

INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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Theme:

Summary

To Standing Committee on Social Issues

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Re Inquiry into the Recruitment and Training of Teachers Response
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I wish to respond to Point 6 *The role, distribution and effectiveness of university pre-service teacher education.*

My credentials:

I have been teaching in the NSW public education system for over 35 years. I have taught all classes K-6 including special education IM classes of students with mild intellectual disabilities. I also served as a teacher /librarian in two schools.

I worked for 25 years in the Campbelltown and Cabramatta/Fairfield areas where there was a high concentration of beginning teachers and few teachers had more than five years experience. These areas also had high populations of students from language backgrounds other than English. In contrast my last 14 years have been spent as principal of two schools on the Central Coast where generally very few teachers have less than five years experience.

My current school, Wyong, is not typical of other Central Coast schools. It is a challenging "disadvantaged" school receiving funding support through the Priority Schools Funding program and the Priority Action Schools Program. It is a difficult to staff school where many of the teachers are still young and are just starting families. Five of them have only returned to work on a part-time/shared class basis. For the past four years we have employed between seven and ten young casual teachers in full-time relieving positions for teachers on leave.

I am currently the Cental Coast Primary Principals' Council representative on the Central Coast Professional Education Consultancy Committee.

For several years I served on panels to interview graduates seeking employment in the public education system.

From those interviews and from my experience supervising young teachers in the school, I am absolutely convinced that pre-service training is not meeting the needs of its participants, our students, our schools or our communities. My view is strongly supported by all the young teachers I have worked with and by the many schools represented at the evaluation of the Priority Schools Action Program after its first year of operation..

Beginner teachers comment on how ill-prepared they were for even the most elementary aspects of teaching and behaviour management. The staff at Wyong are a very dedicated group of teachers keen to do the right thing and willing to learn. They represent some of the best graduates from a variety of universities. They are fortunate that we can provide an hour of professional learning in Stage or grade teams every week. Not all school staffs have this level of support. But even with the high level of support we provide, we all recognise that there are still many gaps that a quality pre-service training program would not have allowed.

I hope my comments will lead to a closing of the gaps.

Pre-service training needs to be more **vocationally specific** i.e. it

1. needs to concentrate far more time on curriculum and classroom management (e.g. 12 hours of lecture-time on the English curriculum, over a four year period, is not enough!);
2. needs to provide teachers with skills in teaching literacy and numeracy;
3. needs to train teachers to teach students with learning difficulties;
4. needs to train teachers to work effectively with at least three different ability levels in the one classroom;
5. needs to train teachers in a wide variety of strategies to manage students with challenging behaviours;
6. needs to give teachers high level technology skills in using computers in classrooms.

The following points may seem like nit-picking, but they illustrate how much support beginning teachers need when they assume responsibility for their first class. Executive staff in schools cannot provide all of the training and support needed in a timely manner. Consequently students don't make the progress they could with a well-trained teacher and many new teachers experience sufficient difficulties in behaviour management to make them take excessive leave or resign from teaching.

A. New teachers need to enter schools with a *sound working knowledge of current curriculum, especially in English and Mathematics.*

- (i) They need to know that the curriculum, not commercial textbooks, should guide them in assessing and programming to meet student needs.
- (ii) They need to know how to use the curriculum to develop assessment tasks which determine the starting point for each unit of work so that their teaching is matched to student needs.
- (iii) They need to know how to translate the curriculum into effective class teaching and learning programs.
- (iv) They need to know how to use the curriculum and support materials to develop quality lessons which cater for the different levels of ability in the class.
- (v) They need to know simple things like where to locate and how to select the spelling words their class should learn and how to plan a systematic program of instruction in spelling from the introduction of unknown words, through practice, to assessment of the level of mastery of the words. (Principals had to stop asking for this type of information at graduate interviews because they would have had to fail all the applicants).
- (vi) They need to develop a variety of strategies including learning games and computer assisted learning activities to help students develop fast accurate recall of basis number facts and tables.
- (vii) They need to know how to determine students' reading levels and how to match students to text.

- (viii) They need to know about the different types of questions they must ask in order to strengthen student comprehension of what they read.
- (ix) They need to know how to break down new skills into small steps to ensure fail-proof learning e.g. short multiplication, then multiplication by ten, twenty, thirty etc, then adding both steps together before setting a long multiplication task.
- (x) They need a good understanding of systematic, explicit teaching using modelled, guided and independent strategies. They often don't understand how to translate these terms into practice even if they can actually articulate the words (which is rare).

B. In classroom management strategies:

- (i) they need to know how to lead students quietly from the assembly area to the classroom and get them to enter classrooms in an orderly, cheerful manner, ready to begin work promptly.
- (ii) they need to know how to set out desks in a way which ensures maximum time on task, helps students see the board and teacher without damaging their eyes, and is flexible enough to cater for different activities during the day. They need to learn about matching students to the correct size of furniture and that you don't sit left hand and right hand writers together in a way which causes them to bump elbows.
- (iii) they need to develop simple systems for storing classroom supplies in a way which makes them easily accessible to students e.g. where to locate spare pencils; where to store dictionaries, scissors, glue.
- (iv) they need to develop efficient ways of distributing, collecting and marking books.
- (v) they need to learn some basic ways in which to set out student books so that they don't waste time and confuse students by changing requirements frequently through the year.
- (vi) they need to have some idea of standards to expect from students at each stage.

C In behaviour management

- (i) they need to learn how to be proactive in order to prevent disruptions and violence rather than overlook the early warning signs and then have to spend time and energy resolving issues.
- (ii) they need to learn how to use praise and reward more frequently than negative consequences.
- (iii) they need to develop a wide range of positive and negative consequences to help them maintain discipline and follow up breaches of discipline.
- (iv) they need to develop skills in managing playground supervision where they don't know many of the students.
- (v) They need the ability to develop in consultation with their students a set of appropriate class rules and consequences. (Many graduates cannot articulate a few clear rules they would be trying to establish. Very few can give you a list of appropriate consequences. "Send them to the grade supervisor" is the common response.)