Examining the Bachelor of Education: mentor's perceptions of student/teacher performance

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Chapter 3: Examining the Bachelor of Education: Mentors’ perceptions of student teacher performance

David Lynch & Tony Yeigh

Teacher education in Australia has been the subject of numerous reviews over recent decades. Each report has highlighted the problematic nature of the current model of teacher education in Australia. In this chapter, mentor attitudes to the Bachelor of Education program are examined for points of reference.

Over past decades there have been countless inquiries conducted and numerous articles written, each questioning the efficacy of teacher education in Australia (See for example: ‘Top of the Class’, 2007; Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education 2003; Sachs and Groundwater-Smith, 2006; Lynch, 2012; Smith and Lynch, 2010). Notable is an article published in 2000 by Smith (2000) and his various follow-up pieces since (See Lynch and Smith, 2012; Lynch and Smith (2011); Smith and Lynch, 2010). Smith’s central proposition is that the university-dominated pre-service teacher education model in Australia had served its historical life. His assertion reflected the central premise of previously cited inquiries.

More specifically, Smith argued for a rethink of the prevailing teacher education rationale, content and delivery model so that there was a better fit with the demands of an emergent society. A problem remains, however, in that despite such critiques the predominant model of teacher education—the Bachelor of Education (BEd) - albeit with some periodic tweaks in response to various government agency attempts to refocus or reform teacher education over past decades, continues largely unchanged (See Ashenden, 2013; Smith and Lynch, 2010; Lynch and Smith, 2011). As the chapters in this book highlight, teacher education, with its 1960’s and 70’s hallmarks, is problematic in a number of ways!

On another front the performance of Australian school students is being called into question as reports such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) indicate that the relative performance of Australian students on the world stage is slipping. Teacher education once again is implicated as various commentators call for an overhaul of the current regime of teacher education (See Thompson et al, 2009; Jensen, 2011). In Australia the predominating model of teacher education is the four year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree, and this chapter will focus on this model as providing the elements for necessary change. In relation to this, we examine the results of a study into the attitudes of classroom teachers who acted as practicum ‘mentors’ for their final year teaching students in a Queensland BEd program. First, however, we need to outline the Bachelor of Education program concept for points of reference.

The Current Model of Teacher Education

Pre-service teacher education was born during the early 19th Century as ”on-the-job” training regimes, where teaching skills were mastered mainly through practical experience, without any specific training criteria (Lynch, 2012). The ‘new teacher’ learned their trade after a study of subject matter, and while acting as an apprentice teacher. Psychological and pedagogical knowledge began to develop during the late 19th and early 20th Century leading to a ‘professionalising’ of teaching and, consequently, the
formalising of teacher training programs through teacher training colleges (Fullan, 2007; Korthagen, 2001). During the second half of the 20th century a growing professional knowledge base, spurred-on by a political desire within western countries to educate students of all abilities, created knowledge domains which became central components of formal courses in teacher pre-service education; firstly within specialised teacher training colleges and later as education faculties in university (Korthagen, 2001; Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting & Whitty, 2000).

Since the 1960s teachers were elevated to professional status and teacher-training colleges were progressively incorporated into universities and colleges of higher education, and teacher training became ‘degree worthy’. The courses comprised sociology, history, psychology and philosophy, and theory associated with these disciplines became the universal basis of education degrees (Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting, & Whitty, 2000). In this respect Wilkin (1996) suggests that the 1970s entailed a period of ideological confusion in teacher education, as there was no consistent ideological context or influence inside or outside governments, as well as no coherent presentation of principles or priorities upon which to base educational training. Further, education employer groups, together with classroom teaching practitioners, became critical of teacher training courses, believing they were based too much upon theory that had little or no connection to practice. Of importance to this discussion, the same concern has continued to the present day (See Smith and Lynch, 2010; Ramsey, 2000; Smith, 2000).

By the 1990s teacher education programs comprised two key organisational components: a course of formal university study over four years (course work) and in-school practicums known as ‘fieldwork’ (up to 80 days of required practice in a classroom in a school) (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Furlong, et al., 2000). Course-work is the main component of a contemporary teacher education program and is typically prepared by ‘faculty-based specialists’ and then presented to students ‘on-campus’ through a lecture/tutorial configuration (Hagger & McIntyre, 2000; Tom, 1997) and organised around the same professional knowledge domains as attributed to the 1960s. It is of interest that this approach represents the profile of the BEd at the university under focus.

Tom (1997, p.48) cites four common criticisms of teacher education programs throughout the western world (See also Ashenden, 2013; Hattie, 2009 and 2011; Smith & Lynch, 2010; and Fullan, 2007): ‘The programs’… ‘are vapid, impractical, segmented and directionless’. Specifically Tom (1997) contends that courses are often superficial and fail to embody the practical knowledge and skills needed by beginning teachers, tending instead to cover pedagogical material that could be better learned in an apprentice situation, an approach to teacher training covered in several other chapters in this volume. Further, courses tend to have little relationship to each other, often because they have been developed and delivered in separate ‘schools’ or areas within an education faculty and delivered by specialists in equal isolation. As well, much of the content of teacher education course-work is aligned to the research interests of university academics, as promotion is tied to the necessity to ‘publish’, and that “the conventional teacher education model’ has largely managed to avoid accountability for specific developmental sequences and particular kinds of course-school linkages, except at a global, program level” (Lynch, 2012; Smith, 2000; Tom, 1997).

Given this segmentation, courses are often not grounded in a common set of educational purposes, themes or assumptions, leading to a program that becomes a collection of disconnected theoretical components (Lynch, 2012). Lyndaker (1990) cited in Tom (1997, p.50) concludes that “most of these courses had nothing to do with survival in a classroom and many [courses] were taught by professors who had grand theories but little or no teaching experience”. Even with the pressures arising from social and economic changes discussed earlier, few teacher education courses in Australia have been restructured and revised to address these concerns (Hattie, 2011; Smith & Lynch, 2010; Smith, 2000), and such
programs can be classified as "conventional BEd programs". Thus, there are problems with current educational training that stem from the historical design of teacher education degrees, and yet have not been addressed by the calls for reform (Smith & Lynch, 2010).

While the vast majority of teaching academics emerged from classrooms as teachers, their focus tends more on the theory for preparation than practice regimes, and thus the BEd has tended to have a predominance of theory over practice in its structure. As also noted in the other chapters of this volume, the literature confirms that the current practicum arrangements with schools and classroom teachers all too often operates as another impediment to preparing teachers (Lynch and Smith, 2012). In simple terms, this is largely the result of the differing teaching world views as represented by 'university faculty life' and the realities of modern classrooms. Consequently the logistics involved in maintaining a faculty-school relationship that best supports teaching students whilst on practicum is complex and time consuming and requiring much problem solving for effect. Limited funding is another oft cited reason for the practicum having a lower priority and thus minimal numbers of contact days. Regardless of the rationale presented, however, classroom teachers all too often view ‘hosting’ a student teacher for the BEd practicum as an inconvenient and one-sided (i.e. for universities) chore. Clearly the existing training model does not provide the basis for a viable and sustainable relationship upon which to prepare teachers (Lynch and Smith, 2012; Lynch, 2012).

On yet another front, the BEd now operates in a changed socio-economic circumstance, one that is a significant departure from the 1960/70's when the conventional BEd model was conceptualised and developed, and when most teacher educators underwent 'training' themselves. In specific terms, the emergence of a Knowledge Economy in the 1990's has fundamentally changed society, due mainly to: (1) a rapid, ongoing and increasing pace of technological innovation and shorter technology and product life cycles (Freeman and Soete, 1997); (2) new economic communities, whose prime function is the distribution and exchange of goods across national and continental borders; and (3) a market that is increasingly technical and with consumers that are more informed (Freeman and Soete, 1997; Robertson, 1993).

Consequently it is argued a ‘worker’ in the ‘Knowledge Economy’ will require characteristics including: an ability to adapt to constant change and uncertainty; capacity to work in knowledge and service-based economies; and participate as a constructive member in cohesive social communities (Edgar, 1999; Education Queensland, 2000). Accordingly, these arguments suggest such social changes and the emergence of the Knowledge Economy will entail a different education and schooling system to that which presently exists. The main premise of the proposition being put forward in this chapter is that current schooling and teaching reflects the features of an industrial society, and, because society has changed, the education and schooling system, including primarily teacher training, requires significant change and restructuring (Bentley, 1998). This brings the focus of these discussions directly onto the efficacy of the predominant BEd program regime, to which we now turn.

In line with the mentoring and partnership models of teacher training promoted widely throughout this volume, we now turn our attentions to a study of mentor perceptions concerning the Bachelor of Education program at one Queensland university. In presenting this study we seek to position the BEd in terms of how it performs and how it is viewed by involved mentors as primary points of reference. To this purpose the study asked in-school teaching mentors (classroom teachers employed by the BEd program to ‘supervise’ and ‘mentor’ teaching students during a final program practicum) their perceptions of the BEd program they were involved with.
Methodology

The study used a mail-out Likert scaled questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to determine the attitudes of school-based mentors towards the Bachelor of Education program offered at one university in Queensland. The particular context of these teachers was that they had ‘hosted’ a final year (thus near to graduation) BEd teaching student, as part of their mentoring involvement. There were 153 mentors who completed the questionnaire and 96 mentors who were interviewed, and participant characteristics appeared normally distributed, with no statistical differences between the teachers in terms of location, age, gender, age or degree. Mentors were asked questions about their experience with the BEd program by reflecting on their allocated teaching student, all of whom were on their last practicum and thus ready to graduate. For clarity, we refer to these final year students (i.e. those who have completed their final practicum and thus ready to graduate) as “teaching students”, and the children learning in classrooms as “pupils”. A number of results of interest to this chapter were found. Data reported is part of a larger study conducted by Lynch in 2005.

The Results

Working on the premise that the BEd is designed to prepare teachers for work as ‘teachers’ on graduation mentors were first asked to define what they thought ‘workplace ready’ meant for a new-to-service teacher. In other words, what are the things the new to service has to know and be able to do to successfully work as a teacher from day one of graduation? Three distinct themes emerged following analysis of the mentor’s responses:

1. Elements of teacher work that are associated with relationships to students and others,
2. Professional knowledge sets associated with teaching, and
3. Personal attributes that underpin a teacher.

Specifically, we interpreted these themes to mean a student teacher’s ability to ‘get on’ with pupils, staff members and parents in the school context, the ability to plan and ‘deliver’ the school curriculum with sufficient knowledge and expertise, and the display of personality factors commonly associated with being a “teacher”. Mentors also identified the notion of having ‘confidence’ and a ‘flexible outlook’ as important attributes of a graduate teacher. Respondents 1-22 and 1-23 made comments typical of such:

Workplace ready’ is someone who is ready on day 1 to meet and greet parents, knows what to do with all the books that are brought in with the children, how to set the classroom up, how to find help, if they need help. (1-22)

Globally it means, that they’ve got a good strong sense of their identity and where the school fits in as an organisation, know their own strengths and those of the people in the school, how they can relate to students. Initiating, engaged in partnership, connected classroom to the world out there. (4-11)

Mentors were asked to identify the specific capabilities that a new to service teacher needed for work in today’s schools. Responses comprised lists of skill attributes centred on four domains:

1. Skills that are associated with cognitive/academic ability
2. Technical skills associated with teaching
3. Inter-personal skills, and
4. A professional knowledge base associated with teaching
Cognitive / Academic Skills
- Reflect on practice
- Intellectual capacity
- Organised
- Apply critical thinking
- Flexible attitude

Technical Skills
- Manage behaviour
- Plan lessons
- Use ICTs
- Manage / use resources

Inter-personal Skills
- Communicate with various stakeholders
- Work as a team player
- Accept advice and guidance

Professional Knowledge Base
- Curriculum knowledge
- Pedagogic strategies
- Child development

| Table 1: Mentor Identified Workplace Ready Capabilities |

A review of the literature confirms these identified ‘elements’ are referred to as ‘teacher centred activities’ (See Lynch, 2012; Dimmock, 2000; Hargreaves, 2003; 1998; 1997; Hood, 1999; Ryan, 1998). These data suggest that specific elements of workplace readiness, as detailed by the mentors, mirror those of ‘teacher centred’ activities. Table 1 provides a sample of the skill attributes identified by mentors.

Mentors were asked for the three most common problems that they faced as a teacher. Responses to this question were extraordinarily similar. Managing behaviour, dealing with time constraints and dealing with change and its ramifications were the typical responses given by the majority of mentors. Mentors 3-4 and 5-3 made responses that were typical of other mentors:

There is a lack of time in the school day to cover the things that need to be covered…. subject content and the ongoing curriculum changes and additions. We have a lack of resources such as material and human support resources. Finding a balance for all the students and their needs is a big problem. Coping with change as we are in a new world with new stuff to learn for a changing world, such as ICT skills, solving emergent ever changing problems and the pressure to achieve defined learning outcomes for all learners. (3-4)

Behaviour management is a big issue today: different children, different likes and we are expected to have the answers. (5-3)

Mentors were asked to detail any ‘new problems’ they faced that challenged their ability to ‘cope’. By ‘new problems’ we meant teaching related problems that were only emerging now and thus not a concern when they were trained as a teacher. Their responses mirrored responses previously. There was nothing in the data to suggest that these problems were ‘new’, however.

Mentors were asked to think about the directions social change might take in the future, and to detail what they thought teachers must be able to do better in order to deal with such social change. The majority of mentors thought teachers would have to be; ‘better communicators’ and develop skill sets associated with counselling students, use various information communication technologies and associated technological advancements; and be prepared to take on differing roles as families ‘broke down’ and society ‘turned to schools and teachers’ for ‘answers’.

One mentor offered this advice to members of the teaching profession, and this typified other mentor responses:

Teachers must be able to speak-up, get a voice to express their concerns, so they are not just victims of the change…. that they have opportunity to initiate and make suggestions for change. An awareness of one’s professional skill profile as things change - more ongoing PD required. Skills to manage the diverse behaviours of students will become critical. How one gets time to do this is anyone’s guess (3-4).

Again, these interview data reveal that, like the previous interview questions, managing behaviour, dealing with time constraints and constant change, are recurring themes in mentor responses.
In summary, mentors had a clear idea about ‘workplace readiness’ for new to service teachers, and the themes of workplace readiness identified by the mentors were associated with cognitive skills, technical teaching skills, inter-personal skills and a professional knowledge base associated with teaching children. Underpinning these themes, as we indicated earlier, is the notion of ‘teacher centred’ activities. Given these elements, it can be hypothesised that (near to graduate) teaching students require a knowledge and skill base associated with teacher centred activities. Specifically, this means capabilities that enable a teacher to manage the behaviour of students, to work in a context of time constraints and to deal with constant change.

Table 2: Students who Excel in Workplace Readiness

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<tr>
<th>Mentor Defined Attributes</th>
<th>Example of Attribute</th>
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<tr>
<td>Developed and maintain effective relationships with students and others</td>
<td>Easy to get on with Approachable Liked children Good communicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had professional knowledge sets associated with the business of teaching</td>
<td>Planning skills Assessment strategies Delivery strategies Knowledge of curriculum and its content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had personal attributes that underpinned the work of a teacher</td>
<td>Listened to advice Had a ‘presence’ in the classroom Organised and reliable</td>
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Given these insights the required impressions of how well ‘their’ BEd students and their readiness of for work as a teacher, final practicum was assessed. The interview recommenced with a pursing of the concept of student teacher readiness. We asked mentors to identify the specific ‘workplace ready capabilities’ in which their student teacher excelled. Three themes emerged: develop and maintain effective relationships with students and others, professional knowledge sets associated with teaching; and personal attributes underpinning teacher work. Table 2 contains the attributes of graduate students who excelled in workplace ready capabilities.

Mentors who considered they were workplace ready, made comments such as:

*The student excelled in planning and implementing the planning. Their assessing of the needs of the children and catering for individuals as well as their behaviour management techniques were good. Built relationships with all stakeholders (1-6)*

*Organisation, communication with parents, willingness and enthusiasm; good knowledge (1-9)*

Mentors, who thought their teaching student was workplace ready, generally commented that short term planning and knowledge of curriculum content were good. In comparison, some mentors felt that knowledge of curriculum content was lacking in some teaching students. Many mentors commented that student teacher contact with the school for practical teaching sessions was limited for most BEd students. Mentors of BEd students with limited final practicum days (i.e. 3 or 4 weeks), who also had a perspective on ‘other’ teacher preparation programs that had longer practicum arrangements, such as an internship of 10 consecutive weeks, were critical of the BEd student’s building of relationships with students, as illustrated by three comments that follow:

*In regard to the BEd student’s interpersonal skills.... it seemed an effort to build a relationship with others in the school (3-1 – experienced mentor and primary school teacher)*

The second comment is from a secondary teaching mentor who was in her first year as a teacher. She used her own experience of the BEd preparation program to support comments of her BEd student:
The teaming stuff……working across subject areas, out of the department…not there, not seen. As an undergrad I never was given opportunity to focus on relationship building (4-21)
…relationships building with parents;interviews, interactions, not evident with [the BEd student] (1-17 – first time BEd mentor)

Comments typical of these BEd mentors with respect to the workplace ready capabilities of their BEd students are given below.

The BEd student knew how to cry when things got too much…. and how to download from the internet (1-22 Experienced BEd mentor)

We asked mentors to make comments on the graduate workplace readiness capabilities that student teachers lacked. Most mentors felt their teaching student lacked behaviour management skills and specialist content knowledge to teach certain subjects. Mentors commented that some teaching students could not make the theory to practice link, despite having a sound content knowledge. The two mentor comments that follow illustrate this:

Theory to practice,… making the link. Student would say they learn such and such at university and how they had to bring it across in prac. and this was quite difficult for them. Didn’t link theory to practice well. Could self evaluate well (5-4)

Didn’t know how to access resources or plan and prepare, or much about levels of learning (1-24).

We asked mentors to judge their graduate student’s capability to deliver key outcomes that underpin the role of teacher: that of achieving learning outcomes in pupils. More, we asked them to specifically judge the overall performance of their student teacher in reference to a variety of teaching attributes (See Table 3). Note that overall, an average of 61.42% (range as low as 17% for one element-Interview Question [15G], which dealt specifically with Achieving learning outcomes for all pupils) of BEd students (mean score of 1.27 indicating a low response to yes on average) were rated as being able to deliver on such outcomes, with 38.5% rated as not able to deliver on these outcomes. Importantly, only 17% of teaching students were considered capable of ‘achieving learning outcomes in all learners’, with 83% considered as not capable. When mentors were asked about the teaching student’s capability to deliver outcomes for ‘learners who find school easy’, 54% of BEd students were deemed capable, and 46% were not. Overall, these findings indicate that the student teachers were not perceived, on balance and in total, as well prepared for post-graduation teaching. However, these findings may also indicate that mentors believe teaching skills are honed post-graduation, because no mentor appeared to think this circumstance alarming or out of the usual.

<table>
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<th>IQ.15 Was your final year teaching student able to:</th>
<th>BEd Students</th>
<th>Graduate Students</th>
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<tr>
<td>Analyse student data collected from various sources and make professional judgments?</td>
<td>Yes 23 66%</td>
<td>No 12 34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop learning plans to meet identified needs?</td>
<td>Yes 21 60%</td>
<td>No 14 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate the effectiveness of developed learning plans?</td>
<td>Yes 30 86%</td>
<td>No 5 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate the outcome of such plans to various stakeholders?</td>
<td>Yes 28 80%</td>
<td>No 7 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognise likely consequences of developed</td>
<td>Yes 14</td>
<td>No 21</td>
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It will be recalled that mentors were asked to identify the three most common problems they faced as a teacher. This was revealed as themes associated with: managing pupil behaviour; dealing with time constraints; and dealing with change and its ramifications. We asked mentors to rate the performance of their graduate student with respect to the student teachers ability to deal such problems. Few mentors of BEd students considered their student capable with respect to the three identified problems. Most mentors commented that BEd students were seldom in schools resulting in little scope to learn the practicalities of dealing with such problems as the following example illustrates:

Melissa (BEd student) only completed a three week block. By the time she finished she had just remembered the kids’ names, so how could she? (1-12-1)

We asked mentors to rate how prepared their student teacher was for work as a teacher in the future. Themes such as; solve problems in a school situation; initiate change in a school situation; envisage different education programs outside of traditional schooling; and do their work outside a school situation were elicited from mentors as to what they thought a ‘futures orientated’ graduate teacher would have to be prepared for. Few BEd mentors considered their graduate student to be prepared for work as a teacher into the future as per. Mentors generally commented that BEd students did not have a detailed understanding of the future or future issues for teaching, with some mentors feeling this was reflected in the lack of “futures orientation” courses in the BEd program. The two mentor comments that follow illustrate this point:

(the student) did not understand where research and professional information came from. (1-24 – primary teacher)

Mentors were asked to provide a reason for the judgment they had made about their student teachers’ aforementioned futures orientation capabilities. Mentors were reluctant to offer a reason for the ratings they gave their BEd graduate student teacher. However those who had mentored both a BEd and ‘another type of graduate’ (i.e. teaching students from another teaching program or another university’s BEd) made comments typified by the following:

The BEd student lacked confidence overall (1-24)
This really depends on the individual student and in this case (BEd) they had no idea (4-22)
The BEd student hadn’t heard of QSE 2010, so not at all (5-4)
There was a lack of professional independence (BEd). (2-2)

It might be argued that mentors lacked ‘yardsticks’ for judging students against orientated capabilities. This is perhaps because mentors did not fully appreciate the characteristics of future-orientated capability as such terms are not part of the lexicon of current teaching philosophies (Smith and Lynch, 2010).

Of particular note is that when mentors were asked to comment on their graduate students’ university program, with respect to what students learnt at university and what was needed in classrooms, no mentor praised the BEd program. Overall, mentors tended to say that fieldwork for BEd students was ill-

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<th>Graduates' ability to workplace capabilities</th>
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<tr>
<td>15F</td>
<td>Make professional judgments concerning aspects of their practice?</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15G</td>
<td>Achieve learning outcomes for all learners?</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15H</td>
<td>Achieve learning outcomes only for those pupils who find school easy?</td>
<td>17%</td>
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Percentage of Response Ratings: 61.42857, 38.57143
conceived and that taking a BEd student was generally a burden because it impacted on regular classroom
work. When further clarification was sought about this, mentors made comments about the knowledge
and skill base held or not held by their student and the lack of input into their program. The following
three comments were typical of those made by BEd mentors:

There was not enough emphasis on the practical day-to-day routines of running a classroom. To learn how to cope with
the day-to-day routine needs constant classroom practice. I felt that the university had, although it had a good
understanding of philosophies, curriculum and BM issues, had lost touch with classroom practice. (1-17-1)
Some elements a bit inadequate and the outcomes focus provided a narrow view … I always provided the ‘starting point’
for lessons (1-13-1)

Behaviour Management inadequate – (BEd student) would not cope with worst case scenarios in a classroom (1-13-2)

The data indicates clearly that mentors value close contact with university in the form of: visits and meetings
with university staff; increased time spent by the student in a school; and student knowledge and skill base reflecting
workplace readiness. Mentors were asked how beneficial to the development of student teachers’ capabilities
were the fieldwork tasks completed during the teaching practice. No BEd mentors commented that the
BEd program’s tasks were beneficial. They believed that the BEd was too theoretical and had lost touch
with modern day classrooms, as indicated by the mentor comment that follows. Most BEd mentors made
regular comments during interview that indicated the BEd was too theoretical and that it had lost touch
with modern day classrooms. The mentor comment that follows was made by an experienced classroom
teacher, who has coordinated the placement of BEd students in her school over many years, illustrating
the previously mentioned finding:

There was not enough emphasis on the practical day-to-day routines of running a classroom. To learn how to cope with
the d2d (day-to-day) routine needs constant classroom practice. I felt that the uni had, although it had a good
understanding of philosophies, curriculum and BM issues, (the BEd) had lost touch with classroom practice. (1-17-1 –
experienced teacher who has coordinated BEd student placement in her school over many years)

As a follow-on question, we asked mentors whether they had to modify their classroom program to fit
their BEd student teacher. It seems notable that all mentors indicated they had to make modifications.
Most said significant changes were to what they had planned to teach in response to what the ‘student teacher’
had to practice and thus be assessed on. This finding might be interpreted as being evidence of how out
of step the BEd program is with what teachers do in their classrooms. There is a long history of such
preparation problems in the teacher education literature. It is interesting to note that if the mentor had
the opportunity to contribute, by way of being part of ‘program working parties’, such as the
development of practicum handbooks, which was the case with some mentors, they tended to rate the
program highly and were reluctant to critique.

The majority of Mentors however said the BEd needed revising. Comments made about what
distinguished the BEd, such as those comments below, were themed around the relatively short time BEd
graduate students were in schools and the lack of fit the BEd fieldwork program had with classroom
demands:

Not long enough (BEd practicum) – not having the contact at the beginning of the year made the BEd program
inadequate. (1-22 – new to service primary teacher)
Confusing handbooks and a lack of contact with the university (1-5-1 – experienced BEd mentor)

Very prescriptive tasks; not much scope to be flexible. (5-4 – experienced BEd mentor)
Study Summary

The interview data revealed that mentors had a clear idea about what they thought constituted workplace readiness for new to service teachers, and themes of what readiness is were strikingly similar. These data suggest that workplace readiness is constituted by mentors to mean that (ready to graduate) student teachers require knowledge and a skill base associated with ‘teacher-centred activities’ as defined in the literature (See Lynch, 2012; Berry 2011; Fullan, 2007) This concerns things such as; planning what is to be taught, ‘engage in the act of teaching’, managing students in a variety situations, liaising with various stakeholders, dealing with tasks associated with being a teacher in a school.

On balance the preparation of BEd students can be considered sub-optimal. While the student teachers’ capacities to plan ‘teaching units’ and the like was rated as ‘good’, the student teachers content knowledge and their capacities to achieve learning outcomes in their pupils were mixed. In terms of their actual teaching capacities only 17% of pre-graduation teaching students were considered able to achieve the key capability of achieving learning outcomes in all their pupils. Further, no mentor praised the BEd program, indicating instead that fieldwork for BEd students was ill-conceived and that taking a BEd student was generally a burden because it impacted on regular classroom work. When we sought further clarification about this, mentors made comments about the knowledge and skill base held or not held by their student and the lack of input into their program as contributing factors. This indicates that the preparation of teaching students, and in particular the cross-correspondences between university mentors and schools, was not as collaborative as it should be.

The majority of mentors consider preparing teachers a joint responsibility and these data suggest more university contact with ‘the university’ and mentor opportunity to input the program will strengthen a school-university partnership. This could have the added benefit of improving school-university relations and the enhancement of student teacher performance. Despite this assertion, it is clear from this study that work needs to be done on the BEd’s program content as well, because the findings suggest it is out of step with the demands and contexts of modern classrooms and the work that is teaching into the 21st century.

Recommendations

In-line with the major themes of this volume - that the problems involved in teacher education are complex and diverse, that mentoring is superior to traditional supervision programs, that school/university partnerships are preferred, and that it takes both schools and universities working together to train teachers sufficiently - this chapter has indicated that basic problems exist with respect to the more traditional models of teacher training currently practised across the Australian education system. These problems appear systemic and broad, involving both universities and school systems, teachers and teacher trainers, governments and the societies they govern. Yet the very fact that there are clear indicators of where to go, how to change things and move education in a more positive direction, as well as which aspects of teacher training require address, are to be viewed as encouraging.

Various considerations concerning what to address and how to address them have been presented here, but perhaps the most fundamental considerations involve the imperative of change and what this means in terms of a sufficient model of teacher training. All things occur in a context, and within the context of the research presented in this chapter it appears that, as stated by Johnston, the need for “big thinking” is required, in particular ideas about how to train teachers authentically and in partnership. The areas for
training focus will need to include how to prepare teachers in relation to time management, behaviour management, communication skills, and an expanded role in supporting the needs of their students, but the main frameworks for training will be the ongoing development of technology and changes to the accreditation process at both state and national levels.

In light of this, a key direction for ongoing research in this area will be the development of a taxonomy for change, wherein the relationships between accreditation requirements and technology are delineated with respect to an authentic model of teacher training that focuses on the “future skills” needed for teaching into the 21st century. Important questions relating to this development will include how the requirements of accreditation require or affect the need for authenticity, how technological change is opening up new means of affording authenticity, and how the expanded support roles required for teachers can be incorporated into the training they receive prior to professional workforce entry. Overall, this represents a new paradigm for teacher training, yet it is a paradigm that seems replete with possibilities and opportunities. Exploration of the paradigm is encouraged for both teachers and academics, with the common need to innovate and integrate offering the basis for an integrated training model. The future, it seems, is in our hands.

Reference List


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ii. Based on a study conducted by David Lynch in 2005