

The impact of tertiary teacher education: a fast-track to teaching excellence?

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Focus of discussion

Teachers at Unitec work in an institution that spans a breadth of tertiary instruction unusual in the sector and one that aims to achieve both vocational and professional outcomes. By examining and comparing the approaches and attitudes of staff (those with formal education about education and those without) this study aims to discuss the implications of differences in such an institution.

To achieve this we have investigated the possible impact of tertiary teacher education on the performance of academic staff at Unitec, New Zealand. This study has been a collaborative one with Napier University in Edinburgh and had the following aims:

- To describe differences and similarities in approaches, strategies and motivations of trained and untrained teachers in tertiary education.
- To identify reasons for the differences and similarities found.

We have been interviewing a range of academic staff from three different departments in order to explore their views of the tertiary learning and teaching process. The interview has been a structured process, using a questionnaire developed at Napier in order to be able to draw out similarities and differences.

Context and significance of focus

Learning is an outcome of interactions between individuals and social environments, and because individuals themselves are complex then the outcomes of teaching are uncertain and the effects of interventions may have uncertain effects (Knight, 2002). The purpose of teacher education programmes at all levels of education is to assist teachers to develop effective professional practices. In these programmes teachers learn about learning and about teaching to enhance the learning of students. However, there is uncertainty about the effect that such programmes have on the attitudes to teaching and learning and on the strategies adopted by graduates of such programmes in their teaching.

There is currently an international debate, in institutions of higher education and within governments about the quality of teaching. As part of this debate it is commonly suggested that compulsory acquisition of teacher qualifications by tertiary teachers may be a panacea for the perceived ills of the sector.

While not exclusively confined to university teaching, it is about teaching in universities that much of the current literature and debate is centred. As MacDonald points out the debate is carried out on the basis of an assumption that the sector is a homogeneous one internationally – it is not (Macdonald, 2003)

Outline of process

I intend to highlight the outcomes from this study and indicate major similarities or anomalies between our findings and issues raised in current literature. We hope that these differences will provide areas for participant discussion which in turn will feed back into our work.

References

Knight, P. T. (2002) *Being a teacher in higher education*. Buckingham: SHRE and Open University Press.

Macdonald, R. (2003) Academic Development: A practical or theoretical business? In (Eds.) H. Eggins & R. Macdonald, *The scholarship of academic development*. Buckingham: SHRE and Open University Press.