EDX4150
Assignment 2 – Professional Conversation

The Australian education system is changing rapidly to meet the demands of the global digital economy. International competitive pressures for employment and academic comparisons has intensified the Australian Government’s focus on education policies, initiatives and funding. Schools are focused on preparing students for work, apprenticeships or tertiary study and feel pressure from changing education policies, competitive work expectations, the community and parents to increase student academic performance. Teachers are required to understand all of these compounded interests while also satisfying curriculum requirements in teaching. To best prepare for teaching in this changing environment a beginning teacher needs to understand these global pressures and the resultant government policies in education while still learning their own style of teaching practice and ensuring that lessons are developed to cater for diversity in learners. This essay will explore how education in Australia is changed by global competition and the resulting impacts on schools and teachers will be analysed. A professional conversation has been conducted and the main points will be outlined and further analysed. Implications for beginning teachers will be described to help better prepare for the teaching profession.

The professional conversation questions were designed to seek information from a professional teacher regarding their knowledge on themes related to the changing world, government policy, senior secondary pathways, career education, vocational education and the implications to beginning teachers. Appendix A contains school and teacher approval for the professional conversation. Numerous implications that are vital for beginning teachers to consider were identified and summarised; refer to Appendix B. Three main issues impacting a beginning teacher’s role are the competitive pressures for continued improvement and accountability in teaching, the
requirement that teachers integrate ICTs in teaching and understanding the different pathways and vocational education and training (VET) options for senior secondary student’s career education.

**Changing World competitive pressures**

Education policy in the past was balanced between the nation’s interest in improving social equity and increasing economic potential (Lingard & Rizvi, 2010). Today’s competitive global demands have shifted education policy towards a main focus in increasing the economic growth of a nation through “...education as the production of human capital...” (Lingard & Rizvi, 2010, p. 16). This shift in focus has created added pressures to teachers through the use of accountability that include quantifiable measurements, specifically directed at academic improvements reflected by student grades.

Education reforms that rely heavily on standardised testing which provide an easily quantifiable measurement, such as NAPLAN and senior secondary high-stakes exit results, have introduced the concept that student academic performance equates purely to teacher performance quality. These competitive pressures on schools are compounded by education initiatives, like the MySchool website, and media that instruct community and parents that student academic performance is directly related to teacher quality. Due to the competitive economy that parents face daily and their resulting lack of time to devote in building strong families, it is argued that many parents are expecting teachers to prepare their children in all aspects of learning and growth; thereby, increasing the demands on teachers (Fetherston & Lummis, 2012). Teachers are required to learn how to deal with behaviour management issues and helping students learn resilience, interpersonal skills and morals. Compounded with these good citizenry learning and personal growth learning, teachers are also required to teach specific syllabus content with links to overarching economic and educational policies while grading students only on the basis of academic achievement with narrow
outcome objectives (Bryce & Withers, 2003). The realities of daily teaching expectations are vastly different to the main economic focus of current educational policies, as outlined in the professional conversation answers within Appendix B.

Technological skills are important for students to learn to ensure that they are prepared for the competitive economy (Bryce & Withers, 2003; MCEECDYA, 2010; OECD, 2008). While competitive world pressures have impacted Australian education policies to be driven by the potential of economic growth, the increase in the resultant technology available in education is a strength that has not yet been fully realised. The implementation of increasing school technology resources and integrating teaching with ICTs has been a difficult change for many teachers who are not familiar or comfortable with computer technology (McGuinness, 2012-2013). This added pressure to improve teaching performance by using technology has been an issue for many teachers resulting in resistance to change due to the time required to gain ICT pedagogical skills (McGuinness, 2012-2013).

**Technology in Education**

To compete in the changing world, the Australian Government implemented the $8 billion Digital Education Revolution (DER) in 2008 which has increased access to technology in schools and provided training for teachers to help integrate ICTs in teaching (Lane, 2012; McGuinness, 2012-2013). Education initiatives such as the Queensland Government’s National Secondary School Computer Fund (DETE, 2013) require that teachers are digitally skilled and have knowledge in how to integrate ICTs meaningfully into lessons and learning activities. Since the introduction of the DER there has been success in technology access for teachers and students; however, the professional
development for teachers and the lack of curriculum change to ensure ICT integration has been criticised (McGuinness, 2012-2013).

For teachers to improve their technological pedagogical content knowledge they may need to develop new ways to understand the complexity of ICT integration with learning and be open to changing how they teach (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Along with this demand for increased teacher technology skills, is the requirement that students also attain technological knowledge and skills. Teachers are therefore expected to learn the technology while also teaching it to students. It is not surprising that teachers are disillusioned by the use of technology in the classroom when there is a lack of support or understanding of the increased skills required. This issue is compounded by the idea proposed in the professional conversation referred to in Appendix B where teachers who do not actively seek to integrate ICTs in their teaching are then viewed as a struggling teacher. This is an example where the pressures put on schools via educational policy, the community and parents have negatively impacted the support within a school culture.

**Senior secondary pathways**

Legislation related to the Queensland Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) requires that young people, until the age of 17, are in senior phase schooling, training or working (Harreveld & Singh, 2006). The main focus of the ETRF, which relates directly to Australia’s educational response to the competitive changing world, is to keep young people learning or working towards vocational training qualifications and providing various pathways of work and study to prevent school disengagement (Queensland Government, 2002). This legal requirement for young people to attend school has increased the burden for teachers to increase the diversity of their teaching to promote student learning and attendance. Schools in Queensland focus heavily on student
attendance as a means to prove that increased attendance equates to increased learning; however, attendance does not guarantee that a student is engaged in learning (Queensland Government, November 2012).

Schools inform students and parents about pathways into industry through subject selection presentation nights, inviting University and TAFE presenters, meetings with school guidance officers and with guidance from the senior school head of department, as outlined in Appendix B. To cater to student needs it is imperative that teachers have knowledge of career and study pathways in the senior secondary schooling system. Teachers who are informed about VET programs are less likely to disrespect VET student choices, which in the past have been commonly labelled inferior to traditional academic education (Bryce & Withers, 2003; Polesel & Keating, 2011). VET pathways have been created to cater to skill shortages in industry, to increase employment opportunities for young adults and to satisfy school or equivalent completion targets (Polesel & Keating, 2011). Unfortunately, VET outcomes vary and there is some criticism towards the quality of these programs, as noted in the professional conversation summarised in Appendix B.

There is evidence that VET programs offered in senior secondary schools do not result in sufficient job qualifications since the qualification offered at school is at the basic, Certification I, level (Polesel, 2010; Polesel & Keating, 2011). VET program pathways at the secondary level are followed commonly by students from low social economic status (SES) backgrounds which raises concerns regarding social segregation in the school system (Polesel, 2010; Smith & Smith, 2011). Australia has struggled for decades to increase school completion, especially for indigenous students and students from low SES backgrounds (Polesel & Keating, 2011). VET has been designed to help diverse groups of students, including social disadvantaged groups of students, attain qualifications and to increase
school completion rates. VET students often exhibit low self-esteem due to stereotypes regarding their educational pathway choice in a school culture that favours traditional academic pathways (Polesel & Keating, 2011; Smith & Smith, 2011; Walsh, Lemon, Black, Mangan, & Collin, April 2011). The quality of VET programs has been criticised and this is reflected in the possibility of VET teachers creating simplified learning activities to ensure that students simply pass the qualification to minimise the pressures put on teachers to increase student retention (Polesel & Keating, 2011); see Appendix B for professional teacher views on VET grades.

**Implications for beginning teachers**

The direction of education in Australia is focused on maintaining and increasing the economic growth of the nation to remain competitive in the global digital world. Improving student work skills and promoting student resilience for the competitive economy is an important focus that beginning teachers must understand. A direct implication for my personal philosophy of teaching is the minimised focus of improving social equity through education policy and curriculum requirements (Schneider, 2010). To overcome this dilemma with the unbalanced Australian educational direction I will need to first accept the current economic focus of education. Within the rigid and content-heavy senior secondary curriculum I will then endeavour to increase student lifelong learning skills by including critical thinking skills by questioning society’s norms and stereotypes, fostering compassion for diversity, integrating ICTs within lessons to ensure authentic learning and promoting cultural understanding. This type of learning will require time, dedication, passion for teaching and may also include having to explain my reasons to colleagues, school staff and parents by referring to supportive educational policy (Bryce & Withers, 2003; MCEECDYA, 2010). Further implications may arise from lack of support of this type of teaching and this could lead to frustration and a re-evaluation of my career expectations (Buchanan, Prescott, Schuck, Aubusson, & Burke, 2013).
I believe in the potential for embedded ICTs in learning to improve learning outcomes and specifically to engage disadvantaged students in a meaningful and authentic way (Walsh et al., April 2011). Fortunately, the adoption of technology in education is something that I passionately support and therefore I do not experience the challenges that many teachers experience with this initiative (Jordan, 2011; Lane, 2012; McGuinness, 2012-2013). My previous work experience in Canada as both an IT Analyst and a College Professor in Technology and Business has provided me with insight and experience in how to integrate ICTs within teaching to improve learning outcomes. The implications of my past experience is that I often have more ICT knowledge and skills than current teachers and this naturally places me in a leadership role while also presenting challenges whereby teachers feel threatened by my confidence with ICT knowledge and skills. To overcome these challenges during practical experience I have had to explicitly show that I value learning from experienced teachers and I share as much of my ICT knowledge as possible to promote a culture of sharing in the teaching profession. As a beginning teacher I will encourage a supportive and professional environment while also contributing to my personal learning network (PLN) which provides me with continued support from educators around the world. Support in education is important for me to find and also model since it is one of the major reasons cited by teachers for leaving the profession early (Buchanan et al., 2013; Fetherston & Lummis, 2012).

A beginning secondary teacher should work towards understanding the many student pathway options. There are hundreds of VET certificate qualifications available to students and understanding what an individual school offers is important to be able to offer knowledgeable advice to students (Queensland Government, 2002). The implication for a beginning teacher who does not teach in VET is finding the time to research VET pathways and understanding that this knowledge is valuable. It is imperative that a beginning senior secondary teacher, who primarily teaches academic subjects for University entrance, also understands the political and social reasons
behind the creation of VET pathways to help in improving the respect for VET pathway choices made by students (Polesel & Keating, 2011). An awareness of social class issues related to the gap in social economic status is a factor in promoting a non-segregated attitude of social class within a school culture. There is evidence that the promotion of school-wide ICT integration, especially in VET subjects, will help engage disadvantaged students and thus has the potential to close this social economic gap (Smith & Smith, 2011; Walsh et al., April 2011).

**Key learning from the professional conversation analysis**

There are major challenges in teaching today that a beginning teacher should be knowledgeable of to enable better understanding of the focus of educational policy and the realities of teaching. Our changing world that is increasingly global and competitive has demanded that nations focus on educational reforms that increase the potential of our economic future. The role of teachers is changing and the expectations by government, schools, parents and community, of teachers are increasing. A beginning teacher needs to focus on improving student performance, evaluating their teaching effectiveness, integrating ICTs in an authentic way and having knowledge about the various pathways available for diverse students. Evaluating the implications to teaching and learning is a valuable exercise for a beginning teacher to help prepare them for the realities of teaching.
References


Appendix A

EDX4150 Professional Conversation

Approval Form

Authorisation by Principal or Senior Officer for access to a staff-member for purposes of the assignment.

The student has clearly articulated to me the requirements of the assignment and I am happy for a staff-member of my educational facility to be involved. I understand that the name of the educational facility and the respondent will remain anonymous and that I will receive a copy of the final report upon its completion.

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 10/5/13

Authorisation of the teaching professional.

The student has clearly articulated to me the requirements of the assignment and I am happy to participate in a professional conversation to answer the identified questions. I understand that no identifying information will be provided.

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 29/5/13

Confirmation of the Summary of Response by the teaching professional.

I have had the opportunity to check the summary of responses and agree to this summary being included in the assignment.

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 29/5/13
Appendix B

Professional Conversation Questions & Summarised Answers

Changing World

1. What changes have you experienced in recent years in society’s expectations of schools and of teachers?

Significant changes in the expectations of teachers have occurred in recent years that include a major focus on teacher accountability. There are many aspects of learning and teaching that cannot be easily tested or quantified. Due to pressures from Government education policies and a concerned society, schools feel pressure to prove that they are performing well and their performance is increasing. This pressure for quantifiable data to show learning improvement is felt by teachers and impacts what they teach and how they grade students. This pressure is magnified by concerned parents who expect their children to pass every subject and they believe that failure is a direct result of inadequate teaching. Schools perpetuate this belief by adding further pressure to the teacher by continually expecting that the teacher find additional ways to support learning to ensure student’s marks improve to the next level band of grades.

Teachers are also expected to not only teach students academically but also teach the role that traditionally is expected from parents. Teachers are expected to teach responsibility, respect, courtesy, politeness, punctuality, forgiveness, interpersonal skills, morals, ethical knowledge and work ethic.

2. Considering the changing nature of work and the types of jobs available today, how have you seen this change reflected in what and how you teach?

Teaching today involves digital integration and as much authentic, real-life scenario type teaching as possible. The use and development of digital media that helps visual learning, such as videos, images and websites, is increasing in schools. Accessing the Internet and using digital tools and applications is a major focus in Australian education policy today and this requires that teachers are knowledgeable about these digital tools as well. Today’s jobs require that workers are digitally capable with information analysis skills and therefore these job skill requirements are integrated in school curriculums.
3. Today’s workforce needs skills in technology, communication, innovation, collaboration and lifelong learning.
   a. How are these skills fostered in how you teach?

Lesson activities are designed to encourage competitiveness within group work projects. These projects give students the opportunity to improve their communication and collaboration skills. Within IT specific subjects, such as IPT or related junior IT classes, there are numerous possibilities to include problem solving activities. Problem-solving activities improves student critical thinking skills and helps improve their skills of identifying problems and recognising problems that other’s miss; this can lead to innovative learning. Strategies such as the 6 Thinking Hats allows for differentiated learning with varying levels of expertise expectations.

b. Do you think teachers feel pressure to change or catch up to the 21st Century world of work expectations? Do you think the curriculum caters for this?

Yes, teachers feel pressure to change and catch up to the 21st century world expectations. A teacher is viewed as a struggling teacher if they are not using technology or not reflecting on their teaching practice. The curriculum caters for 21st century world of work expectations only sometimes. For example, syllabi ask to grade students on assessment pieces that are applied to all students in the cohort / subject. An analogy of this is “an exam is given to a monkey, hippo, elephant, and giraffe where they have to climb a tree”. The exam is marked on criteria. The monkey of course receives an A because it can climb to the top, the hippo fails because it cannot climb at all, the elephant also fails because it can only hold onto the tree, and the giraffe just passes because it can put its head in the tree. Right from the beginning this assessment piece is flawed as it does not cater to all. Therefore teachers are expected to develop assessment pieces that cater for all, through differentiation, as teachers are expected to make all students pass. The amount of time it would take to do this is unrealistic when teachers have families of their own and a life away from school. It is not uncommon for a teacher to work a 50+ hour week for no extra money.

**Government Policy**

4. Please describe what you think is missing in education today.
   - Classes that teach life skills, discipline, and focus
   - Problem solving and troubleshooting classes; teachers require extra time to develop improvements
   - Psychology classes
   - Adequate access for all students to a variety of technology
• Time for developing and building relationships with students
• There seems to be a growing lack of strong family values that promote motivation in children to learn and a lack of guidance for positive attitude expectations
• Innovative thinking and a reduction in inefficiencies
• Actual knowledge of systems/processes/life and not just ‘book’ knowledge; life skills

5. Countries around the world implement education reform to improve the productive capacity of all citizens; this is based on the premise that, an increase in student performance equates to an increase in productivity, GDP and the economic status of that country. There has been a lot of focus and media attention on accountability of teachers and standardised testing of all students due to the economic goals behind current education reforms.

   a. How well do you think the current education policies and curriculum ensures an increase in student performance?

   Not very well. On the books it may appear that it is increasing but when in actual fact student performance may be either the same or less than in previous years. This is going to be compounded by the introduction of teacher performance pay. Teachers may feel so pressured to increase their performance rating that they increase student grades inappropriately, simply to look better and avoid potential penalties. The Swedish school system avoids this problem by setting student pathways dependent on their actual achievements.

   b. Does the economic purpose of these policies filter completely through to the daily realities of teaching?

   Definitely not! The economic purpose is asking for one thing, but there is no money in education to be able to deliver what it is they are asking for. You can only do so much in the classroom.

**Pathways, Career Education & Vocational Education**

6. How does your school ensure that students are aware of career pathways?

   • Subject selection nights outline the pathways into industry
   • Guidance officers meet with every student from year 10 – 12
   • HOD of senior learning meets with every year 12 student and discusses future pathways
   • Universities and TAFE have career days and nights that students can visit (that students are made aware of) and occasionally universities come to the school
7. What are some of the ways that teachers can participate in ensuring that students consider all career pathways? How much influence do you think teachers have or should have in student pathway decisions?

Not sure. Some of the guidance that I have heard given to students from other staff is terrible. Staff and teachers need to do a lot more in regards to this issue. Most teachers give advice based off their own experiences or thoughts.

a. Do you think it is realistic to expect teachers to be knowledgeable about different career pathways?

Teachers are assumed to know the pathways available in a general sense. There are many teachers that often go straight from school to university and then straight to teaching which means that their industry knowledge is minimal. Teachers have their own preconceived ideas of pathways that are available and may not have current information about career entry requirements. There probably needs to be a set process, guidelines or professional development that teachers can consult.

b. What are the related implications for teachers to have effective impact on student decisions?

Teachers would require time to learn and understand the jobs and roles that exist, which would require extra funding for teacher development. Teachers with good content knowledge in the chosen area would soon identify that changing careers may be beneficial. Thus effectively reducing the amount of good teachers. Then students are being led by teachers that maybe do not have the ambitions of others.

8. Can you tell me about how you include career education within your teaching?

Throughout units of work I usually show the amount of jobs available at that point in time from seek.com or other work related website. I have a discussion of what the job is most likely to entail and show them expected salaries.

9. What are the limitations you face? (such as blocked Internet an time management due to syllabus constraints etc)

So many websites are blocked by EQ! In regards to syllabus constraint it just depends upon how you interpret what you are expected to do. Having to sit exams and some other assessment is probably
the only dilemma as you are required to have a balanced approach to assessment. This sometimes results in rote learning content and then this ultimately leads to less focus on career education.

10. Please tell me about the vocational education opportunities/choices that are available at your school. Do you think teachers are aware of the vocational education possibilities at your school?

What are the benefits and challenges of VET in schools?

All teachers as far as I know can find where the information is in regards to VET schooling at this school. We have a VET coordinator in the school that also delivers a lot of professional development. Benefits of VET in school are massive; giving the opportunity for some students to leave High School with qualifications that helps them to enter an industry.

The challenge presented in teaching VET classes is that students typically do not catch up on work that they have missed and usually do not care. They are not paying for it so they seem to not value it. Even when you explain that the qualification they are working towards cost approximately a few thousand dollars they still don’t value it. There are also cases where teachers pass students as competent when the student may not be; this improves the appearance of teacher quality but the benefit for the student in the long term is questionable.

11. Based on all that we have discussed today, what advice would you give me as a beginning teacher?

- Don’t believe everything you read
- Always question (regardless of whom they are)
- Don’t be afraid to stand out from the crowd & think politically
- Have ideas for projects in mind that aligns with the schools vision
- Get your Cert IV in TAE so that you can teach VET subjects
- Learn the VET sector as well as you can
- Establish as many relationships with industry as you can
- Stay informed and be informative – keep people in the know.
- Be prepared to have curve balls thrown at you and be prepared to work with many limitations.
- Have at least a 5 year plan before you start and stick to it walking through open doors on the way.