

1988

## The Discourse of Teacher Education Policy in Australia.

David Battersby  
*Riverina-Murray Institute, Wagga Wagga*

John Retallick  
*Riverina-Murray Institute, Wagga Wagga*

---

### Recommended Citation

Battersby, D., & Retallick, J. (1988). The Discourse of Teacher Education Policy in Australia.. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 13(1).  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.1988v13n2.2>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.  
<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol13/iss1/2>

## THE DISCOURSE OF TEACHER EDUCATION POLICY IN AUSTRALIA

*David Battersby & John Retallick*  
*School of Education*  
*Riverina-Murray Institute*  
*Wagga Wagga*

### INTRODUCTION

In Australia, scrutiny of teacher education through Commonwealth and State reports and policy documents has been extensive, especially during the past decade. This attention has paralleled a major thrust for change in teacher education in the United Kingdom and particularly in the United States where the Report of the National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education, the Carnegie Report and the Holmes Report have each called for the dramatic upgrading of teacher education. This paper argues that, despite calls for change and innovation in teacher education in Australia, the discourse of policy documents invariably reflects an underlying conservatism or what we refer to as an ideology of accommodation. Specific reference is made in the paper to preliminary outcomes from a teacher education policy project underway at the Riverina-Murray Institute.

### AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The development of teacher education in Australia has clearly been episodic. The era prior to the mid-1960s was one in which teacher *training* had been conducted in small, specialised, state-run colleges where corporate spirit, traditions and the practicalities of teaching were often emphasised. The turning point to this era came in 1964 when the Martin Report argued for increased funding, more autonomy and enhanced status for teachers colleges. What followed, was a brief but intense period where an influx of Commonwealth funds into teacher education coincided with the conversion of many teachers colleges into colleges of advanced education. Barcan (1985) describes this period between the mid-1960s and 1974 as one of transformation, considerable freedom and where there was 'enthusiasm, innovation and experimentation' in teacher education. From the mid-1970s onwards education in Australia, and teacher education in particular, suffered what Barcan aptly refers to as a collapse of 'social and cultural consensus'. It is this era in teacher education which is the focus of both this paper and of a major project which is currently underway at the Riverina-Murray Institute. The aim of the project is to catalogue, and

then analyse, the numerous State and Commonwealth teacher education policy documents. These documents range from the 1978 Bassett Review of Teacher Education in Queensland, and the subsequent flurry of reports in other States (e.g., Correy Committee Report in New South Wales - 1980; Vickery Report in Western Australia - 1980; Asche Report in Victoria - 1981; etc.), to the various Commonwealth reports such as those by the Commonwealth Schools Commission (CSC) and the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC).

### THE DISCOURSE OF TEACHER EDUCATION POLICY

Our initial cataloguing and analysis of the last decade's policy documents has begun to unmask the ideological terrain of teacher education in Australia. Although much of this terrain is still yet to be traversed, several preliminary observations are warranted.

The architects of Australian teacher education policy documents appear to take for granted that *maintenance orientation* is the *raison d'être* of teacher education. That is, the role of teacher education is 'to equip people to cope...' (National Inquiry into Teacher Education (NITE), 1980), to make people feel 'confident in teaching students' (CSC, 1979), and ultimately to provide society with 'an adequate supply of...teachers' (CTEC/CSC, 1986). The effects of this maintenance orientation are at least two-fold. First, from a teacher supply viewpoint, teacher education has increasingly taken on a fiscal importance as the costs and economic benefits of 'training' teachers comes to be seen within the context of the restructuring of the Australian economy. Queensland's Project 21 and the 1985 report of the Quality of Education Review Committee both make it clear that, while teacher education should still serve a 'maintenance orientation', it has to do so within the context of Australia moving from an industrial to a post-industrial economy. This is further reinforced through recent moves to review the training of science and mathematics teachers in light of the future technological needs of the Australian economy.

A second and more pervasive effect of the maintenance orientation in teacher education is that of producing teachers who are able to fit into existing patterns and structures of schooling, so much so that they come to 'promote and reflect the core values which public schools are seeking to instill' (NSW Department of Education, 1987). Beyer and Zeichner (1987) refer to this as the *integrating function*, which itself is given prominence in Australian teacher education policy documents. It is pronounced, for instance, in the way the professional development of teachers is conceptualised as a process of *assimilation*. In reference to this, the policy documents allude to teacher development as 'a continuing process' (NITE, 1980) whereby teachers 'through carefully structured programmes' (Coulter and Ingvarson, 1985) combined with 'considerable periods of experience ... [begin to] fully assimilate broader issues and respond to changing educational priorities' (CTEC/CSC, 1986).

The ascribed importance of the integrating function of teacher education is also evident in various policy documents' commentaries on, and suggested recommendations for, pre-service programmes. On the one hand, this is reflected in the prescriptive yet superficial way in which it is often assumed that there is 'a core of studies and learning experiences for *all* pre-service programmes' (NITE, 1980 - our emphasis) and on the other hand, how the practicum serves the instrumental function of linking theory to practice.

The myriad of recommendations concerning a pre-service core of studies and the associated practicum highlight how deeply *technical rationality* has penetrated teacher education policy and practice in Australia. Technical rationality manifests itself most obviously in how dominance is given to the acquisition of skills, techniques, and methods associated with teaching. Examples of this abound. For instance, in its *Discussion Paper on Teacher Education*, the Commonwealth Schools Commission (1979) listed amongst its preferred objectives for pre-service teacher education 'the acquisition of ... knowledge, values and attitudes which will serve both the individual and society', and gaining 'skills in dealing with people and the teaching techniques necessary for professional practice'. Moreover, these and similar objectives in other documents convey an unquestioning reverence to the place of psychology in teacher education. Thus, for instance, high priority is placed on inculcating the rudiments of human growth and development, learning and motivation, but little mention is made of the ideological, political and economic dimensions of education and schooling. Although the rhetoric of more recent documents, such as Queensland's Project 21, does acknowledge a 'reflective critical orientation to teaching', what appears to be promoted is merely reflection on selected and uncontested aspects of the status quo, rather than serious questioning about the existing patterns and structures of schooling.

The aim of technocratic rationality also extends into the discourse about the practicum with its emphasis on role modelling and developing skills through practice. For example, mention is made of those 'carefully selected and well-trained practitioners' (NITE, 1980) who do not only have 'a responsibility as a professional group for the development of its members' (CSC, 1979) but 'who help student teachers to apply their campus learnings to the classroom teaching situation and to develop their pedagogical skills' (Project 21, 1987). This concentration on development, application, and skills leads to the technical aspects of the practicum becoming an end in themselves with questions of educational purpose, practice and equity largely being ignored.

The patterning of the practicum and pre-service programmes into a specific time sequence provides a different example of how teacher education in Australia is ideologically driven. On this point, the various policy documents are dogmatic and contradictory. Most suggest that it either takes three or four years to train a teacher, while at the same time arguing strongly that teacher education should be seen as an ongoing process. The exercise of State and

Commonwealth control is also visible in the way in which the discourse of policy documents genuflects to the notion that there should be a 'diversity of models' for teacher education, but that the time length of teacher education courses should be similar.

The discussion so far has drawn attention to the type of ideological terrain that characterises teacher education policy documents promulgated in Australia during the past decade. By necessity, our analysis has been cursory. And yet, in the few references made to various documents there can be no mistake that teacher education policy has been predicted on an 'ideology of accommodation' which results in a conformity to conservatism. In the contest of teacher education in Australia, this ideology manifests itself as a maintenance orientation which pays homage to the principles of technical rationality. There is, however, a sense of unease in conceding that teacher education policy documents in Australia may be deeply sedimented with this type ideology for it might imply that, in practice, teachers become easily duped by the system and do not resist being assimilated and domesticated. The fact that teachers do engage in contestation and resistance provides a sense of optimism and perhaps a way forward for a radical paradigm shift in teacher education.

#### **Conclusion: Towards a Paradigm Shift**

A lead has already been taken towards a redefinition of teacher education by Giroux and McLaren (1987). They argue that there is a need to move beyond the 'language of critique' to the 'language of possibility' and thereby move from theorizing about schools to theorizing for schools. This approach enables an emancipatory model of teacher education to be constructed. A central tenet of this model is that the teacher is a

... *transformative intellectual who defines schooling as an ethical and empowering enterprise dedicated to the fostering of democracy, to the exercise of greater social justice and to the building of a more equitable social order.* [Giroux and McLaren, 1987, p. 270]

In tandem with this idea of the teacher as a 'transformative intellectual', the notion of 'counter-hegemony' is employed by Giroux and McLaren to develop a political, theoretical and critical understanding of ideology and domination and the type of active opposition it should engender. In this way, teacher education can be viewed as a 'counterpublic sphere' where the classroom is seen as a cultural milieu characterised by contestation, struggle and resistance. This is in stark contrast to the prevailing paradigm in teacher education which portrays the classroom in terms of rules and regulations and management by the teacher.

According to Giroux and McLaren, a counter-hegemonic curriculum for teacher education would comprise a form of cultural politics stressing the importance of the social, cultural, political and economic as the primary categories for understanding schooling. As part of this curriculum, at least two tasks would

be undertaken by potential teachers. First, an analysis of how schooling is organized and conducted within asymmetrical relations of power (critique). Second, they would engage in the construction of political strategies aimed at furthering democracy in schools (transformation). Teaching practice would involve understanding and experience of the nature of power, ideology and culture in schools rather than being saturated with learning models and strategies, behavioural outcomes and techniques of teacher performance. A counter-hegemonic curriculum would also embody a pedagogy which makes problematic the existing relations of power and dependency in teacher education. Freire's (1972) notion of a dialogical or problem-solving pedagogy as distinct from a banking mode would be relevant here.

As Giroux and McLaren point out, a paradigm shift in teacher education has to be part of a broader political and social agenda. Moreover justifying a departure from the conventional wisdom of current teacher education practices will require a detailed consideration of the pedagogical possibilities and political limits of the newer, more radical paradigms. The recantations and opposition that results from this process will itself provide a commentary on the hegemony currently exercised by the technical, mechanistic and maintenance orientation prevalent in teacher education policy and practice in Australia.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Barcan, A. (1985) Ideologies in Teacher Training, 1967-1974. *Unicorn*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp.5-17.
- Beyer, L.E. and Zeichner, K. (1987) Teacher Education in Cultural Context: Beyond Reproduction. In, Popkewitz, T.S.(ed.), *Cultural Studies in Teacher Education: Its Folklore, Theory and Practice*, Falmer Press, Lewes.
- Board of Teacher Education (Qld) (1987) *Project 21: Teachers for the Twenty-first Century*. Board of Teacher Education, Toowong.
- Commonwealth Schools Commission (1979) *Issues in Teacher Education: A Discussion Paper*. Schools Commission, Canberra.
- Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission and Commonwealth Schools Commission (1986) *Improving Teacher Education*, CTEC/CSC, Canberra.
- Coulter, F. and Ingvarson, L. (1985) *Professional Development and the Improvement of Schooling: Roles and Responsibilities*. Schools Commission, Canberra.
- Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin Press, Harmondsworth.
- Giroux, H. and McLaren, P. (1987) Teacher Education as a Counterpublic Sphere: Notes Towards a Redefinition. In, Popkewitz, T.S. (ed.), *Cultural Studies in Teacher Education: Its Folklore, Theory and Practice*, Falmer Press, Lewes.
- New South Wales Department of Education. (1987) *The Values We Teach*. New South Wales Department of Education, Sydney.
- Report of the National Inquiry into Teacher Education*. (1980) Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra.