TRENDS IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND SINCE 1990

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The last decade in New Zealand teacher education has been one of diversity and change. Currently there is also a sense of uncertainty. Since the publication of a government Green Paper on Teacher Education in 1997 there has been a policy vacuum. There have been important innovations within institutions but the need to maintain funding by attracting higher numbers of students has sometimes led to claims and assertions which are not easy for potential students to assess. In place of the collegiality which once allowed a comfortable cooperation between provider institutions, there is a greatly increased sense of competition and less willingness to share and discuss new ideas. In such a climate it can be difficult for professional staff to take a critically evaluative stance towards developments or policy. There has also been an extensive and ongoing debate around professional standards. While this has had positive results by encouraging institutions and individuals to focus on the purposes and outcomes of initial and ongoing teacher education programmes, there is a continuing danger that a codification of official standards could stifle creativity and questioning.

In this paper I identify six trends in New Zealand teacher education in the 1990s: a diversity of providers and provision; an accelerating move towards an all graduate profession; new relationships with the programmes; the ongoing professional development of teachers; and the role of new central regulatory bodies. These trends result from government policy, demographic trends, institutional initiatives and professional pressures. Since the proliferation of providers in early childhood education is much more dramatic (over 70 providers are offering programmes at some level) this paper is confined to teacher education for primary and secondary levels, and those teaching in the primary and secondary sectors.
Background

Until 1990 initial teacher education in New Zealand was provided by six\textsuperscript{1} “stand alone” colleges of education. Although they had been administered by their own Councils since 1968, they were still closely linked to the Department of Education which approved their programmes, determined the numbers of students to be admitted by each college on an annual basis and provided funding according to set formulae. All offered 3 year diploma programmes for primary and early childhood teachers. Secondary teachers normally completed a one year professional programme in Auckland or Christchurch after the award of a university degree in a relevant field. The 1980s also saw a large increase in the number of programmes designed specifically for practising teachers, many of whom were seeking to upgrade their qualifications to degree equivalent status to improve both their professional knowledge and their pay. Most colleges had links with their local university which allowed their students to complete a BEd degree either concurrently or later, and most of these programmes included joint teaching. At that time only universities could award degrees in New Zealand. College programmes tended to stress a child-centred approach to learning and there was both considerable similarity between programmes and collegiality among staff from different institutions. Until the early 1980s, students were paid while they were in college and primary students were placed in their initial appointment.

The reforms to the tertiary sector incorporated in the Education Act of 1990 provided for considerably more autonomy for all tertiary institutions, including the teacher education colleges. The Department of Education disappeared in late 1989, replaced by a policy oriented Ministry, and other crown agencies – the Education Review Office (ERO) and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) – were also created. Principals of colleges became Chief Education Officers, and their councils were given wide ranging powers of governance.
Diversity of Providers

The number of providers of teacher education mushroomed from 6 in 1990 to 25 in 1998. New institutions have entered the field; existing ones have amalgamated. At the same time some long-standing alliances have been severed. In large part this has been due to a severe shortage of teachers which developed by 1996, leading the government to provide incentives for a variety of institutions to develop programmes which could be expanded and contracted quickly, such as one-year professional training for graduates. While the staffing crisis has now moved into the secondary sector and the indications are that the crisis in primary schools has passed, it seems likely that many of the new programmes will remain.

In 1991, Hamilton Teachers’ College amalgamated with the University of Waikato, with which it shared a campus and an existing BEd programme, to become the first University School of Education in the country. In 1997 Massey University and Palmerston North Teachers’ College also amalgamated. Massey University and Auckland College of Education have announced their intention to amalgamate from the beginning of 1999. Concurrently the existing cooperative alliances between Auckland College of Education and the University of Auckland and between Dunedin College of Education and the University of Otago have been broken and these institutions now offer competing programmes within their own cities.

A number of polytechnics have entered the teacher education field over the past two years, mostly in response to the additional EFTS (equivalent full time student) places offered by the Ministry of Education in the face of a teacher supply crisis. Initially they introduced one-year graduate programmes but some are now moving to the three-year programmes. Some of these programmes were sold to other polytechnics, often under a franchising arrangement. Some colleges began offering programmes through regional polytechnics within and outside what was once considered to be their “region”. There are now private training establishments offering teacher education programmes, both one year and three/four years in duration. At least two of these
have a specifically Christian emphasis.

Maori language immersion programmes have been offered for some time by a number of the traditional providers of teacher education. However, this has also been one of the largest growth areas in the field with programmes being offered by *wananga* (Maori tertiary institutions) and one of the regional polytechnics with a programme franchised in many smaller centres.

**The Accelerating Trend Towards An All Graduate Profession**

The primary teachers’ union in New Zealand, the NZEI, has promoted the goal of a graduate teaching profession for a long time. By the beginning of this decade most college of education students in primary programmes could study for a BEd degree as well as their professional qualification, the Diploma of Teaching. Many of the courses were cross-credited to both qualifications and some were jointly taught by college and university staff. The minimum time for completion was four years: three years for a Diploma for Teaching and an additional year to complete the degree. Some students graduated with the degree before entering teaching. Others opted to begin teaching as Diploma holders after three years and to continue studying part-time for the degree, completion of which gave them access to a higher salary band. Secondary teachers normally completed a specialist degree followed by a one-year professional diploma though some four-year concurrent programmes were offered.

In 1996 the government announced that special contract funding would be available for institutions to offer one-year professional programmes for graduates wishing to prepare for primary teaching. As noted above, this provided an incentive for a number of institutions to offer a teacher education programme for the first time. Although there was considerable opposition from the profession, which considered that the training was being “compressed”, follow up monitoring indicates that many of the graduates from the first intake of these programmes are coping well in schools where they provide a diversity of subject expertise.
Also in 1996, Auckland College of Education submitted for approval a new three-year professional teaching degree to be taught entirely by college staff. Its core was professional enquiry and practice, and liberal education components were largely excluded. When the Ministry of Education determined that this degree would give teachers the same salary entitlement as four-year BEd degrees, other institutions reluctantly developed three-year degrees. By the beginning of 1999, all but one small provider will enrol students in three-year degree programmes. It is not yet clear what the international recognition of these qualifications will be, given the trend to longer professional preparation elsewhere.

At the same time the government has negotiated with the teacher unions a unified pay scale that will give primary teachers with degrees parity in starting salaries for comparable qualifications. As a consequence, there is likely to be a significant number of primary teachers seeking to upgrade their existing diplomas to the level of the new three-year degrees. The academic worth of the professional qualification by which graduates enter primary or secondary teaching does not appear to be a matter of concern to the government or the ministry.

New Partnerships with Schools

Partnerships between traditional teacher education providers and the profession have generally been close and cordial. All initial teacher education students in New Zealand are required to spend substantial periods of time engaged in professional practice in schools. Most provider institutions also offer professional training for the teachers with whom these students work. Curriculum committees and student selection committees include teacher representatives. Normal Schools, associated with the colleges of education have played an important partnership role, providing regular access for students and contributing to lecture programmes in which some of their staff work as adjunct lecturers. The status of these schools has been under threat throughout the decade, however, as a result of ministry policy. In addition, some newer providers resent the access accorded to
the traditional providers, while schools without this “normal” status, which are involved heavily in practicum arrangements, feel they could also play a wider role and should have the same staffing privileges. At the time of writing, the issue is not yet settled, though disestablishment of Normal Schools was mooted in the Green Paper.

New Zealand political thinking on education was influenced earlier in the decade by developments taking place in England where the conservative government mandated much greater professional preparation in schools and less time in tertiary institutions. There was a distrust of educational theory and a belief that beginning teachers would best acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for teaching by almost full-time work in classrooms. Nor did teachers, they believed, need an understanding of educational and social contexts outside the classroom. In effect, this mooted a return to the apprenticeship system in vogue at the beginning of the century.

Some of the newer providers have initiated new ways of working with schools. The University of Auckland, in its one-year diploma programmes for graduates, uses a system of mentors, school staff appointed to teach and guide students in delivering the seven essential learning areas that make up the New Zealand curriculum as well as developing the teaching skills of students. As part of their contract these mentors are required to complete a masters course on mentoring and counselling offered by the university. The university has also developed a consortium of 37 schools which will work collaboratively with university staff to develop, deliver, and evaluate programmes. Some polytechnic and private providers also expect their students to spend more time in schools than has been traditionally the case. Maori programme providers have often established close links with whanau (family) and iwi (tribal) groups rather than with schools directly. They may also seek community endorsement of the fluency of programme applicants and their knowledge of and commitment to Maori values and protocols. In some cases they have fewer institutional staff, preferring to spend more of the funds available to them in schools.

Schools react to closer partnership models in a variety of ways. Some
of them accept students on practicum from several different providers. Different requirements can be either stimulating or confusing. The frustrations of the secondary teacher union over salary negotiations has occasionally spilled over into threats to refuse to work with student teachers. Schools find it puzzling that some providers demand an exclusive contract with them while others are willing for their students to work alongside those from other institutions. Many teachers are genuinely overloaded already and find the additionally demands of partnerships in teacher education more than they can cope with.

As a result of these moves, all providers need to assess their partnerships with schools on a regular basis. It will be important that all institutions find ways to ensure that their graduates can demonstrate wide professional competence and are beginning to work out for themselves, through professional reflection, the integration of theory and practice. Some of the newer practices appear to work best when student numbers are relatively small and manageable. This creates a difficulty for larger providers, especially in a time of teaching shortage when they are under pressure to increase the number of students accepted into their programmes.

**Accessibility of Teacher Education Programmes: Distance Delivery and Other Strategies**

The recent shortage of teachers has impacted most on schools that generally find it difficult to attract qualified staff; isolated rural schools; low income, culturally diverse city schools; and Maori immersion schools. In the past, departmental regulations provided incentives for teachers to spend some time in such schools through the imposition of salary bar for those without such experience. Since the advent of Tomorrow’s Schools (the change to school-based management which was legislated for in 1989) not only have incentives disappeared but also the schools themselves are totally responsible for attracting and appointing staff. Schools in such areas often feel that the current teacher education systems have failed them. Some advocate providing their own training. At the same time, the wider accessibility of tertiary education has led to a belief
that almost any form of education should be available on demand, no matter where a student happens to live. Mature students have family responsibilities or existing jobs, around which they must fit the demands of further study.

Before 1990, the traditional providers had all made attempts to address such issues by providing “outpost” training of various kinds. While this has continued, provision has been enhanced by the introduction of new providers, the franchising or purchasing of programmes between new institutions, and by the introduction of distance programmes. All of these developments raise issues about quality standards, about comparability and about resources available to staff and students outside traditional areas. While these are not insuperable, they need to be addressed.

The University of Waikato School of Education, which had offered a number of off-campus programmes from the late 1980s, determined by the mid 1990s that such programmes were extremely costly in terms of staff time and stress. It was, however, committed to serving the needs of its region which included a large number of small, isolated schools, a number of smaller centres and a high proportion of Maori children. From the beginning of 1997 it has offered a Multiple Media programme for mature students who study through campus-based block courses for three weeks annually but for the rest of the time learn through the internet, CD Rom, audio and video tapes, contacting their campus-based tutors through email and teleconference, and communicating with each other through bulletin boards and chat rooms. They submit assignments electronically. To be accepted for the programme they must meet normal entry requirements, and are allocated to a base school where they carry out regular observation and other tasks in addition to the normal practicums which are carried out in other schools. This has led to new partnerships with those schools to the mutual benefit of schools and university.

Students in teacher education programmes across New Zealand now tend to be more mature in age than those of ten years ago. It is likely that more people will choose to enter teaching later in their careers, often but by no means only, after involvement in parenting their own
Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers

As I have already noted above, the introduction of pay parity is likely to cause an increasing number of primary teachers to seek to complete first degree programmes. A significant number of teachers are already beginning teaching as graduates and it seems likely that they will seek further post-graduate qualifications to deepen their competence and understanding and to equip them to work in specialist areas or in management. In fact, this trend is already evident.

Alongside these qualification courses, teachers will also be involved in ongoing professional development programmes. All school principals are responsible for the ongoing professional development of their staff. This means that the learning needs of teachers need to be regularly assessed. The ministry, too, has an interest in professional development to ensure that new curriculum documents, for instance, are well understood and implemented by teachers, or that new management requirements such as school strategic planning and appraisal are developed.

New Zealand has had a network of curriculum advisers since the 1940s. The system gradually became more extensive over the next forty years and broadened to include general advice to smaller rural schools as well as covering a wider range of curriculum areas. In 1989, when massive changes to the education system led to the disestablishment of the Education Department, the advisers were attached to the colleges of education. Since then they have responded to school and ministry needs by focussing on school-wide issues in curriculum planning, in management issues and in helping schools implement the new curriculum and assessment documents and procedures. During this period their continuing existence has been threatened; the Green Paper recommended that professional development funding should all be allocated to schools to enable them to purchase whatever services they choose. It says a great deal for the professionalism of the staff concerned that morale has been maintained in the face of such uncertainty. Advisers
across the country have also sharpened their skills by delivering a wide range of professional development contracts advertised by the ministry, contracts won through a competitive bidding process.

Major changes in this crucial area are likely to occur.

**The Determination of Standards and the Role of Central Regulatory Bodies**

Before 1990, the Department of Education exercised considerable control over the programmes offered by the colleges of education. In addition, after completion of their diplomas, the students were under the supervision of departmental inspectors who were able to assess their competence and also offer ongoing support. On October 1 1989, when the department metamorphosed into a ministry, the inspectorate was abolished. Some of its functions were transferred to a new agency, which eventually became known as the Education Review Office (ERO). Supervision and professional development of young teachers, however, was no longer shared but was solely the responsibility of local principals. ERO’s role is to rate the effectiveness of schools and their compliance with government regulations.

For a time after the changes the colleges of education collectively scrutinised changes to programme requirements through a curriculum committee. But while the universities exercised some freedom in jointly approving new programmes through the Committee on University Academic Programmes which reported to the Vice Chancellors’ Committee, the colleges came under the aegis of another new central agency, the NZQA. Part of its brief was to ensure that “industry needs” were being met by existing and new qualifications. It also developed a national Qualifications Framework on which a vast number of “unit standards” were to be registered. Institutions were expected to demonstrate that their assessment processes ensured that students who were awarded their qualifications had met these individual standards. In an area as complex as initial teacher education, determining unit standards was not easy. Contracts were
let for their development, and considerable consultation took place about the essential skills teachers should demonstrate. There was ongoing debate about whether demonstrating individual skills was sufficient, and claims that overall professional competence or capability demanded the capacity to integrate knowledge and understanding. Initially there were more than 200 units standards proposed, all with corresponding assessment tasks. Much later, the list was reduced to around 20, though some of these were correspondingly large. Much of this work still remains in limbo.

The introduction of a number of new providers of teacher education has made the determination of agreed standards a pressing issue. So too is the assessment of the competence of beginning teachers. The environments in which they work are varied and complex. Classrooms are more diverse, our understanding of issues such as assessment has become much more sophisticated, there are demands for greater biculturalism in curriculum content and delivery, and the impact of information. Teachers are responsible for the development of essential skills across seven major learning areas at eight levels. All these requirements impact on initial teacher education programmes.

A further agency set up during the changes was the Teacher Registration Board. It was emasculated soon after its setting up when the government moved to make registration no longer compulsory. A private Member’s Bill in 1996 precipitated moves to reinstate compulsory registration. Since then the board has developed its own set of professional standards. While there is much in common between these sets, there are also differences. Initial teacher education providers, school principals and teachers find this situation frustrating and confusing.

The Green Paper, which insisted that teachers need high cognitive as well as teaching skills, suggested the formation of a professional body along the lines of the General Teaching Council in Scotland or the similar body set up in Ontario. Such a body would determine
standards and approve teacher registration. There has been widespread support for such a body, provided it is broadly representative. The difficulties of establishing the precise functions of such a council and determining formulae for the appointment of its members have exercised ministry officials for some time. As yet there has been no official statement as to whether a teaching council will be established.

Conclusion

Trends in teacher education in New Zealand appear to be towards greater competition and diversity. This diversity makes the task of establishing standards both pressing and problematic. It is vital that decisions are made at the national level on issues raised in the Green Paper. The assessment and maintenance of quality is crucial; so is the realisation that such issues are ongoing and should continue to be subject to critical scrutiny and debate. Quality is an elusive concept. We can define minimum standards. We can recognise outstanding merit. But we have difficulty recognising the gradations in between. We have to ensure that we do not settle only for the minimum nor insist that all teachers reach an unrealistic level of excellence.

For individual institutions committed to quality teacher education programmes, there are also ongoing challenges. The nature of teaching itself is problematic. In spite of our concept that the learner is central, only gradually have we shifted from an emphasis on teaching to an emphasis on the facilitation of learning. We must persist in our efforts to ensure that we prepare our students to meet the simultaneous demands for both subject and teaching expertise across a range of curriculum areas, especially in the primary sector. We must prepare students to work in classrooms that are culturally and linguistically diverse. We have to equip them to cope with the impact of information technologies on teaching and learning.

A conference at Waikato under the auspices of the New Zealand Council for Teacher Education in October this year will focus on the theme: Remapping Teacher Education for the 21st Century. What will the new
landscape look like? Will the trends of the last decade continue? What guidelines are there when externally set goals keep changing shape? As teacher educators have always done, we must recognise the dilemmas we face and be prepared to go on walking a tightrope.

Note

1 The closure of Ardmore Teachers' College in the 1970s and North Shore Teachers' College in the 1980s reduced the number from eight to six.