tick off ... it's just little columns that you have to write some comments on [which again is not enough] ... if you have students for four weeks it's better to draw up a weekly report", indicated that most felt the assessment of TTs should not be confined to a limited space on the report form.

Interpretation and Analysis

Schools and Associate Teachers found the overall requirements as written in the teaching booklet, relevant and appropriate in the preparation of teachers. However, they also felt that they could better assist and supervise Teacher Trainees if they knew before Teaching Practicum started, what the actual requirements were. The researchers acknowledged that this might be the case in some schools (usually the letters with the requirements were sent out two weeks before TP) but the visiting lecturers who accompany the Teacher Trainees could be contacted for clarification and assistance about the programme. Moreover, the Faculty of Education seemed to take for granted that the ATs would come to an understanding of the requirements through osmosis simply because they had done this over the years.

The point of too many tasks affecting motivation levels of students to complete tasks was mentioned twice - enough for the faculty to examine given the interrelatedness motivation has had with learning. It is important therefore in providing a successful Teaching Practicum that the number of tasks, particularly in relation to the actual TP period be carefully considered. Sometimes ensuring the right balance of Teaching Practicum requirements that can both challenge and expose Teacher Trainees to an array of field experiences require a different approach to teaching and learning. Such an approach would entail a more flexible, creative programme rather than one which is prescriptive and static.

Due to resource limitations, the faculty has had to utilise an increasing number of schools within the town area. This, among other reasons, has required the faculty to use non-government schools for Teaching Practicum. It must be noted that although the faculty is preparing teachers to teach in both government and non-government schools, the different school terms have made it quite problematic to timetable all schools for TP. In addition, decreased NUS staff members have resulted in larger supervisory numbers and the necessity to utilise all schools, taking into account their school terms. Generally speaking, this has meant looking at a three-term year, four-term year, the different holidays, and different starting and ending dates to the school year. It is not an easy task but one that has provided this research with some interesting and comparative findings, such as, the difficulty faced by students when using different curricula for different school programmes. The difficulty experienced was in the lack of knowledge the Teacher Trainee had regarding subject matter. This has raised many questions such as: What steps did the Teacher Trainee take to overcome this lack of knowledge? In what ways were they assisted by their Associate Teacher? Does the faculty TP programme emphasise content over skills development? In the faculty programmes and courses, is this addressed?

At the same time it highlighted the Teacher Trainee's knowledge of the national curriculum. The emphasis on examinations in Samoa's education system and the learning styles associated with this, in particular rote learning, can partly explain why most TTs have a good knowledge level of the school curriculum. Having been through the same curriculum and being assessed in the same way, for example, studying exams of previous years, this may also help to explain the difficulty Teacher Trainees had in using different curricula (for example, offered in private schools) and why there was little use of external resources (for example, NUS library) to assist with lesson preparation. On closer examination, the interviews gave the impression that it was the actual knowledge of a topic that was emphasised during instruction rather than the specific skills related to each subject area. From the researchers view the emphasis on the process and how students access knowledge is critical to the learning process.

Over the years the supervision of Teacher Trainees had been challenging in terms of appropriate and fair assessment. It required honest and open consultation between Associate Teachers and Teacher Trainees in an environment that is supportive and non-threatening. There have been times when Teacher Trainees have not been given the opportunity to thoroughly analyse the strengths and weaknesses of lesson planning and presentations in teaching. This could be addressed through continuous open dialogue between the supervisors and TTs.

ASSOCIATE TEACHER'S ROLE AND EXPECTATIONS

The respondents felt that their role as Associate Teachers was to support and foster a collaborative relationship with the Teacher Trainee. Additionally, they saw their role as guide and provider of knowledge to the TT. One respondent saw her role as that of a mediator.

"... whenever I meet the Teacher Trainee for the first time I engage them in discussions in an attempt to find out their aspirations, where they want to go, whether they intend to pursue their dream as teachers or not."

A few of the interviewees felt that their role was in preparing Teacher Trainees to acquire a higher level of professionalism and this should be reflected in their professional conduct. This aspect of character-building is seen as one of the cornerstones of the committed and dedicated TT. Comments such as:

"I think ... as a teacher who has been in the field for so long you expect to learn something new from the TT while helping them out at the same time."

This notion was also noted by some ATs who were involved with TTs. For example, one teacher stated:

"... good students provided an `extra pair of hands ... and often brought new ideas and enthusiasm into the school." In contrast a poor student took up a lot of extra staff time and the class teacher was left to `pick up the pieces' after the student had gone ..."

The second was on the professional component that commented on areas such as code of ethics, confidence building and role modelling. Respondents also saw it as crucial that Teacher Trainees be mentored by Associate Teachers.

"... [I] desire to see Teacher Trainees speak with confidence in front of students or an audience."

"I have seen a lot of them, they are always stuck into a lot of theory and when they try to do practical they find it difficult. I have seen people who are very good in theory but on the practical side that's where help is needed."

"The content of the lesson should encourage student observation and participation."

"Teacher Trainees should use different aids and resources during their presentations to equip them for teaching."

Those interviewed indicated that Teacher Trainees should show more initiative and show professional conduct in relation to their teaching. It was raised by some Associate Teachers that Teacher Trainees should spend much of their practicum teaching in front of the class to develop confidence in their teaching skills.

Teacher Trainee's Attitude

As Calderhead (1988) noted, the "good student was perceived to have 'presence and personality', 'will ask questions', and 'be willing to act on advice'. The poor student was typically characterised as lacking ideas and initiative, waiting to be told what to do."

The majority of Associate Teachers mentioned how refreshing it was to have, Teacher Trainees that had the vitality and presence of mind to make changes in their teaching, "*e le tau fa'atonuina i ana gaoiga e fai.*" One Associate Teacher strongly felt that it was not their responsibility to get the Teacher Trainees to do things "*e le o sa'u role le fesoasoani iai ma o isi e o mai a /e fai atu lava le fa'atonuga e nofonofo lava.*" Again Calderhead (1988) reinforced some of the important attitudes that TTs should embrace. "Good students were thought to be inquisitive and learnt a lot by asking questions and talking about alternative ways of doing things."

Associate Teachers found that attitudes of some Teacher Trainees were inappropriate for the teaching profession. Many comments referred to some Teacher Trainees reluctance to face students. Others commented on Teacher Trainees not being suitably attired. For example, one of the teachers remarked, "There are Teacher Trainees that I have had to reprimand throughout TP for not being suitably dressed. They tend to favour short dresses above the knee and tops that are low ... " These are the sort of things future teachers need to consider when in schools, that is, role modelling for children.

Some Associate Teachers on Teacher Trainees attitude refer to "... a lack of determination and commitment ... you know, in doing the job, it is just getting the piece of paper to graduate." This is supported by others who point out that "they [TTs] need to work together with the kids, so he/she could learn from the kids not only the kids from him."

Code of Ethics

The code of ethics is one that is undeniably under question in so far as the status of the teaching profession is concerned. Society has a moral code to abide by and in today's changing world teachers are seen as those who uphold these values such as respect and appropriate language. As one teacher with 20 years of experience puts it, "*Va'ai le tū, le savali ma aga fa'afaiā'oga.*" Some ATs refer to this as the ability to use language discriminately and appropriately "*i a iloa le gagana i tū ma aga ... aua le so'ona fa'aaogā ni `upu mamafa, iloa `upu talafeagai e a'oa'oina ai tamaiti.*" Sāmoa, being a traditional society, has a very strong oral tradition and as such, the spoken language has had time to evolve into a precise form of communication such that selecting the appropriate vocabulary to suit the setting and the people present, show good upbringing and respect.

Pedagogy

From the following descriptions and data gathered, Associate Teachers' acknowledgement of the importance of theory was evident, however, this was the mandate of the Faculty of Education or the Teacher Trainees' training institution. The schools merely provided the vehicle whereby 'theory' could be tested, tried, and implemented under the supervisory and watchful eye of the Associate Teachers.

The art of teaching and learning is at the heart of supervision where the theory is translated into the practical realities of classroom teaching. As one Associate Teacher

explained, "I think they need more time to put their theory into [practice] ... they should do it quite often in their own place of study ... before they visit [are allowed to] schools."

Calderhead (1988) in his perspective of headteachers on field experience was of the view that "all headteachers emphasised the importance of the field experience in professional training ... that all the useful aspects of professional training occurred on the job."

Several responses pointed to the importance of Teacher Trainees being well grounded in theory which they can translate into classroom practice. To this end Associate Teachers felt that Teacher Trainees need to be good at using observation skills.

Teacher Trainees and Modelling

Many respondents expected the practicum experience to provide opportunities for the Teacher Trainees to observe how Associate Teachers managed a wide spectrum of pupil ability. Respondents felt that, TTs would then be able to prepare suitable activities for the different levels of pupil ability.

It was also envisaged that Teacher Trainees will observe and learn from the teacher modelling appropriate skills and behaviour "*o mai e va'ava'ai ma mātau metotia o lo'o fa'aaogā e faiāoga ua leva i le galuega, mātau le curriculum auā oute talitonu e fai si `ese'esega o mea o lo'o a'oa'o i totonu o le A'oga Fa'afaiā'oga i le taimi nei ma mea o lo'o a'oa'o i totonu o le potu ā'oga.*" It was also felt that TTs should be able to fulfil requirements by working collaboratively with the ATs and by adopting strategies and methods for assisting various learning needs.

Consultation and Communication

All Associate Teachers either categorically stated, or made reference to the importance for the Faculty of Education to consult with Associate Teachers so that they had a better understanding of the needs of the Teaching Practicum programme "*e mānaia lo tatou feiloa'i i le aso muamua lea e taunu'u ai tamaiti pe a lē mafai ona muamua atu ... malamalama le faiā'oga i mea ua o mai ma latou ... leai se `alofaga o le auali'i lea, auā o lea ua maua e le faiāoga mea mo'omia.*" Also, frequent responses indicated that the ATs did not feel enough contact with the visiting lecturers had been established. They felt this was particularly necessary when experiencing problems with their TT. These comments include "... number one problem is the follow-up from the faculty ... two years ago, we saw the lecturer once on the last day of TP." Thus a more accessible relationship between schools and FoE was perceived by those in the field as an important aspect of monitoring and supporting the programme.

The question that dealt with the input of Associate Teacher to Teaching Practicum requirements was regarded by the majority as crucial. As one respondent has said "*āfai e iai ni mea tāua e maua atu i le Associate Teacher e tatau fo'i ona iai se sao o le AT ... a leai, ia ua lava mea ua iai i le taimi nei*" attests to Associate Teacher's need to be recognised as a partner in this. One respondent felt consultation should be at the management level "*ātonu o ulu a'oga e tatau ona tou feūtaga'i auā e iloa le/el e le ulu ā'oga mea o lo'o fai i lana ā'oga.*"

The issues raised have resulted in anomalies that have been difficult to address. The mechanism of transparency and openness between Associate Teachers and Teacher.

Interpretation and Analysis

Trainees and the visiting lecturer and TTs need to be further established to encourage more consultations amongst the concerned parties. This will in effect provide opportunities towards effective practice.

There is a strong belief that relationships between FoE and the associate schools need to be strengthened. Those interviewed suggested that these should not be a one off attempt rather consultations or meetings should be conducted before, during and after Teaching Practicum. The issue of personal and professional conduct is critical in redefining the Associate Teacher's role. A close relationship between how one dresses and speaks and what was regarded as good teaching was an issue for deliberation. It is generally accepted that the Associate Teacher's role as a facilitator and guide of knowledge need to be complemented by their role as models to emulate. Moreover, acquiring these personal and professional characteristics was seen as enhancing character building.

The code of ethics that the teaching profession abides by is deeply entrenched in the fa'asamoa and its influences. In Samoa the cultural component has been used as the vehicle by which these values have been perpetrated. However, there have been instances where ATs have been liable in terms of breaking this so called code that governs the profession - not smoking in class, not coming to school under the influence of alcohol, attendance and punctuality or in some cases the issue of confidentiality. These are important aspects that future teachers need to consider when in schools and modelling for children.

The idea of 'practice makes perfect' was discussed by a number of teachers as one way to improve teaching of students. Associate Teachers believed that if Teacher Trainees spend more time teaching the class, this will ensure a better grasp of teaching skills and methods. One of the studies in the literature which dealt with teacher supervision, came up with a similar finding. For example, more than half of the respondents in this study stated that, "The best way in which students could learn how to teach was by being 'thrown in at the deep end, being left with the whole class, to find their own discipline and to feel what it's really like" (Calderhead 1988:36). Inherent in this is the belief that teachers can only become effective in the art of teaching when they are placed in the classroom. Good theory then can be tested in practice.

The area of pedagogical teaching and learning must ensure the integration of theory and practice. Moreover, the Associate Teachers have always been seen as the epitome for students and Teacher Trainees under their care. This is through the mentoring process which should encourage TTs to take the initiative and be risk takers. Calderhead (1988) has pointed out that supervising teachers saw their role as one of 'guide' and 'giving practical teaching points'.

Associate Teachers pointed to the importance of having Teacher Trainees model the way they teach. The researchers, however, could sense the danger in this. For though it appears a fine idea there is always the downfall of TTs modelling poor examples from teachers out in the field. For example, the issue related to the use of corporal punishment in Samoa appears to increase rather than decrease. Although Teacher Trainees are instructed and trained against the use of corporal punishment in schools, Teacher Trainees were noted to resort to the use of corporal punishment once they were out teaching. It would seem therefore, that Teacher Trainees are not internalising some of the basic principles governing teaching and learning. Most likely TTs model what they observe other teachers doing. This reinforces the prevailing view that most teachers believe students modelled themselves on their supervising teacher to

some extent and were aware of the students picking up their own phrases and mannerisms in talking to children (Calderhead 1988).

Quality Teaching

Associate Teachers saw quality teaching as a firm commitment by the teacher to their students - to bring about good learning. "*Tatau ona iai le ato'a'atoa o le galue i le fa'atinoia o le galuega, iloa galue tinoū.*" This hinges on their ability to deliver and present content meaningfully. It includes the concept of mentoring and monitoring student ability to achieve the necessary skills and knowledge. Commitment and dedication to teaching embraces the concepts of resourcefulness, honesty and love.

The importance of being well prepared and having a good understanding of the content area could not be undermined. Furthermore, the flexible and effective use of group dynamics attests to quality teaching, "*E teal se faiā'oga na to faia se galuega aogā ae teal se fa'asinomaga, po o se mea e taula'i iai.*" This is equating teacher preparation to quality teaching.

The ATs' responses to the question related to teacher preparation indicated that teachers need to be well prepared and well versed in the content of their lessons. Comments such as:

... teachers should be well prepared prior to meeting the pupils ... be well prepared in terms of planning, presentation, budgeting time well, monitoring and reviewing children's work ... resources should be relevant/appropriate and adequate ... teachers should be well versed in their topic area (lesson contents) ...

were voiced by the majority of Associate Teachers interviewed. The issue of Teacher Trainees being unprepared also elicited many comments. One Associate Teacher remarked that corporal punishment was due to teachers being unprepared for classroom activities. The importance of having adequate time for teacher and pupil interaction and of creating good rapport between teacher and pupils were also mentioned.

Associate Teachers also mentioned that there should be a close match between the goals and activities of education. Discovery learning was also mentioned as another component of quality teaching. Many of the respondents referred to the worth of relevant materials and ideas that cater for varied needs of children.

Interpretation and Analysis

The aspects of quality which were investigated in this research were teacher commitment and teacher preparation. With regard to the notion of teacher preparedness, some remarked that teacher unpreparedness could result in teacher use of corporal punishment. On the other hand, if a teacher is well prepared this could develop teacher confidence. The notion of teacher being well prepared is discussed in McGee and Fraser (2001:76) as pedagogical qualities of teaching and learning.

Other teacher or teaching qualities that have been raised by the respondents as crucial were, the ability to cater for the varied needs of students. Additionally, the notion of pupil involvement as well as active engagement and discovery learning were raised by ATs as fundamental. McGee and Fraser (2001:22-25) discuss the worth of having children discover things for themselves as opposed to being directed by the teacher. The new Primary Education Materials Project (PEMP) that is currently being implemented in Samoan classrooms (to support existing curriculum) has the characteristics of discovery and interactive learning.

This research investigated the perceptions of Associate Teachers with regards to Teaching Practicum. Themes that emerged from the research questions and were investigated included, the TP experience, AT's role and expectations and the notion of quality teaching.

In relation to the Teaching Practicum experience, the Associate Teacher commented on the relevancy of the TP requirements, however, they themselves should be better informed of what these entail. Regarding the role and expectations of Associate Teacher, the respondents pointed to the vital role of the Associate Teacher as mediator or mentor. They also remarked on the importance of TTs displaying attitudes of professionalism, and initiative in the pedagogy of teaching. In addition, another main focus from the respondents emphasised the importance of the Faculty of Education working collaboratively with Associate Teachers. They felt that in this way the ATs will have a better idea of what went on at FoE and they would be in a better position to support the Teacher Trainees.

Implications

The success of Teaching Practicum is directly dependent on the support from local schools and their teachers. Teaching Practicum gives the opportunity for Teacher Trainees to practise at length, as well as to observe, what they have learnt in theory in their subject areas. It has been the responsibility of the Faculty of Education programme to provide theories based on sound practices and research (Gredler 2005, Jensen 2000, NUS 2008). Education core courses emphasise learning and teaching theories as well as classroom management techniques. It is only through TP that they are able to integrate theory and practice as a whole.

This study was prompted by the concern that the needs of the Faculty of Education through Teaching Practicum could only be realised with the support of Associate Teachers. Their perceptions of the role they play directly influence what experiences and exposure the Teacher Trainees go through. Therefore, a much closer and stronger partnership should be established. Some ways in which this can be achieved is through; annual meetings of FoE and principals of schools and their AT staff, seminars conducted by FoE for schools about the TP experience and collaborative relationship established with MESC for school visits.

The need to lobby for Associate Teacher support in monetary terms or in kind should be considered. With the inservicing and staff development ATs undergo, their repertoire of skills and knowledge in the art and craft of teaching should be recognised. Teachers usually selected as Associate Teachers are considered to be successful role models who exhibit good classroom practice.

The need to examine the human resource capacity within the Faculty of Education is also an issue. The number of Teacher Trainees under the supervision of a faculty staff member needs to be addressed. Associate Teachers commented on the infrequent and irregular visits by the visiting lecturer which can be attributed to the large numbers of Teacher Trainees supervised and the length of TP in which to do this.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research was limited by the small number of participants involved. A much more extensive study involving a larger number of Associate Teachers would be required to reach more conclusive findings.

Where group interviews were used, a follow-up with an individual interview would have confirmed some of the findings. However, due to time and workload schedules,

the researchers were unable to conduct follow-up interviews. Future research is recommended which involves a larger sample of participants to ensure generalisation of results. From our findings, the following areas have been identified as key areas for

investigation:

- Effective collaboration between schools and the Faculty of Education,
- Professionalism within schools in Samoa,
- Indicators for successful Teaching Practicum supervision.

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Appendix 1: Definitions

The following terms were used for the purpose of this research:

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| Associate Teachers | Teachers supervising teacher trainees in schools, literature sometimes referred to as cooperating teachers. |
| Teacher Trainees | Students who are training to become teachers. |
| Teaching Practicum/Practice | The supervised implementation of (content and pedagogical knowledge) teaching within schools. |
| Supervisor | Visiting lecturer who visits and evaluates the teacher trainees. |
| Urban school | Schools within the vicinity of Apia. |
| Rural school | All schools within the outlying areas of Apia including Savai'i. |
| Primary | Schools from Year 1-8. |
| Junior Secondary | Schools from Year 9-11. |
| College | Schools from Year 9-13. |
| Loto Taumafai Education Centre | School for special needs from 5 - 30 years of age. |