This is a submission to The Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees inquiry into 'Teaching and learning - maximising our investment in Australian schools'

It specifically addresses the following three terms of reference:

(a) the effectiveness of current classroom practices in assisting children to realise their potential in Australian schools;

(d) the adequacy of tools available for teachers to create and maintain an optimal learning environment;

(e) factors influencing the selection, training, professional development, career progression and retention of teachers in the Australian education system;

My name Is Misty Adoniou. I was a primary school teacher before joining the University of Canberra where I am now a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education. The submission is based on my personal experiences with schools as well as academic research. I am in the final review of my PhD research into the experience of early career teachers in schools and their capacity to teach literacy effectively and this work has been included in this submission.

(a) the effectiveness of current classroom practices in assisting children to realise their potential in Australian schools;

In Australia not all children benefit from schooling. We are, by international accounts, a high quality low equity educational jurisdiction (Thomson, De Bortoli, Nicholas, Hillman, & Buckley, 2010). Low achieving children are most likely to be children who speak English as an additional Language or Dialect (EALD) or children from low socio-economic backgrounds. An examination of the core characteristics of these two cohorts of learners helps us understand why it is they underachieve and why they remain disadvantaged despite attending school.

Firstly, the language they speak at home is different from the language required to succeed at school. This is as true of Australian born children from low socio-economic backgrounds as it is of migrant children who speak an additional language at home. Consider the home language of many children of low socio-economic backgrounds e.g "I done my homework', 'Youse guys' etc

The difference between home language and school language requires teachers to explicitly teach ‘school’ English to all learners in the classroom. However teachers have very limited explicit English language knowledge. They know how to use ‘school’ English, but they don’t know how to explain it. For example, teachers may know that it should be ‘I did my homework’, but they don’t know why it isn’t ‘I done my homework.’ Thus, children may have their errors corrected but not explained to them. The results is that learning does not take place, a potential lesson learned from a careful explanation of how the language works is then not able to be applied to other circumstances e.g I gone to the beach. These children remain in the dark, and seriously disadvantaged in all aspects of schooling where learning is both transmitted and assessed through ‘school English’. The achievement gap simply grows and grows.

Secondly, when you are constantly corrected and never taught, your self esteem reduces and school seems a place that is distant and irrelevant. Children who feel out of place at school, quickly became disenfranchised and begin to remove themselves from the school environment.

The solution.

Too much focus has been given to ‘literacy’ programmes in schools. Every jurisdiction has focused all their curriculum support on literacy. Literacy is important – but a foundational tool of literacy is language knowledge. So whilst systems roll out literacy initiatives and literacy coaches, these work very well for the children who already have good school language knowledge. Thus we have a situation where our initiatives serve these children well, and whose achievement levels increase. This simply increases the achievement gap as the low achieving students continue to lag behind because they don’t have the school language skills to access the literacy teaching – and the teachers don’t have the content knowledge to teach school language explicitly. We need to build teachers content knowledge of how the English language works so that they can:

1. Truly understand the language errors their children make, and

2. Make effective pedagogical interventions as a result of these understandings

(d) the adequacy of tools available for teachers to create and maintain an optimal learning environment;

As implied above, teachers have inadequate knowledge of how English works. They arrive at university with no explicit knowledge, but I also work with dozens of schools every year providing professional learning around language knowledge. Without exception, all teachers currently working in schools have large knowledge gaps. The occasional older teacher (older than 55) can identify clauses or phrases, but even they have no notion of how to make this useful information to their learners. I have identified three levels of understanding for effective language learning:

- Naming – the ability to identify the part of speech
- Function – understanding what it is doing in the sentence or the text
- Intention – understanding why you would choose that particular word or phrase in that particular position

On the whole teachers have very little understanding across any of these levels and thus are unable to teach children how language works and how to make it work for them.

The solution.

There needs to be changes to teacher preparation, and teacher inservicing. However this must be done in thoughtful ways. Explicit language teaching and learning must take place in meaningful and purposeful ways. There is little point in decontextualised stencils where children underline verbs or circle adjectives. Whilst some may fondly recall parsing sentences and identifying parts of speech, we have learned much about the science of learning since that kind of grammar teaching was de rigueur. So whilst I propose it is crucial we return to long forgotten content in schools – i.e how English works, I am not advocating a return to old pedagogies. We need to explore new and exciting ways of making children enthusiastic and curious about how English works, and how to make it work for you. This involves looking at how language works within the kinds of books and texts that provide excellent models of language use, but which are also intrinsically engaging to children – real books with real storylines; not readers or blackline masters and stencils.

(e) factors influencing the selection, training, professional development, career progression and retention of teachers in the Australian education system;

There is much to say on this topic, and my PhD research has focused particularly on this area. In this submission I provide the recommendations from my own study of the experiences of Australian teachers in their first 16 months of employment as I feel they address much of what this focus area is concerned with.

Recommendations

1. The preparation and support of teachers must take account of the motivations and ideologies of the teacher – I have called this 'pneuma'.
2. Schools and systems should consider the impact their responses to external performativity agendas has upon the work teachers do, and their motivation and opportunities to bring abut transformative changes in education.
3. Preservice teacher educators should be cognizant of what beginning teachers need to know in their first years of teaching. Beginning teachers have knowledge gaps that could and should be addressed in both their preservice education and their induction.
4. Teacher education is both continuous and collaborative, and must provide coherence for teachers over time and as they move between contexts. This will require changes to the content, delivery and structure of preservice education and induction.

Each recommendation is explained in further detail below.

The Importance of 'pneuma'

Recommendation One: The preparation and support of teachers must take account of the motivations and ideologies of the teacher – their 'pneuma'.

Many models of teacher education, and accounts of the beginning teacher experience, are focused on what teachers should know and do, but fail to embrace teachers' motivations and visions of themselves as teachers. We cannot ignore these, as they are what brought these teachers into the profession, and disappointment in these areas will push them out of the profession. Beginning teachers leave teaching because they cannot be the teacher they want to become.

I have proposed the teacher's 'pneuma' is primary to why they teach, and this in turn impacts upon the way they teach. Teacher 'pneuma' is the core spirit of the teacher, it encompasses their visions and motivations. When we do not take account of teacher 'pnuema' we misinterpret why teachers leave the profession, and thus proffer misguided solutions to issues of teacher attrition, retention and support. The teachers in this study entered teaching to do good and be good. They did not choose teaching for the financial reward. Well aware of the pay scales, they chose to go into teaching anyway. This is a direct contradiction of popular media and political perceptions that teachers require financial reward to enter or remain in the profession teachers (Jensen, 2010) which is the rationale behind government initiatives in the UK, US and Australia to introduce 'pay for performance' schemes (Caldwell, 2010). It is essential that governments are disabused of these popular myths of teacher motivation, demotivation and subsequent attrition, so they can focus their efforts on induction and retention programmes that target the real reasons why teachers leave the profession. The real reason teachers leave the profession is because they cannot be the teacher they want to be – their 'pnuema' is unfulfilled.

The study found a number of reasons why a teacher's 'pneuma' may be unfulfilled. Importantly, pneuma can be challenged by pragmatics. In this study the pragmatic challenges were gaps in their knowledge, lack of supports and reduced autonomy. Crucially these pragmatic challenges should be viewed with direct reference to the individual pneuma of the teacher. In other words, professional learning, support and responsibility should be given in ways that align with their teaching spirit – pneuma and pragma must align. As such, generic approaches to teacher education and induction are insufficient, they must be nuanced to reflect the 'pneuma' of the individual. I have conceptualized this finding with the following framework, where the bridge between pneuma and pragma is conceptualized as aligned supports and knowledge.

The framework describes the importance of an alignment between pragma and pneuma and presents congruence between what teachers know and do and their visions of themselves as teachers as key to effective teaching. It helps us locate the underlying source of the challenges faced by first year teachers, helping to target supports appropriately.

Autonomy in Teaching

Recommendation Two: Schools and systems should consider the impact of their responses to external performativity agendas has upon the work teachers do, and their consequent motivation and opportunity to bring abut transformative changes in education.

The participants in this study started with a strong and passionate 'pneuma', with clear and sound visions of themselves as literacy teachers. They were excited to put their own learning and vision into practice. Their expectation was that the first year of teaching would bring the chance to finally have their 'own class' and do their 'own teaching'. This was not what they actually experienced. The teachers in this study were rarely allowed to do the teaching they wanted to do. Curriculum constraints, most often linked to external performativity agendas, reduced their opportunities to try their own teaching ideas. New national agendas have been introduced to standardize teaching (e.g. Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2012a), Teacher Standards (AITSL, 2012), National Testing (ACARA, 2012b)). Their aim is to improve accountability and student learning outcomes. However, these same agendas have the consequence of reducing teacher autonomy and increasing competition between schools. Competition between schools and pressure within schools to prove or improve performance results in schools scrambling to meet those performance indicators in ways that demonstrate panic rather than intellectual investigation. The teachers in this study were very often in a whirlpool of ever changing literacy initiatives and practices, as schools flitted from one literacy approach to another in an effort to find the one that would bring quick and immediate results. Consequently, the beginning teachers not only did not have the chance to implement their own strategies, but were very often not given alternative consistent models of effective literacy teaching. They were at the whim of changes in schools which themselves seemed to be unsure of their direction. This uncertainty was layered upon all the other pragmatic challenges that present themselves to beginning teachers simply as a result of being new on the job. It is difficult to be effective in a school that is struggling with its own identity in regards to literacy teaching.

It may be that initiatives such as national curriculum and national teacher standards which are potentially supportive of beginning teachers may instead push motivated and competent teachers out of the profession if schools and systems do not

carefully consider the ways in which they manage their own responses to these agendas. As Goodson (2007, p. 145) suggests such reforms may result in 'de-motivating the vanguard and the backbone of teaching'. Ball (2003, p. 222) warns, in his own review of the impact of performativity reforms on all teachers, 'Their commitments to and purposes for teaching, their reasons for becoming and being a teacher have no place'. This was observable in the teachers in this study, 50% of whom were actively seeking other professional contexts where their desires to make a difference in the lives of children may have more traction. Their motivations for becoming teachers were overwhelmingly humanistic and based on an understanding of teaching as an interpersonal endeavour, and connectedness to students was primary. Whilst performance-based agendas and reforms are not intrinsically dichotomous to these humanistic motivations, these new teachers found it very difficult to reconcile the two.

What Teachers Should Know

Recommendation Three: Preservice teacher educators should be cognizant of what beginning teachers need to know in their first years of teaching. Beginning teachers have knowledge gaps that could and should be addressed in their preservice education.

Teachers need to know a lot, in many areas and in multiple ways. This thesis has described three ways of knowing – 'knowing how', 'knowing why' and 'knowing what'. These can then be applied across six domains of teacher knowledge as it pertains to literacy: knowledge about content, knowledge about theory, knowledge about teaching, knowledge about their learners, knowledge about school context and knowledge about the sociocultural politics of teaching literacy. Using this typology, gaps were identified in the teaching knowledge of the beginning teachers in this study.

Whilst across most domains they had strong 'know why' knowledge, there were significant gaps in their 'know what' and 'know how' knowledge across all six domains. The gaps in their teacher knowledge played a significant role in the frustrations the participants in this study felt about their ability to enact their visions of themselves as teachers. Many of these gaps could be filled through a review of the substance of their teacher preparation to build their 'know what' knowledge,

particularly in the area of literacy content knowledge and knowledge about diverse learners. Changes to their teacher preparation and induction would also help to fill gaps in their 'know how' knowledge across all six domains.

Overall, these beginning teachers struggled to teach language explicitly because they had patchy English language knowledge. This knowledge gap is noted in other studies (Hadjioannou & Hutchinson, 2010; Helfrich & Bean, 2011; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011). Their university preparation needed to improve this aspect of their knowledge. As one of the teacher educators responsible for developing literacy content knowledge in preservice teachers, it was sobering to see them struggle with linguistic knowledge and to consider why this would be so. In particular, they had considerable knowledge gaps around the linguistics of words. This resulted in poor spelling programmes across all the classrooms in the study. As a prime motivation for this study had been to examine my own work as a literacy teacher educator, I have already changed the ways in which I deliver language content knowledge in their course as I apply the following framework to the language content in my Language Education unit. I focus on 'know why' knowledge (why do I have to know about grammar), 'know what' knowledge (content knowledge about grammar) and 'know how' knowledge (how do to convert the knowledge into meaningful teaching practice). Preservice teachers now receive explicit language instruction at sentence and word level (grammar and morphology), and are required to develop teaching programmes that, in turn, develop this knowledge in their learners. The impact of this change is already evident as schools respond positively to their observations of the content and teaching knowledge preservice teachers are bring with them to their practicum. As a result, I have been requested to deliver professional learning to build content knowledge in grammar and spelling in 25 schools in the ACT (see Appendix 11) as well as six workshops run by ACT Education and Training Directorate's Central Office specifically for the Literacy Field Officers, Deputy Principals and Principals.

Apart from content knowledge gaps, the teachers in this study had narrow knowledge of their learners. In particular they struggled to deal with the diversity of learners in their classrooms. They had been given a generalist education at university, albeit with a strong social inclusion undercurrent. Their university preparation in literacy had included specific focus on why it is important to meet the needs of all

learners, including an examination of the stark reality of the inequities in the ACT Education system as reported by the international PISA results (Thomson, et al., 2010). Every practicum experience these teachers had had was bound to have had low performing learners in it. Yet, despite all this, they were not able to meet the needs of the neediest in their classes in their first year of teaching. Clearly, more needed to be done in their university preparation, but also in their induction. Rather than seeing good models of teaching for these learners, the low achievers were usually pulled out of classrooms for specialist help, and this exacerbated the challenges beginning teachers have developing effective teacher knowledge about their learners and how to teach them effectively. A concerted effort is required by university and employers to remedy this particular knowledge gap, which has serious long-term social implications. One such solution is presented in the structural framework presented in Chapter Five and reiterated in Recommendation Four.

Effective Teacher Preparation and Induction

Recommendation Four: Teacher education is both continuous and collaborative, and must provide coherence for teachers over time, and as they move between contexts. This will require changes to the content, delivery and structure of teacher preparation and support.

Teacher preparation: Key to the pneuma/pragma framework is the notion of alignment. This conceptual alignment needs to be supported by structures to enable the alignment. In particular, teacher knowledge and support should be aligned across all the contexts in which teachers are prepared and inducted. Such is the complexity of teaching that one context alone cannot achieve effective teacher preparation. This alignment across contexts is represented in the following diagram

As well as alignment, the key feature of this model is the continuous and collaborative nature of effective teacher preparation, where all involved are working in cooperation with one another. With this structural framework, a model of cooperation is proposed, one that allows those invested in effective teacher preparation and

induction to consider who their partners are and begin to build alignment into their initiatives to support and develop beginning teachers.

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