

Professional Practices

Workshop Reports

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Introduction

The general topics delivered within each workshop will be discussed within the 'description'. However, in the interests of minimising repetition, content specific to subsequent discussions of relevance to a beginning teacher will be reserved until that point. I have also chosen not to simply repeat the content of the lecture in this paper. This would ultimately mask the true value of this process, which is to determine relevance of the content to the beginning teacher (i.e. myself). Hence, content discussion focuses more on the point of the discussion and on categorising the various approaches/content, rather than listing them.

Workshop 1: Child Protection (Professor Freda Briggs)

Description

Professor Briggs conducted, what can only be described as an horrific trawl, through a magnitude of abusive scenarios in which children are involved every day. Physical, sexual and verbal abuse appears to be occurring pretty much every where and much of the time. Sex, age, the presence of a disability, relationships, and positions of responsibility, appear to not guarantee safety for any potential victim. The extent of the abuse and the extent to which teachers are either not trusted, or worse, **SHOULD NOT BE TRUSTED**, is alarming.

Abuse can be both visible, but is most often very difficult to determine through the normal student teacher relationship. Just as it is hard to determine abuse, the impacts of abuse can be equally hard on the person being abused. Drugs, prostitution, alcohol, homelessness, further abuse can all readily result from the initial abusive actions.

If this is not a bad enough, or hopeless picture, those who are abused tend not to report the abuse. They can conceal the abuse or are convinced of their own responsibility in the abusive act (i.e. it is their fault). To wrap up this awful equation, those who are abused subsequently become the abusers themselves (in very high proportions).

What can teachers do? Be supportive and reassuring, but must be compliant with all relevant policy that is in place. It must be reported, and the abuser should not be informed of the report. Importantly the student should realise that it has happened to others.

Sources of Information

- EQ Department of Education Manual (Legal and Legislation) ~ <http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/doem/legalleg/legalleg.html>
- The relevant schools' policies/manual/guidelines/professional standards etc
- Local General Practitioner, school counsellor, Education Queensland
- Education Queensland: general search for 'Student Protection' will find all relevant publications on the topic ~ <http://education.qld.gov.au/search/>
- National Institute of Family Studies, National Child Protection Clearinghouse ~ <http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/>
- Dr Christine Eastwood of QUT is an active researcher in this field with a number of highly useful publications to her name ~ <http://lps.ed.qut.edu.au/staff/display.jsp?id=00011333>

Relevance to a Beginning Teacher

The prospects of having to deal with such an extensive problem, with such significant and dramatic consequences is an undeniably daunting task. Teachers must be aware of the problems, and no matter how painful, must be cognisant of the types and extent of the abuse, and their impacts on students. Given the amount of time that students are within the school, it is somewhat obvious that it is there, outside of the potentially abusive household, that any evidence of abuse may become evident.

This reveals the 'other' part of the teachers role within the school. It is all very well comprehending the different pedagogical strategies, and understanding the latest EQ policies, but the teacher is also a figure of authority, and moral/social/personal responsibility. Effectively they have usurped this role from the church in recent years, with the growing significance of pastoral care.

This also highlights a whole other dimension of the inclusive, student centred approach to teaching. Each student brings to the classroom the sum of all their

experiences and knowledge. It is easy to assume that we can focus on just the positive aspects of these attributes, but there are clearly negative influences that also must be factored into the teaching equation. It also dissolves to some degree the special needs vs. regular student dichotomy, or trap that is easy to fall into. Although we apply inclusive strategies their aim is still to include ‘others’. Professor Briggs has highlighted that there really is no ‘other’ in the classroom. Every student could have major limiting external influences within their lives.

Workshop 2: Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Assoc. Prof. Don Rice)

Description

The term ADHD has become very familiar, both through the media and through educational literature. Whilst being a familiar term, the realities of ADHD can be quite different to the common portrayals. Herein lies the value of the presentation of Professor Rice, where a teacher-oriented discussion of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in students, was delivered.

The key features of the disorder were discussed. Both the core symptoms of impulsivity, inattention and hyperactivity, and the student specific manifestations of these core symptoms were revealed. Some brief historical context and potential causes for the disorder were also discussed, although these will ultimately have little impact on the way in which students with ADHD are taught, that is, the teacher is not a causative ‘vector’ in the development or maintenance of the disorder. Subsequent issues of prevalence and outcomes, which are of more direct relevance to teachers.

The principle content of this workshop included the areas of ‘executive functions often impaired in ADHD’ and teaching methodologies and other strategies for teaching these students. These concepts will be discussed in relation to their relevance to the beginning teacher.

Sources of Information

- Mental Health Council of Australia ~ <http://www.mhca.com.au/default.html>
- Department of Health and Ageing (Commonwealth) ~ <http://www.health.gov.au>
- ABC Health Matters Library ~ http://www.abc.net.au/health/library/adhd_stories.htm
- LADS, The Learning and Attentional Disorders Society ~ <http://www.ladswa.com.au/>
- ADDERS Bookshop (Complete list of current relevant books ~ <http://www.adders.org/ukbookshop.htm>
- The ADD/ADHD Online Newsletter ~ <http://www.nlci.com/nutrition/>
- Local General Practitioner, school counsellor, Education Queensland

Relevance to a Beginning Teacher

Inclusive education should be the goal of all beginning (in fact all) teachers.

Concomitant to this is the requirement to consider all contributory factors in the individual students learning. In this instance the teacher should be aware of the processes and effects of the impairment of executive functions and the variety of strategies that can be employed to overcome or ameliorate these impairments.

Essentially, this workshop has assisted the beginning teacher to identify the presence of ADHD, to understand how it impairs the student, and how to overcome these impairments to provide an inclusive education experience.

The executive functions are the “central control processes of the brain.” Rice has shown how these functions have been categorised into 6 groups. They are ‘Activation’ (organise, prioritise and activate), ‘Focus’ (focus, shift and sustain attention), ‘Effort’ (regulating alertness, effort and processing speed), ‘Emotion’ (manage frustration and modulate emotion), and ‘Memory’ (utilise working memory and access recall), ‘Action’ (monitor and self-regulate action). It is vital to understand the processes that lead to the behavioural manifestations of the disorder. The teacher may see that a student is disruptive, fails to achieve academically, or displays other non-compliant behaviours, but these will not assist the teacher in developing appropriate responses. Ultimately, teaching strategies must address each of the 6 processes involved, if the ADHD is to be overcome (from an educational outcome point of view).

Rice has assisted the beginning teacher in interpreting these executive functions, through the development of a number of responses. These too have been categorised under the headings of support, ideas for classroom organisation, ideas about teaching style, transitions, getting organised, teaching materials, developing social skills, and assessments and tests. The beginning teacher should utilise this resource and develop a 'checklist' of strategies based on their assessment of the relative distribution of executive function problems, and the available resources and individual skills. This must go hand in hand with the realisation that not every strategy will work in every instance, and that any approach should be applied in a flexible manner.

Workshop 3: Legal Issues for Teachers (John Stewart)

Description

John Stewart provided an overview of legal issues as they relate to all teachers. Initially he provided a summary of certain questionable acts and when they are permissible. For example it would be appropriate to touch a student on their shoulder, to get their attention if they are hearing impaired. The teacher could put their arm around a student's shoulder if supporting them after an injury. They could 'pat a buttock' whilst participating in a game of touch football. In some instances the teacher could slap the face of an out of control student, or push them away if they are posing a risk to the teacher or to themselves. Essentially when it is in the interests of the child's welfare, some degree of personal contact is permissible.

This list is not exhaustive and not definitive, the subtleties of each incident and paramount. Other legal liability can rest in the areas of workers compensation, workplace health and safety, risks from excursion (negligence), defamation, breach of contract, to name but a few.

Negligence is the most significant, and individually relevant area of law for teachers. Essentially, the questions in this instance are, is there a duty of care? If so, what is the standard to be applied. There is no one standard, it depends on each case, on the age

and other personal characteristics of the child. The next question to determine is whether there has been a breach of that duty of care. The teacher can operate within a framework of common practice, but the individual characteristics of the student (e.g. age and capacity) must also be considered. The potential to eliminate the risk must also be considered. In some instances, either consent or contributory negligence can be a defence.

The standard of care is generally an assessment of what is reasonable. For the teacher, with their specialised training and knowledge, the standard applied is that of the reasonable professional teacher (a high standard of care). Hence, teachers are expected to be moderate and reasonable, aware of their duty of care and conscious of being professional.

The Family Law also impacts upon the teacher. Essentially the relationship between the teacher and school and the students family, is governed by who is granted legal responsibility for the care of the child. Family law decisions can also indirectly impact upon the student, and the potential for these interactions should be considered.

Sources of Information

- EQ Department of Education Manual (Legal and Legislation) ~ <http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/doem/legalleg/legalleg.html>
- The relevant schools' policies/manual/guidelines/professional standards etc
- Queensland Teachers Union ~ <http://www.qtu.asn.au/> [and their book Teachers and the Law]
- Teachers and the Law: How to Protect Yourself ~ <http://www.qtu.asn.au/secure/teachersandlawprotectyourself2004.pdf>
- CCH School Principals Legal Guide ~ http://www.cch.com.au/fe_ps_details.asp?product_id=378&itemcode=ZPLGS
- Australia and New Zealand Education Law Association

Relevance to a Beginning Teacher

The Queensland Teachers Union best summarise what is at stake, in regard to legal issues for teachers (QTU 2004):

A teacher may be accused of having broken the law either in his/her employment or outside it. Such allegations, if they result in a charge or a conviction, put at risk not only the teacher's reputation, liberty and property, but their employment and teacher registration. Such allegations must therefore be taken extremely seriously. Whether the teacher is innocent or guilty, what he/she says to other persons and to police officers when the allegations are raised may have serious effects on the outcome of the proceedings against them. There is therefore a need for great care.

The teacher can be both individually liable and the school can be vicariously liable for their actions in relation to the students. However, the most important point of all of this discussion about legal responsibilities, is NOT that if you act in a certain way you may face financial or worse penalties, rather the current law dictates that a certain level of professional conduct be adhered to. It is better for the beginning teacher to view these legal requirements as good motivation to conduct their teaching at the highest level of professional standards. It is useful in that it effectively codifies these requirements for professional conduct, thus allowing the beginning teacher to develop a high standard of teaching practice. This legal information should not be viewed as guidelines as to how much the teacher can get away with (the way in which most people for road rules for example).

The teacher is in a position of power in the classroom. Many students look up to their teachers for both professional and personal guidance, and hence, the teacher should be clear as to how to manage their relationships with those students. They should be aware of the law and the possible penalties, but should balance this with a level of social responsibility and a knowledge of the psychological and physical impact that their actions could have.

As we have seen, in relation to negligence, the duty of care is that expected of a professional teacher. They are held to a higher standard. A workshop such as this makes this fact clear to the beginning teacher. A clarity of the law is also essential for an immediate and appropriate response to potential risk. A student may be posing a threat to their classmates. If the teacher is reluctant to intervene in a physical manner, the rest of the class may be at greater risk. This knowledge thus empowers the teachers to respond appropriately in any situation.

Workshop 4: The ETRF Initiatives Agenda (Tracie Warry)

Description

This workshop saw discussion of the scope and role of the Queensland 'Education and Training reforms for the Future'. This included both a 'nuts and bolts' analysis of the reform agenda, and discussion of the rationale behind, and the goals for the ETRF. Underlying the reforms was concern over the issue of disengaged students. The existing education framework in Queensland was failing to meet the needs of some students. This was being reflected in higher rates of school drop-out amongst certain groups. Unlike previous education policy the ETRF represents a whole-state, every-school, every-year approach.

Warry delivered the official Education Queensland interpretation of the ETRF agenda, including an elaboration of the individual policy changes, and the timeline for its implementation. Of most importance she identified six key components of the ETRF. These included improving the Early and Middle phases of learning, ensuring year 10 completion and transition to a Senior Phase of learning, reshaping 'Senior', providing more options and flexibility for young people, giving ore support to young people, and working together – building new community partnerships. This could be summarised by the phrase 'student centred', in that the multitude of approaches are to be implemented with the student in mind.

In addition to the specifics of the policy, which will primarily be discussed in the 'Relevance to a Beginning Teacher' section, two further points can be determined from the workshop. First, the ETRF strategy is currently being implemented across Queensland, and from January 2005, the senior phase of the trial will be implemented. This implementation phase is not just involving teachers, schools and the relevant departments, rather, all relevant parties, including community representatives and parents are being consulted. The second point to note is the extent to which these reforms will impact on a variety of groups. 302 students between 15 and 17 are 'disengaged' with a further 208 at risk of non-completion. But, of course, every student will be effected by the ETRF.

Sources of Information

Queensland Studies Authority ETRF pages ~ <http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/etrf/>

Education Queensland ETRF pages ~ <http://education.qld.gov.au/etrf/>

Sites of schools and regional bodies that have been involved in the ETRF strategy.

Relevance to a Beginning Teacher

The beginning teacher, as should every teacher, should be fully aware of the legislative and policy framework within which they operate. Simply, the ETRF, represents a series of policy/legislative movements that MUST be complied with by all effected parties. Hence it is the professional responsibility of the teacher to be aware and to comply. The two components of the ETRF that will have the greatest impact will be the requirement for students to remain in school until they complete year 10 (or turn 16), second are the transitionary strategies for managing the progression from year ten on to senior school, training or work.

This second requirement will ensure that a student centred approach is undertaken, in that through the development of 'Senior Education and Training Plans' all teachers must become more aware of the relevance and impact of their teaching. Instead of simply providing the requisite skills for subsequent year 11 studies, the school and teacher must ensure that skills meet the requirements for subsequent vocational education and training programs, or employment. This is both a whole of school responsibility, but also one that the beginning teacher must be aware of.

Effectively the reforms will broaden the role of the teacher. Formally the teachers role could be summarised as one of delivering the curriculum material in which they are specialised, to assess the students achievement in that subject matter and to report it to the school and to the parents. Perhaps to this could be added, the responsibility to ensure that the student progressed through the various levels of schooling.

With the ETRF, the scope of the role of the teacher is greatly expanded. Not only are they responsible to the parents and the school, but also elements of responsibility to the community at large, to employers and to the students themselves, have either been added or greatly expanded. The curriculum will no longer be an insular element of

teaching, rather it must be relevant to all subsequent pathways that the student may choose to go down.

Workshop 5: Student Protection Policy Training (Ed Bradbury)

Description

Bradbury clearly stated the objectives of this training. After completing the training the attendee should be able to “list and explain their responsibilities under the Student Protection Policy, when they suspect a student is suffering from or is at risk of harm; describe the boundaries of appropriate, professional relationships and physical contact with students; and make informed and considered judgments and decisions when dealing with harm to their students.” Coordinated, well-informed and whole of school approaches are to be employed to ensure these goals are achieved.

The new policy contains a number of formal requirements. These include:

- Principles and accountabilities;
- Definitions
- Cultural and community diversity
- Categories of harm
- Processes of reporting suspected local harm
- Support for students and employees
- External agency involvement
- Interventions involving alleged employee conduct

The two stand out components of the policy are the absolute protection provided to the student, in that students must be protected from all types of harm, and the strict codification of conduct for teachers. The policy requires that all suspected harm is reported and that the person making it should not inform the accused of the report. This is balanced by the provision for support of teachers against any false allegations. While many procedural elements differ from existing student protection policy, the underlying goal of protecting students is unchanged.

Sources of Information

Education Queensland: general search for 'Student Protection' will find all relevant publications on the topic ~ <http://education.qld.gov.au/search/>

Relevance to a Beginning Teacher

It is clear why this issue is of great importance for a beginning teacher. The beginning teacher (as for all teachers) must be aware of the formal requirements for professional conduct in relation to students. While the significant proportion of pre-service teacher training programs prepare students for the content and delivery of their classroom teaching, little time is spent on the professional responsibilities, or the basic technical/logistical/administrative requirements of the job. While much of this can be gained whilst in employment, professional responsibilities relating to the protection of students, must be fully understood at commencement.

Teachers must be responsible for their own conduct, however the scope of this policy extends far beyond that. Every teacher is to be aware of possible harm being caused by other teachers, by parties external to the school, or harm or potential harm being caused by the students (either to themselves or others). The beginning teacher must view the school environment as one that stands outside of the 'outside world'. The standards of personal interactions between staff and students must inherently be held at a higher level. In the student centred environment, the student must be the primary concern, with personal obligations or relationships secondary.

Not only should the beginning teacher be aware of the types of harm, and the reporting structures should any be identified, but they must also be aware of the various supporting infrastructure and service providers, where assistance can be sort. This is also in recognition of the broader scope of the role of the teacher today. The boundaries between home and school life are getting progressively more blurred, and with this blurring, comes a greater responsibility for both school and home. A teacher must ensure they are continually well informed as to the current (and constantly changing) administrative and legal requirements of their job (another component of continual professional development and learning).