

The following is a submission to the The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee's inquiry into the current level of academic standards of school education.

Most of the problems associated with comparability between states can be solved with a National Curriculum. The problem of standards will not necessarily be solved simultaneously. It is crucial that a high level of academic rigour is the driving philosophy behind any such curriculum and the temptation to adopt the lowest common denominator approach is resisted.

The second part of the equation is to provide quality teachers who can deliver that curriculum. This is of greater concern as attracting graduates into teaching is increasingly difficult. Teaching is simply not competitive when compared to the long term earning capacity of similar professions. The starting salaries are comparable, but after 8 years, it is virtually impossible to advance without reducing time in the classroom. This is the domain of State Governments, but the Commonwealth could play a part.

Every year I ask my Year 12s why none of them have considered teaching as a career. The most common answer is they would not want to work in a job where they are verbally abused on a daily basis. If they could be guaranteed a 'good' school, they might consider teaching. As this is highly improbable, they do not take the risk. The Commonwealth, in partnership with the states, could set up special schools for disaffected students where they receive specialised tuition from behavioural experts. It is no surprise that countries who have adopted the integration policy for behavioural problems are now experiencing teacher shortages. This results in lower entrance requirements for teaching and the vicious downward spiral continues.

This brings me to the final and salient point of my submission: the quality and structure of teaching courses. At present, teachers can do a four year Bachelor of Education or a subject degree followed by a Diploma of Education. Primary teachers have only the former as an option. It is my contention that these courses are totally inadequate in training future teachers to deliver a quality curriculum. They concentrate heavily on educational psychology which is at best a pseudo science.

In a four year secondary B. Ed. at Edith Cowan University, a student will complete 32 units. Half of these will be in education units which are of little value after graduation. I have spoken to hundreds of student teachers over my teaching career and they unanimously agree that time in the classroom teaches them how to teach, the subject units teach them what to teach and the education units are a waste of time. Curiously however, post graduate courses in this area have expanded exponentially in recent years and as they do, there has been a concurrent increase in educational fads which permeate like viruses through education.

I suggest that these education degrees be replaced. For Pre Primary and Primary teachers I recommend a one year induction course where teacher responsibilities and basic teaching techniques are studied followed by a two

year apprenticeship with experienced teachers in one or two schools. The apprentices would be paid a minimum allowance whilst training. By the end of their two year stint, they should have taken on a complete teaching load including programming and assessment for half a year and proven themselves worthy of full time employment.

For Secondary teachers, I suggest a special teaching degree in their subject area. This would consist of perhaps two thirds of a full subject degree with special emphasis on Years 11 and 12 content. After 3 years, they would sit the relevant TEE exams and would not pass unless a score of 80% was attained. In their final year, they would join their Primary colleagues as apprentices in one or two high schools. It has been my experience that teaching graduates are ill-equipped to teach the content and possess few effective behaviour management techniques because of the structure and emphasis of Education courses. Endless 2000 word essays on Bloom's taxonomy, Piaget, constructivist learning, outcomes-based education, Canter, Glasser and Erickson are no preparation for the realities of the classroom. They simply pad out bogus degrees in an attempt to give them credibility.

Teaching is a practical skill, not a theoretical abstract. Nothing prepares graduates better than time in front of a class. Unfortunately, the educational theorists now rule the roost and their flavour-of-the-month approach is undermining tried and true methods of curriculum delivery. No new system should be introduced without strong and independent evidence-based research clearly showing its worth. It is common practice amongst theorists to base their findings on student surveys which verges on academic fraud. Until these charlatans' influence over our most valuable resource, our children, is drastically reduced, the educational product we offer will continue to degenerate and Australia will become less and less internationally competitive.

Yours truly,

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