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Reclaiming and reframing
teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand



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Rapporteurs' report: What should initial teacher education programmes for 2022 look like and why?

Presenter

Jane Gilbert

Rapporteurs

Letitia Fickel and Julie Mackey

University of Canterbury

A response from participants

Teaching and learning in 2022 has the potential to be a significantly different endeavour from teaching and learning in 2012. Gilbert posited three key assumptions underpinning this argument:

- Schools have not kept up with the major changes in the world outside education.
- 21st century teachers need many of the same attributes, skills and knowledge as 20th century teachers but they also need new and different ones.
- Teaching is a complex and demanding role which requires teams of complementary professionals working together for a common purpose.

These assumptions are predicated on a growing body of evidence from cognitive science that suggests knowledge is best understood not as a noun that describes what is known, but a verb that reflects a state of knowing and that is found in the active generation of knowledge embodied in networks of people, ideas and the spaces in between them. Accepting this evidence and the arising three assumptions, the challenge then for initial teacher education (ITE) is how to foster the transformational thinking that will enable this next generation of teachers to flourish in this more complex and fluid environment. Clearly, the thinking and conceptualisation behind our existing models of education, and what it means to be both a teacher and a learner will need to be disrupted and retheorised. This process of disruption and theory regeneration should focus 21st century teacher education on three overarching outcomes:

- Building teachers' capacity for ongoing adaptive learning and complex thinking.
- Developing their ability to work in collaborative teams—of professionals and parents/whānau.



- Enabling teachers to initiate and sustain change in a networked environment where complementary knowledges and practitioners work together.

Not adding more but thinking differently

In meeting these overarching goals, one of the greatest challenges will be the perceived external—and often self-imposed internal—pressure to keep adding content and requirements onto already laden programmes. This additive approach creates tensions between subjects, when in fact more may be gained by layering and integrating knowledge and expertise. This is not a relegation of discipline knowledge to the fringes. Rather, it is recognition of the power of deep and principled disciplinary knowledge while simultaneously acknowledging that it is unrealistic to continue to expect that a single unitary teacher will be able to continue to embody the wide range of knowledge reflected in the curriculum. When we work from the premise that knowledge is actively distributed within the network of spaces between people, our views of both teaching and learning shift. It is expertise, not experts, that will define leadership and leaders of the future. Therefore, we need a more deliberate approach to equip teachers and students to access, discern, connect and employ the knowledge that is embedded within communities. The important skills are related to the appropriation and employment of knowledge rather than only its acquisition.

Genuine community engagement

Genuine community engagement is recognised as a key strategy to support new ways of learning and valuing the dynamic characteristics and properties of knowledge. Teachers should not be positioned as the experts who know, but rather the pedagogical leaders and facilitators who can develop and draw on their network of relationships, involve parents/whānau, collaborate with colleagues, connect with discipline leaders, and model the skills and dispositions of networked learning. Kaupapa Māori schooling and early childhood education already provide viable examples of educational systems that draw on the rich resources, relationships and strengths of their wider communities. Moreover, given the shift that this 21st century model envisions, it is imperative that communities be engaged in the development of this new understanding and ways of working that schools are endeavouring to undertake. Currently, there are schools engaged in this shift, and there is evidence of success at many levels. In these schools we see the positive effects of networks and distributed knowledge, with parents coming into classrooms to support children to raise achievement, right through to international connections with scientists sharing expertise and experiences with children.

The value of community engagement is also relevant for ITE. Institutions need to explore and model ways of working with and within local and extended networks. This will require stronger partnerships with schools and deeper levels of reciprocal engagement, as well as more deliberate and supported networking at other levels. There is also potential to work more collaboratively at programme level to reconceptualise and implement ITE experiences to prepare pre-service students for working in complementary teams and networked spaces.

It is acknowledged that there are structural challenges to overcome if we accept that schools are systems of resources, relationships and strengths where teachers work in complementary and collaborative teams. There are implications related to assessing

standards, appraisal, performance pay and competition within and between schools. Nevertheless, these are challenges to be worked through, rather than barriers to change.

Change happens incrementally—yet needs to consider all parts of the system

The question of ‘who is going to shape education?’ highlights the challenges of systemic change proposed here. Effective change usually occurs in small pockets of innovation. It is the people who can see over the horizon and do things differently who make those changes accessible to others. It takes courageous leaders to pilot innovation. These pockets of innovation need to be seeded across all parts of the educational system—ITE providers, kura/schools, universities—with the innovators connecting up in networks to share their successes and set-backs so that others can follow their lead.

Implications for teacher educators

While the literature in teacher education is rife with caution about trying to change educational systems on the backs of new teachers, we must thoughtfully consider what they can and do contribute to this endeavour. A central question for ITE in this space is, How can new teachers be supported to become change agents of the future? While beginning or early career teachers may have the ideas and energy to disrupt existing models and introduce new approaches, they are also vulnerable and need support, mentoring and guidance. Thus, as ITE providers we need to develop our pockets of innovation around ways of collaboration with kura/schools in supporting, working with and sustaining our graduates as new teachers who are seeking to help change the system, while working within the current constraint of schools as they exist.

