

Submission
No 36

INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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Theme:

Summary

Recruitment and Training of Teachers

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My first appointment was to Warren Central School in 1989. I took this position up immediately after I finished my Bach Sci + Dip Ed in 1988. I was a scholarship holder during my Dip Ed and consequently was required to take up a position in 1989. This I did so with enthusiasm!

Following this appointment I have also taught at Oberon High School (1993-96). I gained promotion to Head Teacher Secondary Studies at Trangie Central School which commenced in 1997. In 2002 I transferred to Bathurst High School to take up my current position as HT Science. I have also been President of the Mitchell Science Teachers Association since 2003 (chapter of Science Teachers Association of NSW).

I have therefore taught in a variety of locations and school types. My observations and ideas that follow are an aggregation of what I have encountered in my career from new teacher to current executive level.

Training

Recruitment and training of teachers directly impacts on the well being of probationary teachers in their first years of service. The majority of probationary teachers that I have had direct contact with in a supervisory role have struggled initially and all comment that they were not prepared for the job.

All have had practicum of some type, however, it is rarely a full teaching load and if it is half to three quarters of a load it is not for an extended period of time (3-6 weeks in general). In that time they are somewhat sheltered from extra-curricula jobs and add-ons, thus they can focus on the classroom work preparation without outside distractions.

When hitting the deck in a school they do so fully running. There is no period of transition. There is no teaching load reduction to give them extra time to prepare or discuss matters with a mentor teacher. There is no concession given to the mentor to team teach with the new teacher.

Probationary teachers are expected to take on the most difficult jobs in classroom teaching from day 1; that is, teach Prelim/HSC courses and in many cases students with severe behavioural/ educational needs. I am sure that private business in most cases do not give its junior employees ultimate control over its most valuable customers or difficult accounts.

My belief is that post grad (Dip Ed) be a minimum two year course with an initial year of academic study plus short term practicum. This should be the year where educational theory and ideas are addressed and initially discussed/discovered.

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The second year should be spent in a school on a reduced load (approx 1/3 to 1/2 of normal load) as a trainee. This would make them a “real member” of the faculty for that year. The majority of the remaining time should be spent team teaching or planning with mentoring staff within the school. A small component of this time should also be utilized in unfamiliar KLA's (or other stages in the case of K-6 schools) to give a breadth of understanding about other parts of the curriculum. Within this the student should also have a small component of tertiary study to complete the academic portion of the qualification.

The experience gained within the school should be fully utilized by academic staff at tertiary level to design a useful and complementary pattern of study. It would be a perfect opportunity to test and discuss educational theory and its utilisation in the classroom in a real time period. The tertiary component could be completed weekly (say one day a week) or several days during each of the school holidays.

One of the problems with teacher training at present is that the short practicum's don't give teaching students enough time to way up their personal ability for the job or give staff in the supervising school enough time to really determine suitability, except in extreme cases where it is patently obvious. The longer training period I believe would make a world of difference.

Many tertiary students have great academic qualifications in their favoured area; however, teaching is a different skill. Learning to communicate ideas to many different levels needs time to develop. On the job training is the only place this can happen. A reduced load with plenty of mentoring can address this before full time employment the following year. **Confidence must be built.**

It also gives trainee teachers an opportunity to follow students through an entire year thus exposing them to longer term student issues, assessment over the year and the myriad of interruptions that occur through the school calendar. All of these things stress new staff. This at least gives them time to adjust. **It also means that take home work will be proactive in planning not simply chasing their tale as they are snowed under with other stuff.** In many cases new staff, encounter topic material in which they are unfamiliar. Training them via mentors to deliver this material can be done with team teaching or at least considered advice. This is an issue particularly when Physics and Chemistry needs to be taught even at the junior level.

Probationary teachers in small schools I believe would be benefited greatly as they presently arrive and are often confronted with being the only person within that faculty or at best one other person or a fragmentation of several part timers. If by themselves they are suddenly the expert within the school in their KLA as well as the keeper and minder of all the associated equipment in many cases. Hence, managing isolation from family, managing resources and managing classes becomes stressful, and for some too much. Hence, they leave after a short period of time. With the above training structure at least they would have some of the initial classroom issues sorted out as well as some

experience in equipment management. Having visited other KLA's through the year may help prepare them for a cross-curricular teaching load often encountered in a small school.

In regards to other academic pathways this idea can be utilized within a Bach Ed structure simply making it an extra year to the current degree length or change the degree structure to make this the final year. I am obviously looking at it from a secondary perspective, however, I do not see why it cannot also work within a K-6 school with a little creativity and flexibility. **In the end what ever the structure of a student's degree the "trainee" year should be a component for full time employment the next year.** The trainee year could be spent in the same school as the full time appointment or could be different. There are pro's and con's to both of these.

Recruitment

In some respects I think teaching is suffering an identity crisis. Ask people about teaching and they see teachers and students as they did many years ago. Today's school is far more complex than that. The teacher and student relationship is different and the place of school in society is changing rapidly. Teaching is far more complex and involves so much more than standing in front of the class. Your day is more interesting than that. It is never boring! In the end we are absolutely essential in each student's life. In fact at times we are the glue that holds the students life together. The only constant in an otherwise unsettled world.

The question is; do we convey this when pitching the profession to the public? It is true that we may scare a few off as they don't want the close relationships with students or the greater workload than expected. However, surely we can address all of the essential elements and make people feel that teaching is the most important profession. I know the pay issue will enter the fold somewhere in submissions, however, teaching needs an ego boost in the eyes of the community not just a fiscal shot in the arm.

This needs to be a long term program and it needs to be widespread. We need to get secondary students interested before they make tertiary or other choices. We must put it onto the radar sooner rather than later. It seems absurd that teachers and schools cannot successfully recruit for their own sake. We need to convince parents that teaching is a worthwhile profession just like being a doctor or engineer. Changing the parent perception often makes all the difference.

Everything that happens in schools and how teachers are placed within these must be communicated. What do teachers really do? Surely we can achieve this type of promotion on a continual basis. TV/Radio/Print must be used. The media use human interest stories all the time to gain viewers and emotionally move the community. Teaching is full of human interest. There are a million good stories about teachers and students working together to achieve. **Let's share some of them and make people see the importance of our work in their community.** This again needs to be long term. The good news story is often used for teachers within DET/BOS newsletters. Lets do better than that.

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The DET has made an effort to attract mature age people to move into teaching. This is to be commended and must continue, however, we need to ensure that younger people come in to keep the profession balanced. They also hold the majority of the technology knowledge in the community and this has to be a positive and preferable to continually retraining older staff who struggle to keep up in this area.

The scholarships available presently by DET are a good idea. I was a recipient of a similar scheme in 1988/89. This needs to continue into the future, however, we must still look at how we advertise the profession. We want a world where supply in all areas is greater than demand not the current reversal of that.

Recruitment into isolated areas has its own difficulties. I have spent my entire career in rural education, both in large and small towns. At Trangie Central I was responsible for (in consultation with the principal) filling of vacant secondary positions. At times this was very difficult. Put simply: no body wanted to come! People were out there on casual lists and ready for employment but moving in most cases to a town of 900 people, 80Km west of Dubbo, was not appealing.

Trangie and Warren are the 2 most isolated places I have been appointed to. The over-riding similarity though is that the vast majority of new staff were young, single and had never been to either town prior to appointment. Taking a step back; how do we get more of these towns in the, "to be considered basket" of trainee teachers (both young and mature)?

Once again we need to sell it! What's wrong with Western Region getting into ALL Uni's and being pro-active on a regular basis? When I went through Uni of Wollongong someone from DET did come around about half way through the Dip Ed course for a short talk and slide show on rural teaching (not too inspiring, but something). Rural and remote teaching needs to have a positive profile in people's minds. They need to be convinced that there are occupational/lifestyle benefits that over-ride the fear of isolation from family and conveniences. I really don't think we sell it hard enough.

As a professional I would love to go to Education students and tell them about my experiences of rural education and moving from Wollongong originally. There would be others; after all, that is what we do! We need to fully utilize our own strength in human resources. Each Easter I complete sessions at a residential school at CSU, Bathurst, for Education students. They have heaps of questions and I believe my experiences have value in this regards.

Recruiting mature staff that are already established in an area is a smart idea. This minimizes family disruption, which is a disincentive for these people to pull up stumps and move. Convincing younger people to return to these areas is also a good idea. My recollection is that DET at times has put schemes in place to do this. The encouragement of people with Aboriginal background to teach and return has also been put forward. All these have merit and should be continually pursued. The DET site has plenty of info – but

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they also need a more direct strategy. Teaching is a person to person profession. I believe that recruitment should also involve this contact.

Incentive schemes are fine and I believe these will appear in submissions, however, ultimately incentives only work when people take the step to consider possibilities. We also want people to take up incentives that are fully aware of where they are going and have had time to consider their choices. What we want are people who want to give something different a go. If incentives are part of a whole package for recruitment, then good. Incentives are not the final solution on their own.

If you would like clarification about any of my submission please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Craig Luccarda

Contact: Please note we will be moving into a new home soon.

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