Teaching and Researching:
One Academic's Welcome
to the World of Initial Teacher Education

By Lesley Harbon

As a new academic in initial teacher education, it has not taken me long to perceive the "publish or perish" culture of the tertiary arena. It is not so much what is or is not written about publishing but what I observe as my colleagues spend long hours at their desks trying to meet publication deadlines.

My colleagues are teachers and researchers. Those who consider they are primarily "teachers" are "good" teachers, and actively research their teaching. They are clearly committed to nurturing and mentoring the next generation of teachers. Although their research on teaching may never reach the pages of educational journals, their daily reflection on how better to plan, design, implement, assess, and evaluate what they teach is evident.

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Other colleagues are primarily engaged in research activity. They are accustomed to spending long hours preparing grant applications rather than assignment marking or student counselling. They are fine researchers and I look up to many of them as leaders in their fields. In contrast to those colleagues described above, for them, teaching seems to have taken a "back seat."

The professionalism of both groups is indubitable, and I am glad to say that, in the current climate, both

groups seem to be supported by the academic institution and funding bodies. No one can foretell the future and how teaching and research will fare, however, especially with "sweeping changes to the way tertiary research is funded" as predicted by Dorothy Iling (1998, p. 27).

I aim to be both teacher and researcher. I stand by what Harry E. Stanton (1998, p. 4) mentions is the "tenet of faith in the halls of Academe. Unless one is a good researcher one is unlikely to be a good teacher." Spurred on by the possibility of eventually being published, my colleague and I carried out a small teaching and research project that allowed us to combine teaching and research responsibilities. In this article I describe my involvement in the project, which was undertaken within the context of a first-year initial teacher education unit (course). I quote from journal entries that describe my reactions to my interactions with students, and analyse my reactions to the management of my teaching and research activity.

Procedures Made Explicit for Students

Before the semester began, my colleague and I reviewed our shared responsibility for first-year students within a new unit in the preservice program. We discussed how we could attempt to induce the students (approximately 150 in number) to become self-sufficient and, most importantly, able to seek help from each other in the first instance. I could not envisage how I would otherwise manage a full-time teaching load, my own Ph.D. research, as well as the year-group coordination duties—and still retain some sanity!

With electronic mail available for each of our students of teaching, we took steps to ensure that they knew where to seek help and advice during their first year. We set "getting-to-know-you"-type tutorials in the first five weeks of semester; we conveyed the message that it is important to make new friends in class for peer support; and we made available on a website all communications from lecturers to them. We thought that if we could manage to encourage the students to attain and retain this self-sufficiency, there would be time for research and publication activity.

We were planning:

> ...to try and build into this unit a self-mentoring program...[and] a self-help structure—we're very conscious of the feedback of previous years that some students don't know each other and so resort to asking the lecturers some pretty mechanical questions. (Journal entry: February 20, 1998)

The getting-to-know-you-type exercises of the first few weeks seemed to work well. My hope was that the friendship groups would help the students to begin to rely on each other. We wanted them to network amongst themselves. The students were given a clear message that the e-mail facility was open for them to double-check all unit details. The corridors remained free of students. My journal entries in the first half of semester record no appointments with students. This strategy to "keep the students at bay" seemed to be achieving its aims.

The Human Face of Initial Teacher Education

What began to worry me, as my journal entries show, was whether we were delivering a "human face" in the unit:

> I hope I'm delivering a human face of this unit. I hope we're showing the students that we care. (Journal entry: March 3, 1998)

About mid-way through semester, my journal entries tell of students starting to approach me after tutorials to discuss assignment details. A few requested further details via e-mail.

When I compared this year to previous years I could see what was missing—the human face of initial teacher education. There were no students in my office telling me their life stories. There were no students sharing their trials and tribulations with me. I was missing contact with students who proudly showed snaps of their children and pets, who had told me that I reminded them of a teacher they once had. My colleague and I noted to each other that our management of the early part of semester had created communications with the students which were quite different to those we had commonly received at this time of the semester in previous years. Our questions focussed on how they were seeking help, who were the significant people in their pathway through the unit, and whether they were truly seeking out each others' help. We were getting some research time for ourselves at the cost of "losing touch" with our student body.

Coinciding with the approach of the due date of Assignment 1, my journal entries became notably cheerier as I listed students who made appointments to see me regarding the assignment task:

> Had a knock on my door today.... I just presumed she was looking for an extension.... She needed to be told that she'd made the right choice to study teaching.... I rather enjoyed being sought out in this "pastoral care" role again.... Seeing and hearing [students] got me right back on the pulse of feeling where the students are at. (Journal entry: April 17, 1998)

I found myself enjoying this close contact with the students. The numbers of students seeking help and advice in person, from both my colleague and me, were still not many but were enough for us to begin to be feeling "in touch," something that the e-mail communications alone did not allow.

Journal entries from the remainder of the semester report only the few students seeking individual time with us:

> They seem to really have bonded into little cliques. The mature-age students really stick together. Then I'm quite sure I see the groups...in the cafe. So, were they friends before they enrolled in my tutorial groups? (Journal entry: May 11, 1998)

And:

Has it made a difference that we brought out explicitly the "help each other" message? (Journal entry: May 11, 1998)

The amount of student contact both of us experienced remained minimal for the remainder of semester 1—a few appointments to work through unsatisfactory attempts at the assignment and a few others concerned about the content of the multiple-choice format exam. My colleague reported receiving E-mail messages concerning tutorial attendance and assignment resubmission, but the e-mail was not facilitating personal communication.

What I Really, Really Want:
The "Spice" of My Teaching Life

My contact time with students and getting to know them as individuals, I came to realize, was the part of my professional academic role which gave me the most job satisfaction. Yet this aspect was the part I tried so intently to lessen at the beginning of semester, as I rationalized the seemingly conflicting demands of teaching and research. And yet, as I fought to manage each aspect of these roles, I wondered whether true integration of research and teaching in initial teacher education was possible at all.

Questions Still Remain

Stanton (1996) asks why it is necessary for academics to be both teachers and researchers. After reflecting on the teaching-research dilemma, I believe that in initial teacher education, the two cannot be separated. Andy Hargreaves (1998, p. 850) states that "Teaching cannot be reduced to technical competence or clinical standards." The important people-to-people communications, which are fostered at the initial teacher education stage and which hopefully flow through to the next generations of classrooms, make a special case for the need to link every activity together. Jennifer Sumsion's (1998, p. 256) advice is that "teacher educators need to be alert to student teachers' emotional responses." What is clear is that teaching has a heart, values and emotions as it is a people-filled arena. Teaching and research in initial teacher education will always need to be interconnected if the human face is not to be forgotten.

Stanton (1998, p. 4) cites Flood-Page (*New Scientist*, January 18, 1997) who maintains: "We will not have a good higher education system until the two [teaching and research] are separated." Perhaps initial teacher education will always be considered a "poor cousin" in the higher education research stakes because teaching and research cannot easily be separated. "Good practice" is all about reflecting on our teaching processes, where the fusion between teaching and research is strongly bonded. I cannot help wondering what will be the role for academics like me. I trust that the situation will not arise where folk-wisdom is proven true: "Academics who

get too close to the world of teaching find that their careers suffer as a result" (Crookes, 1998, p. 6).

References

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