

Personal response from Michael Arthur-Kelly

PART B – Preparing ITE students to be effective teachers

1. What more can we do to ensure that ITE curriculum is evidence-based and all future teachers are equipped to implement evidence-based teaching practices?

Thank you for the opportunity to make a personal contribution to this important ITE review. Given the recent data on increasing numbers of initial teacher education students who are not completing their training, the review is indeed critical and timely.

I am writing at a personal level, as a teacher who worked in special and regular schools, and as an academic involved in teacher education and ongoing professional learning in universities for 30+ years. I am now retired and continue to work with schools and sectors, especially in relation to NCCD. I am an Honorary Professor at The University of Newcastle, but I stress this contribution is my personal view and responsibility.

Although there are many issues for the Review to consider, I have decided to focus on the question above in Part B.

Around 1994, NSW and Australia led the world, I believe, in mandating in most teacher training programs and accreditation processes a defined course in special education. Although some universities pre-dated 1994, this landmark decision was very important especially in the context of the DDA and the Disability Standards for Education. At the time, having a mandated visible course was a vital step towards inclusive practices. The next step, in my view is to ensure recognition that the learning of all students, regardless of setting, disability type or needs, is the core business of all teachers.

In this light, my concerns relate to several quality and delivery dimensions of this course in ITE in universities.

First, in this present time (2021) placement in an ITE program as a stand alone course in has the potential to continue the historic divide between regular and special education. This is a very difficult dance. The legislation, standards and indeed the NCCD process all make it clear that the learning of all students is the responsibility, indeed the central mission of ALL teachers. Placing courses separately has the potential to infer that some students are different to, rather than similar to their peers. In some places, the content is integrated with curriculum and is not stand alone or visible. In fact, it may be washed out or minimised, especially in the secondary areas where there is so much curriculum content to cover. While the intention is good, namely, the desire to ensure graduates have made the connection between inclusive practices, content and the needs of all learners, this may not always be achieved. As I understand it, many universities now focus on inclusive practices rather than special education per se. and embed aspects of inclusive practices in practicum expectations and this is a good thing if my second concern is addressed. However, I think that going forward, there will need to be scrutiny of the overall program outcomes and ethos to make certain that a student-based focus is evident in the coherent design and implementation of the program.

Second, there is an urgent need to have a mechanism at a national level to ensure that only evidence-informed instructional and other pedagogical aspects such as assessment and evaluation are promoted in this vital course. There are many factors at play here, including variations in the qualifications and experience of the academic staff teaching the relevant courses in universities, the casualisation of this workforce and the potential for the promotion of teaching and learning practices that are not considered as evidence-based.

Implementation Science has emerged in human sciences as a way of highlighting not only how changed practices can be established and maintained, but also, sectors can ensure that only quality dimensions (evidence-led approaches) are adopted and sustained. In my personal view, ITE needs a regulatory oversight

mechanism to ensure that only evidence-based approaches to teaching and learning are promoted and modelled in training and indeed ongoing professional learning programs for teachers.

I hope that my brief comments here are helpful to the Review and I would be happy to expand on them as appropriate, Michael Arthur-Kelly.