

Social Justice Research Collective

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SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO TEACHER EDUCATION

This submission was developed by the Social Justice Research Collective (SJRC), a group of academics and post-graduate students in the School of Education at Flinders University.

General comment

The SJRC notes that while the Standing Committee is undertaking an Inquiry into Teacher Education it has chosen to refer to the courses within Australia's public and private universities as 'training courses'. There are powerful social, cultural, political, moral and practical differences between the notions of 'education' and 'training'. While 'education' is generally understood to be a broad term used to denote both first and second order activities such as learning aspects of teaching which are helpful for actual classroom practice as well as the development of an understanding of the nature and significance of education, 'training' signals a narrower, more technical approach to learning which is primarily concerned with first order activities related almost entirely to practice. We acknowledge that theoretical, philosophical, moral, cultural and political underpinnings may be included in 'training' for 'practice'. However, reference to them is not necessarily deemed to be important within an economy of 'training'. As such, we find the Standing Committee's decision to abandon the broader notion of 'education' (signaled in the title) for 'training' later in the terms of reference to be highly problematic. It appears to presage an emphasis in teacher education that views it as a technical endeavour. We are concerned that this is not an adequate view of teacher education given the rate of social and technological change that beginning teachers will face in the first few years of their careers and urge the Standing Committee to work from a broader understanding of education in their inquiry.

Who are student teachers?

At Flinders University student teachers include school leavers, students with some experience as workers and mature age students entering their second or third career. Regardless of age, almost all of our students work to support themselves, some up to 40 hours a week because of the low paid nature of casual work. Many of the mature age students have families which they need to continue to support financially. A number of our student teachers come from rural locations which poses an extra financial burden on them and their families.

Student teachers at Flinders University are, on the whole, of Anglo-European descent. That is, they are white, mono-lingual, middle-class and from reasonably stable family backgrounds. This results in a fairly mono-cultural and certainly mono-lingual cohort of future teachers who sometimes find it difficult to imagine lifestyles, values and educational circumstances different from their own.

Purposes

A major purpose of teacher education is to enable future teachers to develop capabilities that can be used in responding effectively to the range of problems, challenges and opportunities that will arise in their professional, community, academic and work lives. Teacher education should facilitate the development of these capabilities by building on the strengths and

aptitudes developed in earlier years of education. Because we cannot anticipate the nature of all the problems, challenges and opportunities that will arise for future teachers, teacher education should foster the development of capabilities across the different spheres of future teachers' lives. It should not be narrowly focussed on development of only technical or pedagogic capabilities and psychological understandings of student behaviour but should be broad enough to give consideration to some of the philosophical, theoretical, historical, cultural and sociological underpinnings and explanations of education which are a rich part of the heritage of education in Australia as well as other different cultures and contexts. These underpinnings are the ones which will allow future teachers to be responsive to changing local and global contexts. Teacher education should therefore reflect breadth in knowledge, understanding and practical skills. However, this requirement for breadth should not be interpreted as an obligation for future teachers to complete an array of subjects that deal in discrete ways with each of these areas but should guide the development of programs of learning that integrate, in creative and critical ways, opportunities to develop a range of capabilities for complex and challenging futures.

If future teachers are to respond effectively to professional problems they will need to develop powerful knowledge, well-practiced skills, a creative approach to possible futures, a strong sense of hope in democratic, socially just and sustainable futures, and a strong sense of themselves as agents in this endeavour. Knowledge structures that are rich, well-organised and generated through reference to diverse theoretical heritages and experiences in a range of contexts are likely to have the power to support effective problem solving. Such knowledge structures need to be developed alongside sets of beliefs and dispositions in the future teachers that lead them to see themselves as capable professionals who have the possibility of succeeding in response to their professional challenges, opportunities and problems. If future teachers do not emerge from a teacher education program with such knowledges, capabilities and dispositions they are unlikely to be willing, or able, to contribute to their own or their students' further learning and the development of a democratic, socially just and sustainable society. However, this sense of self as an effective, capable professional should not be developed separately from a sense of oneself as a member of a number of educational communities with obligations to those communities.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Criteria for selecting students

Currently students are competitively selected for the teacher education courses at Flinders University through a variety of methods: Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) calculated on Year 12 qualifications (SACE, interstate equivalents, Adult SACE or International Baccalaureate), tertiary transfer, TAFE qualifications, mature age entry STAT test and through special access schemes including Flinders Foundation Course, Indigenous Australian, and Rural and Isolated access schemes. These selection procedures are university wide and not teacher education specific. Specific subjects are not required for entry to the education degrees.

The SJRC supports the practice of not requiring students to undertake specific subjects at Year 12. The SJRC includes people who teach across a number of different curriculum areas including English, Mathematics and Science. Members have expressed the view that should requisite subjects be listed we may miss out on some excellent teachers with outstanding skills in an area that is not a requirement for entry into the course. It was recognised that students who enter teacher education courses are often not confident mathematically but that this lack of

confidence is addressed in the context of topics that are meaningful for students. It was felt that listing requisite topics might also lead to a further narrowing of the already highly selective and mono-cultural makeup of the student population.

2. *Attraction of ‘high quality’ students, including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences’*

The SJRC questions the use of the term “high quality”, particularly in given the additional linguistic string “including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences”. The TOR suggests a racially, culturally, socially, class and gender normative student teacher population into which difference is added, rather than understanding that difference is an essential part of a democratic education in a culturally diverse society and that student teachers should reflect this diversity. While we concur with the need for ‘high quality’ educators we would also argue that since our society does have a plurality of cultures, if teachers come from only one culture (whether they be racially, ethnically or class based culture), or if they only take up the dominant culture, they inevitably do damage to students from other cultures.

The SJRC supports attracting students from diverse backgrounds and experiences. However, the SJRC further suggests that more could be done to encourage students, who demonstrate polyvalent interest in crossing cultural borders and participating in the lives of other cultural groups, to recognise the richness they bring to their chosen profession of teaching, especially in the light of employment opportunities inherent in South Australia’s Languages Plan (DECS 2000-2010).

The SJRC believes that more could be done to work in tandem with the Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS). DECS has implemented a Languages Plan, whereby it is proposed that all children from Reception to Year 10, in South Australian schools, will be learning a second language by the year 2010. The plan aims to develop quality programs “...to strengthen the place of languages other than English as a valued part of the curriculum...” (DETE (now DECS), 1999: 3). The initial target date for the satisfactory implementation of the plan was the year 2007, but this date has been reset for achievement by the year 2010. This is to allow more time to provide increased assistance to schools in the form of funding and resources. However, one of the problems DECS faces lies in the lack of sufficient numbers of suitably qualified bilingual teachers, needed to successfully implement the Languages Plan.

The SJRC also believes that more attention should be given to attracting students who speak more than one language. If future teachers are to come to understand themselves and their students as Australian citizens in a global world it becomes an imperative that they develop an intimate knowledge and appreciation of cultures and languages other than their own.

The SJRC recognises the importance of attracting students from rural and remote areas, including indigenous students. However, the financial burden caused by relocation for the purposes of studying at a university means that almost all future teachers from rural and remote regions are forced to work to support themselves or to supplement incomes from parents, grants or Austudy. This necessity to work plays havoc with the practicum, most particularly in student uptake of practicum placements. A country placement entails travel and accommodation costs which most students cannot afford. Absence of rural and remote teaching experience as undergraduates means many students from rural and remote areas do not return

to these areas and many students from the metropolis do not consider the option of employment in rural and remote locations.

3. Attrition rates

Causes of attrition are complex and multiple. However, causes include:

- Students who lack the cultural capital required to navigate a university education and/or those without support networks. These include country students, working class students, and indigenous students (see a more detailed note below re non-urban indigenous students).
- Students who cannot afford to stay at university.
- Students who are forced to enrol at university by their parents: they often resist parents by failing and parents eventually get the message.
- Students who see 'teaching' as a 'soft option' and find out it isn't.
- Students for whom 'teaching' was never their first choice.

We have a small number of non-urban indigenous students who commence the teacher education course each year. These students often carry the hopes of a community with them when they come to Adelaide to participate in university courses. There is usually an expectation that these students will return to community to enhance the life of the community. As a result, successful completion of the course carries with it a burden which is not generally shared by non-indigenous students. For these students impediments to successful, on time completion of the course include being away from country and community, as well as the white Anglo-European, middle-class and urban-centred construction of the curriculum.¹ As practitioners we understand the onus on us to engage in critical dialogue with the curriculum and with our own practices so these become inclusive of all future teachers. However, non-urban indigenous students need special consideration in terms of funding and support that go beyond what we are able to do as teacher educators. Non-urban indigenous students also need funding assistance to enable them to return to country and community when it is deemed necessary for them to do so. If white Australia is ever going to take seriously our obligation to indigenous people we must learn to see the importance of community and country to future indigenous teachers and be prepared to support them in multiple ways.

Structurally, many initial teacher education courses are offered solely as on-campus courses thus making it difficult for some groups of students to complete courses in a timely fashion. There is not the necessary funding available to schools/faculties of Education to make more innovative courses to meet the needs of these students, eg. intensives followed by work in the local community. This also precludes many mature aged women living in rural communities from participating in teacher education courses. There is a highly successful course offered in NZ that allows rural women to train as educators with the requirement they periodically leave their community for short intensives with the rest of their studies completed in their home community. Funding needs to be made available to support these kinds of initiatives because teacher educators' work lives are currently full meeting the demands of face-to-face teaching of the ever increasing number of students who are entering the courses.

¹ This can also be the case for many international students.

Criteria for selecting and rewarding education faculty members

While the following view is not shared equally by all members of the SJRC, there are a number of members who would argue that education is a masculinised field in which patriarchal values dominate over large groups of women who take up the position of workers within that field. This is the case within both the tertiary and schooling sectors.

The historical components of pre-service teacher education from the early 20th century include General/Liberal Studies and Professional Studies. General/Liberal Studies tended to be undertaken in universities in the Australian context and were credentialled as B.A. or B.Ed. and undertaken in “Schools of Education” in the United States and Canada.

General/Liberal Studies were seen as an essential component of a secondary teacher’s pre-service education. However, they were considered an interesting, but not necessary, part of a primary teacher’s pre-service education. The vast majority of primary teachers were, and remain, women. However large numbers of men have always taught in secondary schools. Access to ‘higher learning’ and ‘deep knowledge’, and who does or does not require it in their preparation for teaching, is gendered.

Professional Studies were divided between studies in the ‘Science of Teaching’ and studies in the ‘Art of Teaching’. The ‘Science of Teaching’ tended to focus on the rules, principles and theoretical basis for practice, policy and administration. There was an emphasis within the ‘Science of Teaching’ on the application of the disciplines, including Psychology, Philosophy, History, Sociology, to education. The ‘Science of Teaching’ also emphasized the importance of quantitative research to identify and understand education problems. This area was, and still is, seen as the intellectual arm of teacher education. It is afforded high status in faculties of education, is generally seen as men’s work and leads to a career path in administration, research and post-graduate study and supervision.

Faculty members are generally selected for a position within the ‘Science of Teaching’ on the basis of their qualifications (that is, they generally have a doctorate or are close to completion and their qualifications are directly related to the discipline that will inform their teaching), their research experience and their research potential. Some of them have no school teaching experience. Most of them are men. They are rewarded with postgraduate work, have autonomy undergraduate teaching and postgraduate teaching is part of their job description. That is, it is their ‘right’ and ‘duty’ to teach theory and research methodology. These practices have shifted little over the last century.

The ‘Art of Teaching’ (which might also be identified as the ‘craft’ of teaching) focuses on the application of knowledge, skills, experience and creativity to any teaching situation. It emphasizes experiential knowledge including the development of the “intuitive skills” of the “born teacher”. It is largely concerned with the ‘mechanics’ of teaching including pedagogical methods and techniques and the application (in classroom practice) of the rules, principles, policies and theories learned in the ‘Science of Teaching’. It emphasizes practical experience as the foundation of knowledge and qualitative research in classrooms. This area was, and still is, seen as the ‘practical’ arm of teacher education. It is afforded low status in faculties of education, is generally seen as women’s work and leads to a career in classroom practice. This is the area most emphasized in primary education in many Schools of Education. The Terms of Reference in the Inquiry also emphasize this area at the expense of other areas of education.

Faculty members are generally selected for a position within the ‘Art of Teaching’ on the basis of their teaching experience. In topics which form part of the area of the ‘Art of Teaching’ a doctorate might be seen as desirable but is not necessary. Most of faculty members who teach in the ‘Art of Teaching’ are women. They are rewarded with large classes, little autonomy over what they teach in undergraduate topics, but the requirement they be constantly updating their ‘skills’ to match what is occurring in classrooms – including having knowledge of the latest ‘tip or trick’ that is being advocated by a ‘consultant’ in a specialized area who has only that area to focus upon. Access to postgraduate teaching is by invitation only. That is, it is not part of their job description. These practices have shifted little over the last century.

All members of the SJRC recognize the work that the current Dean of the School of Education has done to redress some of the issues raised above in our own School. However, the problem is structural and endemic across educational institutions and until real efforts are made to ameliorate the structural and symbolic inequities which exist between these different and equally necessary aspects of teacher education, and to begin to recognize the gendered ways through which these inequities are produced and manifested, these inequities will continue. Until the status of what has traditionally been seen as ‘women’s work’ in education improves, and involvement in postgraduate and research work is seen as the ‘right’ and ‘responsibility’ of all members of Education Faculties, high achieving, hard working, female academic staff will remain disadvantaged.

As noted above, the terms of reference of the Standing Committee, and most particularly TOR #7, tend to emphasize a technical understanding of ‘teaching’ and teacher education. In so doing, the terms of reference focus almost entirely on what has historically been called the ‘Art of Teaching’. We urge the Standing Committee to consider the future of teacher education in terms of a 21st century knowledge economy where the need to ask pertinent questions about the nature of reality, knowledge, ethics, society and culture must stand alongside practical ‘strategies’ for classroom ‘management’.

5. Educational philosophy underpinning teacher ‘training’ and the extent to which it is informed by research

A comparison between educational philosophies that underpin teacher ‘training’ in this, and other, Australian universities and universities in Asia, Europe and the Middle East by examining what is displayed on the ‘web’ highlights the ways in which the educational philosophies of Flinders and other Australian universities are strikingly individualistic. That is, they emphasize the individual rather than the community. Empowerment is often written about in terms of empowerment of individual students rather than an entire society.

The directions evident in the educational philosophies of Australian universities emphasize an industrial model of education which has changed little since the 19th century.

From the perspective of the SJRC the ideal educated person is one who has the skills, knowledge and dispositions to negotiate his/her contribution to a democratic, socially just and ecologically sustainable society and position within it, whilst participating in the formation and realisation of the common goals of that society. The terms of reference reflect a concern with skills, but not dispositions, negotiation, formation or common goals. There is also a lamentable absence of any view of the kind of citizens or society our future teachers will be working to form.

6. *Interaction and relationships between teacher ‘training’ courses and other university faculty disciplines*

This differs according to individuals within and between faculties. Historically education has been a low status discipline within universities. While the status of education has not improved dramatically since the Dawkins era, dialogue between academics in teacher education and academics in other university faculty disciplines has improved largely because education courses currently attract large numbers of students while other faculties have been experiencing a decline in numbers. This has encouraged other faculty disciplines to enter into dialogue with education in the hope of increasing student numbers in their area.

There has been an increased recognition in many university faculties of the importance of their contribution to the formation of teachers who are, in the first instance, educating their future students. At Flinders University this has come from a number of disciplines including English, Speech Pathology, Modern Languages, Australian Studies, Indigenous Studies and the Faculty of Science and Engineering. In particular the Schools of Chemistry, Physics and Earth Sciences and English have modified existing topics and developed new topics to meet the needs of student teachers.

7. *Examine the preparation of primary and secondary graduates to:*

- (i) *teach literacy and numeracy,***
- (ii) *teach vocational education courses, etc***

The SJRC concurs with the need for future teachers to be able to successfully educate literate and numerate citizens in a safe learning environment so they have the knowledges, skills and dispositions necessary to be able to contribute to a civil society. However, we are concerned about the way in which this TOR appears to simultaneously privilege certain aspects of teaching while isolating them from the complex contexts in which they occur. This has led to the unfortunate use of the term “deal with” when requesting information regarding the relationship of teacher education to social difference. The SJRC understands social difference to be part and parcel of life in Australia. As teacher educators we seek to make social difference normative; as such, we teach *for* difference rather than teach students to *deal with* difference. We attempt to educate future teachers for inclusion so they are able to competently support children with the special needs, including those with disabilities and well-being issues.

Prior to specifically addressing the terms of reference we have pointed out that teachers at the beginning of their careers will face significant social and technological change. An approach to teacher education that emphasises technical application of skills is insufficient preparation for a professional life where our current students will need to be able to respond to such change. Future teachers will, we have argued, be better equipped to deal with change when their preparation includes a rich vein of ‘heritage study’ that is the basis for reflective and reflexive practice.

Employers have high expectations of beginning teachers and the competencies required of them are numerous (Australian Council of Deans, 1998; Board of Teacher Registration, 2001). Subject knowledge, educational knowledge, curriculum and pedagogical knowledge, together with practical knowledge, need to be kept in balance across pre-service programs. However, any approach to initial teacher education which compartmentalises and segments learning into boxes like ‘literacy’, ‘numeracy’,

'vocational education', 'behaviour management', 'teaching students with special needs' and so on will result in a severely overcrowded curriculum which, in fact, becomes impossible to deliver within the constraints of even a four year university degree.

Any mandate to include specified elements in a pre-service degree needs to leave decisions about how that might be done with specific institutions, which are in the best position to make decisions about how best to address the requirements of their particular cohorts of students.

Whilst beginning teachers do need some competence in the areas mentioned in this term of reference, knowledge and skills in the areas listed are too complex and too important to act as though they can all be fully developed during pre-service education. Like knowledge in other complex domains, including nursing, surgery or taxation law, there must be provision for teachers to undertake continuing, systematic study throughout their careers. Beginning teachers, in particular, need support to develop their knowledges, understandings, and skills within the particular contexts to which they are appointed. Bullying, for example, manifests itself in different ways in different schools and locations, and teachers need support to apply their general understandings about bullying to the particular, local context in which they are working. The same is true for literacy, numeracy, vocational education and so on.

8. *Examine the role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of trainee teachers*

At Flinders University we enjoy a positive relationship with our colleagues who work in schools. School personnel are invited to the university to present lectures, and many workshop classes are taught by teachers who currently work, or have recently worked, in the school sector. University staff regularly undertake consultancies in the school sector, and carry out research projects in collaboration with or at the request of schools. The main contact by far, however, is through the teaching practicum, with over 150 schools participating in our practicum placements each year.

Despite positive, collaborative relationships with schools, and efforts to position school personnel as partners in teacher preparation, there are some major issues of concern with respect to the practicum.

Firstly there is contention over the primary purpose of the practicum placement. Whilst some staff (both in the university and in schools) see the practicum as an opportunity for future teachers to develop an understanding of the myriad demands made of schools by different stakeholders and the complex nature of teachers' work, others see it as an opportunity to practice and refine pedagogical and behaviour management skills. Future teachers can be placed in a difficult position as they try to negotiate these different positions at the same time as they are enacting their own beliefs about the purpose of the practicum. Our anecdotal evidence is that the practicum can be the site of considerable tension and conflict as the various stakeholders enact their beliefs and understandings, occasionally resulting in quite contradictory advice to the student teacher that may also demean aspects of their course of study.

Secondly, there is much debate, often heated, about the amount of time that student teachers should spend in schools on practicum placements. The prevailing view is 'the more time the better', with many school based educators arguing for equal time for university study and

school placement, or for models like internships. Whilst we recognise the importance of the learning that occurs during the practicum, and see it as essential for beginning competence as a teacher, we would argue in the strongest possible terms that the practicum placement often means 'learning to copy, to imitate' what already exists. We believe that a significant role of teacher educators should be to disrupt those educative processes which reproduce social inequality and perpetuate social division. Our experience is that this very rarely happens at the school site, where the emphasis is almost always on technical competence. Any increase in the time spent on practicum by student teachers must be accompanied by critical interrogation of the role teachers and schools play in social reproduction if we are to achieve a more equitable and just society.

Another issue is the considerable difficulty in finding appropriate placements for the increasing numbers of student teachers in our teacher education program. There are several reasons for this. They include:

- the intensification of teachers' work and their reluctance to increase it by taking a student teacher, particularly one who may need more support than expected
- the difficulty student teachers have in taking up country placements because of their financial situation
- the difficulty of finding a match between the student teacher's subject teaching areas and those offered by the school
- difficulties student teachers have in dealing with travel and family considerations
- the perceived disruption to an already 'difficult' class
- the lack of rewards or incentives for teachers who are involved in beginning teacher education
- some students' need to undertake the practicum on a part-time basis

9. Investigate the appropriateness of the current split between primary and secondary education training

Flinders University is unique among teacher education institutions in Australia in having offered a Middle School (formerly Upper Primary/Lower Secondary) Program continuously for over 25 years. This began as a well researched attempt to bridge the gap between primary and secondary education, and continues to offer future teachers a special understanding about working with adolescents across the transition years. However, our Middle school graduates are often disadvantaged in terms of employment. Various State Governments within Australia have legislated study patterns for employees within the primary and secondary sectors, and the inconsistency of these across Australian states means that our Middle School graduates are often less employable than their colleagues who studied either a designated primary or secondary course; or they are not employable in one of the two sectors at all. They are also discriminated against in our own State, where recruitment strategies and employment requirements, in conjunction with staffing and placement policies, make it difficult for Middle School graduates to win positions on merit. This is regrettable, because their course prepares them to make a significant contribution across the transition years. So whilst there is much rhetoric in the schooling sector about transition, the particular needs of adolescents, and the consequent importance of Middle Schools, the rhetoric does not carry through into the logistics of recruitment and appointment. This becomes a social justice issue for our Middle School graduates.

References

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