

YOUNG TEACHERS' IDEAS IN ACTION

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is the result of a study of some of the first Footscray Institute of Technology primary teacher education graduates.

The study, undertaken in the graduates' fifth year of teaching, compares the ideas about education which these teachers expressed at the conclusion of the three year Diploma of Teaching (Primary) course and the ideas they express now five years' later.

Findings that the graduates feel equipped to participate in the professional lives of the schools in which they have worked and that they have participated extensively cast doubt on the developmental and deficit models which have characterised similar research.

This paper provides a case study of one of these teachers.

## YOUNG TEACHERS' IDEAS IN ACTION

### Setting the scene

In 1985, the Footscray Institute of Technology (FIT) offered for the first time a Diploma of Teaching (Primary) program. The program was intended to be both regionally based and regionally appropriate. In seeking to achieve these goals, Toomey and Ryan (1985) pointed out that the course needed to provide:

- . equality of outcomes for the students undertaking the FIT teacher education program
- . acknowledgment of the particular skills, talents and needs within the western region community

- . opportunities to develop a cooperative and coordinated educational community within the region.

The ethnic and working class composition of the population, the inability of many western suburban students to compete successfully for the limited number of available tertiary places in Victoria and the downturn in the economy of the region made FIT a practical location for bringing to life the rhetoric of Participation and Equity. The establishment of a primary education program was seen as a way of providing greater tertiary access to disadvantaged groups in the community generally and to females specifically. Furthermore, the course was envisaged as providing enhanced self-esteem for the participants but additionally as developing in them role models who would be significant in opening up the educational options of the young people whom they would in turn teach.

In attempting to achieve these aims, the program took as guiding principles multiculturalism and regionality and the drawing together of theory and practice. Attempts at implementing these principles in course design and delivery are outlined in Toomey and Ryan (1985) and in selection procedures in Ryan and Toomey (1986).

The establishment of the FIT program brought with it criticisms of creating a "ghetto mentality" by recruiting "from the west for the west" and of being too overtly responsive to current government rhetoric.

It was within this climate that the first seventy students to enter teacher education at FIT commenced at the beginning of 1985. This paper is a report of one stage in a planned long-term follow up of the graduates of the program.

It is possible to describe the social context for the student teachers who entered the program at FIT as "a time of change".

The Footscray Institute of Technology Diploma of Teaching (Primary) course was established in mid-term of a ten year Labor Government in Victoria. It was a time of lively change in society generally and in education specifically. Educational policy papers were released in 1986 and Curriculum Frameworks documents in 1987. There was a strong access and equity focus through these curriculum documents. The emphasis at the time the teacher in the present study was enrolled in the Diploma of Teaching (Primary) was on curriculum change while, more recently, the emphasis has been on structural

changes in education. The mid-eighties saw the release by the bureaucracy of curriculum documents which have latterly been followed by patterns of school and system organization and individual promotion which have helped to develop the democratic infrastructure to support the curriculum changes.(or so it seemed pre-change of state Government).

Part of the brief of the Footscray Institute of Technology course was to expose prospective teachers to current Ministry of Education policies and to attempt to develop in these student teachers the skills to be able to take part in the processes of change. This was so in the course's establishment in the previously poorly educationally served western suburbs of Melbourne. The mood of change was reflected too in the course's selection procedures which took account of language and cultural background factors and work experience with children and which relied on interview performances as opposed to the more standard academic scores used by similar courses. Additionally, within the course, students were exposed to current and changing patterns in educational rhetoric and practice in Victoria. Most importantly, the processes of the course selection, implementation and administration to which the students were exposed was in large part mirrored within the schools and broader communities of which they became a part during their initial teacher education and of which they continue to be a part. In this way, it can probably be said that the students in the FIT course found higher levels of congruity between various aspects of their teaching preparation than has been reported in other studies.

### Research Background

This study takes its lead from the work of Frances Fuller and Jennifer Nias. In their studies of teachers, they have highlighted stages of career development through which teachers pass (Fuller) and the sense of occupational identity which teachers acquire (Nias).

The development of teachers as conceived by Fuller (Fuller, 1969; Fuller and Bown, 1975) is a three stage process characterised by the dominant personal concerns identified in studies of beginning and of experienced teachers. In the first stage, concerns are about survival and adequacy as a teacher, about class control, being liked by pupils and evaluations by supervisors. Major concerns at the second stage are evoked by the teaching situation, about working with too many students, having too many non-instructional duties, time pressures,

inflexible situations and lack of instructional materials. Finally, in the third stage, concerns are about impact on pupils, being fair, recognising social and emotional needs and matching curriculum content to the abilities of individuals.

Building on Fuller's proposition, Nias (1989) reconceptualised these concerns (from a ten year longitudinal study of ninety-three primary teachers), as preoccupation with survival, search for identification, interest in consolidation, extension and a desire for increased influence within the educational system. In the first two stages, individual concerns are centred on self and in particular with securing a sense of fit between the choice of career and self-identification. In the third, mature experienced teachers' search for personal extension may be seen as concern for task and performance of that task. Lastly, teachers develop a concern for impact, that is, making a lasting impression upon pupils and/or on the educational system.

Although the developmental models espoused by Fuller and by Nias do not suggest that the stages are normative, mutually exclusive or irreversible, the similarities in pace and profiles of teacher socialization are defined. Furthermore, the exclusive focus on identification of teachers' "concerns", "problems" and "self-adequacy" portrays professional development from a negative, problem-oriented perspective.

In a critical examination of developmental theory, Martinez (1992a,1992b) points out that the research is based exclusively on a "deficit" model that highlights the needs and problems of beginning teachers. Major limitations of the research are seen as the definition of problems in terms only of practice; reification of problems without consideration of institutional and social contexts of teaching and reliance on quantitative research methods to reveal central tendencies to the exclusion of everyday teaching situations.

From longitudinal case studies of three beginning teachers, Martinez (1992a) identified positive qualities which neophytes brought to secondary schools in Queensland. Two sets of personal qualities acquired during teacher education at university were knowledge of new curriculum approaches and of concepts underpinning key issues such as social justice and equity, assessment and ability grouping; and the enthusiasm and energy to implement those goals. The finding that beginning teachers make a positive contribution in schools provides a strong argument for a review of the widely held deficit model of beginning teaching.

Clearly, there is a need for qualitative research to describe individual differences and idiosyncrasies in the development and pace of teacher socialization and the influences of system and social factors within schools that facilitate or constrain the performances of beginning teachers.

A purpose of the Gay, Ryan and Wilson (1992) studies, of which this paper describes one part, is to test deficit assumptions in determining whether the FIT program provided beginning teachers with the confidence and competence to be "active agents of construction" in their particular school settings.

### Description of Study

This is a case study of one of the graduates of the first intake in 1985 of the Diploma of Teaching (Primary) program at FIT.

The teacher, Betty, was selected as representative of the students coming into the program at Footscray in 1985. Betty started school with very little English and completed all her schooling in western suburban government schools. Betty continues to live in and since graduating has taught in four schools in Melbourne's west.

Material for this paper has come from several sources. Part of it is drawn from course guides and work programs and evaluation materials that Betty has written in the years, 1988-1992. These represent Betty's ideas about teaching and ways in which she has attempted to put these into practice. This material is supplemented by an application for promotion, which Betty completed in 1990.

In addition to this material, Betty's ideas about education have been drawn from three videotaped discussions. The first videotape, a personal statement of ideas about education, was made at the conclusion of the course in 1987. The second, a group interview, was made in mid 1992 and reported in Gay, Ryan and Wilson (1992) when a reunion was conducted five years after graduation of the first graduates from the Footscray primary program. The third videotape is the one that will be drawn on most heavily in this paper. In it, a discussion was undertaken, relating to major themes drawn from Betty's involvement in the earlier videotapes and in the written documents which she made available to the researchers.

In reviewing the videotaped and written materials, the researchers sought to determine consistent themes and also the points at which new ideas were first raised. Furthermore, in studying consistent themes, the researchers looked for evidence of extension and elaboration of ideas. In the most recent interview, attempts were made to isolate contextual factors (experiences, colleagues, further study) which stimulated the elaboration of existing ideas and the genesis of new ideas.

In preparation for this interview, the researchers framed the following questions:

. What was there about the context at FIT which developed your ideas?

- course content?
- school experience placements
- people/peers?
- special course projects?

. Looking at the videotape made at the end of your course, what comments do you want to make now five years later?

. Please chart for us the placements you've had since leaving the course. What do you see as the important influences in each context?

. What happened between these two statements:

Extract from Curriculum Vitae, 1990: "I feel privileged when my assistance is requested on any matters pertaining to teaching. I have provided support and clarification on situations and issues that have been causing concern. Often I have been approached to share activities and resources, evaluation and teaching strategies. This has been evident in the team planning of units of work, which have developed a more thorough approach to curriculum planning."

"I am capable of displaying general leadership and management skills, that will gain respect and support from my colleagues. I have shown that I provide a challenging, stimulating and caring environment for children, commitment to teaching and pleasant professional approach to other staff members."

Extract from 1987 Videotape: "It is important to provide situations that are non-threatening. That is, as a teacher, the children see me as a friend and as approachable. They

can approach me to discuss work and other personal matters. I feel it is important to praise children and not just for work that is up to standard but to praise just for effort and enthusiasm. I believe this will make a fun and enjoyable

learning environment where children will want to work and want to learn."

. I want to describe to you a developmental model which some writers have said explains the stages of teachers' careers. Do you think this is how things have worked for you?

### Findings of Study

This section of the report comprises a summary of ideas drawn from the first two videotapes of which Betty was a part and from the written documentation she submitted to the researchers.

Main themes were drawn from the 1987 videotape and from the written statement which accompanied the videotape made in mid-1992.

### Themes from Written Material

The material drawn from Betty's course guides, work programs and evaluation statements which comprised the written documentation was divided into ideas which were consistent, extended and new.

The table below includes a summary of this material.

TABLE 1  
KEY THEMES AND DEVELOPMENTS  
1987 1989 1990 1992  
awareness of  
children's  
backgrounds stronger  
meta-  
cognitive  
influenced development  
of children

to fullest  
potential  
parent  
invol-  
vement children as discovers  
who explore ideas  
stronger  
influence  
on future confidence  
in  
providing  
classroom  
environment  
that is  
highly  
organised,  
stimulating  
and  
purpose-ful  
for  
children  
and  
colleagues  
discipline

education is further  
development and  
enhancement of  
children's skills and  
knowledge participator  
in children's  
learning school  
management  
skills school as an  
enjoyable experience  
in which children  
will want to  
learn/teacher: an

approachable  
friendly integrated  
curriculum supportive, warm,  
challenging and  
stimulating  
environment, building

on children's  
self-esteem evaluation  
of self and  
children encouraging  
cooperation and  
participation  
team  
planning praise effort and  
enthusiasm in-  
services,  
camps,  
excursions,  
committee  
membership

#### Influences in the Development of Ideas, (Post-Registration)

Looking through the written material which Betty provided, there are consistent themes which relate to the establishment of a warm and caring classroom which is responsive to individual differences and needs of the children. Other consistent themes relate to the development of children to their fullest potential, to the development of children as reflective thinkers, able to carry such skills into their future lives. This reference to the development of children's thinking capacities and to school as preparation for their futures is elaborated in Betty's more recent statements. References which are not apparent in Betty's earlier statements but which appear later and persist over the years since their appearance are her view that the teacher should be a participator in children's learning, not simply a facilitator of such learning (1989), the use of an integrated curriculum (1990) and team planning (1990). By its nature, the curriculum vitae which Betty prepared in 1990 as part of an application for a promotion which she obtained, includes more references to committee membership and professional activities beyond her classroom base than is the case in the course outline and work program material which Betty submitted to the researchers.

Parents and discipline are mentioned for the first time in Betty's written materials for 1991 and 1992 and it will be interesting to watch development of attention to these aspects of her role as a teacher in future years. In the videotaped interview about her written materials, Betty indicated that her interest in classroom discipline had been aroused this year when she took over a grade at the beginning of Term 2 as the second teacher with whom the children had worked during 1992.

Evaluation, which receives only cursory mention in the earliest documents prepared by Betty, has become an increasingly significant part of the later documents. The year, 1990, seemed to be a turning point for many aspects of Betty's work but especially for evaluation. It was during 1990, Betty explained, that she worked with another teacher developing and trialing teaching and evaluation procedures. The team teaching format allowed Betty and the other teacher the chance to develop and trial a range of evaluation techniques and by its very nature the chance to evaluate both their own and each other's performances. Talking about this team planning, Betty remarked,

Reflecting on our teaching, sharing ideas made me think about

things I was doing - not so much critical of each other but if one of us wondered why the other was doing something, talked a lot. Even if we didn't have to plan something, we still got together to evaluate. We tried so many different techniques and found it valuable to have records of what was happening throughout the year.

#### Influences of FIT Program on Ideas

##### - School Experience

In responding to the question about aspects of the FIT program context which had contributed to her development of ideas about teaching, Betty referred to two people who had influenced her. In charting her movement through four schools in the five years since graduation, she again referred to particular people who had influenced her development. In reference to her three years at FIT, enrolled in the Diploma of Teaching (Primary), Betty highlighted a teacher with whom she spent her third year school experience rounds and a language curriculum consultant from the local School Support Centre with whom she spent a series of days. Betty drew from each of these educators ideas which are still a part of her

classroom language work. The School Support Centre afforded her the opportunity to visit a range of schools with the consultant to whom she was assigned while the school experience rounds enabled Betty to work side by side with a creative teacher and to mirror and extend the work of that teacher in her planning and teaching commitments. She spoke of the publishing ideas she acquired at this time and commented that within her present school, other teachers come into her room to glean ideas about the publishing work she has extended from that base six years ago. In such ways as this, ideas which Betty drew from these two and other experiences continue to shape her classroom work.

In the most recent videotaped interview, she referred to looking back frequently at the original statement and videotape she made at the end of her course in 1987. She voiced the view that the principles that were a part of the 1987 statement continue to be those to which she returns in preparing any rationale or philosophical statement to underpin her teaching. According to Betty, these are the ideas to which she adheres and which she tries hard to implement in her teaching. As Betty said:

It's the way I think and it's the way I'd like to be in the classroom. It's in my courses and it's what I go on."

It is particularly interesting to note that in this time of constraint and philosophical change in education in Victoria, Betty feels as a young classroom teacher, always the last in and the first out of any school in which she is placed, that she is unfettered by the changes that beset the education system at large.

#### - Course Content

When Betty spoke of the on-campus part of her three year Diploma of Teaching (Primary) course, she referred to the way in which all the bits of the course fell together for her in that year. She also cited a maths lecturer as influential in the development of her ideas about teaching and in her practical application of those ideas.

In the most recently videotaped interview, Betty said,

I remember Foundation Studies laid a lot of the theory down."

This comment and others which follow demonstrate the nexus between theory and practice which have characterised Betty's ideas about teaching and her practical classroom work. Betty commented about Foundation Studies,

I remember Foundation Studies in Year 3 - I really enjoyed it - everything - thinking "Now I know how that works" - things just fell into place with that subject."

It seems that while Betty drew practical ideas about activity maths (I still do activity maths the way we were taught at College) and language from the curriculum studies and school experience components of the course, it was in the Foundation Studies component that general philosophical underpinnings of her teaching were crystallised.

Within this component of the course, students worked together in their third year to develop evaluation and discipline policies, interviewing teachers, parents and children in the development of such policies while attending to current Ministerial guidelines.

Additionally, as part of Foundation Studies, students took part in a guest lecture program where speakers as diverse as Jocelyne Scutt (feminist lawyer), Haddon Storey (then Opposition spokesman on Education), Stephanie Alexander (restaurateur), Carmel Bird (author) and David Edwards (Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce) discussed with them their ideas about education.

It was within such a climate that students like Betty prepared videotaped statements of their ideas about teaching as they neared the completion of their courses. (The videotape which Betty made at this point in 1987 was used in the stimulus recall question in the most recent videotaped discussion referred to in this paper).

Betty referred to the support she felt being part of the first small intake into education at FIT:

Not so much influenced my ideas but support - there were so few of us (65) - shared a lot, supported each other a lot; we were the first, easy to ask people for help, support, watching others, getting

ideas.

Betty indicated that her fourth year of study had less influence on her than the earlier three years because of its lack of a practical component. As she described it,

It was rewarding to finish and to have some of the theory to reflect on - but it hasn't helped me in putting things into practice."

#### Influences of Other People in the Development of Ideas

Once teaching, it was again people to whom Betty attributed the greatest influence in the development of her ideas. In her first school, she remembers the Principal taking her aside on her first visit to the school and telling her how much her presence as a first year teacher was valued and how the school staff realised they would gain much from her presence on the staff. Moving from that school in her second year, Betty found after a year of settling in that it was the influence and encouragement of an Integration teacher with whom she worked closely and of a colleague with whom she team planned and team taught who set her on the path to making an application for promotion.

According to Betty, she took on many additional administrative and policy making tasks as part of her work,

For myself, feel more capable, gives you more confidence, important that you interact with other staff, makes you a stronger person for the kids as well - it helps you as well."

In charting her progress through the four schools in which she has worked Betty described various ways in which she has made an impact on the activities of each school. Examples of this are included in the earlier tables but some particular examples worthy of note are Betty's involvement in 1989 in the removal of an aspect of the Maths curriculum from the school program, her initiation of team planning and Activity Mathematics in her third teaching year and in more recent times her development of a camping program and the materials required to support it and her leadership of a team comprising another teacher and parents.

#### Developmental Model Revisited

The developmental model of teachers' careers was described to Betty and her thoughts were sought about ways in which the survival, identification and impact stages related to her. According to Betty, classroom management and discipline have not been an issue for her. Even so, she felt that her first year's teaching was characterised by trial and error, an opportunity to trial what had been learned at College, "to see how it worked for me".

However, Betty was clearly not so overwhelmed by this situation that she did not seek out an institution which would admit her to a fourth year program in her first post-registration year, enrol and complete this program successfully during the first two years of her teaching.

Her sense of self as a teacher was in place as she concluded her three years' initial teacher education. Betty considered herself a teacher from that point and has both had and been able to take up many opportunities to exert an impact on the schools in which she has worked.

While Betty felt her experience did not relate closely to the sequence of survival, identification and impact stages, the way she described her three years initial teacher education provided evidence of a developmental pattern in those years. She commented,

In third year, a lot of the work we did there stuck in my mind."

Speaking of her first year teaching, Betty remarked,

"It was basically what I had learnt in my third year - ideas from third year stand out because you really understood why and how and put them into practice."

Comparing Year 3 with earlier years of her course at FIT, Betty described it this way,

Listened to what was going on in first and second years and understood it but wondered how you would implement it sometimes."

### Some Concluding Thoughts

Early in her career, the teacher in this study, like others in the earlier work by Gay, Ryan and Wilson (1992) has displayed

"competent membership of school organization" as defined by Denscombe (1980). This sets her and them apart from the teachers in Nias' study (1989) where it was unusual for those less than eight years into their careers to develop a concern for their impact on what happened in schools and education. The findings of this study support those of Martinez (1992a, 1992b) that there is little evidence for a deficit developmental model of the professional socialization of young teachers.

It is useful to note that the program at FIT of which Betty was a part exposed students to current educational policies and practices and set a pattern for ongoing awareness of change and development in education. This, coupled with an attitude within the program which valued ideas, experiences and backgrounds of the students, prepared them well to play active roles in their workplaces. Betty has clearly played just such an active role.

She is also a "working model" of the "going home" philosophy to which Smith et al (1986) refer. Not only is Betty working geographically close to home but the beliefs and teaching practices she described are reflective of the original teacher education program at FIT.

The collegiality of teaching is clearly valued by Betty. She responds to colleagues, draws strength from their support and in turn interacts well and shares her expertise with them. This is a pattern which has followed Betty through her initial teacher education and through her career to date.

It is demonstrated in her readiness to have worked with student teachers in her school. She has welcomed this opportunity and acknowledges the contribution which student teachers can make to her teaching and development. With the implementation in Victoria of the AST 1 (Advanced Skills Teachers) scheme where only teachers, in at least their ninth year post graduation year may apply for the promotion which enables them to work with student teachers, Betty is denied this opportunity.

Likewise, with the current poor employment situation for education students completing courses, Betty, like her colleagues, is denied the opportunity to interact on a daily basis with "young teachers". Consequently, she remains the youngest member of staff in most schools in which she works.

This may be seen as an artefact in Betty's contribution to

schools in which she has worked, making that contribution greater than the traditional developmental model has described for teachers in their first five years of teaching. With strong experienced teaching models, perhaps Betty has taken on modes of behaviour more representative of greater experience than would have been the pattern had she been in settings where for one reason or another, "levels" of experience were apparent and ossified within a school staff.

A more positive explanation of Betty's contribution can be found in her comment that she was sure she was a teacher from the point at which she completed her course and it was with this attitude and the expertise and experiences which supported it that Betty went into her first and later teaching positions.

She embodies the social aspects of teaching, referring in her videotape to her interest in talking with and listening to her pupils and in her responsiveness to people with whom she has worked during her initial teacher education and in the years since.

The philosophical basis and the theoretical understandings which support Betty's teaching come to life in her interactions as teacher with pupils and as teacher with colleagues and in her administrative and management activities.

Such a picture emphasises the practical aspects of teacher education and the need for programs which develop skills in both teachers and children to allow for maximum benefit to be gained in social interactions. The importance of valuing the contributions of individuals and of monitoring those contributions and of extending them in ways most advantageous to the individuals and the group are at the basis of democratic and consensual social interaction.

They are at the base too of the future which Betty attempts to shape for the children she teaches. Without an understanding of and an environment in which to trial and extend the skills they develop children cannot travel far. The journey too will be short without the sense of confidence which comes from feelings of expertise and the competence which enables individuals to interact meaningfully with others for both their own and other's development. Betty's career to date has exemplified such a journey and in the work she does with children she both models confidence and competence and attempts to develop the same qualities in the children she teaches.

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## APPENDIX A

TABLE 2  
IDEAS ABOUT EDUCATION  
(the views of one young teacher)

1987 (videotape made at completion of Diploma of Teaching  
(Primary) course)

Main Themes:

- . teacher's awareness of variety of children's backgrounds
- . children learn by discovering, exploring ideas, drawing conclusions
- . the learner is a discoverer, seeking understanding
- . education is further developing and enhancing children's skills and knowledge ... an enjoyable experience
- . teaching is providing an environment that is supportive and warm and challenging and stimulating and which builds on children's self-esteem and motivation
- . encouragement of cooperation and participation
- . providing a variety of learning experiences to cater for individual differences, including children with special needs
- . praise effort and enthusiasm
- . situation should be non-threatening, with teacher, a friend, approachable on work and personal matters
- . enjoyable learning environment - children want to work and learn
- . access and success - opportunity to follow, provide learning experiences and build on previous learning,

varied

- learning experiences; achieve and experience success,  
praise children, help them to feel successful
- . development of reflective, thinking, competent and  
valued members of society