



# ADDAQ

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A Submission to the National Enquiry into the Teacher Training

Prepared by ADD Association Queensland (ADDAQ)

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ADDAQ is the peak advocacy body in Queensland for children, adolescents, and adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The major objective of the organization is to remove the barriers to learning and personal development so that children and adults with ADHD can become fully functioning effective members of adult society.

Considerable attention - especially by the media - has been paid to those who do not achieve this goal and become a burden on society. However, this presents a distorted view of a significant section of the Australian community. Many adults with ADHD hold down regular jobs, support their families adequately, and contribute to the community. A surprising number of them become very successful because of their entrepreneurial nature. Adults with ADHD can be found in all of the professions, and various trades. Having ADHD is not a pre-cursor of unemployment or menial labouring.

The common factor determining whether adults with ADHD will be successful lies in their school experiences. If children with ADHD can leave school with competency in academic knowledge and with a positive self-esteem, they can be successful adults. If, however, they leave school with poor academic skills and a very low self-esteem, they are very unlikely to become successful adults. Teacher expertise in teaching children with ADHD and in managing their behaviours is crucial in achieving positive outcomes.

ADDAQ has for a number of years been aware of deficiencies in teacher training. Feedback from our own members as well as from members of the general public indicates that a many teachers have a variety of inaccurate and unfavourable beliefs and attitudes and often lack knowledge of the teaching strategies and behavioural management strategies which are effective with children with ADHD. The rising number of "Disciplinary Absences" which is a euphemism for suspension or expulsion is a further indicator that teachers lack the necessary expertise to adequately manage these children. In 2003 and in 2004, ADDAQ hosted major conferences in Brisbane for teachers to which acknowledged experts in their field were invited to share their expertise. In August 2005, Professor Rosemary Tannock, one of the world leaders in the education of children with ADHD will present at a conference in Townsville so that we can help teachers in North Queensland to improve their skills. An organization such as ADDAQ can only have a limited effect on such a vast problem. This is the reason that we regard this Inquiry into Teacher Education as such an important initiative and we commend Dr Nelson for taking this important step.

ADHD is a neuro-biological disorder affecting a significant portion of the Australian community. The incidence rate is generally accepted to be about 5% although one Australian study (NSW Health Department) put the rate at 11%. In practical terms, this means that, on average, there is at least one child with ADHD in every classroom - 5% equals 1 in 20 children. While it is possible for some teachers to complete their teaching careers without ever having to teach a child with ADHD, this is extremely unlikely.

Currently there is no national body representing those with ADHD and their families, although a

national organization - tentatively known as ADHD Association Australia- is in the process of formation. In the

absence of a formal national body at this time, ADDAQ would be pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the hearings planned for this enquiry.

This submission has been prepared by a registered psychologist and teacher with close connections with both the public and private school systems over many years. In addition, feedback provided by our members supports the views expressed herein. Limited time and resources prevent us from presenting a well researched submission to this enquiry. However, in relation to the terms of the enquiry, we would like to make the following points.

*1. Examine and assess the criteria for selecting students for teacher training courses*

At this point in time, the selection of students for teacher training courses depends primarily on the academic scores obtained in various tertiary entry examinations. The criteria for entry depends very much on the number of applicants in relation to the number of vacancies. No effort is made to determine personal suitability for the profession of teaching.

*Recommendations:*

(a) Successful applicants for teacher preparation courses should have favourable attitudes to children and to the whole area of discipline with children. Those individuals who believe in a rigid authoritarian approach to discipline are unlikely to make effective teachers with skills in managing the behaviours of difficult children. A good question to ask applicants is "What is your definition of discipline."

(b) Successful applicants for teacher preparation courses should have favourable attitudes to children with disabilities. They should regard such children as having the right to enjoy life to the full and to achieve their potential.

(c) Successful applicants need to have achieved a sufficient degree of academic excellence to be able to be able to read and to learn from the research literature with regard to teaching.

*2. Examine the extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences*

Teaching as a profession will not attract high quality students until the public image of teachers has been improved. While teacher unions will argue that this depends on improving the level of teachers' salaries, it is thought by many including the management committee of ADDAQ that salary is not the major issue.

*Recommendations:*

(a) It is essential to upgrade teacher image in the community. Teachers have to be perceived by the community as having important expertise in the art of teaching. Because, to a casual observer, teaching looks just like talking, many people do not see teachers as possessing any professional expertise - anyone can teach, and no special skill is necessary.

In this regard, teachers need to help themselves. They need to dress like professionals and act like professionals. Teachers need to insist that the teaching of children who have difficulties in learning is something that only they are able to attempt because only teachers have the required skills. Sending

children with learning problems to be taught by teacher aides or parent volunteers is not sending this message. Rather, it is sending the message that anyone can teach, without years of specialized training.

(b) It is necessary to promote the belief that teachers fulfill a valuable role for all children - the gifted, those who have average skills, and those who have disabilities.

(c) Teachers need to appreciate the satisfaction they can experience in seeing children making progress in their learning

(d) Teacher salary is a secondary factor to teacher image in attracting applicants with high potential to the teaching profession.

(e) Education Departments at all levels should make use of scholarships - both undergraduate and post-graduate to attract quality students to the profession and to encourage students to develop higher levels of expertise. This is not to suggest that scholarships should be used to draw quality teachers away from the classroom - rather the reverse. We need to ensure that teachers in the classroom are of the highest quality available.

### *3. Examine attrition rates from teaching courses and reasons for attrition.*

(a) Some attrition would come about as students realized on closer acquaintance that they did not like teaching, or that they were not suited to the profession. These students should be encouraged to seek alternative career paths early in their courses, so that they are not wasting their time and increasing their HECS debt. If students feel that they have committed too much time and money to their courses, they are likely to think that they have no option other than to go into a profession which does not suit them. This is not helpful to the student or to the teaching profession.

(b) University staff may realize some students are unsuitable because of a number of factors such as personality, attitudes, and belief systems. These students should be encouraged to find alternative career paths.

(c) Some attrition may occur due to unsuitable practicing school placements. Currently the philosophy is that students should be exposed to a variety of teachers, a variety of teaching styles and a variety of disciplinary styles. We at ADDAQ would argue that there is a need for quality placements so that trainee teachers are only exposed to good models who will reinforce the best of teaching practices.

(d) Attrition from teaching courses is not necessarily a bad thing. It has happened too often in the past that quantity of teacher graduates has ruled over the quality of teacher graduates. This occurs more frequently when a lack of forward planning results in teacher shortages.

### *4. Examine and assess the criteria for selecting and rewarding education faculty members.*

It would appear that the current system for appointing and promoting faculty members is very much dependent on their own academic excellence. Completion of a Doctor of Philosophy and a record of successful research seems to be regarded as being of greater importance than the ability of faculty members to impart a high level of teaching expertise to their students and to develop appropriate beliefs and attitudes in those students.

It is very disappointing to members of ADDAQ to hear of faculty members telling students that ADHD doesn't exist, is only an excuse for bad parenting etc, when they should be teaching trainee teachers established scientific

facts.

*Recommendations:*

(a) Rewards to faculty members should be based on practical research with direct implications for classroom practice.

(b) Faculty members should have on-going teaching experience in schools or act as members of a consultative team for schools. Faculty members must retain a practical bias as well as any theoretical bias.

*5. Examine the educational philosophy underpinning teacher training courses and assess the extent to which it is informed by research.*

(a) The philosophy underpinning teacher training must be to produce teachers who do not merely implement the educational or behaviour management practices under which they, themselves, were educated. It is important that both education faculty members and supervising teachers in the classroom subscribe to this philosophy. The methods which were appropriate for a teacher forty years ago may not be working now and may be even more inappropriate for a teacher at the beginning of her career.

(b) Teaching students with special needs should be a mandatory subject for all trainee teachers with significant time being devoted to the education and behavioural management of a variety of children with special needs. ADHD is a learning disability (Tannock and Martinussen, 2001, Cherkes-Julkowski, et al, 1997, Nevin et al, 2002 and Teeter, 1998.) and it must be regarded as such. Beginning teachers must be given an adequate knowledge of the most common disabilities and the appropriate teaching strategies to inform their teaching. Many teachers rely on the media for their knowledge of special needs groups. Teachers with an adequate knowledge of teaching strategies suitable for diverse groups of children with special needs will be better able to teach all of the children in their classes since the secret of good teaching is to be able to identify a teaching strategy suitable to the child's specific needs.

*6. Examine the interaction and relationship between teacher training courses and other university faculty disciplines.*

*Recommendations:*

(a) Education faculties should not operate in a vacuum. Students should have some compulsory studies in the fields of psychology, speech pathology, occupational therapy, etc. in order to develop a more global view of the child and the interactive strategies which are available from a number of disciplines to alleviate problems being experienced by the child and/or by the teachers responsible for the child's progress at school.

(b) A knowledge of statistics and research design would allow teachers to be more critical of the research which they read. This should be a vital part of the training for any professional.

*7 Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to*

(i) *To teach literacy and numeracy.* The preparation of teaching graduates at both levels is extremely inadequate to the extent that many teachers teach literacy and numeracy using methods similar to those which they remember their own teachers using.

In teaching literacy, many teachers in the first three years of primary school teach the mechanics of decoding. The assumption is that if children can "read" the words, they will comprehend the passage. In the upper primary school, the expectation is that practising reading is all that is required. Many teachers do not listen to the child reading and they often fail to monitor the development of comprehension skills. In secondary school, the expectation is that the teaching of reading has been completed. An over-reliance

on testing has not led to improvements in teaching practice.

In the teaching of numeracy, many teachers are still failing to teach for understanding despite the fact that this has been emphasised in curricula since the mid 1960's. There is a strong emphasis on rote procedures and children are given plenty of practice. Unfortunately, when they are practising doing the

wrong thing, this is not productive and makes it more difficult to reteach the procedure so that the child is successful.

(ii) *Teaching vocational education courses.* The emphasis in schools is on teaching academic courses. Vocational courses are treated as inferior courses suited only to inferior students.

(iii) *Effectively managing classrooms.* Most teachers are still leaving universities with outdated behavioural management strategies or blind adherence to whatever philosophy is in vogue at the moment. As noted above it is important that teachers have the ability to critically review research.

It is a common experience for psychologists and for members of the management committee of ADDAQ to hear of children who are being excluded from the classroom because the teacher is unaware of the strategies which are appropriate to manage such cases. Rates of "Disciplinary Absences" are steadily increasing. Exclusion from the classroom is an ineffective strategy since the child is falling even further behind in class work and because the child's self-esteem is being further eroded. Exclusion from the classroom is also a public admission by the teacher that she/he cannot cope adequately with the child's behaviour. Suspending the child from school is ultimately a punishment for the parent, since in many cases, the parent has to take time off work to supervise her child. Some teachers would argue that this is appropriate justice since it is the parent's fault that the child is behaving poorly. ADDAQ strongly disagrees with this idea.

(iv) *Successfully use information technology:* it is essential that all teachers be able to do this, but it is often assumed that teachers will pick up these skills along the way. When teachers are busy with their other duties and obligations, they often do not have the time for this.

(v) *Bullying, disruptive students, and dysfunctional families.* The attitude of the teacher is most important. Blaming the parent or blaming the child which is a frequent response from teachers is not productive. Behavioural philosophies such as "Choice Theory" is often relied upon to allocate blame to the child and/or to the parent.

Teachers need to have the knowledge to assist all children with training in handling bullying. Bullying needs to be dealt with in ways involving all of the participants - the bully, the victim, and the audience. ADHD children are often the victims.

Disruptive behaviours occur for many reasons. Teachers must be trained to implement a variety of techniques to manage such behaviours. Exclusion from the classroom is not an effective strategy.

Teachers need to be taught a variety of behavioural techniques to manage typical ADHD behaviours, as well as oppositional behaviour etc. It has been shown by research that children with ADHD will often fail to respond to "normal" disciplinary strategies, but that all children will respond favourably to the strategies which are effective with children with ADHD.

Dysfunctional families are frequently encountered in the school environment. It does not help when teachers adopt a sanctimonious air and blame the parents. It is more effective to regard parents as doing the best that they know how under the circumstances in which they are operating. Hence teachers need to learn to work effectively with parents. They must be respectful of parents and able to communicate with parents in order to develop a positive partnership for the benefit of the child. This requires that teachers

learn the necessary skills and have the time to be able to sit with parents to achieve these goals.

(vi) *Dealing with children with Special needs and disabilities.* Under the inclusive education model, each teacher needs a range of suitable teaching or behavioural techniques in order to cater for the unique needs of the child. ADHD children have particular needs in teaching and behaviour management.

A crucial factor in the teacher's ability to appreciate the need for individualized strategies for children with special needs lies in teacher attitude. It is interesting to note the difference in treatment for a child who has an obvious physical handicap such as visual impairment or cerebral palsy and the child who has an invisible handicap such as ADHD. Teachers often blame the problems with children with ADHD on the parent or the child. ADHD has often been referred to as the "hidden handicap" for just this reason.

(vii) *Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:*

*Achieve accreditation.* Teaching is about the only "profession" whereby an academic examination is the sole criteria for admission. Before being accredited, it is important that students be able to demonstrate teaching competence and competence in the management of difficult behaviours. They must be able to identify appropriate educational and behavioural management strategies for a child with ADHD in a classroom. This could be set as a practical exercise during one of their final periods of practice teaching, but it should not be a mere regurgitation of what the class teacher or guidance officer recommends.

(viii) *Deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards, education authorities, parents, community groups and other related government departments*

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

Supervising teachers must be teachers with appropriate attitudes, knowledge, and teaching and behavioural management skills. They must be quality mentors in the classroom. As noted previously, it is not effective to expose trainee teachers to a variety of teachers ranging from good to poor and to assume that they will only acquire knowledge from the good teachers. Even if this was true, the trainees would be wasting their time observing poor teachers. Some of the feedback received by ADDAQ indicates that there are occasions when the trainee teacher has better skills and a better attitude than the class teacher.

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

*Bridging the gap.* Children with ADHD often have difficulty in adjusting to secondary school with a number of teachers to deal with their problems. In primary school, there is one teacher with the responsibility for the child and that teacher can consult with colleagues and develop appropriate management strategies to manage the problems associated with ADHD. This is much more difficult in secondary school with a number of teachers involved with each student.

The problems of secondary school are exacerbated by the methods adopted by students with ADHD in coping with difficulties in sustaining attention. In order to complete a task, students with ADHD will often "hyperfocus" on a task and become almost obsessive with completing the task. They know that if they are interrupted they will have difficulty in picking up where they left off. Consequently, they become angry when they have to leave a task unfinished - something that often happens in secondary school due to the necessarily rigid timetables.

10. *Examine the construction, delivery and resourcing of ongoing professional learning for teachers already in the workforce.*

*Recommendation:*

Teaching should be like all other professions. Professional development should be compulsory and PD activities approved by Boards of Teacher Registration. Teachers need training in teaching children with ADHD and in adopting appropriate attitudes

11. *Examine the adequacy of the funding of teacher training course by university administrations*

### SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

1.

(a) Successful applicants for teacher preparation courses should have favourable attitudes to children and to the whole area of discipline with children.

(b) Successful applicants for teacher preparation courses should have favourable attitudes to children with disabilities.

(c) Successful applicants need to have achieved a sufficient degree of academic excellence to be able to be able to read critically and to learn from the research literature with regard to teaching.

2.

Teaching as a profession will not attract high quality students until the public image of teachers has been improved.

*Recommendations:*

(a) It is essential to upgrade teacher image in the community. Teachers have to be perceived by the community as having important expertise in the art of teaching.

(b) It is necessary to promote the belief that teachers fulfill a valuable role for all children - the gifted, those who have average skills, and those who have disabilities.

(c) Teachers need to appreciate the satisfaction they can experience in seeing children making progress in their learning

(d) Teacher salary is a secondary factor to teacher image in attracting applicants with high potential to the teaching profession.

(e) Education Departments at all levels should make use of scholarships - both undergraduate and post-graduate to attract quality students to the profession and to encourage students to develop higher levels of expertise.

3.

(a) Some attrition would come about as students realized on closer acquaintance that they did not like teaching, or that they were not suited to the profession.

(b) University staff may realize some students are unsuitable because of a number of factors such as personality, attitudes and belief systems.

(c) Some attrition may occur due to unsuitable practicing school placements. Trainee teachers should only be exposed to good models who will reinforce the best of teaching practices.

(d) Attrition from teaching courses is not necessarily a bad thing. It has happened too often in the past that quantity of teacher graduates has ruled over the quality of teacher graduates

4

a) Rewards to faculty members should be based on practical research with direct implications for classroom practice.

(b) Faculty members should have on-going teaching experience in schools or act as members of a consultative team for schools. Faculty members must retain a practical bias as well as any theoretical bias.

5

The philosophy underpinning teacher training held by both education faculty members and supervising teachers must be to produce teachers who do not merely implement the educational or behaviour management practices under which they, themselves, were educated.

(b) Teaching students with special needs should be a mandatory subject for all trainee teachers with significant time being devoted to the education and behavioural management of a variety of children with special needs.

ADHD is a learning disability and it must be regarded as such.

Teachers with an adequate knowledge of teaching strategies suitable for diverse groups of children with special needs will be better able to teach all of the children in their classes.

6

(a) Educational faculties should not operate in a vacuum. Students should have some compulsory studies in allied disciplines such as psychology, speech pathology, occupational therapy, etc.

(b) A knowledge of statistics and research design would allow teachers to be more critical of the research which they read.

7

(i) The preparation of teaching graduates at both levels is extremely inadequate to the extent that many teachers teach literacy and numeracy using methods similar to those which they remember their own teachers using.

In teaching literacy, many teachers fail to devote sufficient attention to the teaching of comprehension skills both in primary and secondary schools.

In the teaching of numeracy, many teachers are still failing to teach for understanding despite the fact that this has been emphasised in curricula since the mid 1960's.

(ii) *Teaching vocational education courses.* The emphasis in schools is on teaching academic courses. Vocational courses are treated as inferior courses suited only to inferior students.

(iii) *Effectively managing classrooms.* Most teachers are still leaving universities with outdated behavioural management strategies or blind adherence to whatever philosophy is in vogue at the moment.



Teachers are unaware of the strategies which are appropriate to manage difficult and are resorting to “Disciplinary Absences”, the rates of which are steadily increasing. Exclusion from the classroom is an ineffective strategy since the child is falling even further behind in class work and because the child’s self-esteem is being further eroded.

(iv) *Successfully use information technology*: It is often assumed that teachers will pick up these skills incidentally, but this is often not the case.

(v) *Bullying, disruptive students, and dysfunctional families*. The attitude of the teacher is most important. Teachers need to have the knowledge to assist all children with training in handling bullying. Bullying needs to be dealt with in ways involving all of the participants - the bully, the victim, and the audience. ADHD children are often the victims.

Disruptive behaviours occur for many reasons. Teachers must be trained to implement a variety of techniques to manage such behaviours. Exclusion from the classroom is not an effective strategy.

Teachers need to be taught a variety of behavioural techniques to manage typical ADHD behaviours, as well as oppositional behaviour etc. Considerable research has been done in behavioural management strategies and teachers need to be aware of strategies that will work.

Teachers need to learn to work effectively with parents. They must be respectful of parents and able to communicate with parents in order to develop a positive partnership for the benefit of the child.

(vi) *Dealing with children with special needs and disabilities*. Under the inclusive education model, each teacher needs a range of suitable teaching or behavioural techniques in order to cater for the unique needs of the child. ADHD children have particular needs in teaching and behaviour management. Teachers need considerably more training than they have been given in the past to be competent in this area.

(vii) *Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:*

*Achieve accreditation*. Teaching is about the only “profession” whereby an academic examination is the sole criteria for admission. Before being accredited, it is important that students be able to demonstrate teaching competence and competence in the management of difficult behaviours.

8

Supervising teachers must be teachers with appropriate attitudes, knowledge, and teaching and behavioural management skills. They must be quality mentors in the classroom.

9 Children with ADHD often have difficulty in making the transition to secondary school. They would benefit from having a resource teacher to help the school to make necessary accommodations to enable these children to function effectively.

10 Teaching should be like all other professions. Professional development should be compulsory and PD activities approved by Boards of Teacher Registration. Teachers need specific training in teaching ADHD children. They also need assistance in adopting appropriate attitudes

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