TLC REAPS BENEFITS

Education students preparing to teach in primary schools receive an unusually broad overview of school life, thanks to an innovative ACU National program which creates partnerships with schools.

A team from the School of Education (NSW) recently received a national Carrick Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning “for excellent and sustained promotion of student learning in primary teacher education through school partnerships in the Teaching and Learning Consortium (TLC)”.

The team, pictured right, includes lecturer Mr Ed Lewis (left), senior lecturer Dr Sandi Carroll, assistant head of school Dr Paul White, senior lecturer Dr Jan Long and senior lecturer Ms Wendy Moran.

In the TLC, second year students team up before practice teaching and spend six weeks in schools interviewing many members of staff, observing and assisting in all classes (K – 6) across the school and contributing their time and skills as needed.

One Sydney school with an influx of pupils from Sudan asked the University’s students to research their special background and needs and then share their findings with staff, for example.

Others have requested an inventory to match maths and science teaching materials with curriculum requirements and advise on filling any gaps, while others have received assistance with anti-bullying programs.

“Because our students work with every staff member in the school, including special needs teachers, librarians and secretaries, they get a broad perspective,” said Ms Moran, who began the successful program a decade ago to allow each student to experience the techniques and style of more than just one teacher.

The TLC was created in partnership with Catholic Education Office (CEO) in Parramatta, through the vision of Professor Jude Butcher and others from the University. Since then it has grown to include three other Catholic dioceses, independent Christian and non-denominational schools as well as public primary schools in NSW.

“The TLC allows our students to see many teachers in action. It gives them a much more realistic view of the whole school, and how teachers work within that and how they work with others.” At the same time, the program encourages school staff to get to know the students, which in many cases has resulted in employment.

“It also creates an excellent bridge between theory and practice, as our lecturers and tutors visit their students in the schools each week to discuss their experiences.”

Student evaluations of the program in 2006 demonstrated that the TLC clearly enhanced their knowledge of the profession and the scope of teachers’ work with particular focus on strategies that create positive learning environments, the importance of teamwork and collegial collaboration.

The program is being rolled out nationally to all ACU National education courses. “The TLC is now thoroughly embedded in our programs,” Ms Moran said. “It is raised in professional dialogue across the teacher education sector as a model of university-school partnerships that successfully engage student teachers in understanding the profession and the development of their own personal ‘teacher’ identity.”