

# TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE UNIVERSITIES IN NEW ZEALAND: DILEMMAS AND DIRECTIONS

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**ABSTRACT** *Since 1991 teacher education has been an integral part of the University of Waikato, following a merger between the University and the former Hamilton Teachers' College. To date it is the only such school in New Zealand though an agreement between Massey University and Palmerston North College of Education will result in a similar pattern there in 1996. Other Colleges of Education have formal links with neighbouring universities for cooperative delivery of undergraduate preservice teacher education. Preparing teachers for a state education system involves multiple goals such as individual development, universal literacy, citizenship, national identity and economic development and occupational skills. Inevitably goals like these are politically and socially determined. Taking these goals into account this paper will explore some of the tensions inherent in university based teacher education.*

## BACKGROUND

The School of Education, established after a long period of cooperation in the Waikato between the University of Waikato and Hamilton Teachers College, is based on a belief that the professional education of teachers is most effectively carried out in a university. Both partners in the merger would benefit, the professional preparation of student teachers would be enriched and their work as teachers enhanced. The extending and critiquing of educational knowledge and the improvement of practice are seen as inseparable processes and the active cooperation of colleagues in a range of schools is also essential. Waikato's Bachelor of Education degree is clearly professional in intent and based on a set of principles developed through debate and consultation within and outside the university. It is premised on the belief that teaching is a learned profession rather than a skilled craft and draws on the definitions developed by Snook (1992). His practitioners would have a broad grasp of schooling in its social, historical and political context. They would be able to provide expert advice on the theory of education and on educational policy. They would approach their teaching in an informed and critical manner. Their methods would be based on the best research available with a recognition of the limitations of this research. They should be highly educated in the content they teach and understand the nature of various disciplines and their limitations.

In the final chapter of an important comparative study of university-teacher education relationships in three countries, Harry Judge notes that

an exploration of the frontier between the university and the training of school teachers is itself part of a broader analysis of the relationships

among higher education, national conceptions of the university, the authority of the state, the pattern of public schooling, the structure of society, and the role within it assigned to teachers. (Judge et al, 1994, p. 241).

He posits that "contrasts are more illuminating than comparisons", noting that "universities and their teachers, like the societies to which they belong, do not look the same to all foreigners, as to natives, and certainly do not look the same to all foreigners." In all three countries involved in the study, France, the United States, and England, there have been immense changes in higher education, schooling and social attitudes over the past thirty years but the responses were very different. In making judgements about the form and location of teacher education programmes in this country, therefore, we need to examine our own past and assumptions, using international experience for illuminative contrast.

The Waikato view of embedding teacher education in the university is not universally accepted. Knight (1992), argues that stand alone institutions, traditional in this country, will continue to provide the most effective means of teacher education and claims that American and Australian experience demonstrates that in university based programmes the teaching staff turned to research to improve their status to the detriment of their teaching. "A gap developed between the work of primary and secondary schools and the university colleges" (p.8). In response to such criticism in the United States, where higher education is competitive and diverse, there are various approaches to reform. On the one hand the Holmes Group (1986), led by Deans of Graduate Schools of Education, is working at establishing closer partnerships with "professional development schools" to enhance raise the standards of both research and practice; on the other hand some critics of the education system are setting up special programmes to train teachers, often from minority backgrounds, to work in inner city schools. In Britain, while the government supports teachers receiving traditional in depth subject knowledge in a university, recent funding policies open the way for professional training to sever its connection with higher education in general.

In New Zealand, as in England, there have been massive changes to the education system, its organisation, goals and curriculum and the means used to evaluate its success. Such changes have been driven by political will, in a context where the role of the State has radically altered and the language of the marketplace has become widespread, and governments have been challenged to expand educational opportunities without increasing expenditure. Not surprisingly accountability has become a key concept. In such a context the existing professional preparation of teachers is likely to be problematic and a site for political scrutiny.

Preparation for a teaching career is linked to social, cultural and political assumptions about the role of teaching and teachers. The role of the teaching profession has always been ambiguous just as the aims of education are diverse. The status of teachers has also tended to depend on the age of the students they teach. Teacher organisations in New Zealand, as elsewhere, have struggled for more than a century to raise their status, to achieve recognition as professionals respected for their knowledge and skill and capable of justifying, monitoring and

continuously improving their practice. For most of this century the leadership of the New Zealand Educational Institute has seen the achievement of a graduate profession as an important goal. By the 1990s that goal is within sight. But the situation has changed. Professional expertise itself is being challenged and in spite of the market economy more rather than fewer controls are likely to be imposed.

## **HOW HAS THE STATE IN NEW ZEALAND VIEWED THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND ITS AIMS?**

Traditionally New Zealand has not been a country with a high regard for formal educational qualifications. To the pioneers of last century qualities of practicality, physical strength, and adaptability rather than book learning were those needed for success. Those responsible for the passage of the 1877 Education Act had clear and limited aims for schooling. The mass of the population, they thought, would not require more than an elementary education in the 3 R's. By the age of 13 years most young people would be ready to seek employment, their education completed. The period of compulsory education was comparatively short and only a small proportion of students were expected to continue formal study in secondary schools. Even fewer would enrol in tertiary study. Beeby (1986) has characterised the underlying assumption of this period as the survival of the fittest, though class, gender and ethnicity were also factors in determining who would have the benefits of further education. The publicly expressed aim of Peter Fraser as Minister of Education in the 1930s was to redress this and provide all young people with equal access to educational opportunity.

The educational changes following the abolition of the Proficiency Examination at the end of 1936 were influenced by the ideas of progressive educators supportive of holistic approaches advocated by educators like Shelley (in Carter, 1993) who is referred to later. The removal of barriers to access and the adoption in 1946 of the Thomas Committee's recommendations for secondary curriculum opened the way for a more comprehensive secondary schooling for a wider range of pupils. The aftermath of war fostered a commitment to extending opportunity, and instilling virtues of citizenship and international understanding. New Zealand secondary schools which were largely founded on a British model to prepare a minority for higher educational, academic and professional opportunities, began to move towards a more generous American model which prized social cohesion as well as academic success, though the academic curriculum remained privileged over technical and vocational expertise. In spite of this the divisions between primary and secondary schooling remained and no real integration of the teaching bodies or their professional preparation took place. In addition an expanding school population meant that teacher supply inevitably took precedence over extension or integration of preservice education.

The 1970s and early 1980s saw major challenges to any comfortable consensus about New Zealand education. From a burgeoning feminist movement and a Māori renaissance it was argued that female and Māori values and interests were ignored, resulting in marginalisation and lower educational outcomes. There were calls for greater community involvement in decision making and for more awareness of bicultural approaches. The rise of the polytechnic system

provided a greater diversity in the tertiary sector and greater emphasis on vocationalism while the concept of lifelong learning received increasing attention. In the tertiary sector questions about the professional training of tertiary teachers was raised. At the same time there were significant new developments in early childhood education in which issues of professional preparation were also paramount. From the mid eighties onwards there was publicly articulated concern about the quality of teaching and an increased emphasis on the desirability of consumer choice and professional accountability.

In the 1990s New Zealand is committed to a mass education system in which the period of compulsory education has been lengthened and there is an expectation that further education and training for the workplace will be the norm. The emphasis on education for social and individual development has given way to an emphasis on skills which will enable country to become economically enterprising and competitive. The Minister speaks of a seamless education system in which the boundaries between schools and continuing education become blurred and in which the task of schools has become to prepare their students with the skills and motivation to enable them to continue their learning. These changes pose additional challenges for teacher education as does the accelerating development of information technology.

The relationship between schools and society has always been complex. It is particularly so at present. On the one hand teachers are attacked by politicians and the press for failing to turn out people with the right mix of skills to contribute to the economy. Their pupils are unemployable. On the other hand there is an almost blind faith in the capacities of education as the key to economic reconstruction. Such complexity is not confined to New Zealand. Smythe (1994) in his inaugural address at Flinders University cited the work of Judith Bessant who shows this pattern in Australian economic and educational history. The response of right wing policy makers in New Zealand, Australia, and Britain in the 1990s has been to impose greater control over the purposes and control of education through charters, mission statements, quality assurance, accountability, measurement of outcomes and curriculum guidelines. While teachers argue for a professional status which entails tertiary level training, in recognition of the complex professional judgement and skills they need to operate on a daily basis, the assumption of the New Right appears to be that teachers are mere technicians, delivering a received curriculum.

## **TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE UNIVERSITIES IN NEW ZEALAND**

It is also salient to look briefly at the development of teacher education programmes in New Zealand and their relations with the university system. At first many teachers in New Zealand schools were immigrants from Britain who had received their education and training there. As the network of schools spread and a larger number of uncertificated and untrained teachers were employed by local boards principals were permitted to employ and train pupil teachers. The passing of the 1877 Education Act made elementary schooling free and compulsory between the ages of 7 and 13 and made Education Boards responsible for the training of teachers. Payments were made to them for the establishment of normal or training schools on a per capita basis. The reality often was that pupil

teachers who could be as young as fifteen were an overworked source of cheap labour who could easily be neglected by head teachers. The range of subjects they were expected to cover with few resources was wide. When training colleges were set up they relied on universities to provide lectures in education and English. The principals were regarded as *ex officio* lecturers of education. At this period, of course, the universities themselves had few resources of staffing, books or other learning tools. Nevertheless there were attempts to bring about more integration especially through the work of Hogben and White in Otago.

The arrival of Professor James Shelley to take up the new chair in Education at Canterbury University College in 1920 brought the possibility of change to existing patterns as well as the intellectual stimulation and excitement he brought to students in Christchurch. Ian Carter's scholarly biography of Shelley insists that he arrived in New Zealand believing that he would also be made principal of the Christchurch Training College and that Canterbury would establish a special school of education to take over the training of secondary teachers for the whole country (Carter, 1993). Shelley's plan for this school included the training of teachers with experimental pedagogy a compulsory subject, providing short courses for administrators, inspectors, teachers and parents and developing the beginnings of educational research. All students studying for the Diploma in Education (for intending secondary school teachers) would be enrolled at Canterbury. The plan drawn up by Shelley is an interesting one in that it involved a partnership between the university, other colleges and local schools. The principals of the four colleges were listed as associate professors for research, while staff from the two major state secondary schools and the normal schools, and the school of art in Christchurch were also to be involved. Shelley also had plans for a Master of Education degree and for travelling scholarships. These plans, some of which had apparently been approved by the Department of Education, came to nothing when the Minister, C. Parr axed them without consultation on the grounds of expense. Though he shortly afterwards agreed to fund a professor of education in each of the four university colleges, university based teacher education in New Zealand did not develop.

Five years later the Reichel Tate Commission Report on New Zealand university education judged it "regrettable that professors were appointed before a full scheme of (integrated teacher) training was thought out" (Reichel Tate Report, 1925, p.34). It expressed surprise that the contact between university and colleges developed in Britain and Australia had no parallel in New Zealand and that though intending teachers made up a high proportion of university classes they studied education for a B.A. degree not an education degree.

The economic depression of the early 1930s was disastrous for teacher education. Two training colleges, as they were called, were closed for a period as they had been in the earlier depression in the 1880s and they faced another difficult period during the Second World War. The resulting post war boom saw them, as the rest of the education system, struggling to cope with the influx of children into the system and providing accelerated and shortened courses. The Campbell Report of 1948, with its finding that personal qualities are more important than academic ones did little to boost the rigour of programmes though the Department of Education, through its Director, was actively involved in the establishment of what became Massey University's extramural programme in the

late 1950s (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, p.315). Three year training for primary teaching was introduced in the late 1960s. In the early 1970s the governance of colleges was vested in independent councils instead of the Education Boards though curriculum and the size of the student bodies remained in Department of Education control. This mirrored developments in Britain and Australia to lengthen and increase the rigour of teacher education programmes and to set them more firmly in a tertiary education setting. While the next twenty years saw the development of joint B. Ed degrees in a number of centres, teacher education remained formally outside the university system. In 1990 the colleges became independent tertiary institutions, free to develop new alliances and partnerships and chart their own directions.

### **LOCATION, CURRICULUM AND CONTROL OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES**

By the early 1970s in Britain teacher education appeared to be finding an established place within higher education in general and the university sector in particular. The English experience of the past twenty years should give those of us in New Zealand pause. During that period initial teacher education has been consistently under attack from central government. At first aimed at "educational theory" and child centred learning, especially in primary and secondary modern schools, and favouring in depth subject knowledge the attacks widened. Implicit in the assumptions underlying the changes imposed by the conservative government were central control, a distrust of professionalism, and a belief in competition as a spur to improve practice.

The diversity possible through tertiary autonomy and the associations with local educational authorities was altered dramatically in a comparatively short period. A White Paper, *Teaching Quality*, published in 1983, identified concerns about teacher supply and quality. The establishment of the Committee for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) in 1984 and later the Teacher Training Agency in 1994 asserted much greater control. The former was to accredit and approve programmes, while the latter has become the disperser of funds which formerly went directly to higher education institutions. The initial membership of CATE included few teacher education professionals. It asserted the importance of knowledge of subjects taught in schools, increasingly tied to the new national curriculum, relevant school experience for teacher educators, and strong links to schools. "With CATE the government defined the legitimate interest of teacher education and, to some extent, teacher educators" (Judge et al. p. 209). Over ten years the criteria by which they worked tightened and became more specific. From advising on course approval CATE's work expanded to cover the ongoing monitoring of courses and identifying and disseminating good practice.

At the same time government ministers were calling for much greater emphasis on school based training, up to eighty percent for intending secondary teachers. Despite political dissatisfaction with schools, the old model of teacher apprentice received official support and new schemes to allow selected adults to qualify as "licensed" teachers or to gain "Qualified Teacher Status" were introduced. The new orthodoxy is strictly technicist and anti professional: on

Doyle's (1990) model of the ideal graduate, quoted by Adrienne Alton-Lee (1994) they would be "good employees", prepared for the prevailing norms in classrooms and able to manage with minimum supervision. With the establishment of the Teacher Training Agency in 1995, CATE had completed its work and was disbanded. The new body has "absolute control of the financing and administration of the whole teacher education enterprise. Teacher educators and teachers could no longer hope to exercise any professional control over training for and entry to 'the profession' " (Judge et al, p.221).

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK**

The introduction of a New Zealand Qualifications Framework based on unit standards poses particular problems for teacher educators within and outside the universities. The logic of the Framework is that qualifications should be industry driven and that the role of providers is to demonstrate that their programmes enable students to satisfy all the standards regarded as core. This degree of prescription, as in Britain, will fundamentally change the role of tertiary educators and make them subject to outside prescription though they will be able to package their own curriculum and assessment practices. McGrath (1994) welcomed an approach based on standards as a means of "helping students, teacher educators, teachers, principals and the community to have better understanding of what teaching is" (p.10). He went on, however, to caution against their potential misuse, allowing for training in competencies entirely within schools and through fragmentation. The authors of the teacher education unit standards themselves, in a paper designed to reassure teacher educators, note that "the implementation of Teacher Education Standards requires a reorientation for most teacher educators and for some it may mean a paradigm shift" (Gibbs and Munro, 1994 p.13). They note also that "the benefits of the standards approach to teacher education is yet to be demonstrated". Yet it is the illusion of certainty about standards and quality that the Framework offers.

Paine and Sedlak (in Judge et al, 1994), American researchers reporting on teacher education in England, note that in the decade after the establishment of CATE "growing control had proved to be a mighty distraction for teacher educators. It had encouraged compliance rather than critical reflection among teacher educators" (p.221). I believe that the current work on unit standards is having a similar effect in new Zealand. In spite of the valiant efforts of the authors to incorporate standards of critical reflection, those working in the field are so busy trying to keep up with the new terminology, coming to terms with the shifting concepts of unit standards, and their seductive promises of ensuring quality, that genuine debate has not been possible. The new discourse developed for the Framework both shapes and limits the debate. This is antithetical to the function of a university where enquiry, critique and rational justification debate are fundamental. Bates (1994) quotes with approval a statement from MacIntyre that universities should be "a place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation in conflict, in which a central responsibility of higher education would be to initiate students into conflict" (Bates, p.11). Kemmis notes that such a view

taken into teacher education, is literally inconceivable from the perspectives of the advocates of competency-based teacher education. A framework of competencies, after all, is intended to provide an answer to all the crucial questions of what and how to teach, not to pose them. . . . It is our task as university educators to engage in debate, not to suppress it. It is our role too, to disagree productively and constructively with those who take different views of teacher education from our own (Quoted in Bates, p.11).

### **Entry to Teacher Education and to the University**

Entry to teacher education programmes in New Zealand has only recently been the responsibility of the institutions teaching these programmes. Nor have academic qualifications been the major selection criteria though there have normally been national guidelines for minimum standards. Intending students have faced interviews in which their communication skills, demonstrated interest in young people and breadth of interests have been probed. Panels have included teacher educators, teacher unions and employing bodies, and until 1990, the Department of Education. With the introduction of B. Ed. degrees students enrolling in these programmes have been required to meet entrance criteria for the Universities as well as those for teacher education. Since New Zealand universities have always provided opportunities for provisional admission for mature students, academic barriers to entrance except in highly competitive professional schools have not been insuperable.

Concern about teacher supply has at various times here as in other countries led to the acceptance of students who did not meet the normal academic prerequisites. Such concerns are resurfacing here as the effects of population increases, new staffing formulae, and retirement patterns in the teaching profession coalesce. Demand is particularly acute in Māori bilingual and immersion schools and in rural areas. There are community expectations of flexible learning opportunities for any local employment needs. Hard pressed school principals and boards see small locally based programmes as a panacea for their staffing problems. University based teacher education cannot ignore this situation which raises issues of equity, conceptualisation, organisation and delivery. In addition there are issues about the maintenance and definition of quality and expectations of staff.

### **CHALLENGES FOR UNIVERSITY BASED TEACHER EDUCATION**

This paper has examined briefly the continuing relations between teacher education and the universities in New Zealand and outlined some of the challenges facing university based teacher education programmes internationally at a time when government policy is to decrease institutional autonomy while at the same time increasing institutional responsibility for centrally determined outcomes. It has noted the difficulties facing such programmes in England where government policies have deprived higher education of any direct funding in this field and mandated a theoretically starved and school based curriculum. As a

result, in spite of a number of well designed and highly regarded programmes the continuation of such enterprises within the higher education sector is at risk.

I have identified some of the specific dilemmas for staff in this School of Education in the current context. Seeking to maintain a balance and equilibrium among these contradictions will be a crucial task in fulfilling the dual role of extending knowledge and improving practice in an institutional context which has traditionally privileged the former but nevertheless has a strong commitment to meeting community and regional needs. In facing a multiplicity of roles, staff will be challenged by the following issues:

- Combining research imperatives with the demands of professional involvement in schools.
- Contesting narrow views within the university over what constitutes appropriate and rigorous research.
- Maintaining the crucial importance of teaching in an institution which does not require its staff to be professionally trained for this role.
- Providing students with a theoretical base to inform their reflection on practice so they are not constrained within their own experience.
- Preparing teachers to be effective practitioners in schools as they exist as well as innovators, change agents and questioners.
- Maintaining a professional concern for students which provides support yet develops professional independence.
- Maintaining the quality of programmes in the face of demands for local delivery and shrinking financial resources.
- Maintaining genuine partnerships with schools in an increasingly market driven educational system.
- Maintaining a balance between involvement in and critique of national policy developments.

Tensions are inevitable in any professional preparation programme. They are particularly acute and prominent in teacher education because of the compulsory nature of schooling, the ubiquity and distribution of schools, the equity dilemmas in a democratic society and the conflicting agendas of parents, community groups, politicians and their financial advisers. Nor is the work of teachers confined to the classroom or indeed to teaching activities. In spite of the demands for precision and measurement the results of their work must often remain intangible. It may frequently have a direct bearing on the life chances of individual students in their care; it also has an impact on social outcomes. It is inevitable that politicians seek to exert control over their work. The task of the university is to provide access to the best tools currently available to enable teachers to be truly critical not only of their own practice but of the context in which they work.

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