

An experienced educational leader (Dean, PVC, ACDE President), with teacher education experience reaching back to the 1970s, offered the following thoughts in reference to the TEEP Report:

1. ABOUT ITE FUNDING & PRACTICUM

Problem

Some of the problems besetting teacher education are systemic and, to my knowledge, have never been confronted, even conceptually much less practically. In the 1970s and 1980s, teacher education was mainly State Department funded where every dollar went directly to the training of teachers, with practicum resourced via internal allocations within State systems. In a word, practicum costs were not included in the resources provided to the teacher education institutes (TEIs) of the day. With the unified national system from the 1990s, funding progressively became a Commonwealth responsibility via the Relative Funding Model (RFM). It was suggested at the time that the latter was calculated roughly against the former, but practicum costs were to be borne within the total allocation and through negotiation between universities and State and Private school systems. The additional cost burden of this change was never satisfactorily addressed. Added to the problem was the inevitable cross subsidising that EFTSL high/ relatively inexpensive university areas (like teacher education) would have to contribute to EFTSL low/ expensive areas once incorporated into the unified national system. As an example, see the way capital expenditure funding has been generated (via EFTSL) and distributed (via costliness). Add to all this the general problem of the diminishing value of each RFM dollar in keeping up with costs and the current problem of under-resourced teacher education was easily predictable. And predicted it was! These were commonly agreed claims of Deans of Education in my time, brought up *ad nauseam* with Education Ministers and their departments, with a special concern being around the costs associated with adequate places for practicum.

Potential Solution

The above is not in any way a call to retreat from the unified national system and re-establish separate TEIs. The integration of teacher education into the university system has had many advantages, especially around the greater professionalisation of the teaching profession, although it must be said that regression from two to one year “end-on” ITE risks reversing this enhanced professionalisation. Regardless, the resource squeeze signalled by the above historical situation must be seen as an element of the problem being experienced currently. At the centre of this problem is the issue of adequate practicum. The one time the problem was recognised at the Commonwealth level was between 2005 and 2007. For two years (2006-2007), a separate allocation of funding to universities was provided for teacher education practicum. The amount was of the order of \$100m annually provided to each TEI via an EFTSL formula, on top of the RFM. It was clearly earmarked for its designated

purpose and universities were instructed that they would have to show that the funding was being used for that purpose. From 2008, the specially earmarked funding was rolled into the new “uncapped EFTSL” environment, and essentially lost.

Nonetheless, this fleeting innovation points to a potential solution for resourcing the greater level of practicum being flagged as needed by the TEEP Report. It might even point to a way in which teacher education generally might be better and more effectively resourced. This can be done within the university system but not as it is currently funded. There are highly prestigious instances where TEIs are funded in more creative ways to greater effect. Columbia Teachers College within the comprehensive Columbia University, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) within the comprehensive University of Toronto, are two examples that might be studied in this regard. Moreover, a study of the way in which Finland resources its ITE, indeed manages ITE generally within its university system, would be highly instructive. In each of these cases, different in themselves, it is guardrails around ITE funding that guarantees the desirable outcome.

2. ABOUT TEACHERS’ WORK

Problem

Problems in teacher education cannot be adequately appraised without reference to what is happening in education generally. Failure of universities to attract prospective teachers, along with failure of systems to retain teachers, both of which are problems currently beyond anything experienced in my many years in the trade, are inevitably tied to what is known to be happening in schools, and therefore how attractive, or not, is the prospect for those who might be considering teaching as a career or for those who are currently engaged in it. There are many facets to these problems, and certainly the issue of “unruly behaviour” and the like is one that will inevitably impel distaste in any prospective candidate and be a factor in driving teachers away. The TEEP Report notes this issue, highlighting the need for prospective teachers to receive better training in how to deal with it. The Report however does not delve into the central causes behind the increase in unruly behaviour, probably because it is a complex issue and understandably beyond the Panel’s brief. Nonetheless, the problem cannot be solved without some delving.

In this regard, it is interesting that the TEEP Report, while citing several recent reviews and reports, makes no reference to the Grattan Institute’s 2022 Paper, *Making Time for Great Teaching* (Hunter, Sonnemann & Joiner 2022), despite the fact that it seemed to resonate with the experience of teachers in unprecedented ways, as well as with the seminal Pisa Wellbeing Framework (OECD 2019), and the many recent commentaries by Andreas Schleicher, the OECD Educational Chief (Bita 2022). In various ways, they all point to the nub of the problem in schools about teachers’ work, what it is that teachers are being asked to do, the surfeit of trivial

administrative tasks that leaves too little room for engaging in teaching, teachers feeling exhausted and unmotivated, and students bored, unstimulated, and so ripe for unruly behaviour.

For Schleicher, much of the problem emanates from the low-level cognitive outcomes being pursued and the consequent struggle ‘... to keep the best teachers in the profession because of curriculums that restrict creativity’ (Bagshaw 2016). He also refers to the risk of turning our student population into “robots” rather than thinkers (Bita 2022) through the interminable testing and measuring of these low-level outcomes. He points to Australia’s sliding Pisa results, and associated Naplan regime, as both symptomatic and an inevitable outcome of this low-level educational pursuit. In similar vein, Les Perelman, international doyen of educational testing, described Naplan and its associated approach to the testing of literacy and numeracy as ‘bizarre in its inappropriateness’ and wholly directed at the wrong kind of learning (Perelman 2018a, b).

One cannot underestimate, or least of all divorce, problems in teacher education recruitment or teacher retention from the kinds of malaise that teachers pressed into serving such myopic directions are suffering and reporting on, both in words and, more alarmingly, in their hasty retreat from the profession. Even the architects of Pisa itself recognised the potential for systems to become unhealthily enmeshed in a testing and measuring regime; the result was in their crafting of the Wellbeing Framework (OECD 2019). The framework is an attempt to temper some of the most deleterious effects of over-attending to low-level cognitive tasks, effects liable to manifest in dulling the minds of students and lowering the motivation of teachers. Unfortunately, the warnings implicit in the framework have gone largely unheeded, certainly in Australia, in the five years since its release.

Potential Solution

The TEEP Report makes appropriate and pleasing reference to the need for greater awareness of the findings of neuroscience in teacher education regimes. These findings are quickly becoming the new foundations for teaching, supplementing if not replacing the more traditional developmental foundations of Piagetian, Kohlbergian, et al. theories. Understanding better how the brain works is clearly at the heart of what teachers need to learn. But those who are responsible for setting the directions of school learning also need to learn the lessons that advances in neuroscience have to offer to those in the learning game. If they did, the problems identified by Grattan, Schleicher, Pisa and Perelman (above) might be solved quickly.

As an example of some of the distilled findings of educational neuroscience, Darcia Narvaez (Narvaez 2014, 2016) proffers that *imagination* is the key to unlocking the emotions that facilitate human reasoning of the best kind. In other words, the cognition best disposed to learning is one heavily determined by the learner’s emotional state. She goes on to tease out the two main features of this emotional

state; the first is the emotion of feeling safe and secure, cared for and supported. As an aside, it conforms with Ken Rowe's large ACER study (Rowe 2004) that found "teacher care" and "trusting the teacher" to be more instrumental factors in student achievement than were both "teacher knowledge" and "teacher delivery". The second emotional state identified by Narvaez pertains to the stimulation and excitement of learning itself, of learning something new, sensing its relevance to oneself, and so wanting to learn more, ideally impelling the motivation for lifelong learning.

Importantly, from her mining of the neuroscientific data, the key to instilling the emotional state that underpins optimal cognition is *imagination*. What school learning must be about, above all, is stimulating imagination, the positive imagination that goes with feeling safe, secure and supported, on the one hand while, on the other hand, the positive imagination impelled by an engaging, "deep learning" approach to curriculum content. Conversely, the greatest enemy in all this is rote learning, standardised assessment, and endless testing and measuring, what Rowe, and others, have described as 'trying to fatten the pig by weighing it more often'. It might seem like the obvious thing to do but, like so many realities in life, the counter-intuitive is where the truth lies.

It is fascinating how modern neuroscience of this kind confirms so many of the educational "gems" from our history. According to Thomas Stanley's seminal work on Pythagoras, citing Socrates' pupil, Antisthenes' work on him, the great mathematician himself learned this lesson in establishing the learning regimes of the Pythagorean academies 2500 years ago. It was for him 'stupidity' to expect that a pupil in an uncongenial environment faced with mind-dulling learning would achieve anything worthwhile. The two priorities for establishing the effective learning regime were emotional support for the pupil and stimulating the imagination. Hence, the academies, essentially there for education in mathematics, were replete with philosophy and ethics, music, art, play, and nature studies (Stanley 1979; Kalouche 1999).

In a word, Pythagoras learned that learning is not a linear game; achieving optimal learning is actually a long, often circuitous game, one encompassed by safety and security at one end, and, at the other, holistic stimulation of the brain. The irony is that Pythagoras, with no knowledge of neuroscience, nonetheless understood the enigmatic nature of learning while modern systems, with neuroscientific knowledge all around them, are so persistently tin-eared. As a result, our students continue to fail, and our teachers are in retreat. This is why some knowledge of the history and philosophy of education is important, if not for every teacher, then at least for those setting the directions.

Arguably, a greater irony is that the Australian Government itself funded many years of research that confirmed both the wisdom of the ages and the neuroscientific

insights of today. In work that has gone on to receive academic affirmation internationally, the Australian Values Education Program (2003-2010) was built around a pedagogy reflecting the two priorities for effective learning that both Pythagoras and modern neuroscience point to as essential. It spoke of the two dimensions of values pedagogy, the implicit referring to establishing the values ambience (care, trust, positive relationships, etc.) and the explicit referring to the teaching focus being on the imaginative potential in curriculum dissemination, basically concentrating on the “value”, or meaning, to be drawn from any curriculum content, rather than merely on the easily measurable facts and figures. The ways of knowing theory of Jurgen Habermas (Habermas 1972, 1974) served to guide the explicit dimension. The 316 schools involved in the Program developed interventions built around this pedagogical approach.

An evaluation study (DEEWR 2009) was conducted towards the end of the Program. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed against four factors, these being [1] *ambience*, [2] *relationships*, [3] *wellbeing*, and [4] *academic diligence*, factors drawn from an array of studies focussed on student achievement. Evidence collected, as per the executive summary, included the following: against [1], ‘... calmer environment with less conflict and with a reduction in the number of referrals (ie, for behaviour) ...’ (p. 8); against [2], ‘... rise in levels of politeness and courtesy ... better manners ... students being more kind and considerate ... a greater understanding of each other’s perspective’ (p. 9); against [3], ‘...the creation of a safer and more caring school community, a greater self-awareness, a greater capacity for self-appraisal, self-regulation and enhanced self-esteem’ (p. 10); against [4], ‘...observable and measurable improvements in students’ academic diligence ... putting greater effort into their work and “striving for quality”, “striving to achieve their best”’ (p. 6).

The central point of all the above is that teacher education will struggle to attract, motivate and retain the teaching force needed for tomorrow while ever teachers’ work is built around regimes that counterpose the wisdom and empirical evidence concerning what works best for the wellbeing and holistic achievement of students and, in turn, the professional satisfaction of teachers. There is abundant research evidence that points to what works best. Yet, our systems remain largely locked into what works worst. While ever this remains the case, teachers’ work and its deleterious effects on student behaviour and outcomes will function as a disincentive for prospective teachers and an incentive for those currently in the profession to find something better to do.

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