

INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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Theme:

Summary

Partially Confidential

Submission

to the "Inquiry into the Recruitment and Training of Teachers."

Apology for the handwritten form of this item - my computer has been out of service for two months and I have no access to the internet at present.

• "The best means of attracting quality teachers."

What is quality?

- Various previous panels have constructed their own definitions. Various dictionaries offer further choice, including

"that condition or variety which attracts the highest price" (my emphasis)

- I have taught in schools for over 30 years and had the responsibility and later was told the "honour" - the bosses word, to assist student teachers.)

Most were NOT quality teachers, but may have become such at a later time.

One WAS a quality teacher at the beginning. I was asked to make an assessment. "A" I said. "B" they said. I was persistent. "One of the best teachers I have met," I said. "We don't want to bother coming out," they said. "We both have to agree on an "A," they said. "Well come out and look," I said. They came, grudgingly and an "A" was awarded.

Sadly, after one year of work in a school, she succumbed to offers of

much higher pay and left teaching.

- I believe that quality teachers are those who teach to give understanding rather than teaching just exam strategies and "rote" explanations.
- Thus quality requires a strong background in the subject taught, thus requiring top students, who can easily obtain a job in other avenues, NOT subject to daily ABUSE from children. (I did not use the fashion-word students, whom these are not!)

AGAIN, we have arrived at PRICE-competitive price, but also at conditions. NO-ONE deserves to work under the conditions which are present in many "modern" schools.

- All of the persons whom you wish to recruit, have recently passed through school. No amount of government singing-TV-commercials and other advertising campaigns will make them forget the experience. They must be desperate or dedicated to come back. (No, it wasn't like that when I started.)

Recently, one of my best students said that she was thinking of becoming a science teacher. We must be honest. I asked if she was sure that she would like to be in

charge of her class. She said that she had never thought of it like that and wouldn't become a teacher. (The alternative: Waste time training - leave with mental scars - try to find another job, some six years too late.)

— One of my teachers became an administrator in a "teacher's college" by whatever name it had at that time, and lamented to me that I had spent far more time studying my subject at school, than his students did, before they were released into schools to teach the same subject HAVING NEVER STUDIED IT AT SCHOOL, OR UNIVERSITY. He had no control over this structure.

QUALITY TEACHERS MUST HAVE QUALITY UNDERSTANDING OF THE IDEAS WHICH THEY ARE TEACHING.

— SUBSTANTIAL studies in the teaching subject are absolutely necessary. (eg two years university)

— Additional support is needed to MAKE quality teachers from teachers. If teachers are asked to pay for the support, they will not. HECS debts are enough!

In the distant past, the government apparently felt responsible of children's education and teachers from state AND private schools met once a month to exchange ideas,

work-sheets and friendship.
 "Here's how I do it" was a popular hour, with three teachers demonstrating.

Economy measures killed such ideas 20 years ago and conferences with "keynote speakers" from government or educational research bodies talk. BJT in the classroom, we are told that "learning occurs by doing".
 Something of a dichotomy?

— Quality teaching involves manipulating and challenging ideas which are in student's minds. (Manipulate/adjust/improve, if near correct, or challenge/rebuild/demolish/replace, if irreconcilably incorrect.)

Teacher-centred lessons have an important place in such a process, allowing greater control of student experience and allowing analysis of student interpretation, by carefully constructed "ad-lib" questions, only available to an expert in the field.*

* Dr Karl Kozlowski is usually considered a quality teacher and uses this method. It's not "hands-on".

◦ To summarise: Quality teachers are made from expensive, top quality graduates of universities, who are "improved" by frequent, government-supported meetings of teachers in the same field, including

experienced teachers, and training/refresher/additional courses on new developments or interpretations, current events (eg the Aceh seismic sea-wave disaster).

Quality teachers are a product of interested, experienced teachers, money and top university training.

- Scholarships: For historical truth, it should be understood that no-one I ever met at university had not received offers of free entry. I received four offers of fee-free entry (scholarships). When the bill for university education was transferred to the taxpayer, students began to choose courses of study by pay rates for graduates in the completed courses. Now that students have to pay (eventually), the same process still applies. Some might be persuaded to take a fee-free option if they forget that education courses are career specific and if they don't like it, they are stuck. Still a problem? You have to be desperate? Last choice?

- Accelerated courses: I had close contact with several persons who completed an "accelerated" course some twelve years ago. They found that ① the content they were given did not allow them to cope with the job of teaching the subject. (Students frequently appeared at the door, sent by these people, with the message, "Ms needs help.")

I was happy to help. (The head-teacher did not have the knowledge to help & the desperate "accelerated" persons knew better than to ask.)

At the end of the year, only one of the four, with whom I had contact, continued. The others found alternative occupations.

- There is no substitute for adequate training.
- Economy courses are not really economical.
- What is the value of the quality education of the students who experience the accelerated teachers?

• NSW Institute of Teachers: How many of these will we have? I had to pay to be approved by the previous one, which disappeared. The charges will discourage people from becoming teachers. (Far higher than union fees!)

How will they detect good teachers? We would probably be better off with votes from colleagues and deputy principals. (Principals are out of touch with classrooms - they may visit for a moment but have no continuity. How can an outside board find out? With the old "inspection" system, a deputy said to me, "If you don't pass, I'll want to know the reason why.")

- Certainly, they can check academic records for forgery, but can they check CVs for lies? Who has the time or means?
- They can check years of service.
- How can they do more, SUCCESSFULLY & EFFECTIVELY?

• Effectiveness of pre-service courses:

- feedback from teachers over 30 years suggested that the best model was that used by Macquarie University in sending students to a school for one day each week, over a whole year.
- I did not pass through that system.
- Most teachers whom I have met, have expressed the opinion that the content which they were given was not adequate and that they were told how to teach an "ideal" or "perfect" class and did not find any when they began work.
- Some institutions seem to believe that teaching experience is more important than subject knowledge, or teaching expertise. (Can you say how it might be done, or can you show me how to do it?) I remember one lecturer at a teacher training institution who told a group of teachers at a conference, that Newton's laws didn't apply to living things, so the force at the two ends of a muscle were not equal. When I challenged this idea, he changed the subject.
- Poor understanding among senior staff is a real and serious problem. How can it be fixed? Could well-qualified, retired teachers be used as a resource at teacher meetings or in training courses?

Other matters:

This works
against quality
teaching.
Whose job is this?
No-ones!

- Teachers are not made aware of outside (non-teacher) groups or organisations, which may be of help as resources. Having recently tried to offer resources (free) to schools, I encountered considerable resistance and the offer never reached its target.
- Teachers must know more than the minimum (more than the syllabus). Students ask questions. A little more may complete the pattern for understanding.

Quality requires,
planning -
planned content,
planned implement-
ation,
planned support.

- The syllabus may change, for reasons which never seem clear. The result is teachers in schools who don't know the content. (Material from the 70s reappeared in the nineties and the present syllabus in my field contains material which had never been taught in schools before, but was in my university texts, plus some other books which I had. I had to share the notes I wrote with many other teachers)

The provision of "notes" by "OTEN" and crash courses by universities, for persons who could afford the charge, is not satisfactory. (Neither were the courses.) A great deal of background knowledge was needed to understand the material supplied, and which was supplied LATE.

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