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Rethinking Teacher Education
- a mentoring model

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Beverley Elizabeth Norsworthy

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Abstract

This thesis explores concerns about the quality of traditional teacher training particularly in relation to preparation of teachers for schools committed to the provision of a coherent world and life view¹.

A consideration of the **nature of the teaching task** provides an understanding of the importance placed on the development of a coherent world and life view and the concept of educator as **role model**. These understandings are seen to apply to lecturers and associate teachers in the pre-service programme as well as to the trainee teacher involved in the school classroom.

The current image of teacher education programmes is shown to be negative and the clear **call to change** in areas of content, emphasis, and setting is presented. Areas of concern are identified and the conclusion is reached that this 'call for change' is not something to be ignored, but rather, to be considered and responded to with implementation of appropriate changes. It is suggested that the best way in which to respond to the call for change is through a teacher preparation programme which has a much increased component in the school.

In consideration of the literature about school-based teacher preparation it becomes very clear that one key component is the role and training of the Associate Teacher. Models of preparation which are based on concepts such as **Mentor, Lead Teacher and Coach** are compared and important characteristics are subsequently identified. Other factors deemed to be important to training are relationships, critical and reflective thinking, and experience in the classroom setting.

The thesis concludes that while a more effective teacher preparation programme would not be solely conducted or based in a school, major changes to the role of

¹ Examples of such schools in New Zealand would include Kura Kaupapa, Fundamental Christian, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Rudolph Steiner, Montessori.

The thesis concludes that while a more effective teacher preparation programme would not be solely conducted or based in a school, major changes to the role of initial training, philosophy, the importance of meaning and the provision of role models must be considered. Support is given for a training programme based on a coherent philosophical foundation with significantly increased time in schools, in which Associate Teachers are involved as key players. Such a course provides experience in the 'real world' of teaching as a base to which the trainees, with the help of teacher educators, can bring theory. Combined with critical and reflective thinking, this process will enable them to develop as skilled and perceptive teachers.

The conclusion of this thesis is that there is potential for training excellent teachers within a model of teacher training which has significant school based components with an increased role and responsibility for the associate teacher and school. Such training is seen to simultaneously enhance the existing school staff and community. This is seen to be most appropriate for special character schools where the concept of role modelling is a key to effectiveness.

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Introduction

Though written by Adolf Diersterweg in 1865, the following statement applies as much today as it did when written.

The school is worth precisely what the teacher is worth and for this reason an improvement in teacher education is a first step in any educational reform. (MacLaughlin and Murphy, 1982:121)

It is held that the effectiveness of a schooling system is dependent on the quality of the teachers within it. The quality of the teachers depends on the teaching expertise they have as well as the qualities of their personal character (Hansen, 1993).

This thesis concerns itself with issues related to improving the provision of teacher training¹ in order that teachers are better equipped to be effective in the roles which society expects of them. In Chapter One it is argued that teacher training requires an in depth consideration of the nature of the teaching task. Just as a foundation for a building presupposes the shape, design, purpose and use of that building, so too does understanding the nature of the teaching task provide a framework for teachers. Each teacher needs to understand and find meaning, not only in *where* s/he is going but also in *why* s/he is moving in that direction. It is presupposed that the teaching task has as its goal the development of future citizens and that teachers are role models for these. It is argued that teacher training should take cognisance of the teacher trainee's² epistemological framework in the developing of meaningful experiences.

The belief that teaching is more than the sum of its parts, is thought to necessitate shifting the *emphasis* of teacher training from the training institution to the school community. The classroom teacher who models the science and art of being a teacher would need to be trained to function as a mentor for trainees. This would enable an increased proportion of the training period to be undertaken within the real world of the school community.

¹ Throughout this paper, 'training' as in teacher training, is used to embrace all aspects of teacher development in training and education and should not be interpreted as narrow and technocratic, nor seen to be concentrating only on the 'how' rather than the 'why'.

² Similarly, teacher trainee is used in preference to student teacher - indicating that the person is a teacher in training and the word student is used to refer to a school student.

Following consideration of the Nature of the Teaching Task, attention is given to current approaches. Consideration of the perceived weaknesses of current programmes provides further foundation for building a case for an alternative approach to teacher preparation. Chapter Two presents an overview of the 'Calls for Change' which pervade the literature on teacher training. Attention is given to common, key components such as whether training has value, course length, characteristics of training personnel, the role of pre-service training within lifelong development and the role and value of the teaching section or practicum. Responses to criticisms are offered and it is argued that one way to satisfy identified need for change is to increase the contributing role in training for the classroom teacher as s/he functions within a school community. It is also suggested that initial teacher training be viewed as part of a lifetime of learning and development rather than a stand alone preparation time.

In order to identify strengths and weaknesses of a programme with an increased role for the classroom teacher, Chapter Three provides a literature review of school-based teacher training. As a consequence, the importance of a coherent philosophy underpinning training, the pivotal role undertaken by associate teachers and their need for training are identified to be key components in effective training. Chapter Four then considers the required attributes, preparation and training for associate teachers in order that graduates of such programmes are not conservative, technocratic copies of their training personnel. Further consideration of critical factors leads to the conclusion that there is a definite, vital role for an institution which has as a focus teacher training and development. Thus it is concluded that initial training should not be based entirely in schools.

Throughout the world, particularly in Britain, Australia and America, there has been a growing trend to close the perceived gap between theory and practice through the inclusion of more school based time and tasks in teacher training. Chapter Five considers programmes that have endeavoured to do this. Clearly while advantages and disadvantages can be identified, the teacher education world is complicated, unpredictable and full of competing interests. Reported also in this chapter is information gained from an interview with Tracey, who was based entirely in a school

during her teacher training. References to her experience are made throughout the thesis and a transcript of the interview is included as Appendix Three.

Chapter Six considers key components, identified shortcomings and integrating aspects of effective programmes in order to present the basis for an alternative model of teacher training. It is postulated that such training is potentially able to lead to the development of effective, creative teachers who can provide appropriate models or examples for others to follow, while at the same time acting as a catalyst for ongoing professional development for existing staff in schools.

Finally, the conclusion highlights key points from throughout the thesis. It is acknowledged that this study has a limited function and serves as a catalyst to encourage informed and thoughtful consideration of necessary factors for further pursuit of an alternative teacher training approach. Further research is needed into the ramifications of a mentoring approach to training.