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teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand



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Who should develop initial teacher education policy and why?

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Abstract

Contextual factors such as the competitive educational market and self-managing schools are significant influences on initial teacher education providers, the programmes they offer, and the employment and induction of beginning teachers. In this paper NZEI and PPTA account for their belief that initial teacher education policy development should be a collaborative effort. It is argued that collaboration between the different players in initial teacher education strengthens policy making. These players, we suggest, are professional teacher educators, the New Zealand Teachers Council, other approval bodies, the Ministry of Education and the teacher unions.

Teacher unions are guardians of the profession as a whole, protecting both its status and the conditions under which teachers work. They are grounded in the reality of schools, and can share this knowledge with teacher educators. Teacher unions, as 'unions of professionals', have a part to play in developing initial teacher education policy. Historically, teaching unions have held themselves accountable for high quality public education, and exercise a high degree of responsibility in the way the objectives of their organisations are fulfilled by teachers, realising their values and understandings through principles of unity, social integrity and social justice.

First, we explain briefly our vision of initial teacher education and how we try to honour this in our practice. Secondly, we explain our historical and legal roles and how these are played out in practice. Thirdly, we discuss what we see to be the contributions of the other significant players in policy collaboration.



Introduction

The role of teacher unions

Teacher unions in New Zealand see as their mission to defend and support high quality teaching across all the sectors from early childhood to tertiary. They are committed to principles of social justice, fairness and collectivism. They are instrumental in shaping the professional identity of teachers through democratic processes and provide collective representation of their members. Teacher unions advocate raising the status, professionalism and the overall quality of the teaching workforce. This improvement agenda goes beyond the bounds of education, contributing to a democratic New Zealand society.

Scope of paper

In this joint paper the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association Te Wehengarua (PPTA) and the New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa (NZEI) take the position that development of initial teacher education (ITE) policy, like all education policy, should be a collaborative effort. Our argument is based on moral and ethical claims, our commitment to equity and social justice, our role as historical and legitimate advocates in education, and our leadership of powerful networks. These aspects are discussed within this paper. We contend that teacher unions, such as PPTA and NZEI, stand as significant partners in initial teacher education policy-making and teaching practice. We conclude that a broad approach to achieving quality education for all must be taken by the education community. A collaborative effort is needed—a partnership between a range of groups including teacher unions.

Before our discussion begins, however, we set out our expectations for initial teacher education.

What we want from initial teacher education

While recognising that initial teacher education starts with recruitment and selection processes through to the transition into teaching as a career, the focus for this paper is on what contributes to high quality initial teacher education. Aspects we believe to be critical are those which

- develop confident, motivated, reflective practitioners with knowledge and skills to undertake inquiry into their practice;
- acknowledge and model in practice the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand;
- minimise socio-economic inequalities which are proxies for other kinds of discrimination;
- develop understanding, tolerance and respect for cultural, ethnic and other forms of diversity among learners, colleagues and their communities;
- provide opportunities for student teachers to practise as well as take risks with new ideas;
- encourage learning from and sharing with colleagues;

- provide an appropriate balance between theory and practice;
- teach and model effective pedagogies;
- contribute to improving teaching practice for the benefit of learners and the teaching profession; and
- recognise and secure support from teachers and their unions.

Teacher unions seek to balance their industrial and professional goals and achieve improvements to teaching intended to improve student learning. Their political action and social justice focus mean teacher unions have multiple factors with which to contend. This paper will examine some of these factors.

Developing initial teacher education policy should be a collaborative effort

The core of democratic professionalism is an emphasis on collaborative, cooperative action between teachers and other educational stakeholders. (Sachs, 2001, p. 53)

In her New Zealand research, Kane (2005) describes the shape of initial teacher education as “a complex and multi-faceted endeavour” characterised by a range of providers responding to “the demands and expectations from a number of quarters” and “offering qualifications through internal face to face and alternative modes of delivery” (p. xii).

Kane (2005) found that there were 85 different ITE qualifications, which were offered by 27 institutions through a total of 131 programmes leading to teacher registration (p. xii). It should be noted that since 2005 there has been a moratorium on the development of new qualifications so it is likely these figures have remained static.

Universities and their faculties of education, institutes of technology, wānanga and private institutions give shape to initial teacher education policy and practice, but setting of New Zealand’s educational policy agenda cannot rest only with individual providers. Government agencies such as the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Teachers Council are also significant players in the development of initial teacher education policy. Teacher unions offer different perspectives. A fuller discussion of the significant players can be found further in this paper.

Writing on teacher union collaboration with external agencies, Naylor (2005) maintained that mutual benefits arise when there are effective partnerships. He argued that an environment of trust and commitment is created, leading to a better mutual understanding of the differing professional and organising strengths of others to achieve a common goal. Naylor’s argument was developed from business literature on alliances and collaborations which stressed that in effective collaborations, partners learn from each other, and such learning increases understanding and respect. As Naylor wryly adds, this is “hardly a negative in a fractious educational world that sorely needs greater levels of understanding and respect” (p. 17). Bourgonje (2006) concurs, and stresses that “research can be more effective when undertaken in partnership or consultation with strategically aligned stakeholder organisations or individuals” (p. 13).

The purpose of any policy discussion should be to reach consensus. The wider the range of groups participating in the discussion, the greater the likelihood of identifying more problems and discrepancies that require negotiation. Much of recent policy has

come from global education reform movements. While this may be supported by research evidence, it is not always appropriate to the local New Zealand context. It is far better that issues are discussed openly with genuine attempts to reach agreement than groups being forced to take polarised positions through the media.

In New Zealand, collaborative efforts between PPTA, NZEI, government agencies and professional bodies have helped build support and respect. Significant examples include the development of the New Zealand Curriculum from 2003–2007, the development of professional learning opportunities for the primary and secondary sectors to support the introduction of the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), work contracted by the Ministry of Education for the Schooling Strategy (2005), work on Ministry guidelines for performance management (1997), and the development of Te Whāriki (1993–1996). In all cases PPTA and NZEI worked in partnership with the Ministry of Education.

Over the past few decades there have been significant changes in government consultation practices and policy development. An inappropriate market model has been applied to education, resulting in significant restructuring. A changing tertiary environment, including the introduction of the performance-based mechanism (PBRF) intended to lift research performance at tertiary institutions, has had varying impacts on initial teacher education practice and negatively affected the funding, provision and recognition of initial teacher education courses and qualifications.

It is within this often-fraught context that collaborative efforts to provide the highest possible quality of initial teacher education must operate.

Why teacher unions should be part of that collaborative effort

The issues that have arisen internationally in initial teacher education are well covered by research literature in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia (see for example, Darling-Hammond, 2006). New Zealand has undertaken research projects providing a comprehensive picture of initial teacher education. Sankar, Brown, Teague and Harding (2011) provide an evaluation of the New Zealand Teachers Council's induction and mentoring pilot programme. Other studies include Cameron (2007), Cameron, Dingle and Brooking (2007), Rivers (2006), and Kane (2005).

There is, however, comparatively little research on the professional role of teacher unions. Teacher unions have not been absent from the debates, although evidence of their participation and impact is often submerged in their submissions, presentations, position papers and media releases.

The power and leadership of teacher unions stems from their representative base and their professional and industrial focus, making them significant players in developing and safeguarding initial teacher education. Their strength can be seen in their ability to mobilise their members. Fortunately they work under democratic processes and their modus operandi includes a willingness to collaborate and contribute positively and responsibly through lawful actions.

Moral and ethical claims to be involved

It is our contention that teacher unions have moral and ethical claims to be involved in the development and operation of initial teacher education.

Teacher unions are guided by a vision of education as a human right and public good, and their goal is a high quality public education system. A key part of a high quality system is high quality recruitment, preparation and induction into teaching. This implies excellence in initial teacher education as the first step in the process, clear and effective partnerships with schools, and robust assessment to ensure that only those who should enter teaching do so.

The partnership does not end with initial teacher education. The teaching profession and teacher educators continue preparing the new graduate to become a fully registered teacher through professional learning opportunities. Ensuring effective transition is a shared responsibility.

It is sometimes argued that consultation with selected individuals is adequate and equivalent to consulting with the teacher unions. We contend that this is no substitute for consultation with teacher unions. Individuals can be selected because they are likely to say what the hearer wants them to say; as individuals they are not accountable to any wider body. Union representation, submissions and presentations are supported by the moral authority of people who have a powerful accountability to a wider group. This accountability means that if the membership does not like what the union is saying on their behalf they can reject their leadership through the ballot box.

The mergers of colleges/schools of education into universities have seen the demise of many teacher education institutions' advisory committees, which included union representatives who were able to give advice grounded in the experience and views of the wide range of teachers. Union representatives have a powerful accountability to their organisations and access to union networks that enhance the partnership of teachers and teacher educators. The loss of these representatives is, we believe, a loss to initial teacher education.

It is important to recognise that, despite an increasingly secretive government agenda, teacher unions nationally are still usually consulted on teacher education policies. Most recently, PPTA and NZEI were both represented on the New Zealand Teachers Council reference groups for the development of the Graduating Teacher Standards and the development of the Guidelines for Teacher Education Programme Approval, Review and Monitoring. Both of these policies have a significant role in the work of teacher educators.

Equity and social justice in teacher education

If New Zealand education is to be truly inclusive, teacher education must ensure the integration of social justice and equity issues in initial teacher education. Unions can be strong allies in supporting and informing this agenda.

Both teacher unions and teacher educators operate in a politically and economically fraught environment. Too often initiatives that are driven by the government's political and financial ideologies rather than by educationally or pedagogically sound evidence are introduced to schools and centres. The political and economic independence of teacher unions means that they are well placed to challenge these initiatives.

Education sector unions are united in their belief that school and early childhood education environments must be emotionally, intellectually, physically, spiritually and culturally safe and nurturing for learners and education workers.

Teacher unions as historical and legitimate advocates for education

Teacher unions are ‘unions of professionals’. Brown and Angus (1997) define this concept of professionalism as follows:

- A genuine concern for the welfare of learners, particularly those perceived to be disadvantaged by their social background or by the nature of their educational experience.
- An active role in the development of curriculum innovation and school/centre improvement.
- Collegiate behaviour, including a willingness to share resources and experiences and to support colleagues.
- A willingness to take direct industrial action in support of just causes despite the risk of contending with those in authority.
- An awareness of the influence of social issues in the discourse of the profession and a willingness to take an active part in that discourse. (p. 49)

Unlike the usual definitions of professionalism, this definition conveys the co-existence of the professional and industrial in the work of a teacher union. It highlights the fact that teachers’ working conditions are young people’s learning conditions, making it difficult in many cases to separate the industrial motivation from the professional motivation behind positions taken.

Teachers are salaried professionals, usually in the employ of the state. Unlike many other professional groups, teachers do not have the power to increase fees for their services to support the quality improvement of those services. Through political and industrial action, however, teacher unions have the collective power to persuade the government, either to increase funding of education in particular directions, including salaries or class/group sizes or non-contact time allowances, or to enforce their view of more directly professional matters such as qualifications systems or curriculum.

The independence of the teacher unions means they are not at the political or financial whim of the government of the day. In contrast, tertiary institutions are vulnerable as they are often dependent on financial support from the government. Despite the role of academics as ‘critic and conscience of society’, university managements, pressured by government funding mechanisms, have been known to put pressure on individual academics who choose to be outspoken or are openly critical of government policy. Teacher unions, on the other hand, are not funded by the government and are able to be more outspoken, particularly on policies and initiatives that seek to reduce teacher professionalism.

Neoliberal governments seek to exclude the profession—teacher educators, teachers and the unions representing them—from any government policy-making advisory groups on the grounds that including them will result in ‘provider capture’. The Picot Report (1988) articulates this: “Ministers need high-quality advice on which to base policy, and so we see a clear need to separate policy advisers from the providers of education to eliminate any conflicts of interest” (p. 5).

This characterisation is very different from the way that most teacher unions in the developed world see themselves. Their constitutional purposes usually involve some statement of purpose in relation to the wellbeing of public education. Both PPTA's and NZEI's first object is "To advance the cause of education" (NZPPTA, 2013, p. 7; NZEI, 2012). The very names of the New Zealand teacher unions suggest a founding purpose that is professional, not industrial: *Post Primary Teachers' Association*, and *New Zealand Educational Institute*. The histories of both these unions (for example, Grant, 2003; Simmonds, 1983) clearly indicate a professional purpose and foundation. Ironically a more industrial focus has evolved in response to increasing efforts by governments to weaken teacher unions' power by limiting engagement and consultation to the bargaining arena.

Sachs (2003a) has argued for an activist teaching profession, in which teacher unions have a fundamental role which would "reinstate trust in the teaching profession by the community at large and to counter the de-skilling of teachers by governments who want to control teachers and the teaching profession" (p. 7; see also Sachs, 2003b, on the same theme).

Teacher unions have powerful networks

It is our contention that teacher educators need to engage with teacher unions to be successful. PPTA and NZEI represent the vast majority of teachers in state schools, with around 95% union density. They have strong communication systems, with email newsletters, regular magazines, annual conference/meeting papers and social networking. They have well-developed local, regional and national networks to support effective relationships and communications. This means that unions are influential and relevant, reaching large numbers of teachers and wider communities, conveying and seeking information and views about education issues including teacher education. Teacher unions work closely with the wider community to influence or alter education policy, the class size debate being the most recent example.

The mix of theory and practice that is the foundation of New Zealand's approach to teacher education means teacher educators need practising teachers to support the practicum by acting as associate teachers/tutors. Teacher unions act as a link and reinforce the importance of this partnership to members.

The responsibility of practising teachers for the quality of the practicum is enormous, and we recognise that high quality cannot be guaranteed. We argue that acting as an associate teacher or tutor needs to become a high status career pathway for practising teachers, one for which they receive extensive preparation and expert guidance, and which should be recognised on the pay scales. Both unions continue to try to achieve this through collective agreement negotiations, despite the lack of progress due to government's industrial response.

The practicum serves as a useful example of the mix of industrial and professional in teacher unions' role. When the unions seek an increase in the payment to teachers for practicum work, they are seeking improved financial reward for the role. However, they are also seeking to have it valued as the important professional work that it is, and to increase the motivation of teachers to do it.

There is also an obvious need for far better resourcing of initial teacher education so that the triad of initial teacher educator, student teacher and associate teacher or tutor can work more effectively. This is particularly problematic in secondary schools where a student may have up to four associate teachers during one practicum, plus a liaison teacher overseeing the whole placement. Finding time to bring all these people together is enormously difficult with current resourcing. Recognition of the work involved in primary and early childhood education practicum is also a major issue.

Significant players in initial teacher education

Successful initial teacher education requires collaboration between the key players. We see those key players to be the tertiary institutions, the government agencies, and the profession. We have argued in the previous section that collaboration with teacher unions is an essential ingredient in ensuring the voice of the profession informs teacher education policy development and operation.

Universities

New Zealand universities are the main providers of initial teacher education (Kane, 2005). The first priority for each university, however, must be its credibility and survival economically, and sometimes this priority can conflict with professional goals. While generalisation is difficult, teacher unions believe that the move of teacher education into universities has been problematic, with a number of issues still unresolved.

The 'free-market' approach to education creates a continued tension between the need for universities to have staff members who hold doctoral qualifications and are research active, and the need to recruit teacher educators from among expert practitioners. The former relates to the university's national and international standing on research-focused league tables that create a competitive mechanism for 'the market'. The latter relates to a foundation of understanding about the complexities and realities of centres, schools and classrooms.

While the unions continue to see initial teacher education as a career pathway option for teachers, in the current environment this pathway appears increasingly closed. Unions believe this provides little benefit to teacher education. It makes teacher education less credible to teachers and increases the dissonance between what students learn in their university lectures and what they experience in practice.

Unions believe that they have done their best to stop this trend through strongly advocating for all teacher educators involved in the practicum to be teacher registered. This was included in the requirements.

The New Zealand Teachers Council

It is our view that the New Zealand Teachers Council, among the government agencies involved in initial teacher education, is the one that most requires our nurturing and support because it is the most endangered. The struggle for a teachers council was fought largely by the unions in the late 1990s, when New Zealand had been through a period during which a right-wing government abolished the requirement for teachers to be registered, a decision they later came to regret. The New Zealand Teachers Council

was established by the 1999–2002 Labour Government, with the unions heavily involved in the policy development. After a rocky start it is now a well-established and competent body that has done good work in a number of areas including regulation of initial teacher education.

It is vulnerable, however, to the whims of government because it is established by statute as an autonomous crown entity. It is subject right now to a review by government, the hidden agenda for which is likely to be to make it less, rather than more, independent of political direction. It is unlikely that this will be good for initial teacher educators, especially those who are delivering the programmes, any more than it will be good for teachers.

The unions are well aware that teacher educators are unhappy about their lack of representation on the New Zealand Teachers Council. Both unions strongly support changing this situation and expressed this in submissions to the current review.

Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education's role includes monitoring teacher supply and developing overall policy on initial teacher education. The Ministry of Education has had little success in predicting supply for years, and has shown an unwillingness to control recruitment into teacher education anyway because of their usual hands-off approach. Ministry of Education supply data is used to make decisions about scholarships for initial teacher education, but even in this area their success rate is poor; for example the recent over-supply of physical education graduates for secondary schools. Sudden policy shifts such as the government decision to reduce qualified teacher targets and funding in early childhood can also have very disruptive impacts on management of supply.

There have been numerous reviews of teacher education. Little good has ever come of these reviews despite the thoughtful and considered submissions of teacher educators and teacher unions. Unfortunately, political interference with education policy means that the Ministry of Education becomes a political mechanism rather than standing for education.

Tertiary Education Commission

The Tertiary Education Commission has essentially become the tertiary funding arm; as such the Commission is lobbied by universities, institutes of technology and all other post-secondary education and training providers. Funding decisions for universities are made mainly on commercial goals and initial teacher education rates poorly in the high stakes environment.

In summary

Teacher unions see themselves as the guardians of high quality public education. They provide the collective voice of the profession. Teacher unions have a moral imperative and coherent epistemological position, which means they have an important part to play in providing advice on the development of initial teacher education policy. They exercise a high degree of responsibility and accountability in the way their

organisations' objectives are embraced by the community of teachers. At the heart of their contribution are principles of unity, social integrity and social justice.

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