

Submission to the ITE Review

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Dear Review Committee,

I will not write much in my submission. Unfortunately, although I believe Minister Tudge and the Review Committee are approaching this review with admirable intentions, I also believe the Review can accomplish little. The Review is considering how to attract high quality candidates to teaching, and then how to prepare these candidates for the classroom. But these questions cannot be seriously addressed without also addressing systemic issues in Australian education. In particular, until there is established a genuine culture of learning based upon a coherent curriculum framed upon proper mastery of knowledge and technique, and until the obsessive micromanaging and evaluation of teachers is ceased, there is little hope of attracting genuinely strong teachers in large numbers, and little hope that many such genuine teachers can teach meaningfully.

The dearth of a proper educational culture also impinges on some of the specific questions raised in the Discussion Paper. I will comment briefly on what I regard as the major questions, including one important question the Discussion Paper failed to raise, in regard to this lack of culture, and in particular in regard to the teaching mathematics.

What can be done to attract more high-achievers and career changers to the profession?

As indicated, in my preamble, not much. Teaching is so weighed down by a moribund curriculum and mountains of administrative trivia, that even seasoned teachers buckle under the weight of the meaninglessness, particularly in public schools where extra burdens are imposed by thoughtless bureaucrats with no price signals to make them pause.

Teaching can be incredibly rewarding, but not when the teacher is handcuffed by absurd curriculum demands, and policed and evaluated in a constant, mindless manner.

To attract high-quality candidates to be teachers, you must make it possible for them to teach. That includes the possibility for them to teach badly. That is part of the bargain, and the society must accept that. Real teaching is human, individual and prone to error. What is currently being aimed for, and achieved, is error-free McDonalds. What intelligent person could be attracted by that?

What features of the current ITE system may prevent high-quality mid-to late-career professionals transitioning to teaching?

Pretty much everything. There is clearly no argument for a 2-year Masters of teaching, for anyone. There is just not that much book-learnin' that is going to help you. It takes years to become a good teacher, but the way you learn to teach is by teaching, not by writing essays on some ridiculous Unified Theory of Teaching that directly contradicts last year's United Theory. The vast majority of teacher pedagogy is snake oil, which is so tendentious and/or so meaninglessly general, as to be utterly useless.

What are the main reasons ITE students leave an ITE course before completion?

Perhaps a distaste for nonsense.

Are the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers fit for purpose in identifying the key skills and knowledge pre-service teachers need to be ready for the classroom?

The Professional Standards are so farcically pointless, it is difficult to know where to begin. No one cares about them, and no one reads them except when randomly choosing a dot point to accompany a PD submission.

What is required is a short constitution-like list of fundamental principles, not a Zeno concoction of trivial points and subpoints.

How can ITE providers best support teachers in their ongoing professional learning?

By staying away. Again, teachers learn to teach by teaching. Give them the freedom to teach, the mentor and instruction of other teachers within the school, and otherwise leave them alone.

Do the current HALT (Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers) arrangements support the education ecosystem, particularly in relation to ensuring quality mentoring and supervision of ITE students?

Of course not. “Highly accomplished” does not mean highly accomplished, it means playing the game and playing it safe. Genuinely highly accomplished teachers take risks and make errors and put noses out of joint; these teachers, who are the true leaders, will seldom if ever be recognised by any such system.

Should ACER’s Numeracy Test be scrapped?

Yes. In forty years of lecturing and teaching and tutoring and critiquing and writing, ACER’s Numeracy Test is genuinely one of the most pointless, insidiously wrong measures I have ever encountered.

There is no question that teachers, notably primary school teachers, should have a minimal competence in the basics of mathematics and language. However, what this basic competence amounts to in mathematics is a decent appreciation for the nature of numbers, arithmetic rules and arithmetic technique. Such competence has absolutely zero relation to the over-egged wordy nonsense that constitutes ACER’s test. The test is obscene, the inevitable consequence of the ignorant pedestalling of “numeracy”, at the expense of number and arithmetic.