

**Practice Teaching:
Perspectives from Three Fiji Institutions**

Lautoka Teachers' College
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Lautoka Teachers' College (L.T.C.) is a Government-run primary teacher education institution. It currently offers a two-year programme leading to the award of a Primary Teachers' Certificate.

One of the important components of the LTC programme is practice teaching. It plays a pivotal role in the training of our student teachers. In the two-year programme there are three segments of practice teaching. Each segment is for four weeks. The first segment in home-based and the other two segments are LTC-based.

The first segment does not involve much teaching. It provides exposure for the student teacher to the different areas of work expected of primary teachers in Fiji. In addition, some tasks are assigned to the student teachers, such as the preparation of a scheme of work and writing a school profile.

During the other two segments, the student teachers are given more teaching. To make these practice teaching segments more fruitful to the student teachers, the College has introduced briefing sessions for the schools used for practice teaching. This programme is carried out before the commencement of practice teaching.

The briefing sessions are decentralised to allow for better turnout of the participants. It is conducted in two or three central schools, depending on the number of schools used. The schools are divided into zones. Normally, the College chooses a school in each zone after prior approval from the respective Head Teacher to host the programme. So far the host schools have also catered for tea and other refreshments for the participants.

To avoid classes being left unattended and to minimise disruptions to the school's programme, the Head Teachers or their nominees are invited to attend. They in turn are responsible for conducting briefing sessions with the associate teachers of their respective schools. The briefings not only focus on matters related to

practice teaching such as assessment procedures, the responsibilities of Head Teachers and associate teachers, but also on developments in the primary education system.

In one of the recent briefing sessions, presentations were on the revisions to the upper level primary subjects which emphasise activity-based learning. Time is also allocated for the participants to provide feedback for improving the practice teaching programme.

We are impressed with the schools' contributions. In one of the sessions the participants expressed concern about the departure time of the student teachers from schools. They felt that early departure did not provide student teachers adequate exposure relating to the duties carried out in the afternoons. With this in mind, we now require student teachers to supervise afternoon duties.

Through the briefing sessions, we were able to spell out the College's expectations pertaining to practice teaching. In addition, the feedback from the participants has helped us in improving the programme. This has made the associate teachers and Head Teachers more supportive of the practice teaching programmes. We value their efforts in helping and supporting our work at the College. The briefing session is one of the means employed by the LTC to establish links with co-operating schools so that we can mount a more effective practice teaching programme.

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Fulton College - School Experience (Practicum)

Beverley Norman

The profession of teaching demands much of an individual. During the 'act of teaching' teachers will use knowledge, a physical ability or a value that they have mastered to share or teach the individual or group before them. Often people perceive that this is all that teaching is, an ability to transmit some knowledge, skill or value to another person or group: in reality, the actual 'act' infracts with a multitude of other factors, making the task infinitely complex and challenging such that no two teaching experiences are ever the same. These factors range from environmental factors to the physical and emotional status of the teacher and each of the students. The clinical environment of a teachers' college is a fine place where a potential professional teacher can obtain foundational subject knowledge, pedagogical skills or educational theory, but it is not until the individual is in a classroom before a group of students that it can come together.

To take theory and ideas of good practice from the College classroom and give the student teacher and experience and practice in the real context in the classroom is the aim of the Practicum sessions at Fulton College. In each of the three years of the programme there is a five-week practicum session for each student from mid June to mid July. First-year students have a stronger emphasis placed on observation of the environment and behaviours of children, teachers, head teacher and others who interact daily within a school context. The third year students are given an emphasis to target practice in the holistic activity of teaching. The Education Department of Fulton encourages a wide spectrum of experience to occur through its open planning process. Students are given the opportunity to nominate the school that they wish to teach in. Each student needs to keep in mind that the College has the general expectation that over three years they will need an experience in a rural school as well as a town or city. They will also have had an experience in a school that has a dominance or an ethnic, cultural group that is not their own. It is also mandated that they will have had experience in the upper, middle and lower classes of the primary school.

Being an independent provider of teachers, Fulton College works closely with Fiji Education Ministry personnel at each level of the planning

and implementations stages of the Practicum programme. Our planning commences at the beginning of the College year in February and March, with the collection of the information of where students would like to go for their Practicum. Students are required to approach a head teacher, making personal contact with the professional administrators at the work place. The contact is a survey contact to establish the availability of a school early in the year and indicate an intent of interest by the student. It allows for initial planning at the school level. It is in no way binding, as appropriate authority to use these schools has yet to be obtained. This is seen by the College as an important step as it helps in relationship-building and assists the young people and the primary school to have some form of ownership of the programme. Students may choose any school in Fiji (possible special cases can be arranged outside Fiji) within an understanding that some remote schools may not be accepted if a supervisor cannot make the one support visit there.

The second stage of the planning process is to gather all the requests, checking that each of them is consistent with our need for students to have a broad experience over the three-year programme. As and where appropriate, students are counselled if it is seen that a different choice of schools would be more beneficial. In March the total list of primary schools nominated is then sent to the Permanent Secretary for Education in Fiji with a formal request from the College that these schools be used for the current year. Upon approval all the regional Senior Education Officers are informed that the respective schools in their area are nominated and approved by the Permanent Secretary for use by us for Practice Teaching. The Senior Education Officers are at this stage invited to guide the planning process if they see any specific problems with the schools chosen.

Soon after the Senior Education Officers have been contacted, a formal letter is sent to each of the Head Teachers seeking appropriate confirmation of the use of their school for Practicum. At this time each school is sent a listing of the student teachers who are appointed as their school, a copy of the assignment that they are expected to fulfil and information on the College's expectations of support from our

student to the respective school and the school's support role for our student.

During the middle three weeks of Practicum, each student is visited by a representative from the College. In this time of movement around the country by the College staff it is a time of professional development for them as well as support for the College students. During this time the College staff member is expected to talk to teachers, staff and administrators of schools and note common practice and concerns and update themselves on common current educational issues. This information helps to make the work that they are doing in the College relevant. As appropriate, the College staff also meet the various non-teaching Education administrative officers around the country to discuss relevant concerns and issues.

Fulton sees that the Practicum is an essential part of the teacher training programme. It is also very important time for co-operation between the Fiji Ministry of Education and the College. It is a time when we can work closely together for the common good of education and teachers in the country.

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