

## Rethinking Teacher Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Barry Down

---

### Introduction

This short paper is a personal response to the HofR Inquiry into Teacher Education. While the ideas are generic in scope they have particular relevance to the following terms of reference:

- (5) examine the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher training courses;
- (7) examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to ...;
- (8) examine the role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of trainee teachers; and
- (10) examine the construction, delivery and resourcing of ongoing professional learning for teachers already in the workforce.

### Reconceptualising teacher education

A key issue is to decide whether we want to take the opportunity and/or risk to reconceptualise teacher education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On this point, I agree with Judyth Sachs (2003) when she urges faculties of education to move away from reactive responses to engage with the dual tasks of reconceptualising and restructuring at the level of the profession rather than out of self-interest. She warns that restructuring without reconceptualisation does not lead to genuine change in teacher education. Too often, programmes have been adjusted to respond to the immediate demands of internal and external pressures. As a consequence, Sachs argues that there is a tendency to make adjustments around the edges, change the names of a few units of study, adjust the amount of time spent in schools, and even to introduce a couple of new units so that the institution is seen to respond. Over time, this can lead to teacher education programs that are “[D]isjointed, fragmented, and confusing” for staff and students alike (Bullough & Gitlin 2001, p. 1).

Like Grimmer (1995) and others, I believe there is a real danger of not taking the opportunity to align ourselves with the systemic reforms of schools and systematically seeking out partnerships. Smith (2000) warns that failure to do so will exacerbate the discontent which is felt by some schools and systems which perceive that their interests are not served in the present arrangements for teacher education. In response, Sachs (2003, p. 61) calls for new forms of professional relationships and partnerships in the conceptualisation, design, delivery and future development of education programmes.

### **Building school-university partnerships**

Numerous reviews of teacher education over the past 20 years have emphasised the shortcomings of traditional models of teacher education in particular the links between schools (practice) and universities (theory). For this reason, the notion of building school-university partnerships in the preparation of pre-service teachers and the on-going professional development of in-service teachers is seen as highly desirable (UNESCO, 1984; Ebbeck Report, 1990; Teacher Quality, 1989; Australia's Teachers, 1990; Teaching Counts, 1993; & Quality Matters, 2000).

From my own reading of the literature in the field of teacher education there are some key principles that seem to underpin productive school-university partnerships:

- Fostering "collaboration as an articulating and integrating principle of action, planning, culture, development, organisation and research" (Hargreaves, 1995, p. 150).
- Building learning communities wherein beginning teachers and mentors collaborate to analyse and question theories and practices of teaching (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995; Grisham et al, 1999; Fecho, 2000; Hogan & Down, 1998);
- Developing "professional collaborative research enterprises between groups of educators across educational sites" (Grundy, 1996; Sachs, 2003);
- Initiating critical collaborative inquiry into school and social culture by academics, teachers, the principal and parents, students and others (Goodman, 1995; Smyth, 1998, 2001; Bullough & Gitlin, 1991).
- Developing a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) whereby a conversation is initiated about learning, and how people can learn from each other, when they work collaboratively on school based projects (see Yeatman & Sachs, 1995).

### **What kind of teacher?**

Central to this larger project is the desirability of articulating a shared understanding of the kind of teachers we want to produce for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This process will enhance common ownership, purpose and practice as well as providing a strong foundation for developing relevant teacher education programmes.

Focusing on this kind of dialogue will assist in developing a conception of the desired teacher in these changing times.

In this task there are a range of perspectives and images that we can draw on. For example:

- Teachers need to redefine their roles as "engaged and transformative intellectuals who combine vision, conception, and practice" (Giroux, 1996, p. 301-32; Giroux & McLaren, 1986)
- Good teaching is "scholarly and intellectual" (Hilty, 1996).
- "The expert is no longer someone who has arrived, who already knows, but one who is continuously engaged in educative experiences" (Gitlin, 1996, p. 114).
- "Our programs must prepare morally sensitive and inquiry-oriented teachers, not classroom technicians" (Tom, 1997, p. 3).

- “[Good teachers] understand that questions of learning cannot be separated from questions of equity, justice and even oppression” (Gitlin, 1996, p. 116).
- “Education is irrevocably linked to politics and power (who gets what, when and how)” (Harnett & Carr, 1995, p 41).
- Understanding diversity is an integral part of learning to be a teacher (Hatton, 1996).
- Producing reflective practitioners that can make sense of their professional thinking and action (technically, practically and politically) (Adler, 1994; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Smyth, 1989, 2000; Yost, et al, 2000).
- Teachers need to be explicit about their own ethical and political assumptions about education, curriculum and teaching (Hursh, 1995, p. 110).

By sharing our individual and collective vision about the kind of teachers that we want to produce we have an opportunity to think anew about the kinds of programmes that are relevant and meaningful for future teachers.

### **Critically reflective practitioners**

Given the entrenched problems of educational disadvantage in many areas of Western Australia and elsewhere, there is an urgent need to interrupt existing arrangements. In this task, critically reflective practice provides us with some new ways of thinking about teachers' work. According to Simon (1998, p. 2), critically reflective practice is concerned with the moral question of 'why things are the way they are, how they got that way, and what set of conditions are supporting the processes that maintain them. It involves a critique of existing practices for the purpose of taking action to improve student learning. In this perspective, teachers and teacher educators are “knowledge workers” (as opposed to technicians/civil servants) who 'research, interpret, expose embedded values and political interest, and produce their own knowledge' (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 241).

Carr and Kemmis (1983, p. 43) argue that:

Teachers 'become critical' – not in the sense that they become negativistic or complaining, but in the sense that they gather their intellectual and strategic capacities, focus them on a particular issue and engage them in critical examination of practice through the 'project'.

The potential benefits of this kind of approach are put well by an experienced classroom teacher:

The most important aspect for me in conducting this research was that I was truly able to confront myself and my beliefs ... Where I was once [speaking] with an emotional and perhaps irrational voice, I feel I can now speak with more conviction and authority ... With knowledge comes power and peace of mind (cited in Hogan & Down, 1998, p. 55).

### **Teaching and learning strategies**

Based on the picture of the desired teacher emerging from these kinds of discussions, we are better placed to develop relevant, meaningful and coherent teaching and learning strategies.

By way of illustration the following kinds of teaching and learning strategies present themselves in the teacher education literature:

- Connecting emancipatory action research to teacher development (Gore & Zeichner, 1995).
- Using life stories/autobiographies as a way of increasing awareness of personal beliefs and preferences about teaching and exposing them to critical examination (Ayers, 1992; Street, 1990).
- Exploring how "teacher personal theorising" influences curriculum decision-making (Ross, Cornett, & McCutcheon, 1992; Ross, 1994)
- Linking teachers' stories of action with theories of context (Goodson, 1995; Teitelbraum & Britzman, 1991).
- Theorising teachers' practice through critical incident analysis (Tripp, 1993)
- Recognising and encouraging teachers as agents of knowing and constructors of knowledge (Grimmet, 1995; Jenne, 1994; Valli, 1992).
- Fostering "Depth rather than breadth" (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. xvi).
- Fostering intellectual quality, relevance, supportive classroom environment and the recognition of difference (Gore, 2001; New Basics, Education Queensland).
- Teaching against the grain (Cochran-Smith, 1991).
- Developing "authentic pedagogy": high order thinking; depth of knowledge and understanding; substantive conversation; and connectedness of the lesson to the world (Newmann et al, 1996).

Importantly, as Goodman (1991, p.74) points out, "our work must be comprehensive .... In order to have a more meaningful impact upon future teachers, this orientation needs to be the focus of seminars, supervision, foundation courses, field experiences, and methods courses". He warns that without a coordinated effort our effectiveness will be severely limited. As we act, reflect, and evaluate our own work practices and organisation so we become role models for our own students in the art of becoming students of teaching.

### **Principles guiding teacher education reform**

Tom (1997, p. 97-98) commenting on the American scene, identifies 11 principles for reforming teacher education. These principles provide some useful signposts to help guide our thinking about the future direction of teacher education in Australia:

- The program faculty and the curriculum of a teacher education program should model the image(s) and skills of teaching that the faculty desires to foster among students in the program;
- The concept of pedagogy that underlies professional preparation programs must go beyond a 'how-to' emphasis to include the moral (some would say political) dimension of the teacher's role;
- Among the many possible ways of conceiving of subject matter, the teacher education faculty must make its own view explicit and embed that view in professional instruction;
- The nature and purpose of multiculturalism must be identified and connected to the professional curriculum, as well as to other components of the program;

- Policies and processes for reviewing, examining, and renewing the teacher education program need to be part of the programmatic design;
- A teacher education program especially its pre-service component should be compressed; that is, short in length and intense in its involvement;
- The tendency for a beginning teacher to view teaching in light of past student experiences needs to be replaced as quickly as possible with a pedagogical perspective;
- Teaching practice and the study of professional knowledge ought to be integrated-or some teaching practice should precede the study of professional knowledge;
- Instead of programs being staffed horizontally (by speciality), they should be staffed vertically (by interdisciplinary teams or another method that helps bridge areas of specialized knowledge and practice); and
- The resources currently being devoted to the career-long development of teachers should be redistributed so that fewer resources go into initial professional preparation while added resources go to teacher development during the first few years of teaching.

### **Specific issues**

Specifically, the following issues present themselves as likely candidates for discussion:

- Extending district-school-university partnerships whereby respective staff work collaboratively to prepare future teachers;
- Developing collaborative curriculum projects to enhance student learning outcomes in context (place-based education, service learning);
- Planning for maximum flexibility of entry and exist points given the changing nature of the student population;
- Integrating common (core) learnings and specialist curriculum knowledge areas eg early childhood, primary school, middle school, vocational education and training;
- Blurring the boundaries between levels in ways that enhance flexible career options for pre-service teachers (see *Shaping the Future: Educating Professional Educators*, Report of the Review of Education, 2001, UniSA).
- Developing synergies with other relevant discipline areas eg technology, multi-media, Asian studies, arts, sustainability, and so on;
- Fostering interdisciplinary approaches to course content, delivery and assessment tasks.
- Considering new ways of (re)organising knowledge eg shifting from the "old subjects to new basics" as recommended by the ACDE (2001) report *New Learning: A Charter for Australian Education*; and Marie Brennan's grouping in *A New Generation of High Schools for the ACT* (2000) - "Critical literacies: reading the world; Community building: Learning to live together and with others; Real life research and futures study; and Working with cultural, ethical and environmental heritages".
- (Re)mapping the scope and sequence of programs to achieve both vertical and horizontal integration.

## Conclusion

The ideas outlined in this paper reflect my own personal perspectives on what is possible in teacher education. Hopefully, it might provide a small contribution to the ongoing review process. The upshot of this kind of activity is to ensure that Australia retains its position as a leading provider of innovative teacher education programs, research and professional development to enhance learning outcomes for all students.

## References

- Adler, S. (1994). Reflective practice and teacher education. In W. Ross (Ed) *Reflective practice in social studies*. Washington: National Council for the Social Studies.
- Ayers, W. (1992). Teachers' stories: autobiography and inquiry. In W. Ross, J. Cornett, & G. McCutcheon (Eds). *Teacher personal theorising: connecting curriculum practice, theory, and research*. New York: State University of New York.
- Burstein, N. et al (1999). Redesigning teacher education as a shared responsibility of schools and universities. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 50(2), pp. 106-118.
- Bullough, R. & Gitlin, A. (1991). Educative communities and the development of the reflective practitioner. In B. Tabachnick & K. Zeichner (Eds) *Issues and practices in inquiry-orientated teacher education*. New York: The Falmer Press.
- Bullough, R. & Gitlin, A. (2001). *Becoming a student of teaching: Linking knowledge production and practice*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Britzman, D. (2000). Teacher education in the confusion of our times. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), pp. 200-205.
- Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming critical: Knowing through action research*. Geelong: Deakin: University Press.
- Cochran-Smith, M. & Paris, C. (1995). Mentor and mentoring: did Homer have it right? In J. Smyth (Ed.) *Critical discourses on teacher development*. London: Cassell.
- Cornett, J., Elliot, J., Chant, R., & Stern, B. (1994). Creating partnerships and building a reflective community: the role of personal theorizing and action research. In W. Ross (Ed) *Reflective practice in social studies*. Washington: National Council for the Social Studies.
- Evans, M., Lomax, P., & Morgan, H. (2000). Closing the circle: Action research partnerships towards better learning and teaching in schools. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30(3), pp. 405-419.
- Fecho, B. (2000). Developing critical mass: Teacher education and critical inquiry pedagogy. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), pp. 194-199.

Giroux, H. & McLaren, P. (1986). Teacher education and the politics of engagement: The case for democratic schooling. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(3), pp. 213-237.

Giroux, H. (1996). Educational visions: what are schools for and what should we be doing in the name of education? In J. Kincheloe & S. Steinberg (Eds) *Thirteen questions: reframing education's conversation*. New York: Peter Lang.

Gitlin, A. (1996). Teacher education: what is good teaching, and how do we teach people to be good teachers? In J. Kincheloe & S. Steinberg (Eds) *Thirteen questions: reframing education's conversation*. New York: Peter Lang.

Gore, J. (1991). Practicing what we preach: Action research and the supervision of student teachers. In B. Tabachnick & K. Zeichner (Eds) *Issues and practices in inquiry-orientated teacher education*. New York: The Falmer Press.

Gore, J. (1995). *Emerging issues in teacher education*. Murdoch, Perth: Innovative Links Project.

Gore, J. (2001). Beyond our differences: A reassembling of what matters in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(2), pp. 124-135.

Goodlad, J. (1988). School-university partnerships for educational renewal: rationale and concepts. In K. Sirotnik & J. Goodlad (Eds) *School-university partnerships in action: concepts, cases and concerns*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Goodman, J. (1995). Working with teachers to reform schools: issues of power, expertise and commitment. In J. Smyth (Ed.) *Critical discourses on teacher development*. London: Cassell.

Goodson, I. (1995). Studying the teacher's life and work. In J. Smyth (Ed.) *Critical discourses on teacher development*. London: Cassell.

Grimmet, P. (1995). Developing voice through teacher research: implications for educational policy. In J. Smyth (Ed.) *Critical discourses on teacher development*. London: Cassell.

Grimmet, P. (1995). Reconceptualizing teacher education: Preparing teachers for revitalized schools. In M. Wideen & P. Grimmett (eds) *Changing times in teacher education: Restructuring or reconceptualising?* London: Falmer Press.

Grisham, D. et al (1999). Connecting communities of practice through professional development school activities. *Journal of Teacher Education*, (1999), pp. 182-191.

Grundy, S. (1996). Building professional research partnerships: possibilities and complexities. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 23(1), pp.1-15.

Grundy, S. (1995). *Action research as professional development*. Murdoch, Perth: Innovative Links Project.

- Hargreaves, A. (1995). Beyond collaboration: critical teacher development in the postmodern age. In J. Smyth (Ed.) *Critical discourses on teacher development*. London: Cassell.
- Harnett, A. & Carr, W. (1995). Education, teacher development and the struggle for democracy. J. Smyth (Ed.) *Critical discourses on teacher development*. London: Cassell.
- Hatton, E. (1996). Dealing with diversity: the failure of teacher education. *Discourse*, 17(1), pp. 25-42.
- Hilty, B. (1996). Teacher education: what is good teaching, and how do we teach people to be good teachers? In J. Kincheloe & S. Steinberg (Eds) *Thirteen questions: reframing education's conversation*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Hogan, C. & Down, B. (1998), Acknowledging professional lives: a case study in rethinking teacher education. In B. Down, C. Hogan & P. Swan (Eds) *Reclaiming professional knowledge: new ways of thinking about teachers' learning*. Murdoch University: Centre for Curriculum & Professional Development.
- Hursh, D. (1995). It's more than style: reflective teachers as ethical and political practitioners. In J. Smyth (Ed.) *Critical discourses on teacher development*. London: Cassell.
- Kincheloe, J. (1993). *Toward a critical politics of teacher thinking*. London: Bergin & Garvey.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Newmann, F. & Associates (1996). *Authentic achievement: Restructuring schools for intellectual quality*. San Francisco: Josey Bass.
- Unesco (1984). *Learning to teach*. Unesco.
- Reid, A. & O'Donoghue, M. (2001). *Shaping the future: educating professional educators. Report of the Review of Education at the University of South Australia*. Adelaide: The University of South Australia.
- Ramsey, G. (2000). *Quality matters. Report of the review of teacher education*, New South Wales.
- Sachs, J. (1997). Revisioning teacher education. *Unicorn*, 23(2), pp. 46-56.
- Sachs, J. (2003). *The activist teaching profession*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Smith, R. (2000). The future of teacher education: Principles and prospects. *Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 28(1), pp. 7-28.