

Response to
*Working Together
to Shape Teacher
Education in
Victoria*
Discussion Paper

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About the Mitchell Institute

The Mitchell Institute at Victoria University is an independent think tank that works to improve the connection between evidence and policy reform. The Mitchell Institute promotes the principle that high-quality education, from the early years through to early adulthood, is fundamental to individual wellbeing and to a prosperous and successful society. We believe in an education system that is oriented towards the future, creates pathways for individual success, and meets the needs of a globalised economy.

The Mitchell Institute was established in 2013 by Victoria University, Melbourne with foundational investment from the Harold Mitchell Foundation.

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■ Introduction

Mitchell Institute welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Working Together to Shape Teacher Education in Victoria* Discussion Paper. Mitchell Institute's response is largely concentrated on Focus 3, with an emphasis on building an integrated system centred on structured and mutually beneficial partnerships between universities and schools to lift student outcomes across the education system. Mitchell Institute supports efforts to raise the status of the teaching profession, but believes a focus only on initial teacher education misses an opportunity to achieve the reform agenda the Government articulated in *Education State*.

Focusing on initial teacher education alone is a lot of effort for little impact. Beginning teachers represent a minority of the teaching workforce – less than 6 percent of all teachers in New South Wales and Victoria are beginning teachers. Less than one in three teacher graduates in Victoria get jobs as teachers. One in three beginning teachers leaves within 5 years, so placing significant effort into developing this minority of the teaching workforce won't effect change at a system level. We need a new model of teacher education that develops *all* teachers to lift system performance.

Our submission details how initial teacher education can and should be situated alongside the broader teaching workforce strategy. Mitchell Institute's *Powerful Learning and Teaching* trial shows how it can be done, with promising practice on how partnerships between pre-service teachers, universities and schools can be developed to improve student learning.

We need an ambitious teacher development reform agenda

Children who start school next year will enter the workforce or tertiary education in 2030. The world they will face will be very different to today. The knowledge, skills and capabilities that young people will need in the future will be broader than ever before (Foundation for Young Australians, 2015). Young people will likely have multiple careers, and will need to have deeper analytical and problem solving skills, and more developed interpersonal skills, to navigate a more uncertain landscape. This requires new and better ways of thinking and teaching and learning across our education system.

To improve these student outcomes, we need to further support and develop the teaching workforce. We need to focus on all teachers, to extend all teachers' capabilities in order to develop the capabilities of young people. The Framework for Improving Student Outcomes rightly focuses on the need for teachers, principals and schools to work together to strengthen teaching and assessment – but this misses a key resource, universities. Universities have a key role to play in supporting schools to research and apply evidenced based practices, and teacher education can be used as a catalyst for change.

The Victorian Government, through *Education State*, has outlined a transformational education agenda. It recognises that the quality of teaching is ‘the single biggest thing’ to improve the outcomes of children. The policy includes a strong focus on wellbeing, and a focus on and beyond literacy and numeracy. This reform agenda, and the inclusion of capabilities in the Victorian Curriculum, signals that a broad range of capabilities are needed by learners. This is supported by local and international literature which reinforces the need for a focus on broader capabilities for young people, in addition to literacy and numeracy.

Teachers are at the core of this agenda – they are integral to developing the capabilities of young people. Not only do teachers need to be able to develop students to have inquiring minds that can think critically and creatively, but these learning dispositions are critical for teachers to possess. An education system where groups of teachers are supported to identify a particular aspect of learning, examine the evidence base, trial teaching practices and assess impact on student learning should be the goal.

We need teachers to learn, and students to teach, to improve the quality of education (Hattie 2009). Inquiry should be at the heart of education – with teachers examining what they can do to improve learning. This highlights the increasing duality of the modern teacher – that of both teacher and learner. It also suggests that 21st century teachers will be unable to navigate the modern educational workplace without the skills and dispositions that enable them to focus on their own learning and improvement. A broader focus on teacher education – how pre-service and in service teachers can develop the professional practices that put inquiry and evidence at the centre of teacher education to lift student learning is essential. This places professional learning at the centre of school activities. This stronger nexus creates a more adaptive learning system, where pre-service teachers and schools develop in unison.

We know there are pockets of effective practice – the next imperative is to develop systems where these pockets can become mainstream practice. To fully realise this potential we need universities and schools working together in joint pursuit of improving quality teaching practice to improve learner motivation and capability.

Teacher education – the untapped resource

Teacher education at present is an untapped resource. Pre-service teachers receive the bulk of their training in universities then are placed in schools willing to accommodate them, under the guidance of an available teacher. The quality of the placement depends greatly on the supervising teacher. The supervising teacher needs to have effective teaching practice and be a good mentor and guide. They need to conceptualise themselves as a teacher educator. Given the high level of variability in teaching quality within schools and across schools, and the absence of rigorous processes for identifying and developing registered teachers’ abilities to mentor, guide and support pre-service teachers, we continue to exacerbate variability in our newest entrants to the profession.

What is needed is a different model of teacher education that places pre-service teachers in schools that model high quality professional learning and practice, and where they can learn high quality, high reliability teaching practices with teachers who are learning and improving. We need to place teachers in schools that focus on evidence based practices, where teachers are continually striving to improve practices and assessing impact on student learning, and we need to ensure that these schools are not an isolated minority.

A longitudinal study into teacher education found that collective responsibility for improving teacher education is essential:

“... quality teaching requires a reconsideration of teacher education such that it is a collective responsibility between universities, schools, systems and communities requiring the fusion and synthesis of teacher education, schooling and the goals of education.... It will require much working together to make it clear what each is uniquely positioned to offer teacher education and to learning teaching over time” (Mayer, D., Allard, A., Dixon, M., Doecke, B., Kostogriz, A., Rowan, L., Walker-Gibbs, B., White. S., Kline, J., Hodder, P., Moss., J. (2014) p. 179).

Structured and mutually beneficial partnerships between schools and universities can lift the quality of education by ensuring pre-service teachers and school teachers build their capacity at the same time, and the professional learning is aligned. Unleashing this potential requires support. We need “to actively encourage and support teachers to use evidence and undertake their own rigorous small tests of change, improving outcomes for pupils all the while. We need to actively encourage teachers to innovate, giving them permission to fail sometimes” (Lucas, 2016). To support this, schools and universities need to work together more closely, with constant feedback loops, and schools as active sites of inquiry, with improvement of practice for student learning the focus.

High performing systems already do this

Collaborative approaches are in places across the world. For example, in Shanghai teachers are:

“encouraged to identify a particular aspect of learning and examine the theory and evidence base, then trial different teaching practices drawing on their findings” (Jensen, Hunter, Sonnemann & Burns 2012). In British Columbia senior teachers help lead inquiry approaches and collaborative learning teams to inquire, trial and evaluate approaches to improving learning (Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull, Hunter 2016). Similarly in Hong Kong teachers investigate, test and trial approaches. Pre-service teachers are involved in these inquiries and learn alongside existing and master teachers, making the transition to the classroom more seamless and ensuring all teachers develop together.

Partnerships to drive system improvement

Mitchell Institute is working in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Training, the Queensland Department of Education and Training, Monash University, Victoria University, Griffith University, RMIT University and schools on a large-scale multi-year initiative, *Powerful Learning and Teaching*, to improve the quality and consistency of teaching practice and lift student learning outcomes (Hopkins, Craig & Knight 2015). Its focus is on lifting teacher practice across the lifecycle, by working in partnership with schools, networks and universities on mutually beneficial partnerships centred on teacher inquiry.

This model is developing sustainable relationships, and lifting professional development in schools across Victoria and Queensland. Thousands of teachers have attended professional development sessions, including attending twilight sessions in their own time, whilst more schools wish to join the initiative. The initiative combines conceptual and practical learning, and provides the opportunity to learn from practice across four school networks.

Powerful Learning and Teaching has been supported with funding from the Sidney Myer Fund and the Victorian Department of Education and Training. Financial and in-kind contributions are also provided by the Queensland Department of Education and Training, schools, universities and the Mitchell Institute. The initiative is being implemented:

- across four school networks (85 schools),
- In two states (Queensland and Victoria),
- 50,000 school students,
- 3,900 teachers, and
- More than 200 pre-service teachers.

Schools work in partnership with pre-service teachers and their universities to strengthen high quality, high reliability teaching practice culture. Universities assist schools to inquire into an aspect of student learning, with the inquiry forming part of university research. Schools and universities work together to enhance pre and in-service teachers' inquiring dispositions and the habits of improvers.

A key principle of the initiative is the 'inside-out' approach which is the development of local capacity and decision-making to lead and sustain the improvement and partnership. Schools drive successful school improvement from within – this is often called bottom-up change. But rather than describe the 'direction' of change as top-down or bottom-up, *Powerful Learning and Teaching* refers to working 'inside-out'. Successful school improvement starts at the core of the school improvement strategy – with student learning – and moves outwards.

Principal Reference Groups (PRGs) are well established in each network. They are comprised of a sub-set of Principals (up to 12 per network). University teacher educators attend PRG meetings regularly. PRGs are key enablers of the initiative, for example: they are playing a decision-making role where schools are seeking to join the networks in 2017; they work with their partner universities to develop and refine the approach to pre-service teacher placements in each network; and they are working with universities to co-design network-specific research projects.

The initiative is creating a learning eco-system that cultivates curiosity and capabilities for all students, teachers, leaders and teacher educators and creates sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships.

Improvements to date

Progress has been made on establishing and delivering the professional development activities and tools to provide the groundwork for high quality teaching in teaching schools. Universities and schools (and the education system) are establishing structured and mutually beneficial partnerships to have greater continuity of learning for professionals from pre-service teaching through early career teaching and into later career and leadership for school improvement.

The initiative has begun to review how university and school-based professional learning can better serve professional learning of ALL teachers (both pre-service and registered teachers). The initiative will provide important evidence on the structure, curriculum and quality of the overall teacher education program as well as insights on the development and maintenance of mutually beneficial partnerships.

How it is operating in practice

In the first half of 2016, there were 60 separate professional learning sessions attended by 4500 attendees. By the end of 2016, there will have been 25 whole day network sessions, 11 whole or half day school professional learning sessions, 14 half day cluster strategy and review meetings, 10 twilight professional learning sessions for teachers, 2 whole day professional learning sessions for pre-service teachers and 4 evening seminars for parents. More than 20,000 manuals from the Curiosity and Powerful Learning series have been distributed to schools.

Levels of implementation across schools are being tracked.

The rapidity and extent to which networks have developed has been surprising. The networks are demonstrating signs of a self-sustaining and mature learning network. For example, school-to-school professional learning is regularly taking place at a localised cluster group level and across-network sharing is occurring in pockets. There is also now a highly capable group of Principals who are ready to lead others in this work. However, the role of the Network Coordinator is still pivotal in providing backbone support to each network.

Monash Network

In 2016, 35 pre-service teachers from Monash University (final year Bachelor of Education and Masters of Teaching students) have been placed in 12 teaching schools.

Pre-service teachers have volunteered to undertake an additional 20 placement days in schools.

They are present on the first day of school term, before students commence the school year – they are part of the vital planning and preparation with teaching teams. They are also present when students start classes for the year and meet their new teachers for the first time – this means they are an accepted part of the classroom from Day One.

Induction is really important, as is being treated like a member of staff. Pre-service teachers attend professional learning days alongside their mentor teachers and participate in peer observation. Undertaking professional learning with mentors means they have a shared language in the classroom.

Mentor teachers are frequently members of the school leadership team or school improvement team. Pre-service teachers are placed with a team of teachers and have a mentor teacher. Pre-service teachers attend meetings alongside mentor teachers.

The additional 20 days also allows pre-service teachers to learn broader aspects of the profession, for example assessment processes for students, parent teacher evenings and participation in school camps. Monash University is working on creating a unit that, in future, will provide their students with credit for the additional 20 days of professional learning.

The Monash network is holding a full-day forum on the *Powerful Learning and Teaching* concepts in October for the 80 'opt-in' 2017 pre-service teachers from Monash University. This will mean this cohort of pre-service teachers enters the classroom with an understanding of the same evidenced based teaching practices that are being applied in the classroom by their mentor teachers.

Given Australia's diminishing performance in international testing, and the flat lining of NAPLAN, it is vital that all teachers, including pre-service teachers, are best utilised to lift results.

Monash University is conducting research to uncover empirical evidence on the role of pre-service teachers in improving student learning.

Towards a new system of initial teacher education

A variety of areas require addressing to better support partnerships between schools and universities.

Alignment

Misalignment between school and academic calendars makes pre-service teacher placement more difficult, as students miss out on initial induction sessions. The university calendar is different to the school calendar, meaning that pre-service teachers often commence at schools later in the school year. The impact of this is that they miss induction, planning and other opportunities to be engrained into, and feed into, school culture and operations. Universities need

to re-think their calendar for teaching education to harmonise with school terms in order to provide higher quality placements.

Recommendation 1: That the Department of Education and Training (and VIT) work with universities to align academic calendars with school calendars for teacher education courses.

Funding

Currently universities pay supervising teachers a daily rate of up to \$30 per pre-service teacher supervised (although early learning centres receive less than \$2 per day in stark contrast). This equates to millions of dollars each year being spent to little effect. This funding could be better spent on building sustainable partnerships between universities, networks and schools to inquire, test and share what works in lifting outcomes in a local context.

Recommendation 2: That the Department of Education and Training ensure changes to ITE focus on partnerships between universities and schools, and lifting teacher development across the continuum. That the Department of Education and Training work with teacher unions to examine the possibility of using the daily rate payment to support professional learning of all teachers.

Incentives

Schools and universities are driven by different incentives. Universities are measured on research outputs, whilst schools are measured by student outcomes. Neither body is ultimately held to account on how well pre-service teachers develop. By partnering together, and having schools as active sites of inquiry, universities and schools can both benefit, lift the quality of evidence informed practice, and measure impact on student learning.

As part of this, we need an explicit agreement on standards for pre-service teachers – what we expect universities and schools to achieve. Pre-service teachers need conceptual and factual understanding – they need to understand student learning and assessment, have strong content knowledge, understand child and adolescent development, and apply this to classroom management. They also need to understand school improvement – their role in researching, testing and applying strategies to lift school outcomes.

Recommendation 3: That the Department of Education and Training produce a statement outlining the expectations of pre-service teachers, and the obligations on schools and universities to develop their capacity.

Assessment and Impact

Consideration needs to be given to how to assess teacher education initiatives, to ensure they are contributing to school and system level improvement. Given that Australia's results on a range of international tests have slipped, it is imperative that teacher education has a tangible impact on improving school engagement and outcomes.

As was highlighted in the Mitchell Institute’s report to AITSL on a framework for initial teacher education (2015), collecting and reporting on fit-for-purpose data on the outcomes of ITE at the individual graduate level would provide important information on:

- the proportion of graduates where concerns regarding “classroom readiness” remain
- the relative success of individual accredited programs in producing “classroom ready” teachers
- the effects of student background, ITE program and early career teaching context on perceptions of “classroom readiness”
- the success of early career mentoring in maintaining or improving teachers’ perceptions of professional competence and self-efficacy, and in reducing attrition
- the rate of improvement in the preparation of “classroom ready teachers” at aggregate levels
- locations where improvement strategies have worked well or less well as the sites for further research and investigation.

It is vital that any changes to initial teacher education are evaluated to ensure teachers are classroom ready and improving student learning.

Recommendation 4: That the Victorian Department of Education and Training work with VIT to develop a data framework to collect and report on data regarding ITE, including teacher employment outcomes, satisfaction with ITE program and early career induction, and employer/mentor view of “classroom readiness”.

Conclusion

To improve student outcomes the Victorian Government needs to focus on the continuum of teacher education, from pre-service to beginning teachers to education system leadership. Pre-service teachers are a potential asset but in the current teacher education model they are often viewed as a liability for which schools are compensated. Universities and schools have an obligation to develop pre-service teachers – but the teacher education model needs to shift so it is beneficial for schools and universities rather than a burden or struggle for both. Universities have a much greater capacity to benefit from pre-service teachers’ relationship with schools, and schools have a greater capacity to benefit from pre-service teachers and universities than what is being realised currently.

A partnership approach between universities, pre-service teachers, schools and networks can develop teachers in unison, provide rapid feedback to schools and universities, support research and help lift education outcomes across the state. A coherent system of teacher education, built on mutually beneficial partnerships and shaped around teacher inquiry for student learning is at the centre. The *Powerful Learning and Teaching* initiative shows one way to make this happen.

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