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Reclaiming and reframing
teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand



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Rapporteurs' report: From preparation to practice: Tensions and connections

Presenters

Mary Simpson and Lexi Grudnoff

Rapporteurs

Monica Cameron

Massey University **and**

Walt Rutgers

Eastern Institute of Technology

Much of the discussion resulting from the paper presented by Dr Grudnoff and Associate Professor Simpson was focused upon the key connections and tensions they identified as relational, political, and structural—as well as focusing on possible ways forward in initial teacher education. In this rapporteurs' report the authors have chosen to report on the session discussion based on these three aspects.

Relational

In regards to the relational aspects, a core theme of the discussion was the need for working relationships between initial teacher education (ITE) providers and the teaching profession. Traditionally, existing tensions mean that there is often a feeling of 'them' and 'us' in which there appears to be a significant disconnect between teaching practitioners and teacher educators. The audience highlighted the fact that some friction exists between these groups, and while ideally these should be worked out through consultation, the differing perspectives in relation to what this actually entails means that this is generally not being done well.

Issues of power, and the perceptions around who holds and/or should hold power, were also raised within the discussion. Issues of power, and the perceptions around who holds and/or should hold power, were also raised within the discussion as making it difficult for those within ITE to develop what needs to be a strong relationship to effectively consult and share with each other. This needs to be addressed if we are to move beyond current relational barriers. It is also important that what is being done well within ITE programmes, schools and early childhood services is shared and



disseminated in ways that support the development of shared understandings of what each other is doing and why, through the use of ‘best practice’ and current research.

Political

Barriers of a political nature were also emphasised through the conversations. Funding structures and levels were seen as barriers to ITE programmes being able to build closer relationships with schools and ECE services. The merging of the former ‘teachers colleges’ within university structures has added further layers of complexity in which structural systems, such as the need to meet PBRF criteria, are seen as negatively impacting on the ability to teach and deliver programmes in ways that could be more effective. The current ‘low trust’ model in which ITE providers are increasingly accountable to more and more regulatory demands from organisations in which they are not currently represented, specifically the Teachers Council, was also identified as a political tension. Those involved in ITE do in fact know a lot about teaching and teacher education, yet often feel as though they are being ignored and devalued through the lack of trust shown by those in the wider education sector.

Structural

Within this theme there was clear agreement in the discussion that a real disconnect exists between what occurs in initial teacher education programmes and the first years of teaching. ITE programmes in a range of contexts certainly prepare student teachers for their first years of teaching; however, there is no continuity as those institutions have no further formal contact with their trainees once they gain provisional registration. There was general consensus that there is a need to develop and maintain dialogue between teacher educators, teacher mentors and graduating teachers during the first two years of teaching. Tensions and constraints that are currently preventing this are evident in the different perspectives on initial teacher education. There is very little real incentive for schools and mentor teachers to buy-in to the present ITE models within the scope of poor remuneration and inadequate time allowances given to the role of teacher mentors. The teaching profession recognises that teacher education is vital but that in reality it usually occurs as an add-on to the daily demands of teacher responsibility. It was clearly emphasised in discussion that a distinctly different skill set exists between being a classroom teacher and a teacher educator and that there is a real need to identify and highlight these differences.

The wide range of institutions that offer ITE programmes means there is considerable variation of practice between the providers. Discussion highlighted the fact that the current situation could be said to be perpetuating the ‘old ways’. Consequently are we really educating teachers for what exists rather than what is coming? Are we recognising the needs of the 21st century learner? Current moves to introduce postgraduate teaching qualifications appear to be an effort to lift graduating teacher quality by introducing greater academic rigour and depth. However, to some extent, there is little or no real consideration of how these courses might produce better teachers, i.e., they focus on a narrow teacher quality perspective. The current situation in teacher education sees change being driven by a ‘top down’ structure rather than one that involves wide consultation with a focus on best practices. The move to university-based ITE courses has seen these courses shift from a largely integrated approach to one

that fits the regulatory requirements of the institutions and Ministry organisations, i.e., paper/semester-based programmes.

What do teacher educators need to do?

A strong message emerged from lively discussion around the need to step outside the 'square' in initial teacher education. We need to look closely at the deficiencies and strengths of the wide range of programmes that exist and try to build on these to develop a model that will meet the needs of a changing teaching and learning environment.

Two relevant questions emerged from the discussion that would need consideration when constructing a way forward. Firstly, are teacher educators current in terms of practice? Secondly, have they lost touch with what is happening in the field? The discussion identified the need to reconnect and up-skill around the realities of the modern classroom. The responses to these questions centred on the need to share and communicate widely. Developing a common body of knowledge about appropriate 'teacher education' pedagogies was a must and these should be based on authentic settings that are collaboratively investigated so as to achieve collective ownership, i.e., what it is to teach and what it is to teach others to teach.

It was identified that the move towards more practice-based models was seen as the way forward and that we need to be cognisant of how other professions do this in their initial training programmes, e.g., medicine.

The group's discussion around good communication suggested the need to create a 'third space' in which authentic discussions could be stimulated between teacher educators, teacher mentors and newly qualified teachers in the field. It was emphasised that this should sit outside institutional control so that work-related pressures are minimised and solid sustainable networks designed to grow good teachers for the future can be debated and developed.

The existence of a range of constraints in the ITE sector was a theme throughout the discussion, e.g., institutional tensions due to PBRF requirements and inter-institution rivalry to name two. As a way forward the need to undertake collaborative research that was relevant to our local context was seen as vital. This would help create an atmosphere of cooperation and commonality of purpose that clearly should exist in such a key educational activity.

