

Submission for Inquiry into Teacher Education

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My submission will address the following terms of reference:

- Number 7. Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to (i) teach literacy and numeracy (ii) effectively manage classrooms
8. Examine the role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of trainee teachers

Informal interviews of pre-service teachers have resulted in a strong call for more in-class, in-school experience. The students feel they are ill equipped to effectively deal with all that is required of a classroom teacher. Classroom management issues emerged as a major concern because it is so vital to effective teaching and learning.

I have a real interest in the teaching of literacy and numeracy so I will look at that area in relation to recent research and offer some suggestions.

TEACHING LITERACY AND NUMERACY

*In my 20 years experience as a mentor and supervisor to many pre-service and first year students. It has been obvious that the current

teacher preparation to teach literacy and numeracy is inadequate. I believe the theory and essential teachings are satisfactory, but it needs to be supplemented at regular intervals with observation and participation at the classroom level. There is an excellent professional development model that incorporates theory, practice, observation and discussion. The Reading Recovery training model is successful worldwide and is a useful guide to the implementation of professional development and training.

*The diversity of individual learners cannot be learnt from a book. Behaviour, personality, learning styles, and the effects of background experiences are characteristics of real students that require teacher observation or practice. These experiences may then be supported by research and discussed as part of a group to gain a deeper understanding.

“Teachers who learn to be observers of successful and unsuccessful learners have data on which to test their assumptions. I think that effective teachers must continually test their assumptions about students and learning against such observations.” (Marie Clay, *Becoming Literate*)

At the pre-service level, the university could provide a 2 week in-class block, with follow up discussions and application of theory.

I support the research of Carol A. Lyons and Gay Su Pinnell in their book, *Systems for Change in Literacy Education* (2001).

They maintain, "To be most effective, professional development must be broad-based, an ongoing system with interrelated components, including demonstrations, discussion and in-class coaching." Their dynamic professional development program used the model provided by Reading Recovery in the Literacy Collaborative (Ohio State University) and applied it to classroom teachers. However, the model could, and should, be applied to pre-service teachers.

As a past Reading Recovery teacher, I can attest to the effectiveness of the professional development model because of its in-depth training and basic tenants of belief.

*Observation, analysis, and reflection are critical for teachers learning.

*Learning with a peer group is essential – shared meaning and perspectives result in deeper understanding.

*Learning and development for teachers is an ongoing process that takes time, support and a variety of experiences.

EFFECTIVELY MANAGE CLASSROOMS.

Behaviour management issues are a major focus of the QTU for a very good reason. It is becoming one of the biggest obstacles to effective learning, for both the offender and the other students in the class, and one of the main contributors to teacher stress leave.

Behaviour management theories and strategies can be studied in a book, but pre-service teachers need to have experience in the classroom before those theories and strategies actually have some meaning. Each individual student comes to school with a diversity of needs, experiences, behaviour, personality and background. Theories can be helpful but nothing teaches like experience. Behaviour management can't be entirely learnt from a book. It needs observation and experience, which is then supported by research and finally, discussed to gain a deeper understanding.

Two weeks experience in the classroom, where the pre-service teacher engages in the observation of specific behaviours and strategies, should then be followed by peer group discussions where

behaviours and strategies are linked to theories. This interaction would promote a deeper understanding of all facets of behaviour management and, when completed on a regular basis, become an effective tool in the classroom.

INPUT OF SCHOOLS AND THEIR STAFF.

Senior teachers in schools have a responsibility to open their classrooms to allow pre-service teachers to learn by observation and experience. This needs to be on a regular basis so the trainee eventually becomes an astute observer of student behaviours. Observation techniques assist in identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, which then informs teaching strategies, and ultimately, promotes effective learning.

The university would provide the theory, in-depth peer discussions, various assignments and testing. The system of teaching blocks, placed with a teaching supervisor on a particular class in a school, should remain. However, these blocks should be supplemented by observation on a regular basis in the classrooms of senior teachers. These observation sessions should be started in the first year of training so that trainees are studying teaching techniques early in the course.

Effective teaching and learning affects many young lives and we need to get it right the first time.