Title of Report: Online Postgraduate Diploma in Second Language Teaching at Massey
University
Case Report Author: Gillian Skyrme
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1. Identify and describe the Professional Development Opportunity (PDO).

The PDO described in this report is the Postgraduate Diploma in Second Language Teaching (PGDipSLT) offered by Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand. It is a named qualification in its own right, but it can also form 50% of the MA in Second Language Teaching, which is completed by a research project and thesis, or of the taught MTESOL Leadership, both also offered online. The four courses of the PGDipSLT can be completed in one full-time year, but students generally prefer the part-time option, to be completed in four years or fewer, because it allows them to continue their teaching as they study. The PGDipSLT has been available by distance since the 1970s and has had an online component for more than a decade. This element has gradually increased, and since the changeover from WebCT to Moodle technology was made in 2010, the online component and interactivity have increased dramatically. Although paper copies of basic course materials can still be requested, they are all posted online along with many other materials and web links.

There are four courses in the PGDipSLT: The Methodology of Second Language Teaching, The Second Language Learning Process, Language Awareness and Language Issues, and Curriculum and Materials Design. Each course has a coordinator (a member of the academic faculty), and these instructors are supported by tutors who assist with marking/grading assignments and who interact with students online for the course. The online dimensions are supported by University technical staff members who are experts in supporting distance education. There are also two administrative staff members whose roles include support for the qualification.

The PGDipSLT aims to provide professional development opportunities combining theoretical and practical perspectives for second language teachers with existing language-teaching experience who wish to upskill while continuing to teach wherever they are situated.

2. Describe the target audience for the PDO.

Students must have at least one year's full-time language-teaching experience, although many of them have much more. Some of them have entry-level qualifications; others have come to second language teaching from other avenues of life, including other types of teaching. The majority of our students, because of this experience, are over the age of 30, but we have a few recent graduates as well. By far, the majority are teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), although some teach other languages.

While the PGDipSLT was originally developed for New Zealand teachers (often resident overseas), in recent years it has also been available to international students. Most of those studying from overseas locations (New Zealand and international) are based in East Asian countries, but the spread is very wide. Currently, 39 students are enrolled in the courses.

The appeal of distance courses to those who continue teaching as they study part time is obvious: students are able to work on the course in whatever time is available to them. Online courses have enhanced the field by providing a wider range of teaching/learning activities than previous distance modes: speedy response to issues that arise, and numerous opportunities for interactivity with fellow students and faculty to help overcome the isolation that has sometimes been associated with distance learning. However, we also have full-time students enrolled in our program, appreciative of the opportunity to study from wherever they are located. They are also required to have access to teaching opportunities, as reflection on practice is an essential component of the qualification, and some assignments require action in a classroom setting.

3. Describe how you recruit students for your PDO.

Massey University has a long-standing reputation in New Zealand as the major provider of tertiary level distance education, and the PGDipSLT is marketed through various institutional channels, including its International Office. A brochure is prepared annually to assist this, and it is also available electronically on the website. Other opportunities are taken up, such as the website of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Aotearoa New Zealand (TESOLANZ). However, the most effective marketing tool is word-of-mouth from our graduates, and the aspect they most commonly comment on is the practical applicability of the theory-based knowledge they gained.

4. Describe the curriculum choices made

As a university with a focus on distance education, Massey University has been at the forefront of the development of online educational technologies, and there has been an institutional emphasis on the adoption of online delivery. This emphasis is one that those involved in the evolution of the PGDipSLT have been eager to adopt, because of the inherent advantages it provides, and because we believe that it allows us to model to teachers the skills that they must themselves acquire in an age of blended learning. While all teaching staff have worked to develop the opportunities offered by new technologies in innovative and engaging ways, we have been led in this by Professor Cynthia White, whose expertise in the area of distance language education and in how new technologies may support its pedagogy is internationally recognized.

The qualification has been developed over many years and the increasing use of online tools has evolved with close attention to the needs and interests of our student body. Because in many cases we are leading them into a new channel for learning and future teaching, we scaffold their involvement with very careful instructions and with ample opportunities, but few compulsory requirements, for interactive activities beyond the basics. Feedback from both students and faculty concerning the opportunities for creating a sense of a community of learning is positive.

The academic instructor for each of the courses takes major responsibility for online interaction through the Moodle site (and other channels, such as email), supported in other aspects of the course by tutors who are highly successful graduates of the course and experienced second language teachers, employed as student numbers require.

5. Explain the PDO's over-arching goals and specific objectives.

The over-arching goal of the qualification is to produce highly skilled and reflective second language teachers who are responsive to the contexts in which they teach, who are ready to move towards professional leadership, and who have initial research experience. More specific goals associated with the individual courses are:

(1) to help participants to identify and critically reflect on teaching principles, beliefs, and theories about language teaching and learning;
(2) to help participants critically examine a range of methods for teaching second languages;
(3) to help participants develop deep understanding of second language learning processes and factors that affect them;
(4) to help participants raise awareness of language, its components, its use in different contexts and by different users, and the implications of these for teaching and learning;
(5) to help participants investigate and present evidence of identity and power, and their distribution in authentic spoken language;
(6) to help participants examine and apply criteria for effective materials selection, adaptation, and design;
(7) to help participants develop, implement, and rigorously report on processes of classroom innovation and enquiry;
(8) to help participants understand and implement the stages involved in planning a curriculum with a principled approach; and
(9) to raise participants' awareness of the need and opportunities for ongoing professional development.

6. Describe the teaching and learning activities used in the PDO and what online applications are used to support these activities.

The basic course materials provide a wealth of discussion and readings, including but not restricted to, prescribed textbooks, which form the content of the course. These materials are interspersed with while-reading tasks to encourage personal reflection on the application of the ideas to the teaching contexts of the participants.

There is a Moodle-based website for each of the four courses generally available to the participants in advance of the start date, so they can become active as soon as they receive notification of acceptance. This availability helps participants develop a greater sense of membership in a community of learning from the outset. Each topic in the course has a section with extra material, such as PDFs of or links to relevant articles, web pages, a discussion forum, and a range of relevant extra tasks to encourage student-to-student and student-to-teacher interaction. These tasks include initial ones that encourage students to enter dialogues with other students as well as to engage with the online learning resources (a guided process of doing an article database search, for example). The forums are available for

students to make comments, to share extra resources that they have found, and to ask questions at any point in the course, which are then responded to by other students and/or the instructor. As well as such asynchronous tasks, carried out at students' leisure, there are online tutorials where participants can use voice tools such as Adobe Connect or Wimba to interact in real time. These tutorials are designed to take account of the time zones represented in the student body. Participants highly prize these synchronous opportunities because they engender a stronger sense of engagement and allow for more elaborated questions and discussions.

Although most activities are voluntary, in response to the complexity of the lives of working teachers undertaking distance study, several of the assignments have compulsory interactive components to ensure that the value of online interaction as a learning tool is modeled. For example, complex assignments in two of the courses (one to carry out a small action research project and another to plan a professional development workshop) are preceded by a period of assessed collaborative discussion where initial ideas are developed, proffered, commented on, and elaborated on in small groups assigned according to commonality of context (e.g. teaching overseas, teaching children, teaching in high schools). Feedback suggests that students find this a highly rewarding aspect of the course.

7. Describe how the PDO helps students understand the local context in which they are studying so that they can work together with other students in the global context of your online PDO.

As mentioned above, this course is available to teachers, New Zealand and international, who are spread throughout the globe. Even those situated locally often have aspirations to teach overseas or past experience of doing so, and there is therefore a genuine interest in engaging together, commenting, and providing mutual support, which has been known to develop into extended email connections between students geographically very distant, independent of course requirements.

Because of the geographical spread of students, contextual variation is key to our whole purpose and approach. All assignments in the PGDipSLT require students to reflect on their practice and their experience and respond accordingly. Faculty members have themselves taught in a range of contexts, the tutors who assist with marking/grading assignments are chosen to fill perceived gaps, and feedback is alert to contextual factors, such as differences in educational goals, academic culture, and the availability of resources. The selection of readings provided or recommended to students also takes contextual factors into account, and so represents a wide range of settings and encourages a critical approach to cross-cultural teaching (opening students to debates about World Englishes, linguistic imperialism, and the transfer of methods across contexts, for example). There are also assignments that require learners to investigate language use in different cultural contexts in order to reflect on the complexity of intercultural communication and its implications for teachers.

With long-standing experience of distance provision, faculty members have a clear understanding of the intricacy of how distance learning interweaves with people's lives and there is a two-week extension period allowed for all asynchronous assignments, which is often extended further in difficult circumstances.

The University provides a very prompt distance library service that can send out books within New Zealand and photo-copied or scanned resources within copyright allowances further a-field. In recent years, the University has invested in electronic resources that facilitate distance learning. Information about library facilities is provided on the Moodle site, and librarians can even provide synchronous library consultations and instruction online.

In general, the use of the internet (including email) has reduced the challenges of providing distance education in contexts where the postal service had often been unreliable. However, where technological difficulties arise, the University has a long-standing commitment to overcoming these by providing equivalent but different experiences through, for example, providing paper-based copies or CD versions of material.

8. Describe how the PDO helps prepare students for the local contexts in which they will work.

From the student viewpoint, members share information about their own contexts of teaching through the profiles they post (which are used in some cases in early activities to make connections) and in the open forums, enabling all members to recognize the diversity of teaching settings and the need for diverse responses. The small-group forums mentioned above allow for closer investigation and sharing of the particular dimensions of one type of setting. In all these cases, students show themselves to be genuinely interested in one another's experiences and to be ready to offer supportive ideas.

9. Explain the characteristics of the teacher educator(s) working in the PDO.

All academic staff coordinating the courses have PhDs in Second Language Teaching, as well as prior experience and professional qualifications in teaching second languages in various parts of the world, including such diverse settings as China, Germany, New Zealand, and distance provision. They are led by Professor Cynthia White, well published in this area, and the author of an important book on distance language learning (White, C. (2003). *Language learning in distance education*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).

10. Describe the non-teaching support staff in the PDO.

Supporting tutors, who mark/grade some of the student assignments, all have postgraduate qualifications in second language teaching, and most are highly successful graduates of this course itself (for example, former winners of the prize presented annually to the student with the highest Grade Point Average). They are themselves geographically dispersed in a range of teaching settings, supported by software developed within Massey University to support online marking/grading and moderation of assessments.

The technical support team in the University is highly responsive and includes trained teachers, giving the team a pedagogical focus towards solutions that fit the students and their learning, rather than simply considering technological possibilities. They maintain a separate Moodle site where students can go for initial and ongoing instruction on using the online environment, as well as channels (e.g., phone, texting, email, chat) for asking about specific difficulties.

11. Explain the learning assessments used in the PDO.

There is a wide range of learning assessments over the four courses in the PGDipSLT. As has been mentioned, all of them include a requirement for reflection on practice and an alertness to context. For example, one assignment requires students to provide a detailed plan for a unit of teaching appropriate to their own teaching context and incorporating the steps expected in curriculum design. They are also required to design most of the materials used in that unit.

Another feature is that assignments have a focus forward to future roles expected of the teacher, including the facilitation of professional development, and research. In the workshop for professional development students choose a topic and an audience appropriate to their settings (for example, newly-arrived Western teachers about to teach in an overseas context). A range of different research methodologies are included in the assignment range, such as a project based on interviews with learners, classroom-based action research, reflective journals, a process of narrative enquiry based on a critical incident germane to the student's development as a teacher, and collection and analysis of language data. Scaffolding is provided to help participants meet ethical requirements for human subject research, and clear guidelines as to the expected nature of reporting on these projects are included.

All assignments can be submitted online, and they provide for a range of engagements with online technologies, including a quiz, an online presentation including voice and visual elements, a reflective journal that is posted for peer comment, and, as mentioned above, assessed collaborative discussion. One of the courses has an exam worth 40%, which can be sat anywhere in the world, facilitated by the University's examinations section.

12. Explain the mechanisms used to evaluate the PDO.

The University has measures in place for formal evaluation, including online student feedback surveys for each offering of the courses, and a regular cycle of qualification reviews, where outside academics and stakeholders are engaged to conduct a comprehensive review. All University qualifications are accredited by the Committee for University Academic Programmes, the national regulating body for New Zealand university qualifications.

13. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this PDO online.

Because this is a qualification that has been embedded in a highly developed system that has supported distance education for over 50 years, online delivery has in many ways been a way of reducing challenges rather than adding them. It is certainly much easier to engender a sense of community with the synchronous and asynchronous (but nevertheless very prompt) interactivity the online environment allows. It remains true that not all students take up these opportunities to the extent that they could, but that is one of the affordances of the distance mode of delivery, allowing participants a certain amount of choice of learning strategy.

14. Describe the successes of the PDO and explain how they are documented.

There is an online survey provided to all participants in the courses and the results are consistently above four on a five-point scale. Unsolicited correspondence thanking us for the

program highlights its practical applicability within the classroom, something that practicing teachers value greatly. Beyond that, we see our graduates progressing in their careers, taking up positions of responsibility, and enrolling to further their qualifications through the thesis-based MA in Second Language Teaching, which we also offer online.