

## **Getting the Mix Right: A New Bachelor of Education Course in New Zealand**

**By Keith Boswell**

Until the early 1970s, teachers in New Zealand had been trained in training colleges independent of the universities and had, until about 1970, been granted Trained Teacher Certificates after a two-year course. Over the period 1968-1972 three-year training was phased in throughout the country and at this time stronger links were made between some of the training colleges and their nearby university.

Most colleges continued to encourage their students to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree concurrently with the teacher training course and managed to gain for their students a recognition that the training course was eligible as a cross-credited entity equivalent to about one third of the degree. Consequently, students left the college after their now three-year training with a Teachers College Diploma. Some students pursued their B.A. degree as either part-time or full-time students after they had left college. A larger proportion chose to go no further with their academic studies.

Close cooperation between two colleges, at Palmerston North and Hamilton, and their adjacent universities led to the development

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of Bachelor of Education degrees and it ultimately became obvious to the other four colleges in the country that their graduate students were emerging at a disadvantage—at least an academic qualification disadvantage—to those from the two above cities .

### *Getting the Mix Right*

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At this stage in 1987-88, the Auckland University Education Department looked hard at what it offered the teaching profession, prompted by a somewhat critical evaluation of its courses during a formal Review.

Negotiations were begun to find a way to link the two institutions in a programme of study that would allow each to maintain a certain amount of autonomy while producing excellent graduates with a Bachelor of Education degree together with the practical and classroom-oriented aspects that had proved so desirable in the earlier primary teacher training. It is the blending of these two aspects and the maintaining of a strongly integrated approach that became the aim of the joint enterprise. Concerns to maintain an integrated approach have been indicated worldwide over the last 20 years (Schapper, 1974; Lortie, 1975; Monahan, 1984; O'Shea, 1984). Guri-Rozenbilt (1990) describes recent attempts in Israel to organise an approach that integrates courses in the teacher training colleges with the Open University of Israel. This approach which blends the two courses of study from the outset has some similarities with that now being presented at the Auckland College of Education (ACE).

One suspects that any blending of two institutions with a pride and tradition going back over 100 years is likely to prove to be both a tortuous and difficult process. It was. With meetings at the highest level of Principal, Associate Principal of the College, the Dean of the Arts Faculty, and the Professor Head of the Education Department, down to casual afternoon teas where folk who already knew one another from elsewhere but were finding themselves likely to be combining to teach a course would meet. A journey over the minefield that lay ahead was begun. There were many groups meeting from time to time but the most critical of the working parties were those involved in determining the Education courses for the B.Ed. The reason was that in the framework that had been decided for the degree, the teaching by the University Education Department was set to make inroads on the work done in the part by the lecturers in the Education Departments of the colleges. Ownership of courses and teaching positions at the colleges, which would be depleted in the new arrangements, became key factors. As it had been, the college education staff had taught about one sixth of a students' total course, but under the new arrangement this would be shared by university staff although the proportion of course would increase to one quarter.

### **The Key Issues During Negotiation**

A number of key issues arose. Would the sharing of teaching lead to redundancies among college staff members in education? Where there was a division of work into lecturing and tutoring, would the college staff members be relegated to the less visible and presumably inferior role of tutorial leader? Would the university accept staff members with less than their customary levels of qualification? Who would **own** the degree?

While the earlier issues above continued to be discussed for some time, it soon became quite clear that the degree would be conferred by the University of Auckland. It would be a jointly-taught course, but it would remain theirs as the colleges had no legal standing to confer degrees. Subsequent events in New Zealand have since made the conferring of degrees a possibility for the colleges but as the current arrangement is only into its fourth year—and as there is a cautious, but comfortable, relationship between the two institutions—there's little need for change at the moment. There is a shared teaching load and a degree that is 50 per cent generated from the university and 50 per cent from the college.

### **The Make-Up of the Degree**

The degree is taught over four years and is made up of 28 papers. The colleges have responsibility for 14 papers and teach them as 28 units of study. The university has responsibility for 14 papers, seven of them in the Education Department, including three at Stage 3, and the other seven in a subject or subjects other than education, as prescribed for other degrees, including at least three above Stage 1.

The college units of study comprise 22 teaching studies units with at least two at 300 level plus six units of professional practice. (The relationship of “units” and “papers” is that a “paper” is equivalent to two “units” in length and teaching time).

The description of the degree is now almost complete. It remains to explain the part that professional practice plays in the programme.

The Professional Practice Programme was introduced as an outright-last-ditch-stand to retain one of the key strengths of the early teacher training programme. One faculty member could see the element of training which helped student teachers to learn the skills and some theories that lie behind teaching practice being omitted from a largely academic education course. He promoted the idea of developing a course which aims to assist students to:

- develop a personal philosophy of teaching and education;
- critically examine their developing professional competence;
- develop effective teaching and classroom management skills; and
- incorporate the principles of bi-culturalism into their teaching philosophy and practice.

The Professional Practice course is taught in six units over six semesters—the first two units are compulsory in year one—the timing of the remainder is a matter of choice, although most take two units in year two. Each unit is linked with a Teaching Experience block of three to five weeks. The Professional Practice Programme has been a cornerstone of the approach the Bachelor of Education course has taken and it has been a complex concept to organise. With students from all four years of the degree involved plus those doing the diploma course there are about 900 taking part altogether. Some of the 1100 students will be working full time at the university, but in all there are about 900 in about 50 tutor groups over three stages of the course.

### *Getting the Mix Right*

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This has meant that an extensive staff development programme has had to be mounted and sustained because the staff members involved in teaching the course have to come from not only the Education Department where the work had been traditionally taught, but from each of the teaching studies departments as well.

Art, music, mathematics, science, etc. all contribute staff members who work either one-eighth (for those in the Year One Programme) or one-quarter of their teaching time for Professional Practice. Various approaches have been tried to ensure that the students received a good course that was delivered evenly—that is, that their course was more content-dependent than lecturer-dependent. One such scheme was to “spoonfeed” by preparing everything through centrally distributed teaching packages. Another was to involve, say, 18 tutors in preparing material which was shared. There continues to be some variability in student perceptions of their course that indicate the individual lecturer is a key factor in the success with a group of about 18 students.

Lecturer reactions have now changed from a few initial cases of shock and resentment at being “taken” from their subject teaching to do this work. It has become accepted after three years that any teaching staff member may be asked to take on the role. New staff members are reminded in job advertisements, interviews, and job descriptions of their obligation in this area, and with a teaching staff of about 90 in the School of Primary Teacher Education a selection can still be made.

### **The Diploma Programme**

Not every student teacher wishes to be a university student and not every primary school teacher wishes to have a university degree. Many teachers in New Zealand have in the past taught superbly despite their meagre Diploma of Teaching as their only qualification. What has developed has been a Diploma course inside of the B.Ed. so that a B.Ed. student completes both the degree and the Diploma of Teaching, which is a necessary qualification to gain an appointment to a beginning teacher position and thus complete the two successful years of teaching leading to registration as a teacher.

Alongside this diploma students at the college can be taking classes with their fellow B.Ed. students, but after year one concentrating all their effort on Teaching Studies. The requirements for the diploma are:

- 42 units in all
- minimum of 25 shall be above 100 level
- with eight of these above 200 level

Professional Practice is once again a key element of the course and two units of it are taken in each of the three years. Eight units of education with two above 200 level are also required, and the remaining 28 units have a number of compulsory parts:

Art  
Culture and Equity  
Music  
Health Studies  
Science  
Maori Studies  
Social Studies

Fourteen units as specified from the subjects listed above together with English, Educational Media, Integrated Studies, Educational Computing, and Religious Studies. Every student also must complete, in addition, courses in First Aid, Interdisciplinary Studies, and English Language Skills for Teachers. Students must pass sixteen Teaching Studies units above 100 level and at least four of these above 200 level.

Many students are endeavouring to complete their diploma in three years on the way to also gaining a B.Ed. Some switch at year two to the diploma only, while others tailor their courses to get a double conclusion at the end of four years. As things are turning out, we are all pleased the diploma is available. Recent years have seen a change of government and a determined move toward a user pays ethos in tertiary education. Many students find the experience of paying for their course over four years is too great and they work towards their diploma only after three, or to a diploma and partial B.Ed. after three, with the possibility of completing the degree part-time in the future.

### **The Imbedded Teaching Experience**

In the teachers colleges of the past, a strong feature of the work was that the practice element—Teaching Experience (TE)—was spaced through the course. One of the options available to those designing a programme of university study is to clear the TE out of the academic programme to allow a more focussed approach to study. This has been resisted strenuously in the programme described here. Students still interrupt their Teaching Study courses to go out to TE for three, four or five weeks, but some compromises have had to be made to allow them to exit from the school for a maximum of two half-days per week to sustain courses at the university. A number of the papers they take are held after school hours, and although the process gives them some additional pressures, they manage by making sensible selections of papers, schools for TE, and timetable slots. Another enabling feature is that students on TE are all able to be at a school placed within 25 minutes of the college or university by car.

The benefit of having the TE take place as an imbedded part of the ongoing programme, supported, fed, and evaluated through professional practice, teaching studies, and university education papers gives rise to a strongly integrated and coherent programme that allows for spaced learning and a steady monitored

development of teaching skills.

### **Some Innovations and Products of the B.Ed. Programme**

u Students have been given the possibility of a huge variety of courses compared with before. Degrees with university papers in Swedish, Japanese, chemistry, biology, English, psychology, mathematics, and, in fact, almost any subject are being generated.

u Staff members in the college education department have been found to be at least every bit as competent as their university colleagues and in many cases their teaching is a shining example.

u The college has found a need to tighten up its assessment programme. Because the university courses were more demanding and the staff members were less flexible in their requirements for meeting deadlines with assessable work, the teaching staff at the college found the work for college courses was relegated to a lower priority in student minds. (A failed course at college could be redeemed with a contract). The contracts have been abolished and the two institutions are now on an even footing on this basis.

u Some feelings have been hurt. Some university education department staff members who wished to bring their (B.A.) paper into the B.Ed. were disappointed and angry when the content was rejected by corresponding staff members in the college as having insufficient relevance for student teachers.

u Many university papers are being taught on the college campus: music, mathematics, psychology, English, as well as education. Shuttle buses are being used to transport students between the two campuses—about three km. No distance really, but the ensuing car parking problems at both ends are huge.

College students are performing at a very high level in the University papers that they sit. Their percentage pass is greater than students in the same B.A. course taught at the University in one paper in year one, for instance.

u Passes in a paper specially developed by a combined group of university and education staff for Stage 3 students in education have been particularly pleasing. This pedagogy paper aims to enable beginning teachers to analyse critically their own teaching practice in order to assist and encourage them to become reflective practitioners (Massey & Pinder, 1993).

u The assignment work, which has students reflecting on episodes from the classroom, demands they synthesize research and knowledge gained in their course and reading and apply this to their teaching practice. It does in fact link the academic, Professional Practice, and practicum, and provides an appropriate

balance between theory and practice in the students' course.

u. Jointly taught specialist degrees have been initiated—a Bachelor of Science Education is on the books, while a Bachelor of Music Education is currently being proposed. Diplomas in Mathematics Education, Science Education, and Home Economics Education are also available.

## Conclusion

From tentative beginnings, where the staff of a teachers college was thrust rather unwillingly into an academic forum, has arisen a successful enterprise in which the students at the college have benefitted by being able to take a Bachelor of Education course as their teacher training. This has been done without excluding those who wish to qualify with a Diploma of Teaching. It has taken a lot of time on the part of the staff that has had to devise new courses and rewrite old ones to meet new requirements. The result has been that students are taking a wide variety of courses at both the University of Auckland and the Auckland College of Education. Their subsequent degrees will include not only the academic papers customary in a University course but teaching studies papers relating to the primary school curriculum and Professional Practice papers containing a required Practicum. The option of also including in the degree or diploma a Pedagogy paper at the third stage which links all three aspects of the B.Ed. is a particularly interesting feature of the programmes.

The year 1993 saw the first crop of graduates from the Bachelor of Education course. It will be interesting to follow their progress and to see their effect on the schools where they teach and on the education of the children in their classrooms.

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