

Submission on Improving the quality of teaching

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this very important topic.

My background is one of Civil Engineering initially through a Victorian Govt. Studentship, then after teacher training at Hawthorn, teaching Maths and Science for 3 years, then working as a teacher at the Ministry of Education Outdoor Centre at Rubicon for 10 years and now lecturing in Outdoor Education & Nature Tourism at Latrobe University, Bendigo for some 15 years.

I have also witnessed teaching from the perspective of my teenage daughter who has tried several secondary schools in an attempt to find one that challenges her.

I thoroughly enjoy teaching and working with students of all ages. Teaching is my life.

My comments are private and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer.

- whether teacher trainees are being effectively prepared to deal with all the challenges they will face in the classroom;

Current problems are due to past solutions. We are now experiencing the results of yesterday's solutions.

I have no doubt that you will receive many submissions that will allude to & provide evidence of the way in which schools are struggling to address the needs of students, and hence teaching staff and hence society.

I wish to highlight some areas of philosophical concern, though I struggle to deal adequately with an issue that is part symptom, without addressing the part cause. What I am suggesting is that the whole schooling system needs re-evaluating first - the whole issue of WHAT is important to teach and WHY and HOW are critical issues for teachers. However, as the question 'Are schools successful?' is not part of your inquiry, I will, with great difficulty, try to restrict myself to the issue of 'teacher training'.

But firstly, I need to clarify what I see as the problems that teachers face - the result of yesterday's solutions. I see many students who are unchallenged by school and by life, who have much to offer but display so little, who lack motivation, who lack a vision, who see little place for them in 'the outside' world.

I see students being prepared for society through alienation from it - by being taught about life through isolation from it, by being prepared for a place in community being taught by a very select few community members within four walls that keep out the community that they are desperate to be a part of. I see teachers being forced to work within a system that suppresses the natural energetic behaviour of youngsters to explore, experiment, discover and seek adventure in the belief that these have no place in 'proper learning about life'.

I see teachers being forced to teach the subject rather than the student.

I see students learning knowledge of subjects, but little about self knowledge.

I see students being prepared for independence by being taught dependency.

I see students being groomed for success in business, while being trained for failure in Life.

I see students being taught competition over cooperation and of the need for a dual set of values, beliefs and attitudes for business and life.

I have also witnessed teachers with a love of what they do, who teach with a passion, who are excellent role models, who give students renewed belief in themselves and a sense of meaning to their lives. I have indeed seen successful teachers who love what they do, and their students gain enormously from this experience.

Teacher training must address the following:

1. Selection of appropriate teachers is critical

Are there other ways of measuring a successful applicant than the current way?

What are the qualities of a successful teacher?

How do you measure passion for learning /teaching?

Who should choose our teachers?

To what extent is political correctness inhibiting appropriate teacher applicants?

By choosing poor trainee-teachers, are we allowing them to believe they are good teachers?

2. Teachers must have a vision - a sense of contributing to a greater good.

Do we expect all teachers to become mentors?

Besides preparing students for their role in the workplace, how best do we prepare students for relationships and community ?

3. Teachers must feel supported.

If teaching is to be relevant, how much do we support initiative and resourcefulness?

How best do we allow for professional development?

Students don't see much relevance in the curriculum that we have determined as being relevant for them. Their life is full of other things besides knowledge for subject matter. We are teaching our students the way we were taught; we are teaching them to value what is no longer relevant, in their eyes. We are teaching from where we are at, not from where the learner is at. If we are to actively engage our students, we must reverse this. Learning should be an adventure, it should be exciting. We must rediscover this - for both the teacher and the student. What we classify as 'important subjects' needs heavy revision. How we teach and where we teach also needs a shift in thinking. (I am forever amazed at how we believe we can successfully identify and reduce the key aspects of nature (maths, biology, geology, sociology, science, physics,) to cognitive thinking and teach it all away from nature - within 'the four walls'.)

- the adequacy of funding provided by universities to their education faculties;

You get what you pay for. If education is valued, then let it be demonstrated through the people who are employed to teach the teachers, through the quality of the teaching/learning environment, through the energy directed at promoting learning in students. You need to also ask the question, 'Are universities the best place to learn?' People tend to teach the way they were taught. Universities must role model good practice.

- how teaching can become a more appealing career option;

Students will return to school in a teaching capacity if they see their school experience as relevant and of value. You would like to think that people choose teaching as they do any other people profession - that they can gain a sense of meaning to their own life by contributing to the value of others. If school is seen as a side track to life, of a diversion that hides or shelters one from reality, then people will not choose to return to it. Overhaul the school system.

In addition to this, give teachers a vision. Give them something to be passionate about. Promote reasoned action, and reward them appropriately.

Let the community demonstrate that they truly value the quality of the people they employ to guide their children.

Teachers need to become more than teachers of subjects - they need to also teach about life. Currently we teach 'subjects' and then leave students to make the connections themselves as to their relevance in life. Teachers need to be MENTORS. They need to provide living evidence as to how you can live your life - how you blend subject knowledge, values, relationships, understanding and conflict with self and others, into life. Students need to have mentors who can demonstrate a Life that successfully (?) incorporates integrity, sincerity, truthfulness, honesty and compassion.

Teachers need to be guides to provide meaning. They need to raise children's selfconfidence and self esteem, to promote decision making, to promote compassion & connectedness to and for self, others and the environment. They need to be facilitators also - to bring in valued community members to school is one way, but a better way is to take the children INTO LIFE OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM to meet and learn from valued others. They need to involve the community in the teaching/raising of the community.

If students can witness this from their teachers while at school, then you will have many more teacher applicants. Teachers need to be the sort of teachers they want all students to experience.

- how the needs of mature-age entrants to the profession can better be met; and

Mature age applicants CAN have much to offer. Create the space for them to feel valued - allow & promote initiative.

- the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher-training courses (including the teaching methods used, course structure and materials, and methods for assessment and evaluation) and an assessment of the extent to which it is informed by research.

I have provided insights into these already. In the matter of research though, choose to learn from relevant research. I think it was Einstein who said 'The level of thinking that created the problem requires a different level of thinking to solve it.' Many researchers are not capable of seeing or seeking this new level.

Teacher training requires a substantial paradigm shift. Much research needs to be done on clarifying why we are not producing the sort of students/society we seek. We know schools should play a large part in this, but the methods we use to prepare our youngsters for valued contribution to society are based in the Industrial Revolution, when schooling as such began.

Peter Dingle
89 Ford Road
Harcourt North, 3453