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DIRECTIONS AND PRIORITIES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This article identifies directions/priorities in contemporary teacher education in Australia, and indicates the challenges that confront leadership. Examining directions in teacher education programs, research, the conduct of the practicum, relationships with schools, flexible delivery and internationalisation, a dominant theme is the need for strong, collaborative and symbiotic school-university partnerships in the education of prospective and current teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The teacher-education literature, notably the work of Darling-Hammond (1993) endeavours to explain changes in teacher education by citing global changes including the growing complexity of society; the changing nature of the workforce; technology developments; and increasing multiculturalism. Within this context, those countries with which Australia traditionally aligns on matters of culture and education, have responded differently.

In the UK, massive change in the 90s involving political intervention has resulted in a competency and school-based system (Furlong and Maynard, 1995) characterised by increasing emphasis on time spent in school; emphasis on teacher education to instil government defined competencies; and regarding the school rather than the university as the focus of teacher education and assessment.

In the USA, the trend has been to develop sites or 'centres of excellence' in which partnerships exist between schools and universities, and function in a symbiotic way to simultaneously offer the possibility of reform in both schools and teacher education. The two main developments are professional development schools and Centres for Pedagogy (see Goodlad, 1994).

A prima facie interpretation suggests that Australia's response has been closer to that of the

USA: an emphasis on the formation of collaborative partnerships between universities and schools, implicitly based on the belief that there must be simultaneous reform in both systems for the relationship to be effective. However, critical theorists like Sachs (1999, 1997) argue for a more fundamental interpretation of the democratic ethic in Australian school-university partnerships, suggesting that there is considerable scope for integration.

This article examines generic directions and priorities in teacher education in Australia and indicates the challenges confronting leadership. While a variety of different issues relating to teacher education are addressed, viz pedagogy, the practicum, research, responsibility to school education and flexible learning initiatives, there is a common denominator. Teacher education programs which involve these issues will function more effectively if there is a robust, collaborative partnership between university and schools.

PROGRAMS

PRINCIPLES

Several recent reports on teacher education and teaching in Australia enunciate desirable policies and directions (ACDE 1998, MACQT 1998, 1997, MACTEQT 1994a and b, Gore 1995) for teacher education programs. Perhaps thematic is the first principle of the NSW Strategic Policy Framework for Teacher Education (MACTEQT 1994a) that teacher education be responsive (reflect contemporary demands); formative and predictive (seek new ways of improving learning); and collaborative (engage all those who have a stake).

The 'professionalisation' of teacher education is most apparent in the development of Desirable Attributes of Beginning Teachers (MACTEQT 1994b) and the ACDE Report (1998). The former provides a list of attributes in the areas of ethics, content and practice to 'provide guidance'

on how to structure initial teacher education courses, though it is quick to state that 'the actual performance of teaching cannot be atomised in this way'. The ACDE (1998) Report provides national standards and guidelines for teacher education focusing on professional attributes, duty of care, students and their communities, content studies, curriculum, literacy, numeracy, teaching and learning, relationships with learners, technologies, assessment and evaluation, and working with others.

These documents represent a culmination of the thinking in the earlier reports of Finn (1991) and Mayer (1992) and the competency and outcomes movement that involved greater accountability.

The reports that focus predominantly on schooling Towards Greater Professionalism (MACQT 1998) and Raising the Status of Teachers and Teaching (MACQT 1997) raise additional lessons: the need for closer relationships between universities and schools; the need to collaborate on the practicum; the need to assist in inducting neophytes into the profession (and to redefine initial teacher education to include induction); and the need to promote a positive view of teaching.

PARTNERSHIPS

Arguably the most pervasive theme in the teacher education literature is the desirability of forming partnerships between schools and universities (Burstein et al 1999, Rhodes and Bellamy 1999, Sachs 1999, 1997, ACDE, 1998, Kochan and Kunkel 1998, MACQT 1998, 1997, Sandholtz and Finan 1998, Teitel 1998, Goodlad 1997, 1994, ACIIC Roundtable 1996, Southern Cross Roundtable 1996, Gore 1995, NSN 1994). The interdependence of schools and teacher education institutions has clearly permeated the culture of both systems. In the USA, Goodlad (1994) facetiously claims that 'the advocacy of school-university partnerships is de rigeur: not to have one or be part of one could be dangerous to your health'.

The MACQT report of 1998 claims that ideal partnerships exemplify these features: recognition of interdependence and the features that each brings to the partnership; constructive and imaginative problem solving; a working relationship that permits risk taking; tolerance

for ambiguity; and organisational structures that facilitate decision making.

Guidelines for the preconditions of forming successful partnerships are provided by other writers:

- ∞ The need for the democratic operation of partnerships (McCulloch and Fidler 1994). There needs to be a breaking down of the concept of the university partner entering the school as guru, though there can be an acknowledgment of hierarchical relationships when expertise is involved. This need for empowered participation in a democracy is the theme of 'In Praise of Education' (Goodlad 1997).
- ∞ The need to consider the perspectives and distinctive interests of each partner (Whitehead et al 1994, Fidler 1994).
- ∞ The need to acknowledge problems associated with limits on rewards and recognition of individuals engaged in collaborative activities (Berry and Catoe 1994, Goodlad 1994).

The notion of partnerships has been further developed or at least institutionalised in the USA with the establishment of professional development schools and centres for pedagogy (Sandholtz and Finan 1998, Kochan and Kunkel 1998, Teitel 1998, Keating 1998, Goodlad 1994). In Australia there is a continuing development of equal partnerships between school and university and the relationship boundaries remain distinct.

While close collaboration and democratic partnerships are the way of the future, there are the related dangers of adopting a trophy mentality: of getting one quickly and immaculately. As Furlong et al (1995) argue, 'adopting a partnership model is in itself no necessary guarantee of quality in initial teacher education'. The title of Teitel's (1998) article involving the metaphors of separation, divorce and open marriage, denotes what follows: an account of partnerships that break down and reconfigure to include new partners. Sirotnik, cited in Goodlad (1994, 109) poses the problem of forming partnerships:

The norms, roles and expectations of educators in each of these educational realms could not be

more different - the regimen of time and space in schools V the relative freedom of these precious commodities in the university; an ethic of inquiry in the university V an ethic of action and meeting immediate needs in the schools; a merit system with promotion and tenure in the university V an egalitarian work ethic in the schools ... these two cultures are very different, and it is hard to fit them together in productive long term useful ways

PEDAGOGY

The trend in the literature re teacher education programs predominantly involves the provision of general guidelines, and these often include the desirability of partnerships involved in collaborative teaching (Burstein et al 1998, Kochan and Kunkel 1998, Welch 1998).

In Australia several writers believe that partnerships need to develop further, often in the interests of social justice. Hatton (1997), for instance, believes that many practices in teacher education are 'oppressive' and that as teacher educators we need to engage in consciousness raising to develop sensitivity. Sachs (1999, 1997) calls for teacher education to be jointly owned by schools and universities. For Sachs (1999) this involves an activist teacher professionalism: a collective and individual strategy for teachers to work in collaboration with other stakeholders, observing the principles of inclusivity, collaboration, trust building and acting with passion.

Reference to generic models for teacher education programs is scant. Goodlad (1994) represents an earlier model for general education involving six areas (the nature of the human species; social, political, economic systems; the world as a physical system; the world as a biological system; evaluative and belief systems; communicative and expressive systems), though laments the fact that it will be a long time before teacher educators adopt such a balanced curriculum. He advocates a five year program with general studies (those above) in the first two years; developing school experience and subject matter specialisation's in the third and fourth years; and an extended practicum/internship in the fifth year.

There are however some clear program imperatives. One is defined by MACQT (1998):

'teacher educators must give more focus to ensuring neophyte teachers are adequately prepared and supported to provide children with appropriate learning experiences in accord with syllabus requirements'. The report also provides some more concrete guidelines for teacher education. These are detailed as follows:

- ∞ problematise all aspects of practice
- ∞ contextualise student behaviours in explanatory social and cultural frameworks
- ∞ recognise the need for thorough grounding in subject knowledge
- ∞ understand pedagogical practices which make subject knowledge available
- ∞ locate discussions about professional practice in appropriate theoretical and sociocultural discourses.

A second imperative is the ACDE (1998) recommendation that all diploma in education courses comprise two years rather than one (by 2004), though the report does support summer schools and flexible delivery that may preclude the need for two calendar years.

One 'tension' that has emerged for teacher education programs in the 90s is that between technical rationality (the traditional teaching of skills) and the reflective practitioner movement originating with Schon (1983). Gore (1995) believes that a concentration on the former is consistent with the notion of teacher training: the latter is more consistent with the notion of teacher education. The two are obviously complementary and an effective program is one that achieves the appropriate balance.

The teacher education literature of the 90s is abundant with references to the desirability of reflection (ACDE 1998, Smith 1997, MACQT 1994, Calderhead and Gates 1993) and different types of reflection have been identified. Smith (1997), for example, identifies a hierarchy of reflective skills: descriptive, dialogic and critical. Perhaps the most telling proposition for teacher educators is that of Smith (1997) who argues that 'reflection cannot be serendipitous or spasmodic': it must be organised in a deliberate program which provides students with opportunities for reflection and the metacognitive strategies to facilitate it. Smith (1997) further argues the great difficulty of fostering authentic critical reflection.

The challenge of leadership is to:

- ∞ engage in ongoing discussions with system and school personnel re the formation of collaborative school-university partnerships to educate prospective teachers;
- ∞ explore in consultation with schools the ways in which schools might be more involved in the traditional university-based components of teacher education programs;
- ∞ revisit teacher education programs to ensure quality and rigour re the MACQT 1998 provisions, viz. grounding in subject knowledge; understanding pedagogical practice; contextualising and locating practice in appropriate theory; and problematising practice;
- ∞ ensure that teacher education programs are producing prospective teachers who possess the Desirable Attributes of Beginning Teachers and who meet the National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education;
- ∞ re-examine programs/subjects to ensure that skill development is complemented by authentic reflection and not just serendipitous reflection;
- ∞ evaluate teacher education programs in the light of current policy and directions to ensure that they are responsive, formative and collaborative.

RESEARCH

In relation to research for teacher educators, two areas are paramount. The first relates to the role that universities are increasingly exercising in the school-university partnership, and the consequent need to facilitate and engage in school-based action research. The second relates to the university and faculty infrastructure and policy that supports research by teacher educators.

In relation to the former, ACDE (1998) proposes that teachers be encouraged to develop a sense that they are part of the educational research community: that they are 'practitioner researchers'. As early as 1975, Stenhouse claimed that little educational research could be relied upon without teachers testing it, and refuted the still residual beliefs that teachers cannot articulate what they do; that subjectivity in the research role condemns them to bias; and that they are theoretically naive.

The Innovative Links Project (ASCIIC Roundtable 1996, Southern Cross Roundtable 1996, Yeatman and Sachs 1995, NSW 1994) is an excellent illustration of teacher educators engaging in research in partnerships with schools. The Roundtable evaluations build on the project evaluation of Yeatman and Sachs (1995) and demonstrate that teachers can conduct research in their schools that leads to meaningful change; and that changes as a result of such investigative activity can enhance teacher professionalism. Examples of the 1996 case portrayals are as diverse as facilitating Year 6 to Year 7 transition in an independent school; arresting the problem of drop out at a central school; and assisting with changes in mathematics teaching at a country secondary school.

The 1998 Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teachers recommends the establishment of a National Teacher Education Network to build on the work of the innovative links program.

Defining action research as 'inquiry that applies scientific thinking to real life problems as opposed to teacher subjective judgement based on folklore', Keating (1998) claims that teacher educators can give teachers the requisite skills. Perhaps the major advantage of this action research is that teachers can accept ownership.

The Southern Cross Roundtable (1996) claims that academics have a strategic role in helping school-based researchers refine issues; that teachers need ongoing advice on the practice of action research; and that universities should provide theoretical frameworks 'to help researchers investigate and analyse their stories'.

The second area involves education faculty structures that support the research of teacher educators. While the notion of academics as researchers is rarely contested, the research culture has sometimes been relatively slow to develop in teacher education, particularly in the 'amalgamated' institutions. Research priorities vary according to institution, though there are certain shared priorities. These include mentoring neophyte researchers; supporting staff in terms of teaching release and to develop applications; promoting the collaboration of lecturers and students in research projects; and the provision of writing groups.

The challenge to leadership is to:

- ∞ assist teachers engaged in school-based research in the provision of theoretical frameworks and research methodology;
- ∞ initiate school-based action research involving teachers and lecturers;
- ∞ engage in school-university research networks like the National Schools Network and Innovative Links to establish networks and an education community research culture;
- ∞ develop faculty research structures, typically mentoring neophyte researchers; promoting collaboration of staff and students in research; conducting writing groups; and supporting major grant applications through teaching release.

PRACTICUM

According to Furlong (1992) this is the most contested area of initial teacher education. Emergent themes in practicum provision include reflective practice; increased collaboration; increased integration of theory and practice; and the provision of a greater diversity of fieldbased experiences.

From the Turney and Eltis (1982) conceptualisation of practicum in the 80s to include classroom, school and community, the 90s brought the development of reflective practice (reflection on, in and to action) and an emphasis on student reaming through collaborative interaction with peers (Smith 1997, Gore 1995).

The emphasis on partnerships in the implementation of field-based experience is also strong. with schools being given a greater voice in determining both the nature of the practicum, and the content of the teacher education program in general.

Another emerging trend is that towards a diversity of field experiences. The collaborative focus of the Australian Catholic University initiative developed by Howard and White, by which small groups of students are appointed to a school and negotiate their program (in consultation with the university) so that areas of interest or weakness can be challenged, has considerable merit.

Greater attention is also being given to the nexus between theory and practice in teacher education programs, both in schools and on campus. Yet there still seems to be a perception among some students that the practicum functions as something akin to Postman and Weingartner's (1972) vaccination theory of education: that it is something you do, and when you've done it you're immune from it, and need not do it for another semester. The important consideration is understanding how practical experiences contribute to the process of reaming (Fidler 1994, Johnston 1994) and the ACDE (1998) suggests that this can be achieved by 'a critically reflective' approach.

Reflective practice, increased collaboration and a diversity of experiences are all elements that need to be included in a reconceptualisation of the practicum. There will need to be greater university involvement in the supervision triad (Veal and Rikard 1998) than now exists, and careful attention to Le Cornu's (1997) three R's of practicum reform: restructuring (a fundamental redefinition of rules, roles and relationships); reculturing (a move toward a more collaborative culture); and reciprocity (the need for a mutual relationship between the two).

The challenge of leadership is to:

- ∞ refine the operation of school university partnerships in the provision of field experience;
- ∞ reconceptualise practicum to include a greater diversity of school-based experiences by investigating a variety of allocation options beyond the traditional one student-one class practice;
- ∞ engage in ongoing examination of the integration of field-based experiences in the practicum and overall program;
- ∞ ensure the practice of reflection on action through an appropriate triad relationship in supervision.

SCHOOLS

Apart from school assistance in teacher preparation, and university involvement in facilitating school-based research, universities arguably have a role as part of a robust school university partnership in helping teachers and schools meet other expressed needs.

Hinton (1997) identifies three forces shaping schools: changes in societal values and structures; information technology; and management trends towards decentralisation that will impact on competencies students require. It is the recognition of the impact of such forces that led to the views expressed in Schools as Teaming Communities (DSE, 1995) that schools are centres of inquiry (producers as well as transmitters of knowledge); lifelong education must become a core activity; and school-community partnerships are desirable.

The MACQT Reports of 1998 and 1997 and the Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teachers (1998) collectively identify teacher and school needs. These are:

- ∞ to understand syllabuses in schools, especially in new areas like IT and vocational education;
- ∞ to understand outcome-based education and its implications for school practice;
- ∞ to improve links with communities; to develop skills for interaction with parents;
- ∞ to understand the link between schooling and employment (vocational education);
- ∞ to be professional and professionalised (the process by which the whole occupational group improves its status).

The following needs could be added to the list:

- ∞ to help students locate and access information (some recent literature refers to teachers as 'learning managers');
- ∞ to understand the educative potential of the community;
- ∞ to increasingly become facilitators, co-learners, diagnosticians and learning managers;
- ∞ to adopt more student-centred pedagogy; helping students take responsibility for their own learning;
- ∞ to use more problem solving, inquiry, values clarification, group and individual learning (see also Brady and Kennedy, 1999).

Teacher educators can assist through formal programs, inservice and research in meeting these needs, thereby promoting the professional development of teachers and the professionalisation of teaching.

The challenge of leadership is to:

- ∞ engage in ongoing partnership debates with schools in relation to their perceived needs;
- ∞ initiate strategies for meeting certain needs of schools through award courses, inservice or collaborative action research projects;
- ∞ ensure that teacher education graduates are 'professional' in terms of the desirable attributes and national standards;
- ∞ assist in the professionalisation of teachers by establishing academic and ethical standards, and by expanding the profession's contribution to teacher education.

FLEXIBLE LEARNING

One response of higher education institutions in a climate of economic rationalism has been an insistence on developing modes of delivery. This imperative applies equally to teacher education programs. Thus, 'flexible learning', a relatively recent addition to the educational jargon, is justified as educationally sound and economically desirable. While most of the debate about flexible learning involves new technologies, a variety of different expressions are regarded as authentic (Trigwell, undated). These include distance learning; resourcebased learning; self study methods; simulations/role play; problem-based learning; workbased learning; and negotiated learning.

In educational terms, the critical question is not so much whether a particular form of flexible learning should be adopted, but what learning strategies best suit the outcomes, program, and student needs. Brady (1985), presenting a continuum of teacher models, argues that no one method is better than another: ipso facto it is a case of matching method to need. We therefore need to be self consciously critical about the strategies we adopt, and mindful of economic mandates.

Some of the strategies identified by Trigwell, viz. simulations/role play and problem-based learning, are strategies that have relevance for teacher education. Case methodology, exemplified by the cases in Brady (1999) is another example of an educationally powerful learning strategy that also meets the criteria of presenting learning problematically and contextually.

Perhaps the area with greatest potential for teacher education, apart from the use of new technologies, is the more extensive use of work-based learning: extending the school university partnership beyond responsibility for the field-based component of the teacher education program.

The challenge of leadership is to:

- ∞ identify viable forms of flexible reaming and encourage their implementation as appropriate;
- ∞ encourage the adoption of a great variety of reaming strategies based on their appropriateness in achieving desirable educational outcomes;
- ∞ provide ongoing evaluations of the efficacy of new technologies that have teaching application

INTERNATIONALISATION

Brill (1998) cogently identifies several reasons for internationalisation in teacher education: rapid change; increasing interdependence; encountering cultural diversity; and communication technology. The latter is particularly relevant for teacher education in the light of Jaffe and Graves (1991) advocacy of 'intercultural literacy': the reamed ability to identify and interpret the cultural bases of all interactions in all types of contexts...'

A final reason is a pragmatic concern expressed by Klasek (1992, 54) and endorsed by Brill (1998)

International understanding and co-operation become as pragmatic as redressing the balance of payments deficit, as humanitarian as dealing with global hunger and disease, as crucial as avoiding war, and as humanistic as promoting a world of fully educated women and men.

Beyond the more obvious expression of internationalisation involving the recruitment of overseas teacher education students, and the associated issues of intemationalising the curriculum, there are several strategies worthy of consideration. These include promoting overseas practicum; student exchange programs; semester

or year-long overseas placements as part of B.Ed/B.A. International Studies degrees; reciprocal staff exchange programs; and establishing links with overseas academics.

The challenge of leadership is to:

- ∞ support the continuation/development of international initiatives in the practicum; student overseas exchanges; award courses; and overseas field placements;
- ∞ consider the ways in which teacher education curricula can be internationalised;
- ∞ implement reciprocal staff exchange programs; encouraging visits from international institutions; and establishing research links with overseas academics.

CONCLUSION

Of all the challenges facing teacher education, the paramount claim is that for robust and symbiotic school university partnerships that operate collaboratively to educate prospective teachers through both the practicum and campus based subjects; to meet the burgeoning needs of practising teachers in providing both content and pedagogical knowledge; and to conduct school-based action research.

Such partnerships, however, are not easily developed or sustained. They involve the collaborative union of two organisations that represent different work cultures embodying different professional practices. A related problem involves the way in which decision making might operate within this partnership, and the ways in which leadership might be expressed as empowerment and shared responsibility. The exercise of decision-making and leadership needs to be constantly negotiated and modelled so that no single partner assumes a dominant role.

A second major difficulty is that of sustaining commitment and leadership. Effective partnerships require time and effort which are at a premium for teachers and university staff. High staff turnover, particularly among executive staff, may change the nature of an already established commitment. Furthermore, 'getting things going' may involve expertise that all members of the partner organisations do not possess.

Apart from operating within dynamic partnerships, teacher education needs to be responsive in that it expresses contemporary demands; formative and predictive in that it discovers new ways for improving learning; and inclusive in that it engages all the stakeholders.

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