

DIRECTIONS

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Quality Teaching

Quality teaching attracts increasing attention, and its contribution increasing recognition.

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Is Funding the Answer or the Question?

The jewel of the education policy crown for the new Federal Government would appear to be the much vaunted education revolution, with the spotlight on the provision of a significant increase in funding for computer hardware and infrastructure. However, there has been no conclusive research that the unembellished provision of such equipment makes any significant improvement on educational outcomes for the vast majority of students. In comparison, there is irrefutable evidence on the pivotal nature of providing academically rigorous instruction in the domain of information literacy, as opposed to information technology.

The impact of the delivery of those skills - which far surpass mere ability to operate the apparatus - is assessable not only in K-12 education, but also tertiary education and in post-education citizenship.

Patricia Karvelas does provide hope for the gloom-inflicted. Karvelas, a political correspondent for the *Australian* (26/11/07) stated 'Labor insiders yesterday said Mr Rudd would be an 'evidence-based' leader, whose intellect would mean he would make considered decisions.'

The Rudd Government policies on education have also included ICT instructional support for pre-teacher service training but to date there has been no national plan for the retention of gifted and experienced teachers. In recent years, there has been a major investment in the retention of beginning teachers, but little attention for mid-career teachers. The bleeding-out of experienced teachers resigning or taking early retirement is also largely ignored. In the context of educational digitalisation, this may be related to the fallacy of 'the digital native', where the pedagogic skills and accumulated educational wisdom of more mature teachers is not appropriately valued or utilised.

Industry pundits have proposed that the most effective way of addressing Australia's skill shortage - another of the new government's major educational concerns - is to increase the wages of apprentices. Could such a simple strategy as addressing teacher salary levels be worthy of consideration, for the effective integration of the emerging digital landscape into meaningful education?

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Teacher Quality: A Broad Mix of Attributes

In the 2007 Australian report on the inquiry into teacher education, *Top of the Class*, the point is made (backed by considerable research conducted nationally and internationally in the past 20 or so years) that quality teachers bring to the profession a broad mix of attributes of which academic capacity is but one; and that reliance on academic performance as the principal selection indicator could potentially exclude future quality teachers from the profession.

Some universities already implement a broad selection criteria and many have alternate entry pathways options to support their equity and access agenda. After all, school leavers do not admit to all students who enter teacher education programs and (increasingly, especially in the US), mature-age and career change people have been attracted to the profession.

Within this context, and to move to standards for national accreditation of teacher education, it might be timely to consider a national approach to university admission to teacher education that implements the use of tertiary entrance rankings such as QPs and which might be used by universities at their discretion.

However, of most significance in the debate about university entry levels into teacher education is the consensus emphasis on input rather than output. It is anticipated that, throughout a teacher education degree program, students will acquire or further develop a range of skills and skill sets to prepare them, as best possible, to become quality, beginning teachers.

What is paramount is that universities produce excellent, beginning teachers. Teacher education programs must, therefore, be able to add and provide the resultant outcomes associated with successful completion of university study. This should be the main emphasis. This is not to devalue academic performance as a selection criterion, but to ensure that with the wealth of research findings that validate the idea that quality teachers possess a variety of characteristics and capabilities - personal as well as professional - that impact on their commitment to the profession and efficacy in working with young people. Aspirant teachers bring elements of these qualities with them to university, while others they develop throughout their degree.

As stated in *Top of the Class* there should be no compromise on standards at graduation. This is the guarantee that all teacher education programs along with program accreditation and teacher registration authorities in Australia should be able to provide to the Australian public.

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