

Mrs. Deborah Mobberley

Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training
Inquiry into Teacher Education.

May 11, 2005.

Dear Committee Members,

In February, 2005, it was widely publicised that the Minister for Education, Dr. Brendan Nelson, announced this Inquiry.

As a second year (part-time) trainee teacher at a University, I wrote to him congratulating him on this much-needed initiative.

This week I received a letter from his Senior Advisor, Alan Tudge, requesting that I make contact with the Committee with the aim of submitting a late contribution.

Even though submissions closed on April 15, 2005, I write the following in the hope that it will be read, and taken into consideration by the Committee.

GENERAL:

I am very disillusioned by my experience as a trainee teacher, to the point where I wonder if it is worth completing.

We trainees know instinctively that what we are being taught will not help us in the 'real world' of our schools. Teacher training would benefit by being removed altogether from the University system and given its own, separate status. There is no reason why this should be an academic course. It should be treated as a vocational course.

My practical experience has shown to me that I will be a good teacher. However, the theoretical courses that I am obliged to complete bear no relevance to the 'real world' issues and problems that teachers face, but are only relevant if one is considering a career in academia.

TERM OF REFERENCE 2:

The teacher trainees I study with are from a diverse range of backgrounds and ages. This will be a great asset for the nation in the next generation of teachers. However, I urge the Committee to consider that all trainee teachers should have a good level of English. Classroom management is difficult enough, so a prerequisite of a good command of English would ensure all trainee teachers have at least this to aid them in the classroom.

TERM OF REFERENCE 3:

Many of the students I began my course with are no longer studying. The reasons for this are going to vary from student to student, but I think it is fair to consider that the issues which I recount later in this submission are part of the problem.

TERM OF REFERENCE 5:

Teacher training at University is at an academic level. Theory courses are structured, taught and marked much in the same way as other humanities based courses. This philosophy behind this is seriously flawed and needs to be addressed as a matter of great urgency, as it just doesn't make for good teachers.

I feel that as a BA graduate, I have completed my academic life. I have proved myself competent in an academic setting, and now wish to gain vocational training as a teacher. I – and most of my fellow students – do not wish to become a PhD in Education. We just want to become effective teachers. By removing teacher training from the academic setting, the course would become more practical and relevant.

I graduated in 1991 and have been in the workforce until recently. My profession was as a journalist and a report writer. During that time, my focus was to make my writing style as clear as possible. During my time at University, I've been forced to 'unlearn' that kind of writing and re-invent my style to be as convoluted as possible in order to succeed. Jargon is everywhere. This style of writing is fair enough for academia, but what about when I am writing for students, parents, other teachers, and school Heads? I think I know which kind of writing style they are going to respond to, yet clear and concise writing styles are actively discouraged.

TERMS OF REFERENCE 7:

The list of eight very useful skills in your terms of reference really should be the absolute cornerstone of any teacher training course. Imparting literacy and numeracy skills, classroom management, dealing with difficult people and situations, technology and students with individual needs are the stuff of life for every teacher. The diversity of students and the problems they encounter are only going to heighten the challenges for future teachers.

These matters are not given enough attention at the University level teacher training course. The consequence is that some secondary student teachers get 'eaten alive' during practical work and that must be extremely disheartening to the young, new teacher. That's not to say practical work should be easy, but what we learn in our theory courses should back up what we learn in our classrooms. However, this is not being done.

Technology

We have been told that as teachers we will need to have a command of all sorts of software packages and web design technology. Databases, spreadsheets, graphics, presentations...it's all included in the curriculum.

The pupils will have a good grasp of all these skills, and as their teachers, we need to be at their level or beyond. Although my course told me this, the University does not teach it or even make courses available. The courses conducted in the library are for the staff members only. The answer? Either to forget this altogether (to the detriment of our schools), or go out into the commercial world and spend thousands of dollars of our own money to complete courses to gain these skills. I imagine that most new teachers will opt to forget about acquiring new technology skills, or obtain them in an ad hoc fashion. This approach cannot be beneficial to Australian school students. There are large gaps in trainee teacher's knowledge of technology, so structured courses in this need to be offered.

This is where my point is most salient. Revising Excel spreadsheets or the finer points of Microsoft Word is NOT an academic activity – yet vitally important for all trainee teachers to come to grips with. Only in a non-academic environment would new teachers have any hope of gaining or brushing up on these very vital skills.

Literacy

Literacy courses at the University I attend are actually linguistics courses. Courses on how children learn are really psychology courses. These overly theoretical academic programs are fine if you plan to become a PhD. But offer little in the way of support to a new teacher. These same topics could be taught in a more practical way, with relevance drawn from direct classroom experience.

Dealing with others

Dealing with students, parents and other adults who present a challenge to the teacher is going to be very, very difficult for many young teachers when they leave University and are placed within a school. Many are not parents themselves, so fail to understand the stresses and politics of the modern family. Many people in our community are not native English speakers, so dealing with communication problems in our schools will be encountered. There is nothing I have gathered in the University courses I have done which will equip me for these situations.

IN CONCLUSION:

Common sense dictates that the theoretical courses surrounding the practical ones would be complimentary, that they would support each other –this is most certainly not the case.

There needs to be linkage between the theory and the practice. There needs to be some kind of acknowledgement that teaching new teachers is often quite mundane – and not the work of academics or Professors.

To become an accountant, you do your commerce/business degree then your practical work comes after. To become a lawyer, you do your law degree then go to the College of Law for very practical training. So teacher training should be like that – where everyone acknowledges that as a Graduate, you have gained your subject information, and then practical information needs to be attached to that. You shouldn't have to do another degree all over again.

Yours sincerely,
Deborah Mobberley.