CASE STUDY

General information
Name of institution: Victoria University
Primary contact/s: Shiona Long - Shiona.long@vu.edu.au **Course Chair**   **and Paul Russell** paul.russell@vu.edu.au **(Literacy and Sociology academic)**
Location: **Footscray Nicholson Campus, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia**
Type of institution: **Teaching and research university**
Name of unit/subject: Diploma of Education Studies – sequence of eight units   ● Academic and Professional Learning   ● Learning through Literacy   ● Investigating Australian Humanities   ● Sociological Orientation to Learning   ● ICT in Education and Learning   ● Investigating STEM Education   ● Health, Physical Education and Wellbeing Education   ● Learning in and through the Arts
Discipline: Education Studies
Level of study: **First year undergraduate - Sub bachelor pathway program**
Intensive offer: (Describe duration)   ● One year diploma that consists of eight unit, each four weeks in duration.   ● The first unit is 55 hours, with subsequent units 44 hours. Students attend university three days a week with four or five hour sessions on each day for three weeks and two days in week four.   ● Students are offered a consistent timetable to help build belonging and community in their group and manage work/family commitments   ● Students are offered a pathway to the second year of a bachelor course on successful completion. Bachelor programs are conducted in intensive mode.

Issue
The Diploma of Education Studies at Victoria University is a sub-bachelor diploma that pathways to the second year of five Bachelor courses, including initial teacher early childhood, primary and secondary education. Successful completion of units at a distinction average plus meeting *Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE) benchmarks*, allows students to pathway into the second year of Bachelor of Education P-12.   The cohort consists of diverse cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds, and includes students who identify as gender and neurodiverse. The majority are first in family to attend university. Approximately 50% of students are school leavers, with the remainder mature aged students. The diploma provides opportunities for students often excluded from higher education, and brings greater diversity to the teaching profession. This pathway course is accredited with the Victorian Institute of Education (VIT).   Students aspire to be teachers, despite their own less than optimal experience of education. Common themes include: disrupted final years or secondary schooling, working to support

families, mental health or learning challenges, cultural barriers, or being misunderstood by teachers. The diploma provides a community of learning for students, by keeping them with the same group of students, with a consistent timetable, for all eight units. There is improvement in attendance, learning outcomes and social connection, with students also able to maintain their work and family commitments.

85% of students successfully complete the diploma, with 80% of students successfully offered a pathway to bachelor level education, 45% of these the Bachelor of Education P-12. The diploma meets students where they are, providing extensive support and learning opportunities to prepare them for bachelor level studies. The focus on relationships and wellbeing, plus pedagogy, that balances the development of academic/literacy skills with embodied and arts-based practice, disrupts students' previous perceptions of themselves as a learner and potential educator.

Goals

- **Community and belonging** – We understand that belonging is the precursor to student success. We elevate relational teaching and learning; students have a network of support that facilities their growth. The emphasis on social constructivism, creativity, risk-taking and student wellbeing means learning and teaching becomes a joyful partnership.
- **Developing of academic and literacy skills** – As direct entry was unachievable, we acknowledge that students have gaps in their learning. We have a responsibility to our students and their future students to bridge these gaps. We balance explicit instruction and practice of academic and literacy skills with active, embodied and arts-based learning that acknowledges that many of students are active learners who need to move to think.
- **Scaffolding of learning across the eight units** – When students stay in the same group, completing the same group of units with a small team of teachers, we are able to make explicit connections between subjects, gradually developing their understanding. We can identify at-risk students and direct them to additional support. This is more difficult in other degrees when students are changing units and groups every four weeks
- **Culturally competence and planetary health** - As a teaching team we understand that belonging goes beyond the classroom. We implement culturally competent pedagogy and incorporate First Nations perspectives and resources into our units. We encourage connection to our global and natural world through integration of the United Nations Sustainable Development goals, and VU's commitment to protecting country. A work in progress!
- **Successful pathway to initial teacher education or an alternative pathway** – The intention of the diploma is to support student to pathway to bachelor degrees. We have a responsibility to students to help them to achieve their goals, a responsibility to the university to meet the pathway promise and a responsibility to the Victorian Institute of Teaching to meet our accreditation benchmarks and add competent, creative, relational teachers to the profession.

Challenges

Unit scheduling - Careful scheduling of units ensures a consistent timetable across all units of the diploma. Setup of unit sequences on enrolment is necessary, with students communicating challenges with attendance so movement to a more viable option can be established promptly. In contrast, students in other courses face a timetable that changes every four weeks. Relationships shift constantly and work scheduling is challenging. As EDES has multiple intakes throughout the year, it is not always possible to maintain these principles if student numbers are low.

Partnerships with administration systems including timetabling and enrolments – Systems need to be established at the outset to allow unit scheduling to function to meet challenge 1. Timetabling need to be open to this arrangement and enrolments need to be flexible, moving students to ensure they remain in the same group. Once this has been established, students know their timetable for the entire year and there is little movement. Course Chairs need to advocate for the benefits of these arrangements annually, especially when personnel changes.

The downside of belonging – Students can form firm friendships with like-minded peers and work exclusively with them in collaborative tasks and on assessments. This does not broaden their understanding of student lived experiences, or community and global issues. The balance shifts too much to socialisation, with learning and teaching impacted.

Solution

Describe the solution

1. **Planning of units and unit sequences** – Critical evaluation of the unit content and pedagogy to meet course goals and objectives. Establish unit sequences that allow learning and academic skills to be scaffolded across the year, building connections between units. Ensure academics are teaching units within their area of expertise, and have previous experience in the education sector for explicit connections to primary and secondary classrooms. We want students to be brave and creative in their learning, so it is important that teachers model this.
2. **Systems –** Request that unit sequences are timetabled at consistent days/times to allow students to remain together with predictable study times. Establish strict sequences of unit that autofill on enrolment. Without this step, students 'choose their own adventure' which creates unnecessary administration. Have clear channels of communication for consistent messaging and allow students to change sequence if necessary to meet work commitments or navigate travel distance to campus.
3. **Community building and belonging** – Active learning, games and arts-based practices such as drama in the first unit of study, Academic and Professional Learning, provide opportunities for students to share their story, appreciate their differences and work collaboratively to achieve a common goal. In this case, a short play. This builds belonging and creates a strong foundation for subsequent units. Continue this approach to pedagogy across all units.
4. **Intentional grouping of students in units -** Encourage student to work with different members of the class for some activities and assessments. For example in Investigating STEM Education, students are carefully groups for a mix of abilities, cultural backgrounds and levels of engagement. In a subsequent assessments, students are groups with those who exhibit similar approaches to learning, outside of their friendship group, allowing all to take a leadership role. This requires teachers to know students well.
5. **Identify at-risk students** – EDES is committed to trauma informed practice and inclusive education. Academics in the program work collegially to provide support to students who are struggling with attendance, academic or social skills or mental health, linking them to support at the university were appropriate.

Justify the solution

All aspects of this solution are carefully considered, nothing is left to chance. This requires the Course Chair to be actively involved in the administration of the program, vital to the overall student experience and learning outcomes. Academics who work in the program share the

philosophy of the program and we work collaboratively to enact our vision. The program moved to intensive block delivery in 2019. Many academics worked in the EDES when it was taught in semester mode. Students enjoy learning one subject at a time, they appreciate working closely with their peers and knowing their timetable for the year. This cohort needs to work, or look after their family, these provisions make this possible. EDES has also been taught successfully via Zoom, both during the response to COVID-19 and beyond. Pedagogy is adapted to ensure the course philosophy is retained in this delivery mode.

Results and reflections

2020 QILT Student Experience Survey – EDES was the top performing course at VU during the response to COVID-19 with a 92% overall satisfaction rate, exceeding the national average for teacher education by 25%. Teacher quality in this period was 87% satisfaction.

2020/21– Recipient of the Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (HE) and university nominee for the Australian Award for University Teaching (AAUT) program award.

2021 Comprehensive course review – Current and past student focus groups. Conversations with students highlighted the benefits for the block learning and the pedagogical and philosophical approach discussed in this case study. Students report readiness to commence bachelor degrees.

Student evaluation of units (SEUs) - The first unit consistently performs over 4.5/5 on SEUs in the 2019-2023 period. This unit establishes the learning community and sets student up for success. The majority of units in EDES perform about 4/5 on SEUs, over 80% of students agree of quality.

2021-2023 Research studies – Student case studies that focus on belonging, innovations in pedagogy and inclusive practices all highlight the capacity of the program to create learning communities that allow students to pathway to initial teacher education.

2022 - 2023 - Victoria Institute of Teaching (VIT) Pathway accreditation – An extensive evaluation of the program to ensure it builds academic/literacy skills and meet socioemotional needs.

Advice to colleagues

- Belonging is the precursor to student success, especially for students who struggled at school or are returning to study. Activities to build relational capacity need to be prioritised.
- Intensive modes for vulnerable cohorts require consideration of content and active methods of teaching and learning. Students need support to make connections between units. They also need explicit instruction to build literacy/academic writing skills and assessment support.
- Be intentional when grouping students for activities/assessments so they need to work with different people. Keep students focused on learning with brain breaks to meet social needs.
- A small collegial teaching team helps identify at-risk students. Relational teachers with extensive experience in classrooms makes a big difference to student success. Academics who do not work collaboratively, or have a different philosophy will derail the program.
- Be prepared to advocate for timetabling and administrative support to keep the integrity of the structure. It will be challenged, so be prepared to problem solve proactively!

Resources required

- Time allocation for the Course Chair to oversee the set up for the program and monitor implementation. This is imperative prior to intake periods, then it will run relatively smoothly.
- Teams of academics with a shared vision for the program – creative approaches that focus on building relationships and academic skills. Students want to pathway, we need to help them.
- University support structures and personnel open to maintaining unit sequences
- Student voice – listen to the experiences of students, and modify the program as required.

- Lots of hands on resources – games, blocks, activity cards, props, bean bags. Bring learning to life.

Images

Image 1 Belonging - Using wool to map our connections. We also explore ideas of individual and community resilience.

Image 2 – **Collaboration** Students collaborating on an idea for their Group play in the first unit.

Image 3 – Courage and Creativity Students share the intersections of their personal stories in the form of a play to their peers.

Image 4 Growth – Student creative work across many different units.

Keys to Growth

A+B+C+D, letters on a page
drawing up a dream.
In order to grow
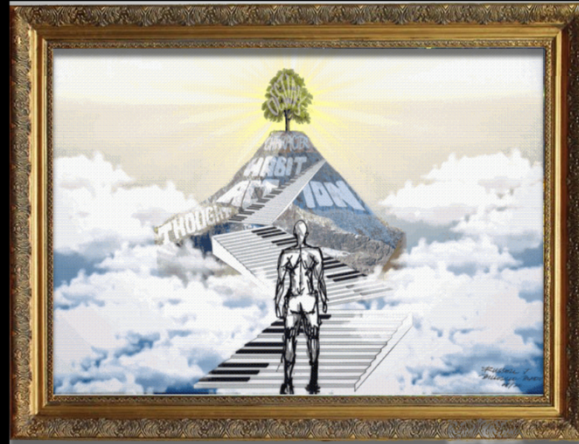the ways that you know,
you must look within
to settle the whims.
To change how you see,
or what you believe.
The straight A mindset
of what we perceive.
No judgement to fail,
No errors received.
No one can flourish
by crushing the seeds.

He finally felt
Happy.