Submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee: *Teaching and learning – maximising our investment in Australian schools*

Summary

This submission from the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education recognises the importance of teaching and learning to Australia's future, and seeks to address some of the major educational debates currently on the agenda.

Underlying this submission is our philosophy and methodology of teaching: teachers who are adaptive experts, and highly proficient in diagnosing, intervening and evaluating are our most successful. We call this *clinical teaching*.

This is quite different from the current mantra of finding the best classroom practices and enticing all to follow (because not all students learn the same way), or using accountability measures (like NAPLAN) to inform, entice and embarrass students and schools to do better.

Instead, we argue that we need to establish a teaching profession (teachers, leaders, systems) that are learning professionals, who constantly ask about the nature and magnitude of impact they are having on student outcomes. This requires a different agenda focused on growth and standards, the provision of resources that allow schools to know their impact, and a collaborative profession that values its autonomy and publicly demonstrate its success.

Clinical teaching underpins the thinking behind the University of Melbourne Master of Teaching and our new Master of Instructional Leadership. Clinical teachers diagnose, intervene and evaluate, using evidence about what each student knows and understands at the start of the teaching period to inform their teaching interventions. Through the construction of appropriate teaching and learning environments, clinical teachers scaffold learning for every student, whatever their developmental stage and current abilities, and then evaluate the impact of their teaching – to know how to continue this process.

Teaching is much more than passionate information transmission and behaviour management – these are the just craft elements of a much more complex and challenging profession. Our system needs to recognise the true nature of excellent teaching. This nature is based on experts who have detailed knowledge of the areas in which they teach, know their impact on learning, and are adaptive in providing interventions.

1. **The effectiveness of current classroom practices in assisting children to realise their potential in Australian schools**

We argue that it is a mistake to identify particular classroom practices (even though many are highly correlated with successful learning) as too often these practices are implemented even when the evidence shows it is not working for some students. We then tend to "blame the students" for not learning how others have learnt. Instead, we argue that teachers need to be adaptive experts in knowing their impact on students and if students are not responding to their teaching methods and classroom practices, it is the teachers who need to change. Teachers need proficiency in many classroom practices.

Teachers need to be highly proficient in assessing student needs, evaluating their impact, and intervening using multiple methods. This requires high levels of intelligence, a depth of multiple teaching strategies, and an openness to evaluating their impact.

Our research indicates that effective teachers do the following:

- Replace didactic styles of teaching with multiple forms of intervention
- Encourage student questions and dialogue
- Recognise that student outcomes can be importantly influenced by teacher attitudes, expectations, skills and knowledge
- Interpret data to make better decisions about their impact and choice of interventions
- Collaborate with other teachers to learn to improve their impact
- Use differentiated and targeted instruction rather than depend on whole class teaching
- Develop both student surface *and* higher order skills and turn students onto the love of learning.

Our Master of Teaching is focused on developing these skills in its graduates, and we conduct clinical assessments to diagnose, intervene, and evaluate their impact. Our Masters of Instructional Leadership is focused on developing these skills in school leaders.

It is the case that there is a "practice of teaching" (Hattie, 2009, 2011) and these should be known to all Australian teachers but the success is in adapting from these practices in an ongoing manner in light of the prior impact of the teaching.

2. **The structure and governance of school administration – local and central – and its impact on teaching and learning.**

Much has been written about the power of school leaders and we argue that instructional leaders are far more successful than transformational leaders (Dinham, 2007, 2008). School leaders (and central governance) should:

- build collaborative teams to critique, support, and provide expertise to one another
- break down isolation and individual teaching
- support the resources that provide evidence of successful impact on all students.

The major element of leadership is the mind frame that leaders are "evaluators". Their focus needs to be on evaluating the impact of the programs, teachers, curricula, themselves, etc. on the learning of all students within their school.

This is about more than test scores; it includes seeking evidence of the impact on character and students' engagement in learning; it includes seeking evidence about whether the school is an inviting place to learn, enhancing retention and desire to continue learning; it includes seeking

evidence about surface and deep learning; it involves ensuring all related to the school (including parents) are engaged in the language of learning; and it involves demonstrating that every child can make sufficient growth in a year. The Melbourne Declaration (2008) provides a useful frame for the sorts of evidence of impact needed.

Leaders should be proficient in ensuring teachers across the school engage in dialogue, debate, and evidence informed collaboration about not only the quality of evidence about their impact, but the messages from this impact evidence. They need to be able to seek resources that assist schools to maximise the impact, and remove barriers to learning.

The capabilities defined by the National Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL) need to be developed prior to and during the holding of formal leadership positions. This can be done through:

- evidence-based in-service and formal professional study
- coaching, shadowing, scenarios and hypotheticals
- developmental feedback and personal reflection.

It is particularly useful for aspiring and practising leaders to widen their experience in different forms of organisations and in different school contexts including different systems.

The National Professional Standard for Principals provide an ideal opportunity for national professional development programs. We recommend leadership development programs and resources are developed collaboratively between systems, jurisdictions and sectors; and an independent and robust evaluation of their impact. Such preparation will be most effective where sufficient time and space are made available rather than expecting self-directed learning on top of an already heavy workload.

The current penchant for "autonomy" mixes the autonomy to have an impact with the autonomy to do as one wishes. Schools have no right to have autonomy unless they can demonstrate their critical impact on all students' growth, their investment in learning and how they are an inviting place to learn. In Australia there is a move to the autonomy in the form of deconcentration in that many other agencies are gaining more "control" over schooling (private, religious, home schooling); to autonomy in the form of instituting market mechanism (and this is well known to increase inequality among schools, favoring the more able (parents, students, schools); and to autonomy in form of increasing participative democracy and not only involving parents more in the running and direction of schools but also collecting information from schools to appease parents that there tax resources are being well spent. Ironically, in Australia there is a move away from autonomy in the form of inviting teachers and school leaders to collaborate together to maximise impact on students (as in the top PISA countries, especially Finland) and take responsibility for this maximising.

3. The influence of family members in supporting the rights of children to receive a quality education.

It is difficult to find many family members who do not want to support the rights for their children to receive a quality education, it is just that some family members do not know how to optimally do this. Many students benefit from having parents that can have positive impact on their learning, but for those whose parents do not how to optimise learning, school is the major influence.

Schools already work hard to involve parents, however there needs to be more emphasis on developing parental understanding of the "language of learning". For example, using

- student-led conferences (such that students deeply learn the impact of their learning and are able to communicate it to family members)
- evidence of how schools adapt their environments to be inviting for all students
- evidence of the worthwhileness of the childrens' investment in schooling.

4. Adequacy of tools available for teachers to create and maintain an optimal learning environment

A culture of excellence and effective professional development depends on agreed criteria of success or high performance. To this end, we recommend an emphasis on student *growth* targets as well as the more typical achievement levels.

Every student should gain at least a year's growth for a year's input. Evidence shows that, while lower attaining students are receiving greater than average growth in Australian schools, higher attaining students are not currently making similar progress.

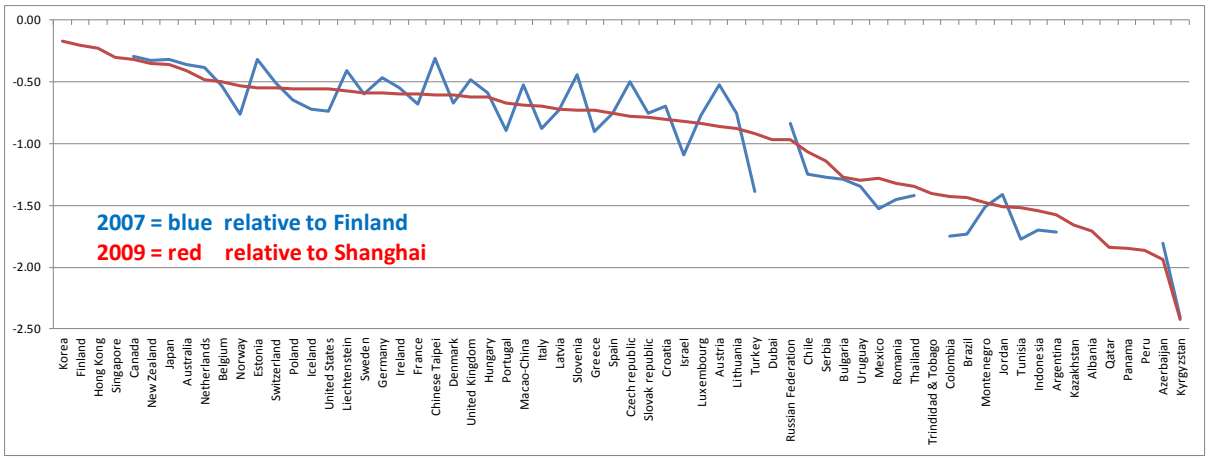
It is critical that Government values growth by providing resources to schools to assist them to *know their impact* on growth in learning. Summative claims like much of the reporting from NAPLAN are not enough. So much of this information hardly informs teachers of their impact such that they can use their adaptive expertise to alter teaching in a timely manner – it is too late, too broad, and too oriented to merely telling students of their performance in a narrow range of subjects.

Specifically, we recommend that each school has a dashboard of high level agreed outcomes (e.g., retention rates, growth rates, achievement standards, quality of learning, invitation to learn evidence, etc.) and agreed levels of growth for *all* students. These are then all linked into a school like me/ state/ Australian dashboard with an emphasis on growth, on targets. (e.g., some students need greater growth than others; increasing growth across the state by around 2% per annum, etc.) There is a necessaity to drive the Australian system from growth success.

When politicians make claims like Australia needs to be in the top 5 in the world, it is important to understand what this means. Australia is -.40 effect-size in reading, and -.80 in numeracy below Finland or Shanghai – this is a huge difference which equates to one year for reading and two years in math behind the top countries. Doing more of the same in Australia will not touch this gap – a major enhancement to our schooling system is needed to close this gap (realising that many other countries are making these major changes and will race past us).

We need to develop measures of teacher impact on learning and feed this information back to them in a timely and formative manner so they can adapt teaching, set defensible targets for learning and see the success of their teaching – preferably in a collaborative manner. This is not an accountability system, it is a formative mechanism to fine tune, to see what is working and what is not, and to truly use evidence in a timely and collaborative manner to enhance student learning.

We do not currently have such growth oriented tools at present, but the University of Melbourne has developed these tools and very willing to help implement such a system. This would also assist for showing schools and communities when schools are having greater than average growth and they can then share and build from this success.



5. Factors influencing the selection, training, professional development, career progression and retention of teachers

a. Selection

There is a call for more effective selection into teacher education programs. There is little evidence that stipulating minimum criteria for entry has any effect other than lowering the entry to these minimum criteria. Focusing more on exit standards from teacher education (with more control by principals and those who make appointments), and similarly focusing on registration after 1-2 years of teaching has been shown to more effective.

Given the major over supply of teachers wishing positions (in most subjects and areas) it is time to make teaching entirely a graduate profession (e.g., as happens in Finland). This would help to raise the profile of the profession, stop institutions taking in students unlikely to be competent in the classroom, and ensure that students are more prepared through their undergraduate degrees.

If there is still a wish for entry standards, we have developed a teacher-selection tool, and early evidence shows that those who are the brightest in achievement outcomes from undergraduate studies, have better profiles in personality, attitudes and many other desirable criteria for teaching. We will be implementing this tool to assist in entry into our Master of Teaching from 2014.

There is an unfortunate tendency to generalise about all teacher education programs and teacher candidates. We challenge the assumption that teaching is not currently attracting 'great' people. Our experience runs counter to this argument. The Master of Teaching (our only pre-service course) is a high quality, graduate course that attracts over 700 students per year. Our experience has been that moving teacher preparation to the graduate level, and lifting the quality of the course has, in turn, raised the quality of our candidates both coming into and exiting from our programs. For example, the median bachelor GPA of Teach For Australia Associates was 5.9 in 2010. Using this as a benchmark, in 2010 the Master of Teaching Secondary had 210 candidates with bachelor GPAs above this mean.

It is also worth noting the current trend towards employment-based pathways into teaching. While such models have some advantages, our experience is that quality university preparation is an essential element of teacher preparation. We caution against pathways which do not build the knowledge frameworks that underpin teaching practice.

b. Training

Our Master of Teaching is a genuine clinical Masters degree. It was launched in 2008 in response to growing evidence that Australia's teachers need to be prepared more effectively, and is different to traditional teacher education courses because:

- Teacher candidates spend two days per week in schools or early childhood centres from early in their studies, closely supported by a school-based Teaching Fellow and a University-based Clinical Specialist. This means they can connect what they learn at university, with what they learn in school (in a similar way to trainee doctors or nurses in a training hospital).
- Teacher candidates are prepared as clinical analysts: to assess and diagnose students' individual learning needs, learn multiple interventions, and to work with learners of all abilities.

An independent evaluation conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research in 2010, found that 90 per cent of our graduates felt either 'well' or 'very well' prepared for the classroom. This compares to approx. 40 per cent of beginning teachers nationally (AEU, 2009).

More evidence of the impact of this and other teacher education programs is critical to improving the impact of these programs, and restoring confidence in the quality of training. Similar value-added models of building evidence bases could be used to evaluate other professional development programs.

c. Professional Development

There is much evidence about the power of professional development. However, it must have an impact not only on teachers but specifically on students.

Better evaluation methods are needed to show the impact of professional development on the learning of students. One method would be to ask schools to become responsible for showing the impact of their professional development on subsequent student learning (growth and attainment), and then to invite others to judge evidence according to how convincing it is, its trustworthiness, its impact and its scalability. Other schools can then learn from this evidence, and adopt effective professional development programs which are similarly evaluated.

Professional development should:

- be evaluated to determine its impact on students
- be planned according to evidence about what should and should not be included
- assist schools to determine multiple ways of ascertaining success in learning
- be shared across networks of schools

A dashboard of successful professional development and its impact on students could be developed to aid these decisions.

We also recommend any new framework is planned in the context of the important work that has already been undertaken by AITSL to define teaching standards.

d. Career progression.

The current progression and salaries of teachers is reasonable flat, with most teachers attaining the top of the scale within 10-14 years – this is a major problem and a barrier to enticing excellent people to stay in teaching.

One of the associate concerns is the current flatlining of salaries is not so different from the progression of teacher expertise – teachers grow the most in the first year, half as much in the second year and their professional growth is reasonably flat thereafter. One solution is to look at how to introduce more expertise in 3-10 year teachers, and we are trialling schemes of this nature – to then defend increasing the slope of the salary scales from 2-15 years and beyond.

e. Retention

We know many of the attributes we need for great teachers: high intellect, willingness to give back, enjoying working with students and fellow educators, and a passion to make a difference. These are the same skills desired by so many professions, so they are not enough. What is also needed is:

- attractive remuneration
- evidence that one can grow in the profession
- evidence that pay is related to commitment, passion and impact
- teachers to be held in high esteem by the community

While there have been many implementations of teacher performance pay, it is difficult to find one that has lead to improvements in student learning. An alternative is to consider how we can "add" expertise into the system – for example by retraining current teachers in specific areas and then returning them to the school to take charge of up skilling fellow teachers.

For example, re-learning in the latest evidence and methods for working with 'learning disabled' students, with younger students who do not get numeracy or literacy first time (etc.) and then asking these teachers to then work with fellow teachers to upskill them. Introducing such expertise could be accompanied by increased pay.

The AITSL national teaching standards provide a framework that can be used to inform, develop and assess teacher expertise, particularly if certification at the various levels can be tied to salary and career structures.

References

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