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In the past decade in Australia there have been no fewer than forty reports on various aspects of teacher education. All of them made recommendations for changes in entry, length, content, practicum, standards, certification, induction and continuing professional development. As the latest report (Standing Committee on Educational and Vocational Training, 2007) points out, following the submissions of the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA, 2005) and the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE, 2005), few of the recommendations of any of these reports have been implemented. There is no lack of advice or understanding of the issues facing teacher education. There is a significant lack of political will in addressing them.

This stasis results, at least in part, from the chaotic patchwork of overlapping and contradictory jurisdictions and responsibilities associated with a federal system of government (Australian College of Education, 2001; Connors et al, 2007). While educational provision is constitutionally the responsibility of the six states and two territories, the fact that the Commonwealth raises some 80% of revenue through taxation while the states incur 40% of expenditures (predominantly on education, health, welfare and police) ensures that the Commonwealth can exert considerable pressure on the states by tying financial transfers to its own priority programs. Moreover, over the past three decades the Commonwealth has increased direct funding for private (non-government) schools to the point where it is now the source of 73% of their recurrent expenditure (Connors, 2007:7) In addition, competition between states, as well as ideological and program differences between states and the Commonwealth, leads often to considerable confusion in both conception and execution of educational policy. Currently there are loud calls for a clarification and separation of the policy and budgetary responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the states in order to redress the inefficiencies and confusion that currently characterise the ‘system’ (Connors, 2007). However, while Australia has a Commonwealth Government of one political persuasion and state and territory governments of an opposing persuasion it would seem unlikely that the Commonwealth Government would see its ability to exercise increasing central
control (through intrusion into state responsibilities via tied grants and the exercise of the ‘corporations’ power) as something to be readily surrendered.

Nonetheless, there has been a shift over the past two decades towards increasing Commonwealth control of education, particularly higher education. This is exercised, in large part, because universities are funded by the Commonwealth Government, although they are established under state legislation and have reporting responsibilities to the states. In the recent budget papers proposals have been made for these financial reporting responsibilities to be transferred to the Commonwealth (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007).

This proposal simply continues the movement towards what Marginson (2007) calls a strategy of ‘governed deregulation’ where devolution and deregulation of policy implementation are matched by significant increases in government oversight and the tying of money to specific policy initiatives and accountability processes. Such a policy simply develops further the ‘prescriptive managerialist and economic rationalist position’ described earlier by Knight, Lingard and Bartlett (1993). The objective of the Commonwealth seems to be to squeeze greater productivity from less and less resource. Evidence of this is the declining percentage of GDP expenditure on Higher Education (down from .73% in 1996-7 to .54% in 2003-4) and Research and Development (down from .43% in 1990-91 to .35% in 1998-99) with consequent deterioration in student staff ratios (from 1:13 in 1990 to 1:19 in 200) (ACDE, 2001, 2005). One of the consequences has been a serious deterioration in the numbers available for entry to the teaching workforce - a matter of great concern to state employing bodies.

Nonetheless, within this confused political context, there is general agreement that moves towards a more ‘national’ system of education are desirable, especially in terms of fundamental principles, curriculum, assessment and qualifications. This trend is encouraged by four major issues, increased communication, increased internal mobility, the need to address disadvantage and exclusion, and the pressure of global competition. Such issues, as well as the role education needs to play in creating socially productive persons (ACDE, 2001, 2005) encourage this process of cooperation and convergence.

However, two major issues inhibit this process. The first is the complex diversity of Australian society: life in the remote mining community of Kunanurra is rather different from that in the Aboriginal outstation at Ngurkurr in Arnhem Land, the depressed rust-belt suburbs of Adelaide, the affluent gated communities of metropolitan Melbourne, the canal-side ostentation of the Gold Coast, the ‘affluenza’ of harbour-side Sydney or the depressed multi-cultural communities of Western Sydney. A highly prescriptive, ‘one-size-fits-all’
approach to curriculum, assessment and qualifications might seriously constrain the professional responsibility of teachers to respond to such difference.

The second is a procedural problem: whether such agreement can and should be reached by negotiation within such bodies as the meeting of Commonwealth and state ministers (MCEETYA) and, as far as teacher education is concerned, through the Australasian Forum of Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities (AFTAA): or whether it should be reached by central direction of the Commonwealth through its tying of budget transfers to the universities and states to compliance with directives (such as its current demands for compliance regarding literacy and numeracy, the teaching of history, the imposition of performance pay for teachers and a national assessment and reporting system).

These general features provide the background to the following consideration of issues facing the preparation of teachers at various levels: early childhood, primary, and secondary.

**Early Childhood Teacher Education**

Early childhood education in Australia can only be described as a labyrinth. Differences in policy and provision at Commonwealth and state levels, combined with distinct, overlapping and contradictory provision through ministries of education and ministries of health, as well as a plethora of public and private profit and non-profit agencies, produce a situation of considerable confusion. As Elliott observes

> The forces of history, combined with community beliefs about what is best for young children, plus a bewildering mix of national and state-based early childhood policy, funding and legislative requirements, have resulted in a labyrinth of childhood care and preschool services. There are complex layers and connections between government, voluntary and church groups, public education systems, independent, Catholic and other religious schools, community organizations, free-market forces, small business owner-operators and major child care companies, plus, of course families and children. So complex is the early childhood landscape that many people, including families seeking care, have difficulty negotiating the maze of early childhood services.

(Elliott, 2006:2)
Within this confusion three distinct voices are present. The first, and historically the dominant, voice has been that of the importance of the mothering model: the nurturing of mother-child relationships and bonding through the warmth of physical and emotional contact, whether by a mother or a mother substitute. The second, which developed in the early years of the twentieth century, was a nursing model focused on enhancing infant health and well-being. The third, which has gained considerable ground in recent years, is the education model which sees structured experience as essential to brain development and cognitive functioning and one which places a premium on such experience in the early years as an essential and un-recoverable foundation for later development.

These differences in approach are reflected in the preparation and employment of early childhood workers. While there are no nationally agreed standards for such workers, there are licensing requirements within the various jurisdictions that provide for minimum standards. These range from police checks as to suitability (or unsuitability) for employment, through one and two year diplomas, to three or four year degrees. Generally speaking, the older the children, the higher the qualification required. However, as Elliott indicates:

Somehow we have arrived at a point where a ‘teacher’ in early childhood education can be someone with a degree level early childhood teaching qualification, a child care certificate or diploma from the VET sector, or no qualifications at all. Equally, the designation ‘child care worker’ can apply to a qualified early childhood teacher or a completely untrained staff member.

(Elliott, 2006: 36-7)

This is not to say that appropriate early childhood-education or child-care qualifications have been unavailable. Kindergarten Teachers Colleges provided childhood education qualifications from the 1900s until the 1970s when Colleges of Advanced Education and then Universities became the main providers of diploma and degree level qualifications. Alternatively child-care qualifications were provided through the Nursery Nurses Education Board in the early part of the century, mainly for those who would staff nurseries and crèches, rather than pre-schools or kindergartens. During the 1980’s and 1990’s the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector expanded to provide Child Care Certificates as a quicker and cheaper route to qualifications in response to a rapidly increasing demand for staff.
Despite these various offerings, there are no national standards for teachers in the early childhood sector, no mechanisms for the certification or accreditation of the various courses, no registration bodies for professionals and no consistency in the occupational standards or award rates for employment. Indeed, one of the problems in maintaining standards and ensuring appropriate levels of qualification are the low level of working conditions and compensation for early childhood staff who the Australian Confederation of Trade Unions found to be among the lowest among paid workers in Australia (ACTU, 2003).

Given the recent increase in public demand for both early childhood care and early childhood education there is an urgent need for a more coherent and professional approach to the preparation and employment of workers in the early childhood sector. As Elliott concludes on the basis of her comprehensive review:

> With so many Australian children participating in early childhood services and a critical mass of centres, plus a well documented ‘crisis’ in early childhood staffing, it is timely to commit to national professional standards and guidelines, professional training, and good salaries and working conditions in the hope of securing the quality of early childhood educators in the decades ahead... There must be agreement on professional qualifications for early childhood educators that transcends the care versus education dichotomy and the construction of a comprehensive national framework for preparing, credentialing and rewarding early childhood educators.

(Elliott, 2006:44)

Increasing public disquiet about variations in standards of child-care and education as well as about the qualifications of staff may well lead to political pressure for the setting of minimal standards for qualifications and training. However, arguments over the private/public funding of such services as well as over the development of industry wide standards for remuneration may well inhibit attempts to reach such agreement.

**Primary and Secondary Teacher Education**

Some forty tertiary institutions in Australia provide some 200 pre-service degree and diploma programs in teacher education. Most of these are public institutions, although there are a small number of private, mainly religious, institutions that prepare teachers exclusively for their denominational schools. Some 16,000 students completed teacher education courses during 2005. Some
institutions have multiple pathways, while others have only one. Seventy per cent of students graduated from the fifteen largest institutions. (Ingvarson et al 2006:5)

Primary and Secondary teacher education are almost always lumped together as ‘teacher education’ despite the fact that the trajectories and requirements for the two sectors are significantly different. For instance, while it is now widely recognised that teacher preparation must include Knowledge of Learners and their Development in Social Contexts; Knowledge of Subject Matter and Curriculum Goals; and Knowledge of Teaching (Darling Hammond and Bransford, 2005; Zammit et al, 2007) these issues may be articulated quite differently at different levels. For instance, setting aside the obvious issue of differences in developmental stages, Australian primary school teachers are required to teach across all (usually six or seven) curriculum areas with particular emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Secondary teachers typically teach within two curriculum subjects (although it often the case that they are required to teach outside their areas of specific content knowledge). Consequently the patterns of preparation for primary and secondary teachers frequently differ. Moreover, with the emergence of Middle Schooling as an organisational pattern in schools, teacher preparation for the years spanning late primary schooling and early secondary schooling is receiving particular emphasis.

Primary teachers are most often prepared through three or four year pre-service programs which cover Knowledge of Learners and Knowledge of Teaching but also Knowledge of Subject matter across six or seven content areas as well as consideration of the ways in which such subject knowledge can be achieved through Integrated Studies. A small number of one or two year post-graduate programs are also offered.

Secondary teachers are more usually prepared through an initial three-year degree (focusing on subject matter content) followed by a one year Diploma in ‘teaching methods’. Such university qualifications do not result automatically in a license to teach. Graduates must also meet requirements for registration as a teacher.

As teacher registration is a state rather than a Commonwealth government responsibility, the various jurisdictions have different requirements. Some state registration bodies also accredit university programs for employment purposes. Others do not. The content and award of qualifications however, remain the prerogatives of the universities (Ingvarson et al 2006).
In recent years, as a response to both internal and external market forces, some universities have adopted a three-plus-one model for primary teachers. Others have introduced two-year post-graduate programs, some of which prepare and qualify students to teach in both primary and secondary schools. A couple of institutions have introduced one-year programs that claim to do likewise. Other institutions have introduced double degrees where students study for a degree in Education as well as a degree in Arts or Science simultaneously. This is particularly the case in those universities that have folded faculties of education into larger 'super' faculties. More recently, partly under the influence of the Bologna agreement, two year Master’s programs have been introduced as initial teacher education following a three year generalist undergraduate degree (Melbourne University, 2007).

The result of this plethora of different offerings has been a growing concern with standards in teacher education programs. In particular, entry standards, course content (professional and subject-matter, including literacy and numeracy), and the length and quality of practical experience in schools have been examined. In response several subject associations have produced standards in, for instance, mathematics, English and science. Moreover, some individual states and territories have developed criteria for the registration or certification of teachers as well as the accreditation of university programs. Only two states (Queensland and Victoria) have implemented legislation requiring formal approval or accreditation of teacher education programs (Ingvarson et al., 2006). Other states are moving towards such legislated requirements, partly as a result of the development of a National Framework for Professional Standards in Teaching by the Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (2003).

Partly as a result of the Ministerial Council’s initiative the Australasian Forum of Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities is working towards the collaborative development of a Framework for the Recognition of Approved Pre-Service Teacher Education Programs (AFTRA, 2006). This involves an examination of existing arrangements in order to reach agreement over how to implement agreed aims to:

- Provide common national understandings of what teachers need to know and be able to do in order to support and improve student learning;
- Describe levels of teaching quality to which teachers might aspire and ensure teacher development opportunities are available nationally to achieve these levels;
- Provide a national basis for recognition of the quality of teaching;
- Provide the basis for national alignment of standards for graduates of teacher education programs;
- Strengthen initial teacher preparation and ensure national commitment to effective and adequate teacher preparation; and,
- Provide a basis for ongoing commitment by Commonwealth and State and Territory governments to support teachers' professional learning.

(AFTRAAD, 2006:3)

The Commonwealth, however, has established the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (Teaching Australia) with a mandate to develop national standards for pre-service teacher education. Teaching Australia has developed its own consultation paper on an *Australia-wide accreditation of programs for the professional preparation of teachers* (2006) and is holding meetings throughout the country as a mechanism for gaining support for its proposals. While there is general agreement concerning the need for national standards, Teaching Australia is seen by many as a vehicle for the assertion of Commonwealth control of teacher preparation.

This move is being resisted by state based registration bodies through AFTRAA as well as by teacher unions such as the Australian Education Union, by the Australian Council of Deans of Education, the Australian Teacher Education Association and by the Australian College of Educators. Each of these bodies advocates a collaborative approach through negotiation between state agencies, professional associations and pre-service institutions.

However, even if broad agreement is reached over such professional standards, significant problems remain with regard to the division between Commonwealth and state jurisdictions. State agencies may currently have the legislative jurisdiction to mandate standards, but they no longer fund the institutions that provide pre-service teacher education programs: these are now funded by the Commonwealth through its grants to universities. Such division of legislative and funding responsibilities results in squabbles not only over standards but also enrolment and graduation numbers. As a result, there seems to be little coordination between the work force requirements of the various states (who employ the overwhelming majority of teachers) and the enrolment numbers and levels of funding provided by the Commonwealth.

In terms of numbers, the Commonwealth has been largely unresponsive to predicted and actual shortfalls of graduate numbers in various states. In terms of funding, education fares badly in comparison with programs with similar demands for placements and practical experience such as nursing ($8,217 per head rather than $11,280). The outcome is that universities are squeezed
between increasing demands (in terms of numbers and standards) on the one hand, and low funding and poor staff-student ratios on the other.

These issues have been recognised in report after report, most recently by the *Top of the Class: Report on the Inquiry Into Teacher Education* (Standing Committee on Educational and Vocational Training, 2007) that identified the persistence of problems such as

- The current distribution of responsibilities in teacher education which results in a fragmented approach to teacher education
- Inadequate funding for educational research and for mechanisms to ensure that teacher education and teaching is research evidence-based
- A lack of investment in building partnerships that would help bridge the gap between theory and practice, particularly for practicum
- Inadequate funding for teacher education, particularly for practicum, and
- A failure of policies involving teacher education to reflect that teacher education does not finish at graduation from an initial teacher education course but continues through induction into the profession as a beginning teacher through to established, advanced and leadership stages.

(Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007:xxi)

There is general consensus that the Standing Committee’s Inquiry got it right, in terms of identifying the key issues and in advocating appropriate policy responses regarding: program content and coordination; responding to diversity; school-university partnerships; funding of research; transition and induction; and continuing professional development. Such recommendations echo those of preceding reports.

There is increasing agreement over the content of pre-service courses around such issues as Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, Professional Values and Professional Relationships (AFTRAA, 2006:3). There is also agreement that state registration and accreditation authorities will negotiate such content with tertiary institutions as a basis for their pre-service programs. Most institutions already comply with such requirements.

Two significant issues remain to be addressed, however. The first is the duration of professional studies. In many institutions pre-service preparation (particularly of secondary teachers) is limited to a single academic year of some eight
months, nine weeks of which are mandated as school experience. This leaves some six months within which to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by effective Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, Professional Values and Professional Relationships. Reviews of research into such programs indicate clearly that in such 'short term interventions...we saw little reported impact' (Wideen et al, 1998; Darling Hammond & Bransgrove 2005: 393). It may well not be surprising that graduates of such programs report dissatisfaction with the adequacy of their preparation for teaching. By contrast, 'longer-term programs....were effective when the teacher educators maintained a consistent focus and message (Wideen et al, 1998:151).

This raises the second significant issue: that of program coherence. This is increasingly recognised as a significant feature of successful preparation programs (Darling-Hammond & Bransgrove, 2005; National Research Council, 2001). Indeed:

That coherence should be important is not surprising. Studies of learning suggest that learning is enhanced when learners encounter mutually reinforcing ideas and skills across learning experiences, particularly when these are grounded in strategically chosen content and conveyed through effective pedagogies. Repeated experiences with a set of conceptual ideas along with repeated opportunities to practice skills and modes of analysis, support deeper learning and the development of expertise.

(Darling-Hammond & Bransgrove, 2005:393)

It is clear from a number of reports that the structure of many pre-service programs inhibits such coherence, with division of responsibilities between 'discipline' and 'methods' areas in many institutions being a major obstacle to effective pre-service preparation. As Ramsay argues, it is increasingly acknowledged that 'Pedagogy cannot be separated from curriculum: the dancer cannot be separated from the dance' (Ramsay, 2000:13). Together these two issues form the core of debate over the effectiveness of pre-service programs.

In terms of school-university partnerships most of the debate has focused upon the limited time students spend on 'teaching practice' in schools. Despite a number of innovative partnerships around the country which explore more complex and satisfying ways of approaching collaboration in school research and development alongside student involvement (Sharp & Turner, 2007), several problems seem generally unresolvable. The first is that industrial awards govern payments to teachers for supervision of teacher education students. Collectively these payments consume some 25% of Faculty of Education budgets, a cost that is increasingly difficult to bear. Secondly, schools are not
funded for time and effort spent in working with pre-service students who are often seen as distracting teachers from their primary responsibilities. Thirdly, while state authorities have responsibility for schools, the Commonwealth, through its’ funding of universities, has responsibility for teacher education. Collaborative partnerships, and associated funding arrangements, are often, therefore, frustrated by disagreement between states and the Commonwealth over responsibility.

Several states are already concerned about the transition from university to employment in schools- especially about high attrition rates in the first five years of teaching. In Victoria and New South Wales, for instance, an induction year with reduced teaching load and the appointment of a mentor has been introduced.

However well intentioned such programs are, they face considerable difficulties because of other, particularly employment, practices. The problem is that such programs only succeed where the beginning teacher is appointed to a long-term position with their own class/es. Current employment practices, however, ensure that first year teachers are more usually employed on short term contracts or as casual teachers, conditions which preclude them from the intended benefits and encourage their early exit from the profession (Pietsch & Williamson, 2007).

In Victoria, for instance, new graduates apply for provisional registration and may proceed to apply, through the principal of the school in which they are employed, for full registration after twelve months. This is a particular difficulty for those who can gain employment only as short-term relief teachers. For those who have had continuous employment for twelve months the principal recommendation report must be accompanied by: records of three collegiate classroom activities; an analysis of teaching and learning; and a commentary on professional activities (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2007).

While these induction processes are welcome and well-intentioned, the significant barriers to their effectiveness need resolution.

**Conclusion**

Pre-service teacher education in Australia could currently be said to be in transition at early childhood, primary and secondary levels. The issues of governance, finance, program length and coherence, school-university partnerships and induction into schools have been identified as significant, as
have the issues of diversity in the teaching population and the diversity of school requirements. The most recent Report (House of Representatives, 2007) has not only identified these issues but also suggested mechanisms for resolving them. It is a matter for regret, therefore, that the recent Commonwealth Budget 2007-2008 has made no provision for progress on these issues. It is also a matter for regret that the Commonwealth Minister for Education has failed to endorse or act upon the recommendations of the House of Representatives Report. As Sue Willis, the President of the Australian Council of Deans of Education, commented, the Commonwealth budget ‘appears to give teacher training the worst possible deal. The overall result is probably as bad as it could be’ (Willis, 2007). We can only hope that state governments and agencies will take up the cause of a more rational approach to teacher education, addressing the issues identified above in a collaborative and productive manner.

References


