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Paper Title:

Principles of Learning and Teaching Derived from The Linton Medallists' Study.

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Background:

The paper is based on current research to be disseminated as a monograph entitled: Reflections on Education: The Linton Medallists.

The Linton Medal, which was established by the School of Education in 1978, is awarded annually to the top graduating student in the Early Childhood and Primary Teacher Education Courses. In some years there were two or even three equal winners; to date, there is a total of 21 Medallists.

Until recently, the student cohort has numbered from 300-400, so winning the Medal has been an outstanding achievement. I have taught many of the Medallists, as they progressed through their three years of studies, and they seemed to be an especially interesting group. Accordingly, as I became more knowledgeable about their interests and expectations for a teaching career, I was drawn progressively into undertaking such a study as this one.

The principal method for gathering data was to invite each Medallist to write a personal - professional autobiographical essay (of approximately 3000 words) based on the following four headings namely: their family background and schooling; college experience including winning the Medal; professional development since graduation; and current views on schooling and education.

Results

Although the study is qualitative rather than quantitative, the accompanying Table Summarizing Selected Data Concerning the Medallists, reveals some interesting facts:

TABLE SUMMARIZING SELECTED DATA CONCERNING THE MEDALLISTS

1. Gender	-	male	1	
		female	20	2. Age
category	-	mature-age	8	
		young	13	3. Coburg
course	-	early childhood	2	
		primary	19	4. Age when
decided to become a teacher	-	pre-school	2	
		primary	2	
		secondary	7	
		adult	7	
		unknown	35	

Secondary schooling -	private	9
	state	8
	unknown	46.
Professional position today -	primary teacher	11
-	early childhood	0
-	TAFE	2
-	university	1
-	family leave	5
-	other	2

Characteristics of the group of Linton Medallists

The first of several clearly discernible characteristics of the Medallists is that all but one are women. This perhaps was to be an expected outcome as, over the thirteen years of the Medal's existence, the student body has been composed of eighty to ninety percent females. On this purely demographic basis at the most we could have expected only one or two male Medallists.

Two of the twenty-one were enrolled in the early childhood education course, and the others were in the primary course. The early childhood program had far fewer students than the primary - some 30 each year while the primary has declined from 400 in the 1970s to 200 in the late 1980s, with current intake being 165. Early childhood students undertook more course hours and subjects than the primary trainees, perhaps suggesting that it was a somewhat greater feat for them to achieve top grades. The higher entrance scores, required of early childhood entrants, should also be taken into account.

Eight of the Medallists (or over one third) were mature-age students, that is twenty-one years or older. This relatively large number of older trainees was in sharp contrast to the proportion of mature-age students in the general student body where they have ranged annually from only ten to twenty percent. On a similar proportional basis we could have expected perhaps from two to four Medallists to be of mature-age.

Variety in the Medallists' backgrounds and career paths since graduation. The essays show that the Medallists' paths prior to teacher training were varied. Even taking only the cases of the younger ones, they came from a variety of families and decided at differing times, during their own schooling, to choose to become primary teachers. While they attended a range of schools, - state, independent and Catholic, half of them were enrolled in private secondary schools; unsurprisingly their study majors were evenly balanced between humanities and sciences. They reveal greatly differing attitudes towards their own schooling, and their levels of academic achievement ranged from modest to excellent. The mature-age students differed somewhat from the younger ones in that several had work experience in various jobs, and some were married and had children before enrolling at Coburg. However, there were marked differences between these older students - one had lived overseas in the Netherlands, one was 'committed' to an alternative community lifestyle in Melbourne, and one came to teaching from a lengthy career in nursing and health education.

As might be expected, their paths since graduation have been varied. Yet there are some common threads with the younger ones taking up teaching positions, or travelling overseas,....some marrying, then taking family leave for the birth and raising of children and then planning a return to work; while older ones after graduation tended to seek and or remain in their teaching positions. However, two of the younger ones are not teaching, and are instead helping maintain a family business. Three of the older ones have become employed in levels of teaching other than primary. One is in a child care course in TAFE; another is teaching English as a Second Language, also in TAFE; and a third has recently been appointed as a tutor in the Faculty of Education, RMIT, Coburg. Of those who became primary teachers, all cared deeply about their teaching; many of them became involved in a variety of professional activities associated with their schools, and in other related endeavours. Some have qualified for promotion to higher positions which they hope to fill when they become available.

Medallists' views in common.

Their views are certainly varied with regard to the quality of the institution's teacher training courses!! But they also have some attitudes and outlooks in common. These include an obvious love of learning and studying conscientiously; their appreciation of lecturers who were knowledgeable, enthusiastic and cared about students; and the particular value of a professionally sound school experience placement as the most practical means of learning about teaching.

There is some similarity in their views towards the respective roles of families, schools, and education in society. They do emphasise the pre-eminent importance of the family in initially fostering children's self-esteem and the school's important nurturing role. Several Medallists are deeply concerned that children who do not do well academically often see themselves as partial if not complete failures. But they recognise that good and caring teachers can help prevent such negative feelings in these children and their parents. They stress values such as equality of concern for all children, and the promotion of 'non-violent behaviours'. In the light of their own childhood and, especially school experiences, they are obviously gratified that corporal punishment has been officially banished from Victorian and most other Australian state schools. They see many effective schools staffed by good teachers but they are also cognisant, at times, of 'poor' teachers behaving unprofessionally. They consider that such teachers should be monitored, their work performance improved or these persons be dismissed. They clearly and unambiguously appreciate that education is much broader than simply schooling.

Principles of learning and teaching

The following basic and already well recognised pedagogical principles applying to adult learning and teaching, and not surprisingly, soon emerge from a study of this nature, that is...as a qualitative study of the views of a select group of students identified as the Linton

Medallists. These students were obviously 'committed learners' and today, as expected, many are working professionally as 'dedicated' teachers - hence this conference paper on learning and teaching. The principles, as noted below, are clearly applicable to Coburg's and to other teacher education programs, and are germane in similar adult education settings:

1. The learners must have the ability to learn. The Medallists typically were good or excellent students when at school.
2. The learner's self-esteem should be nurtured. The younger Medallists often recalled their parents' fullest support in all their early endeavours and especially progress in school.

3. The learners must have the motivation to learn. During their years as students at Coburg many of the Medallists stated that they experienced the joy of learning. Several 'revelled' in doing their best. From 1980 on, most Medallists were aware that in general only the graduates with top marks would obtain primary teaching positions, so they endeavoured their utmost to do well. Interestingly, most of them did not know of the Linton Medal's existence, so were not seeking consciously to win it. The large number of mature-age Medallists (twenty-one years and over) is worth noting - generally at Coburg mature-age students have done well, presumably and mainly because they have clearly delineated goals and are highly motivated.

4. The curriculum content of the training course must be seen by the learners as relevant and essential to their ultimate goal, in these cases, of becoming teachers. Obviously the blocks of School Experience were seen as absolutely relevant. All the students wanted more School Experience days and to be supervised by the best possible teachers.

5. Lecturers as teachers. Medallists wanted their college lecturers to be models of good teaching practice. In particular, they valued lecturers who were knowledgeable concerning their subject, and showed interest in and concern for their students as learners.

6. Teaching styles. Recent Medallists seem particularly aware, if not concerned, with the quality of their lecturers' teaching levels, presentation styles and classroom performances. They appreciated the introduction of more student-centred approaches to learning, whereby their own interests were taken into account and more often they become actively involved rather than passive listeners in lectures or classes. This approach is linked to encouraging students to think and reflect. Reflectiveness is defined as deep or careful thought which often makes original connections or questions the previously unquestioned. Such an approach is stressed in the new Bachelor of Education primary course introduced in 1989 and should permeate through all subjects in the course. Recent Medallists especially appreciated it, for example, one of the Medallists (1991), reflected on the value of the new 'home-base group' subject called Reflective Learning and Teaching:

'Thinking for myself in a classroom came as quite a surprise, but the instant I tasted the freedom that independent thought offers, I knew that I was born to learn.' !!!

Conclusion:

Clearly in teacher education, lecturers especially ,should preach ,practice and employ , the best possible principles and apply them to their own learning and teaching! Studying the experiences and views of this group of Medallists, or what might be called ' exemplary ' graduates, over the past thirteen years, provides some useful insights as to what these principles are. They obviously could be reduced to even more basic tenets concerning for example, learning,.... teaching,..... curriculum construction.... purpose and motivation in learning and teaching..... It seems that they could be generalised even more widely and applied to other learning and teaching settings, that is, 'lessons' of many and various kinds.

Principles of Learning and Teaching Derived from
The Linton Medallists' Study

- . The learner must have the ability to learn.
- . The learner's self-esteem should be nurtured.
- . The learner must have the motivation to learn.
- . The lesson or curriculum content must be seen by learners as relevant to their goals.
- . The teachers should know their subjects, and care for students as learners.
- . The teaching style should actively involve learners, especially their capacity for thinking and reflecting.

Chart Showing Selected Data on the Medallists

Medallist's Name

Age when decided to be an ECE or Primary. Tchr

Secondary Schooling

Private or State

Coburg Course ECE or Primary

Age Classific. during course

Young or Mat AgeProf Position today - Prim. Tchr.

TAFE/Univ, Family/Other

Georgia

Secondary

State

Primary

Young

Family & Other

Doris
Primary
Private
Primary
Young
Family
Pamela
Adult
State
ECE
Mature-Age
Primary Teacher
Suzanne
Secondary
State
Primary
Young
Family
Julie
Pre-School
State
Primary
Young
Family
Karen
?
?
Primary
Young
Primary Teacher
Jennifer
Adult
State
Primary
Mature-Age
Primary Teacher
Catherine D.
Secondary

Private
Primary
Young
Primary Teacher
Anne
Adult
Private
ECE
Mature-Age

TAFE Teacher
Christine
Post Secondary
State
Primary
Young
Primary Teacher
Robyn
Pre-School
Private
Primary
Young
Primary Teacher
Catherine H.
Adult
Private
Primary
Mature-Age
Primary Teacher
Loren
Primary
State
Primary
Young
Family & Other
Susan S.
Secondary
State
Primary
Young
Travel
Melissa
Secondary
Private
Primary
Young
Primary Teacher
Sheridene
--
--
Primary
--
? Other
Jeanette
Pre-School
Private
Primary

Young
Primary Teacher
Tim
Adult
Private
Primary
Mature-Age
Primary Teacher
Peta
Adult
?
Primary
Mature-Age
Primary Teacher
Sally
Secondary
Private
Primary
Mature-Age
TAFE Teacher
Susan W.
Adult
?
Primary
Mature-Age
University TutorT
0
T
A
L
S
Fem 20
Male 1
Ranges from
pre-school to adult
State 8
Private 9
Unknown 4
ECE 2
Primary 19
Young 13
Mature 8
ECE 0
Primary 11
Other 10