Transforming 21st Century Teacher Education Through Redefined Professionalism, Alternative Pathways and Genuine Partnerships

A report commissioned by The International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increasing globalization and the emergence of the knowledge economy are calling into question traditional perspectives on the transformational capacity of education systems and the conceptions of teaching—of teaching as a profession and the roles of teachers. Additionally, innovations in information and communications technologies provide both opportunities and challenges and thus new hurdles for governments to surmount. How well nations respond to these and other challenges will depend upon the capacity of nations to provide expanded opportunities in the building of stronger competencies for their children through high-quality schooling.

The recent McKinsey report on “How the World’s Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top” (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) suggests that one major driver for maintaining a high-quality education system, one that significantly improves student outcomes and performance, is the quality of the teachers who teach them. With the growing recognition that teacher quality is critical in preparing students for a society undergoing far-reaching economic and social changes, the need for policies and strategies to strengthen teacher preparation, and as a consequence, teaching, is even greater.

There are many issues surrounding this “new” teachers-as-professionals agenda and its complex relationship to teaching and teacher education. Numerous reports, research syntheses, and initiatives to enhance and empower teachers and reform teacher education have emerged over the past decade; the debates, nevertheless, continue. Criticisms about the state of teaching and of teachers as professionals centre on the degree to which teachers are well prepared for their tasks, the degree of responsibility for and authority over their work, the low image and under-valued status of teaching, the influx of under-qualified teachers into classrooms, and the disproportionate demographic matching of teachers and students, among others. There is, as well, serious attention being devoted by academics, policy makers and institutions to improving this state of affairs as well as promising initiatives that deserve careful study.

The Alliance Members

An alliance of eight leading institutions in the field of teacher education and education research was founded at a meeting in Singapore in August 2007; Sao Paulo joined in May 2008. The Alliance acts as a think-tank which draws together existing expertise and research to generate ideas and identify trends, to serve as a collective voice on important educational issues and thus influence policy and practice in education. It aims to inform governments, international agencies, funding bodies and the public at large to enhance the profile and quality of education internationally. The Alliance comprises representative from the following member institutes:

- Faculty of Education, Melbourne University, Australia
- Faculty of Education, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil
- Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada
- School of Education, Beijing Normal University, People’s Republic of China
- Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus, Denmark
- Faculty of Education, Seoul National University, Korea
- National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
- Institute of Education, University of London, United Kingdom
- Faculty of Education, University of Wisconsin, USA
Purpose and Message of this Report

The purpose of this report is to bring to the attention of policy makers and educationists the complexities surrounding teacher education policy and practice, from initial teacher preparation to continual professional development, and the challenges of collaborative partnerships. We call for an acknowledgement of teachers as 21st century knowledge workers, deserving of being prepared and treated as professionals. The preparation of this report involved solicited contributions from the nine Alliance members as well as a survey of current literature on issues identified as pertinent in the Alliance countries.

Our hope is that this report will help to provide a platform for renewed discussion and dialogue by decision makers on how to improve the quality of teacher education, thus addressing the needs of the teaching profession for the new century. It has four key messages:

1. **There is an urgent need to recognize teachers’ work as complex and demanding.**
   - An improvement in teacher quality requires a re-conceptualization of initial teacher education.
   - A re-conceptualization of initial teacher education is best based on a redefined professionalism.
   - Redefined professionalism recognizes the intellectual dimension, a balance of autonomy, control and responsibility, reflexivity, heteronomy and continuous learning as critical attributes that define the 21st century teacher’s work.

2. **Innovative pathways in recruitment and continual innovation in teacher preparation programmes are required.**
   - Teacher preparation programmes need to broaden their entry requirements to diversify the teaching corps and better represent diverse student populations.
   - Teacher preparation programmes require innovative recruitment pathways that allow entry for “non-traditional” candidates.
   - Teacher preparation programmes require continual innovation to respond to changing needs.

3. **Teacher education is enhanced by comprehensive teacher induction that fosters lifelong learning.**
   - Induction is a vital part in the formation of teacher professionalism and identity.
   - Induction is most effective when seen as a comprehensive system beyond just support and assistance for beginning teachers.
   - Teacher education institutions need to prepare a comprehensive curriculum for beginning teacher induction.
   - Effective professional development strategies seek the active involvement of teachers and are largely school-based, developmental in nature and ongoing.

4. **New designs for teacher education will need to rest on strong partnerships with key stakeholders.**
   - The best conditions for successful partnerships in teacher education occur when faculties of education maintain close ties with schools, thus deeply engaging other faculties in the university as well as strengthening community linkages in teacher preparation.
   - Principles and strategies must be put in place to ensure productive and successful partnerships in teacher preparation.
   - Governments play a key role in facilitating partnerships in teacher education.