

Seizing the Opportunity
Part I - The origins of the Auckland College of Education
Degree of Bachelor of Education (Teaching)¹

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Introduction

This paper is the first of a series that deals with important facets of the development of the first New Zealand Bachelors Degree in teacher education. It details issues and key events that were influential in leading to the decision to undertake the preparation of a degree programme for teacher education.

Background

Two of the many international and national background developments that provided a backdrop for our deliberations were an increasing focus on outcomes in teacher education programmes and the attendant debate on competence versus competency. Staff at the Auckland College of Education (ACE) visualised teacher education as based on conceptualizations of teaching as a highly complex, richly textured professional practice involving a myriad of interactions, judgments and integrative reflection on practice and theory. In opposition to this there was (and is) a view of teacher education as involving programmes based on skills specified in minute detail and in alarming volumes, thus raising disturbing questions about whether (and how) teaching competence is merely the sum of the parts.

As well as these two professional/conceptual debates, the terrain of teacher education in New Zealand in 1995 was changing. Diversity in provision was being actively

¹ Material in this paper was first presented as part of a paper, *To degree or not to degree or Breaking New Ground: Narratives of Developing the Degree of Bachelor of Education (Teaching) at the Auckland College of Education* at the NZCTE Conference, Dunedin 1996.

sought by Government policy-makers and, at the time of investigating the possibility of a degree in teaching, we were aware that, within a relatively short period, there would be many challenges to the traditional delivery of teacher education courses. These challenges would be both in terms of large volumes of minutely detailed skills, and in terms of location. We recognised that we faced the prospect of many new competitors in the marketplace. Policy thrusts also prefigured changes in the length of courses such as the now familiar “compressed” course initiative which was designed to address the current shortage of primary school teachers by “producing” teachers within a shorter timeframe. Like other factors noted here, it inevitably fueled debate about the nature and purpose of teacher education and where and by whom these were determined. All that was certain at this point was the turbulence of the context.

Events were important in the development of ACE’s degree in teaching, and some of them are recounted here. Firstly, a new organisational structure was set into place at the very beginning of 1995 reflecting ACE’s responses to current and future changes. The degree development was an initiative within PreService Teacher Education (PSTE). This ACE sector was established to group the staff involved in the delivery of early childhood, primary and secondary teacher education programmes. Within PSTE teaching staff were organised in centres of learning (based on the New Zealand National Curriculum essential learning areas and education studies).

Genesis

In early 1995, the re-organisation was followed by discussion at the PSTE Board level (comprising key personnel in the sector) on the nature of teacher education. This examined the nature of the “ideal graduate” and then moved on to an exploration of teaching and learning principles that would inform a programme to educate such a graduate. At the same time, to promote wider awareness and debate, the College convened a NZ-wide colleges of education seminar to explore the work-to-date of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority’s (NZQA) Qualset teacher education standards. This was significant because here issues arose regarding the number of unit standards, the degree of specification within them and the tension between atomization versus a more holistic and integrative approach. These issues echoed those being debated

among college staff, focussing on concerns about the atomization of the complex and richly textured practice that is teaching. These links were highlighted in a post-seminar ACE discussion. Indeed, this discussion was critical for the crystallization of ideas on key issues and the identification of the need to pursue these within the college.

Other significant and timely events included the release of NZQA Tertiary Action Group's (TAG) consultation papers in August 1995 and the meetings that followed at which the two types of degrees, provider (designed and delivered by an institution) and national (based on Unit Standards on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) but delivered by institutions) were presented, discussed and explored. Concurrently, our programme for a Bachelor of Education/Diploma of Teaching, run jointly with The University of Auckland, was formally reviewed. For the college, what emerged was the clear need for better communication; difficulties associated with dispersed delivery sites; philosophical and cultural differences between partners; and the desirability of a coherent philosophical statement on which to base a teacher education programme. At the same time, there was a feeling prevalent among many ACE staff that the current, joint programme was only just sustainable. There were expressions of the frustrations and difficulties that flow from significant institutional and occupational differences in teaching and learning approaches. Staff were also conscious of competing demands on students' time and energy as a result of a programme located in three sites - schools and early childhood centres (for practicum), the university (for a traditional academic and liberal arts programme) and the college (for courses that develop professional expertise). Our ideas, beliefs and values were increasingly clarified and refined by these events.

In September 1995, the principal, Dennis McGrath, circulated a paper that set out a rationale and process for investigating the possibility of offering an Auckland College of Education, provider degree for teaching. A decision taken shortly after in October 1995, at a second seminar on Qualset, to recommend a moratorium on the introduction and further development of unit standards for teacher education was also significant. It reflected a growing national disquiet regarding the extent of specification. The need to take a more holistic approach to conceptualizing teacher

education was widely felt. Indeed, at this time there were over forty standards on the NQF and it appeared possible that over 100 would be needed for a teacher education qualification. With all this in view, our investigations gained impetus and momentum.

From investigation to action

At this stage, there was no clear decision to commit the college to such a degree, but there was a significant extension of the debate. We formally began a scoping exercise to examine the viability of such a proposal, as well as the potential shape and structure of a teaching - as opposed to education - degree. The TAG requirement that provider degrees focus on a clear statement of programme outcomes set a frame for our deliberations about what we sought to achieve. McGrath's paper, having set out the implications and opportunities presented by the Tertiary Action Group draft recommendations (TAG, 1995), posed significant questions. These questions sought to promote and focus the debate. Crucial to the investigation were issues such as the duration and structure of such a programme, its relationship with possible teacher education unit standards, and the implications for ACE's relationship with the university and other partners.

The TAG recommendations indicated that provider degrees would be viable alternatives to both NZQA national degrees and university degrees. It was obvious that whilst that provided an opening for us it would be no less of one for potential competitors. NZQA revisions of its date for the submission of proposals focused our attention on the time available both for us and others. With hindsight, we have to report that the short timeframe was, unexpectedly, a positive feature. It galvanized our energies and efforts and focused these.

The transition from "investigation" to a definite commitment to proceed with the Bachelor of Education (Teaching)², subject to NZQA approval, was a

²The submission was, in fact, for the approval of the degree of *Bachelor of Social Sciences (Teaching)*; this title was chosen to obviate confusion with the University of Auckland's *Bachelor of Education* currently mounted jointly with ACE. The change of degree title to

Bachelor of Education (Teaching) is the consequence of advice from the NZQA accreditation panel.

significant shift. It was acknowledged, however, that this shift was but one possible outcome - and not necessarily an inevitable one - of the investigation plan launched by formal notice to NZQA of the *intention* to submit a proposal, given in August 1995. That formal notification was a necessary condition for the investigation that followed. It explored strategic options in the turbulent context we have described but no particular outcome was assumed.

The realization that a definite commitment was warranted came late in 1995. A range of factors contributed to what was more an acknowledgment of a gathering momentum than a decision. Among these were the feedback received in response to draft material; a clear sense of stimulation, passion and anticipation by staff and students; and the steady building of a clear and exciting vision of a more manageable, streamlined and focused programme of study and of professional education. A significant component of the growing impetus was derived from a desire to be proactive with regard to the challenges and opportunities inherent in both the predicted competition (including new providers with tenuous connections to the profession of teaching) and the future “frameworking” of teacher education. As 1995 ended, the stakes grew higher and a charged atmosphere pervaded the project. It was at this point that we moved from an investigative mode to one of action: the preparation of a degree programme in teacher education. This process will be documented in forthcoming papers.

References

McGrath, D. (1995) *A proposal for an ACE teaching degree*. Internal Memo: Auckland College of Education.

New Zealand Qualifications Authority (1995) *Tertiary Action Group: Consultation with Stakeholders*. Discussion paper: New Zealand Qualifications Authority.