The impact of the different work opportunities in the organisation of the workplace
(i.e. practical experience) for students on the bachelor of education (secondary
education) course.

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Abstract

University College Arteveldehogeschool has developed a new model for teaching practice to
increase the chances of student-teachers to become better teachers by stressing the influence
of powerful partners. The goal is to establish a ‘step’ between training and real school life
instead of a ‘gap’. Therefore the project ‘StaP’ (step in English) is developed. It is based on a
solid partnership between TTC and schools of secondary education.
Because a teacher has to know what happens outside the classroom the students are also
required to look at other workplacements.
The involvement of placement schools and other workplacements is necessary to achieve all
basis competences of teachers the government requires.

Keywords: Teaching practice, Workplacement, Partnership, New curriculum, Powerful
learning environments

1. Introduction

In Belgium it takes three years/ six semesters to obtain a teacher’s degree (Bachelor in
education). During this period students are trained to become secondary school teachers. That
is to say teachers of children ranging from 12 to 15 years of age in general education and of
children up to the age of 18 or 19 in schools providing vocational education.
Once they have obtained their degree, our trained teachers are qualified to teach two or three
subjects. Today there are 280 different subject combinations (math, physics, physical
education, music, German, English, Latin, Dutch, geography, etc) possible at our institute.
Recently however, the government developed a new law. From September 2007 on all
students can choose only two subjects, each subject being equally important.

The impact of placement schools and other important workplaces is a main issue in
organising practical work experience for future teachers. In the University College
Arteveldehogeschool (Ghent, Belgium) we have developed a new model to increase the
chances of student-teachers to become better teachers by stressing the influence of powerful
partners.
To achieve the competences, we have developed a partnership with powerful learning
environments. The involvement of placement schools and other workplacements (e.g. pupil
guidance centres, museums, business centres, …) is necessary to obtain our goals. We believe that the strength of teacher training can be measured by cooperation and partnerships with ‘others’.

2 PRACTICE IN THE NEW CURRICULUM (starts 2007-2008) at the University College Arteveldehogeschool, Ghent, Belgium

Arteveldehogeschool is an institution of tertiary education. Our department is a teacher training college where student teachers are prepared over three years (6 semesters) for (lower grades of) secondary education.

2.1 General principles
- Workplacement is an integrated part of the curriculum. The link between the theoretical component and the practical part of the course is very important.
- The workplacements are developed with the integrated reaching of all the basic competences in mind.
- The stress is on the student developing his own capability to become a teacher bit by bit during his entire training. The extent of responsibility and self-steering of the learning process increases gradually. The intensity of guidance is an integrated part of that process. Consistent with the principle of gradualism, students are required to obtain practical teaching experience through a work placement programme and each semester the scope and complexity of this programme increases. The institution has developed a ‘competence-oriented teaching practice standard’. This ‘standard’ is a document indicating what the students should have achieved by the end of their first, second and third years of practice. This document is inspired by the basic competences of teachers, is based on the educational concept of the teacher training course and has been tested by teachers in the field. The standard incorporates all the skills and attitudes that should be attained in the practical part of the course. The document is intended for the students in all the subjects they teach, all the lecturers on the Bachelor of Education course and all the mentors, placement school supervisors and the management of the placement schools. Using this ‘standard’ as a basis, the student’s practical progress can easily be tracked. Interim feedback on the basis of this document gives the student an overview of the points that require adjustment. At the end of each teaching practice period it enables the mentors, lecturers and students to determine which expectations have been fulfilled or not. It provides a benchmark for the assessment at the end of each year.
- The cooperation between the TTC (Teacher Training College) and the schools or between the workplacement/practical element and the working field is indispensable.

Important emphasis
During the six semesters there are different lines of force. In the second semester the emphasis is on the basic skills of the student, in the third and fourth semesters course contents and didactics get full attention. The preservicetraining is mainly a teaching assignment. The practical part in the fifth and sixth semester is considered as an ingrowth-experience in the workfield. Within the didactical component of the practice in the sixth semester, the focus is on a school assignment. Besides this, the students also come into contact with other work fields which can be very inspiring for their future lives and work as a teacher.
2.2 **ECTS for practice**

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<tr>
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2.3 **The structure of the 6 semesters: an overview**

There is no teaching practice period in the **first** semester. During this term, students have lot of lessons and tasks in connection with the subjects they have chosen. Both the subject and its didactical component get a lot of attention. Besides that, students get an introduction into communication skills. In this semester a lot of credits can be obtained in the educational field (pedagogical sciences). It is important for students to realise from the start that being a teacher is a lot more than passing on knowledge.

In the **second** semester 4 weeks are completely devoted to teaching practice. These weeks are spread throughout the semester (weeks 1, 8, 11, 12) to incorporate maximal growth potential for the students. During the first two weeks, exercises are organized at the institute itself. ‘Micro-teaching’, for instance, is one of the methods: students are required to present a limited subject-matter to a group of fellow students. This way, they learn how to structure the different components of the subject matter and how to speak in front of a group, paying attention to their intonation, the volume of their voice, and to non-verbal behaviour. Besides micro-teaching, students get exercises in IT-skills, they learn how to make good observations, they get an initiation in how to reflect on their own practice and they are confronted with the ‘competence-oriented teaching practice standard’.

In weeks 11 and 12 of semester 2, when students have already acquired some knowledge of the subject matter they have chosen, they are expected to gain some more practical teaching experience in a secondary school through a work placement programme. Members on the training team are tied to a specific ‘work placement’ school and are responsible for organizing the work placement programme for a group students. For these students, the task of teaching proper is kept to a minimum: a minimum of 4, maximum of 6 hours of observation of their mentors and the same amount of hours for teaching themselves for the two subjects together. They also have to observe lessons of their peers and participate in the feedbacksession after the lesson.

During **semesters 3 and 4** more time is devoted to gaining practical teaching experience, namely 3 weeks in each semester. The tasks assigned to the students are more complex. Not only are they required to observe and teach more classes, they are also expected to get in touch with the school allocated to them by the training co-ordinator. They are expected to contact the teachers they will be working with, in order to make arrangements regarding the
specific material they will be teaching. Of course they are also required to reflect on their 
teaching – particularly on their own achievements and personal growth into the teacher’s role.

In **semesters 5 and 6** the impact of the different environments is much more important than in 
the previous semesters. Therefore, we will explain more extensively the impact of practice in 
the next chapter.

### 3. THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENT WORKPLACEMENTS

#### 3.1 In semester 5

In this semester a wider scope is put on the teaching field with special attention given to more 
different and specific target groups. Also, other aspects of being a teacher are practised in 
preparation of the achievement of competences that - until then - haven’t explicitly been 
aimed at/strived for. For example: the teacher as a partner of the parents, of externals…

During this practice period several items are discussed:
- initiation in aspects of teaching policy and teaching organisation, with special attention for 
care extension
- working out a case study
- participation in workshops and exercises on communication skills; e.g. parent-teacher 
meetings, bad news conversation, meeting-techniques
- further insights in reflective learning with special attention given to supervision as technique 
and instruction device
- special needs education / inclusive education
- transfer primary-secondary education

Several workfields contribute by bringing their expertise into the teacher training. The 
participants of different schools, organisations and services are invited to the campus to share 
their experiences with our students. In several settings the students are confronted with real 
life situations.

In the future, we would like to organise workshops for the mentors of the placement schools, 
in which they could work with the students around different topics.

#### 3.2 In semester 6

The last workplacement period is conceived as an integration into the job market. During 
these weeks the students are able to shape their own “programme-route”, depending on their 
interests, needs and capacities. The students have to work actively and consciously on this in 
order to obtain the needed competences.

This practice period – its duration is 14 weeks – takes place in different working 
environments. A distinction is made between school settings and other settings. Practice in a 
school related setting takes up a minimal period of 6 weeks and takes place in so called StaP-
schools

**PRACTICE IN PLACEMENT SCHOOLS**
All students are involved in ‘StaP-schools’ for their final teaching practice period. StaPschools are secondary schools who are partners of the teacher training college of the Arteveldehogeschool.

StaP (Eng. Step) is an innovative partnership arrangement with schools for 3rd year student teaching practice. StaP stands for StageProject, StagePlatform and the main issue of the project is the StagePartnership. (‘Stage’ is the Dutch word for practice.) This partnership is a student teaching project that resulted from the continuous concern for quality control within the Arteveldehogeschool in Ghent. StaP is based on the Oxford-internship model and refers to renewed ideas about monitoring third year student teachers. StaP is a unique teaching concept because the teacher education institution and secondary schools have a partnership based on equality. The concept was developed in the workfield, taking into account the uniqueness of both partners.

In this model the TTC and schools are both considered as powerful learning environments for student-teachers. The partnership offers more opportunities to obtain the required starting competences for beginning teachers.

In this partnership arrangement all people involved have a very specific role. This role and the responsibilities involved, was discussed on a negotiation platform. Initially, principals from the different secondary placement schools were invited to participate into a platform. The communication between the different partners was formalised in that negotiation platform. The initial purpose of this platform was to discuss the design and goals of a good partnership through an equal contribution of both partners, namely the TTC and the StaPschools. The principals and the StaPteam (a TTC-team responsible for the development of the project) discussed the best way to organise the final student teaching practice period taking into account the specific demands of both institution and placement schools.

One of the important items was the necessity of transparency between the different persons involved. There are different subject teachers in each placement school. They have the same role and responsibilities as in the traditional arrangement. They are the regular teachers of those classes the trainees perform their teaching assignment. They give subject-related feedback to the trainees about their teaching. Beside this role, StaP created a unique and new role for members of the placement schools: the role of the supervising teacher. Supervising teachers support and guide students at least once a week during a support or guiding moment of one hour made available in their and the student’s timetable. The content of these meetings involves the teaching assignments, the student’s participation in school activities, the expectations and progress regarding student’s performance, the student’s concerns, problems and questions. To fulfil their responsibility, supervising teachers attend several training sessions organised and coordinated by the StaPteam at the TTC.

Some teacher educators from the TTC take up the role of in-service trainers in StaPschools. In StaP, in-service teachers support and guide all student teachers in one and the same StaPschool. They form the communication channel between the TTC and the placement school. They also organise supervision meetings with the students from ‘their’ StaPschool’.

If important subject related problems arise during the final teaching practice period in a StaPschool, as subject teacher educator is asked to provide the necessary support and advice.

The Arteveldehogeschool has chosen to implement the innovative arrangement gradually. StaP was developed in 1999 as a small project. Only 10 schools of secondary education and 60 students were involved in the partnership. The other 200 students did their practice within the traditional system. In the academic year 2005-2006, 52 StaPschools, 190 supervising teachers, 51 teacher educators/in-service trainers and 300 students were involved in StaP.
That means that every student in the training college participates in StaP during their final teaching practice period.

Because the innovative and traditional teacher training arrangement existed next to each other during a few years, it was possible to examine if and if so, why the partnership arrangement was more effective. A research group from Ghent University worked together with the teacher training college at the Arteveldehogeschool to explore the concept. Learning opportunities in the traditional student training concept on the one hand and in StaP on the other were examined. The central questions were: are student teachers in the StaP-project better prepared for the teaching profession than the student teachers who followed the traditional student teaching route, taking into account the required basic competences? Do the trainees that follow the StaP-route feel more self-confident concerning the required basic competences? In 2005 Annemie Schepens presented the results of the research, in her doctoral thesis (Ph D paper) ‘A study of the effect of dual learning routes and partnerships on student’ preparation for the teaching profession.’

During semester 6 students work in one school with the full responsibility equal to that of a beginning teacher, because they participate in almost all class- and schoolactivities. The goal of this training is to allow the students to perfect the skills needed for all activities and tasks required from teachers. So they have to plan and assign homework and mark it, write supplementary material on the subject matter for their students, tutor individual students who may have been absent for a while or are experiencing particular difficulties, help to organize and participate in outings, special events, etc., supervise students, attend teacher councils on specific class groups or subjects. Students can also choose to teach at special needs schools, at method schools (Montessori, Steiner, and so on), at vocational schools, at schools for primary education, etc. Some of the students have even opted to teach in prisons, helping inmates to prepare for exams to obtain a certificate of primary or secondary education.

PRACTICE IN OTHER ENVIRONMENTS THAN SCHOOLS

Students in their final practice period are also required to look beyond the concept of teaching in a school environment and to look at other potential areas of employment. Students can, if they so choose, opt for work placements in education-oriented environments, such as training sections of companies, institutions, organizations, or in any places linked in one way or another to education, such as centres for adult education, for student counselling, school administration, parent associations, educational services, etc. However, based on the subjects they have chosen, students are also free to opt for work placement in a business environment. Students who have chosen to specialize in economics, commercial sciences, or IT may work in a bank, for instance, while students studying a foreign language can gain practical experience in a foreign company, in an official tourist office of a foreign country, or as a city guide for tourists from abroad. A zoo, an observatory, a gym (for students specializing in physical education), a hairdresser (for students studying hairdressing), a hospital or company kitchen (for those studying home economics),… all of these are places where we could send our students for their work placement programme.

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The students are allowed to plan their own work placement experience. However, in doing so, they must comply with a number of rules set by our institute. Every student must opt for a didactic training period – i.e. one where they actually teach – of at least 6 weeks. Those students specializing in physical education, commercial sciences and home economics or hairdressing are obliged to gain practical experience in a place of business. All students must be able to justify the choices they have made. They can do so on the basis of the subjects they have chosen to specialize in, on the basis of their bachelor paper or on the basis of their own personal interest. The work placement programmes they come up with are then reviewed by a team of teacher-educators, and modified if necessary. The underlying principle is that the work placement programme must be an enriching experience for the students. It’s clear that the experience gathered by the students in these different work fields has a positive effect on their teaching abilities. The future teacher has to know and realise what happens outside of the classroom as well.