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Editorial

Recently, concern has been expressed in the secondary school sector about the diminishing number of science and mathematics teachers. In what is seen as a related problem it has been argued that Bachelor of Education programs put too much emphasis on the teaching, leaving too little time for students to maintain or develop specialist knowledge. It is argued that this leaves them well qualified in how to teach, but poorly qualified in what to teach.

At the same time a similar argument is being run in the university sector, only in reverse! Academics, it is said, are inadequately prepared in the science (or art) of teaching, having received little or no formal training, but are almost over-qualified (if that is possible) in terms of their specialist knowledge. This leaves them well qualified in what to teach, but poorly qualified in how to teach.

Pity the first year student, then, who must, apparently, negotiate the transition from dealing with those who know how to teach, to those who know what to teach. No wonder so many students experience first year as an abrupt growing up. And there are those who argue that this is no bad thing. In late 2007 *The Australian* Higher Education Supplement carried articles from both sides of the debate. On November 14, 2007 John Gava from the University of Adelaide argued that "requiring university academics to become trained teachers would be bad for university students". He based his argument on a belief that university students are fundamentally different from young children and adolescents; they are older, more mature, and should not need to be inspired to learn. The article stirred a healthy number of responses from both sides; from people who agreed completely and were delighted someone had been brave enough to say it, and also from those who disagreed, having had uninspiring experiences as university students. Whichever side you happen to favour, the debate shows that there is a lively national interest in tertiary teaching and in discovering what makes it work—or not work.

It is, of course, impossible to know whether the student dissatisfaction reported in *The Australian's* debate would have been prevented had the tertiary teachers concerned undertaken formal training in teaching. In some interesting work by Fadia Nasser and Knut Hagtvet, reported in *Research in Education* in 2006, it was found that student rating of teachers was influenced by, among other things, expected grades and interest in the subject, the teacher's workload, whether the teacher had pedagogical training, and the number of years of teaching experience. Ratings were likely to go down as the teacher workload went up. Ratings were likely to be higher if the teacher had pedagogical training. Ratings were likely to be lower for teachers with more experience. That's right: up goes experience, down goes the rating! How could this be? Is it that tertiary teachers grow weary?

New teachers tend to be enthusiastic and to try new things. Students respond to this enthusiasm and perform accordingly. We see no reason why tertiary teachers should stop being enthusiastic and trying new things just because they themselves cease to be new. *ergo* emerges from the conviction that we need to keep working at our teaching, to keep trying new things, to evaluate them rigorously, to report to our peers, to reflect, to talk, to read and to think about teaching in new and surprising ways, just as we do in our research. This is crucial for keeping ourselves fresh, and this journal, *ergo*, exists to serve this need.

David Walker
Editor