School - university partnerships:

An exploration of the perceptions of teachers concerning involvement in teacher education.

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Abstract

Much has been written about the nature of existing partnerships in teacher education which go far beyond the limited involvement in practice teaching that was once the norm in teacher education. However, because most partnerships have been designed by university based teacher educators and school administrators, the classroom teachers' voice has largely been absent. On the few occasions in which the teachers' voice has been heard, it has been at best ambivalent.

This paper attempts to give teachers a voice by asking the question: how do teachers perceive preservice teacher education and their role within it? One hundred and seven teachers in six primary schools in the Parramatta Catholic Diocese of Sydney were surveyed. They were asked four questions about their perceptions of: recent changes in teaching; possible changes in teacher education; their role within teacher education; and the possible benefits of involvement in teacher education for themselves, their class and their school. The results of this initial exploration have relevance for the planning of school - university partnerships for the professional development of both preservice and practising teachers.

Introduction

Few people would disagree that the world is rapidly changing with many societies moving from industrial to knowledge economies, predicated by the enormous advancement of the information and communication technologies. As Sachs and Groundwater-Smith (1999) argue, Australia has been one of these societies which has experienced significant economic and structural reform embedded in human capital development. These reforms have been driven by global economic rationalism that focuses on outcomes which emphasize the need to be to be efficient, effective and economic. As a result, people are urged to achieve at high levels if they are to function successfully in the current global environment.

These economic marketing principles have also shaped the practices of schools and teachers by demanding greater levels of accountability against a framework of assessment and standards. Coupled with this movement, societal expectations and demands of schools and teachers are burgeoning. Teachers are not only expected to maximize the learning potential of all pupils but to attend to the increasing demands of society. Retallick and Groundwater-Smith (1999) maintain that teachers' work is changing as school systems themselves change to become more self managing centres of teaching and learning within a
context of centralized curriculum decision making. Furthermore, the Ramsey Review of Teacher Education in NSW (2000) has clearly identified that the roles of teachers in educational settings, along with the knowledge and skills needed to undertake these roles professionally, are changing dramatically. A cursory glance at recent policies and curriculum documents reveals that teachers are now dealing with a wider range of academic abilities, literacy and numeracy learnings, cultural backgrounds, behavioural problems and information and communication technologies than ever before. The way children learn and teachers teach has been subject to close research and pedagogical debate.

Universities as the main providers of teacher education in Australia also have not escaped the global trends to provide an educated workforce for a strong, economic society. The challenges for university teacher education programs, Sachs and Groundwater-Smith (1999) argue, are:

Pressure for external accountability from a variety of educational stakeholders, increased political pressure to direct the processes, structures and qualifications of teacher preparation, demands for school based teacher education programs, the provision of more economically (sic) and efficient teacher education programs and the preparation of competent practitioners. (p. 217-18)

Ramsey, in the early release of Issues of Significance Canvassed in Submissions to the NSW Review of Teacher Education, has noted the view that continued reduction of the funding base for teacher education has reached crisis point, where "university staff now have workloads which preclude spending appreciable amounts of time in schools...[and] the relevance and currency of university teacher educator's experience of the work of schools and other educational settings is compromised" (2000, p.4).

The earlier report of the Senate Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession "A Class Act" (Crowley, 1998) found that student teachers were inadequately prepared for the complex and demanding task ahead of them. The report noted:

The most trenchant criticism of teacher training related to its practical components. Witnesses considered practicums were not given sufficient priority or time by universities. They were often (but not always) concentrated towards the end of a teacher training course....The rationale for this was that teachers would then be better prepared. The effect however was that some students, confronted for the first time with the reality of classroom teaching, decided it was not for them and left the course. Had they been exposed to classroom teaching earlier they would have saved themselves and universities significant time and effort. (1998, p.183)

There was a general belief that the amount and quality of hands on experience and training in schools and classrooms was inadequate. The report recommended new models of teacher education were urgently needed for high quality and appropriate pre-service training that produced better educated, more reflective and responsive practitioners.

Hence the current situation demands it is time to reconceptualise teacher education which can no longer be the sole responsibility of the universities. "Partnerships need to be developed involving all the sectors which have a stake in teacher education," Ramsey (2000, p.10). As Hill (1998) previously suggested, the direction for reform should begin with the redefining of the role of preservice training so that it acknowledges people as life long learners who develop professionally throughout their teaching careers. This learning needs to embrace an integration of theory and practice where research can form the basis on
which teachers, both preservice and credentialled, can reflect on their practice and inform future action. This means a stronger emphasis must be placed on learning in the field, within differing contexts, which aims to broaden and enrich the learning process for all. This will allow various stakeholders in the teacher education process to participate through new forms of partnership as advocated by Howard and Butcher (1999) which requires collaboration between universities, school systems and teachers.

**Purpose of the research**

Whilst research has investigated the academic staff and student teachers' perceptions of the adequacy of teacher preparation, the picture from the co-operating teachers in the field has been missing. Furthermore, as Veal and Rikard (1998) attest, little evidence exists of co-operating teachers and academics working together to enhance the learning outcomes for students, teachers and others. This study seeks to address this gap by giving teachers a voice to state how they perceive teaching, teacher education and their roles in the professional development of student teachers.

**Methodology**

The School of Education at ACU has been involved in a number of field-based initiatives over the past four years. This study has examined the perceptions of teachers in six schools in the Parramatta Catholic Diocese in the western area of Sydney. Two schools were chosen in each of three strata:

- schools that had no knowledge of the field-based initiatives.
- schools that had been involved with field-based initiatives for at least two years and were still involved.
- schools that had been involved with field-based initiatives but were not currently involved.

The schools were chosen in collaboration with Parramatta CEO to ensure that no school was overloaded by involvement in the research project. All teachers in the six schools were surveyed. The initial data gathering took place in Term 1, 2000.

Data were collected using an open ended questionnaire. The questionnaires were anonymous, identifying only the school where the respondents taught. It contained three questions for which only a Yes/No answer was required and four broad questions about the teachers' perceptions of: recent changes in teaching; possible changes in teacher education; their role within teacher education; and the possible benefits of involvement in teacher education for themselves, their class and their school. The questions asked are presented in Table 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Table 1 Research Questions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you think that teaching has changed over the past ten years? Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>If so please say how it has changed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you think that there should be changes in the way preservice teacher education is conducted? Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>If so please say how you think it should change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you see that you have any responsibility / role in the education of future teachers? Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>If so how would you describe that role? OR If not please tell us why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>In what ways could involvement with a university for teacher education benefit: You; Your class; Your school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaires were presented to the staff at a staff meeting at which time had been allocated for staff to complete the questionnaire during the meeting. This procedure was designed to maximise the response rate. While it was explained that completion of the questionnaire was optional, all teachers present completed the questionnaires. The response rate in five of the schools was 98%. In one school it was not possible to organise such a meeting* and the questionnaires were left by one of the researchers who briefly explained the purpose of the study. Again the optional nature of the responses was indicated and a return envelope was left with the principal. In this case the response rate was much lower at only 23%.

The comments of all respondents were read to gain an overall impression of the perceptions of individual respondents and of each respondent group. Following this, each respondent's comments were categorised, using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each new point mentioned by a respondent was categorised separately to ensure that no comment was lost. These comments formed the content units for subsequent categorisation. If the same point was repeated within one teacher's answer then only the initial content was categorised and recorded. All three researchers read the survey responses and individually determined the content units within every respondent's answer. Individual content units were then categorised by each researcher. Finally, the researchers met as a group and the content units and categories were discussed and finally determined.

The results were fed back to the schools at staff meetings later in the year. The feedback sessions were seen as an essential step in establishing credibility with teachers and giving them a greater sense of ownership of any subsequent plans for field based learning involving their schools. In addition, the meetings provided an opportunity for staff to ask further questions, as well as an opportunity for the researchers to check the validity of their analysis of the teachers’ responses.
Results

In total there were 107 teachers who responded to the questionnaire. Not all respondents answered each question. Therefore, in the tables presented below the number of teachers answering in a particular manner is shown along with this number expressed as a percentage of those teachers who responded to the question. Themes that were mentioned by more than 10% of teachers are discussed below.

1. Do you think that teaching has changed in the past ten years?

Of the 107 survey respondents, 106 stated "Yes" in answer to the first question. The teachers' voice sounded clearly and mirrored the reality of educational change which has been discussed in previous studies (Churchill, Williamson & Grady, 1997; Fullan, 1993). The one respondent who answered "No" to the initial question acknowledged in the second question that teaching had experienced change over the last 10 years but felt that some teachers had ignored the changes and were consequently not accommodating children of today.

2. If so, please say how it has changed

The remaining 106 respondents answered the second question by commenting, mainly in point form, on many differing aspects which comprise the complex task of teaching. In total, 315 separate comments were made by the 107 teachers answering Question 2. The changes perceived by the teachers, were classified into two broad categories: 1) changing practices within the school, which were mentioned 220 times; and 2) external pressures influencing changes within the school, which were mentioned 95 times.

**Changing practices within the school**

Teaching practices, curriculum, accountability, role diversification and increased workload were the chief changes within the school context noted by teachers. The major categories of responses to question 2 are presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
<th>Sub-total of Comments</th>
<th>Total of comments in Main Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHING PRACTICES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering for individuals / groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 107 teachers who commented on changes over the past 10 years, 71% referred to some form of change in teaching practices. The four main types of changes to teaching practices that were noted, involved: catering for individuals and groups; technology; parental involvement in the classroom and changes in assessment practices.

Of the comments written about specific teaching practices, the largest group (26%) indicated that one of the major changes in teaching over the past 10 years had been an increase in focus on the needs of individual students and the task of catering for individual learning styles:

- Teaching is now more child-driven than teacher driven (112)
- Learning is centred around individuals more. (213)
- The need to cater for more individual learning styles. (312)

Some teachers indicated that this focus on the individual learner produced more work for teachers:

- Teachers are having to produce more individualised programs which are being produced in their ‘own’ time. (208)
Awareness of individual needs /more demands on teachers / grouping. (313)

The next largest group of comments on teaching practices (15%) referred to the use of technology. Some teachers spoke simply of the increased use of technology in the classroom whilst others commented upon use of technology as a resource in the classroom:

There is a much wider variety of resources, especially in the technology area. (509)

More technology is used - computers, internet etc. (213)

Other teachers, however, wrote about how the emphasis of technology has impacted upon aspects of teaching practice:

The emphasis on technology has meant a change in the way teachers structure lessons and more learner based than teacher based. (406)

Increased parental involvement in classrooms was a change noted by teachers. These comments were positive with some teachers referring to the partnership of parents and teachers. A greater emphasis on the assessment of individual students was also noted by the teachers surveyed. While 19 other teachers made reference to teaching practices these were of a very general nature such as "wide variety of methods" (308).

**Curriculum**

Changes in teaching practices are often driven by changes in the curriculum. This link was clearly seen by many of the teachers surveyed with 67% of teachers commenting on changes in the curriculum over the past 10 years. The increasingly broad scope of the curriculum was mentioned by 35% of the teachers while the constancy of curriculum change was mentioned by 10% of the teachers surveyed. Some examples follow:

The curriculum has become broader. (103)

Curriculum has become overcrowded. (405)

Especially in terms of overloading the curriculum. If we actually did what we were expected to do we'd need to double the teaching hours. It's a constant juggling act. (606)

Extra 'subjects' like child protection, sun-safe, IT. (122)

Constant changes to curriculum. (203)

Implementation of the ever-changing curriculum / courses of study. (302)

Keeping up with the changes in the curriculum etc. (104)

A number of remarks were also made about the change in the curriculum due to outcomes and reflected on the emphasis now given to this term within the curriculum. The remaining 11% of teachers remarked generally about curriculum and covered a range of aspects relating to particular syllabus documents and the way in which curriculum drives the learning in the classroom. Changes to the curriculum have been classified here as changes in practices within the school but there is also a sense in which teachers see these changes,
which are usually made by curriculum developers in head offices and universities, as a major external influence on changes in their role as a teacher.

**Accountability and Roles**

The aspect of accountability was identified by 31% of teachers as a meaningful change in the last 10 years. Teachers commented on the legal aspects of child protection for which they are accountable as well as the increase in routine administrative tasks that they see as outside their core teaching role.

Closely related to accountability were comments by 22% of the teachers who referred to increases in the number of roles teachers are now expected to undertake and also to the diversification of these roles.

The role of ‘teacher’ is becoming so broad and the responsibilities so great that it is hard to imagine not cracking under the pressure (515)

The change of role of teacher to cover parent, mentor, social worker, counselor, etc. as well as educator. (204)

**Increased Workload**

The final category in internal factors of change was the increase in workload with 20% of teachers remarking on this element. Quite often the comments were tied to other statements made about previously discussed factors, for example, curriculum, catering for individuals and accountability but these comments were grouped together due to their consistency in highlighting the increase of workload.

More and more work is having to be done at home due to the amount of work being done at school (208)

Teachers need to do more in and out of the classroom (508)

**External pressures influencing changes within the school**

As well as commenting upon changes in their day to day practices within the school, teachers also noted a number of changes in the wider society which have an impact upon the schools. These factors included: the type of children entering the education system; family issues which affected the children; the image of teachers as perceived by society and the expectations placed upon teaching staff by parents, the government, the system and community. These responses are presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
<th>Sub-total of Comments</th>
<th>Total of comments in Main Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 3 External pressures influencing changes within the school (N=107).
Of the 107 teachers, 40% remarked upon the increased expectations placed upon them. Some commented on only the increased expectation itself (14%) and did not attribute its origin.

Increased demand on classroom teacher (610)

More demanding pupils, parents, society (523)

On the other hand, more respondents (27%) chose to comment about who they considered to be placing these pressures upon them. Teachers who spoke about parental expectations (13%) while others referred to the government (7%) and of the community (7%).

Greater demands from parents much more involved and wanting more information about their child (606)

Greater school, systemic and societal demands (121)

**Children and Family Issues**

The nature of children and the consequential meeting of their needs was a change noted by 19% of the teachers.

Children themselves have changed - more demanding (212)

Behaviour/respect of children has worsened (309)
Whilst some teachers (9%) commented on the effect that society’s changes had upon the children being taught:

The social structure of society has changed impacting on schools including cultural factors such as multiculturalism [and] breakdown of the traditional family resulting in less social interaction in families - impacting on language development (401)

**Professional Image**

The final external factor articulated by 16% of teachers regarding educational change in the last ten years encompassed the image and profile that teachers believed they presently held in society and the community.

Less respect for profession which filters down from society to parent to child (117)

Community attitude, respect, value of teaching (609)

With respect to teaching, teachers have spoken with a clear voice. Teaching has changed over the past ten years. This clear message and the many faceted picture it presents provides an excellent backdrop to the remaining questions asked in this survey.

### 3. Do you think that there should be changes in the way preservice teacher education is conducted?

Of the 107 teachers who responded to the survey 87% said Yes in whilst 2% said No and 11% chose not to answer.

### 4. If so, please say how you think it should change.

The comments made in response to this question were categorised into two major categories: those referring to field-based changes; and those referring to university-based changes. There were 100 respondents who commented in this question and between them there was 151 remarks articulated regarding changes to pre-service teacher education. The results are listed in Table 4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
<th>Sub-Total of comments</th>
<th>Total of comments in Main Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIELD-BASED CHANGES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More time in schools | 26%  
Structure of field-based learning | 21%  
**UNIVERSITY-BASED CHANGES** | 51%  
Changes in content | 40%  
Comments on teacher educators | 6%  
Quality of students teachers | 5%  

Teachers showed an equal interest in changes in both field-based and university-based aspects of teacher education.

**Field-based education**

Many teachers wrote about the need for student teachers to spend more time in schools so that the student teachers could experience more of what happens in a classroom in an ordinary day.

Student teachers need to be in the real world of classrooms more, really see how the teachers’ day progresses (105)

**Much** more time spent in day to day classrooms!!! (305)

While the call for more time in schools was clear, many other comments focused on the structure of field-based experience as it presently exists for student teachers and for schools. Some teachers spoke about the need to have students within the school more regularly for a longer period of time.

The "1 or 2 off" practicums are outdated. A system of internships should be considered (101)

Preservice teacher education is moving in the right direction by placing student teachers in the classrooms more often. However, I feel that they need to be teaching more frequently too. not just leaving it to a 'block' at the end of their observation period (517)

**University-based education**

**Changes in Content**

The majority of remarks in this category centred on the need for change in the course content taught within preservice education at university. The emphasis from many of the
teachers appeared to be on classroom management, programming, literacy, technology with a focus on practical relevance. Indeed, the sentiment was clear, student teachers needed to know more about the day to day skills of working in the classroom.

At uni more emphasis should be placed on classroom management (115)

The practicalities of teaching should be more focused on at university level. Teaching is not just an academic profession (213)

General course for a semester e.g. how to fill out a roll, etc. (307)

Other examples about literacy, programming and technology were:

In language education - current practices in reading theory should be taught - functional, lociolinguistic model and explicit teaching of text should be given a priority. Running records, reading behaviours, strategies encompassing a balanced literacy programme should be focused upon (401)

PROGRAMMING - I only did one semester out of six on this - NOT ENOUGH (307)

Technology should play a huge part in preservice (some students unfortunately don't know how to turn a computer on!) (302)

5. Do you see that you have any responsibility/role in the education of future teachers?

Of the 107 teachers who responded to the survey 99 answered Yes to this question whilst 6 said No and 2 did not respond to the question.

6. If so, how would you describe that role? OR If not, please tell us why not?

The responses varied greatly in this question as the sample of teachers referred to many different levels of responsibility when discussing their part in preservice teacher education. Those teachers who said No in question five affirmed their position by restating that they believed they had no role to play. The responses of the teachers’ who answered yes to Question 5 are listed in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATURE OF RESPONSE</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts responsibility for teacher education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishes to provide an opportunity for student teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teachers who indicated that they would provide an opportunity for student teachers to be part of the school environment (17%) did not explain further the type of support or guidance that they hoped to give. These teachers indicated a desire to offer students experiences that would provide them with an understanding about classroom life. Some simply stated:

- Accept students into class/school (609)
- I am happy to take on a student each year. I feel this gives students an opportunity to spend time in the classroom (303)

Whilst others expanded this a little further:

- The role would cover exposing training teachers to the practicalities of what happens in an ordinary day (204)
- Inviting students into my classroom to observe - participate - plan learning experiences, etc (501)

However, 43% of the teachers who saw themselves as having a role in preservice teacher education talked about passing on the necessary 'craft' and modeling to students how to do the job.

- As a role model for good teaching practice (604)
- Experience counts!! Theory is fine but it can easily be thrown out when faced with reality. Much of your day is involved with disciplining - experienced teachers can provide workable ideas (117)
- Passing on my knowledge and experience and advice. The nature of relationships in schools - take the focus from the lesson to the interactions (615)

The remaining group of teacher comments explored the relationship between student teacher and the teacher of the class. The role anticipated here was one of mentoring instead of merely modeling good practice. It must not be inferred, at this point, that mentoring does include modeling for it is implicit in the role but it's important to note that mentoring is also so much more. As a mentor, the teacher shares with the student teacher in a more equal partnership. Both participants contribute to the learning experience and both listen to each other. The assumption is not that the teacher gives and the trainee teacher takes but that
they both share and grow professionally from the time they experience together. The language used by these particular teachers was distinctly different from the previous group as they desired to express that their responsibility in teacher education was a 'two-way street'.

Listening to them. Sharing experience. Supporting them especially in modern techniques, etc. (114)

I feel it is the responsibility of experienced teachers to make themselves available for support of student teachers. By this I mean being a mentor who really speaks to students and gives advice and ideas, as well as listening to the students’ own ideas and hopes (212)

For several years I have had the opportunity to have students in my class for their practicums. I view it as a two way learning process, they learning just what's involved in the classroom environment, I learn from the students (403)

7. In what ways could involvement with a university for teacher education benefit: you? your class? your school?

It was hoped that by designing the question in this way teachers would be able to distinguish the different benefits for each of the stakeholders within the school. In turn, this would inform the research more clearly. Overall, there were nine groups of benefits that emerged and many of these benefits were remarked upon for two and often three of the named stakeholders. For example, the strongest benefit identified was keeping in touch with new ideas. This benefit was named for all three school stakeholders. Whereas, the class was seen as the major beneficiary of a variety of teaching practices. The results from Question 7 are seen in Table 6 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keeping in touch with new ideas</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra hands or resources</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of student teachers challenged teacher to reflect on own practice</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links between school and university, finding out what is being taught</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing, communicating and partnerships</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 Benefits of involvement in teacher education for each of the stakeholders within the school.
Being a model or mentor for student teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety of teachers / teaching practices</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of teachers responding *

* The discrepancy between the total number of comments made about each stakeholder and the total number of teachers who responded to that particular section of the question was due to some teachers making comments that were placed in more than one category.

From these results it is evident that teachers consider the major benefit to them and the school from involvement with a university in teacher education is keeping in touch with new ideas. The major benefit to the class is seen as the variety of teachers and teaching practices they will experience.

- Update me on current research findings (526)
- Insight into new methods, ideas research (609)
- Keeping up to date with new developments in curriculum, teaching methods, etc. (209)

Another benefit mentioned with relatively high frequency referred to the extra help that a student teacher gave to the children and teacher in the classroom.

- Extra help with children, more hands the better (511)
- My class benefit from added hands/teachers working with children in small groups (216)

Teachers also spoke about the need for a link between universities and schools and some teachers believed that a benefit which they hoped would emerge would be the exchange of ideas and for them knowing what was being taught on campus.

- To ensure that universities and schools are teaching the student teachers the 'same' skills and knowledge (516)
- To understand how they are being taught at Uni and what I could use in my teaching (204)

According to some teachers their involvement in teacher education resulted in the reflection upon their own teaching practice. This, they considered to be an advantage to themselves, but also to their class and the school.

- You can always learn something from another teacher or trainee teacher. Makes you refocus back on areas you are weak in so you can set a good example / role model (308)
I learn new ideas about theories of education that are new through discussion with my students. It makes me think about why I’m doing an activity if a student is watching me! (311)

Summary of results.

Clearly teaching has changed over the past ten years. Teachers' responses to the survey fell into two categories. Those that indicated changes in teachers' roles and responsibilities and those that referred to factors that have influenced such changes. In the first category teachers noted the changes in teaching practices, in the curriculum content to be covered in the need for accountability and more generally in increased workloads. These changes must be seen in a context where the pressure of and the nature of social expectations on schools has increased. These increased expectations have come from parents, governments, as well as system administrators and society in general. They can also be related to changes in the family background and behaviour of children entering schools.

It follows that teacher education should change to take account of the changes in teaching practice. This will mean changes in the curriculum of teacher education as well as an increase in the amount of time teacher education students spend in schools which are seen as the primary location for learning about the practical tasks of teaching.

Teachers perceptions of their role in teacher education vary from a simple acceptance of the need for student teachers to be given experience in classrooms, through a desire to pass on what they know, to a concern that student teachers be helped to understand and appreciate the importance of and the joys of the teachers' role in the education of children.

The vast majority of teachers see benefits for themselves, their class and their schools through being involved in teacher education. Teachers valued the opportunity to "keep in touch" while they saw the opportunity to have another "teacher" in their class as providing essential variety for their students.

It is of interest that teachers who saw the school as the primary site for learning the practicalities of teaching also valued the contact with student teachers and the university as a means of keeping in touch with what was happening in teaching. The subtleties of this distinction will be the focus of one of the detailed follow-up studies that will flow from this initial survey.

Implications for Teacher Education

If teacher educators are to adequately prepare student teachers for the reality of the field, then the messages heard from these teachers' voices need to be listened to and acted upon.

To accommodate the changes in teaching practices student teachers need experience and instruction on how to cater for individuals and groups with particular attention given to identifying the needs of pupils and their various learning styles. Furthermore, student teachers need to be skilled in the use of technology to assist the learning of children and to enhance daily teaching practices. Student teachers should further demonstrate competence
in the use of technology to facilitate the daily administrative demands that are placed on teachers.

Teachers’ reports of increased collaboration with parents in a variety of contexts to enhance the development of the child, suggests the need for student teachers to develop these important skills during initial teacher education. Knowledge of a broad range of curriculum and how it impacts upon teaching and learning practices was also perceived to be important for teacher education programs. The continuing change in curriculum identified by teachers suggests that student teachers should acquire a thorough understanding of the principles and process of change. Furthermore, the school and the law should be viewed as an important feature of teacher education as teachers identified that teacher accountability, especially in relation to child protection issues, is now a concern for many practitioners.

However, teachers clearly perceived that these types of learnings could not occur in universities alone. For student teachers to gain understanding and knowledge of these areas they needed to be immersed in the field where first hand experience could be gained. It is interesting to note that this experience was not focused upon delivery of content in key learning areas, but on how to work within broader contexts such as facilitating parental involvement in the teaching/learning process, individualised instruction and working effectively across a variety of roles. To experience these various roles, the teachers in the field believed that student teachers should be placed in a mentoring experience where opportunities for shared learning could be fostered. This is a move away from the traditional hallmarks of the practicum which places the student teacher in a subservient role of stand and deliver for assessment purposes.

Therefore, the integration of theory and practice must become the focus of all teacher education programs. It may be, that teacher educators have for too many years left it up to the students to make this link rather than exemplifying it in their own teaching and course structures. Universities, teachers and student teachers must embrace partnerships which can address relevant content for effective practice that is firmly embedded in the school context. As found by Howard and Butcher (1999), benefits need to be evident for all stakeholders in order for partnerships to effectively exist and progress. From our study, teachers in the field reported that their contact and involvement with universities brought personal and professional benefits, particularly in the sense of "keeping in touch with new ideas." However, these same teachers in their call for teacher education to be more firmly based in the 'practical reality' of the school clearly imply that universities and their teacher education staff are out of touch. We know that this doesn't apply to us! But teachers won't believe this unless we are prepared to work more closely with them in the practical and real situations that the schools provide.

Hence, the message for universities is clear. If academics are willing to get involved through partnerships with teachers in practical projects which are of benefit to teachers, pupils and student teachers then mutual benefits can be experienced for all concerned. The practice of crammed lecture auditoriums to hear about the nature of teaching is finished. The arrival of learning in the field with particular projects identified by the school in personalised and meaningful contexts such as classrooms, is now the place for learning.
References


