

Junior teachers (2)

South Australia, 1936-1945

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Teacher preparation in Australia has a complex history. The balance between school-based and college or university-based preparation tends to be rethought in every generation. It took until well into the twentieth century for ill-managed, often exploitative, pupil-teacher and junior teacher preparation schemes to be replaced by arguably superior forms of teacher training and teacher education. The experience in South Australia was not dissimilar to the histories of teacher preparation in other Australian states.

Apprentice teachers

From 1875 to 1920 apprenticeship remained an integral part of teacher training in South Australia, first in the four year pupil teacher system and then as one year of junior teaching. Such school-based teaching was initially discontinued from 1921, but the Great Depression brought a reduction in expenditure for public school staffing and training. In 1931, poorly paid untrained junior teachers were again needed in classrooms in what was often regarded as a return to the worst features of the former apprenticeship system. The number of junior teachers increased significantly, first for small primary schools and later for secondary schools. While this was generally accepted during the Depression, most expected that as the economy improved there would be a return to the principle of no teaching prior to training.

However, at the national conference of directors of education in Brisbane in 1936, the question of an apprenticeship component of teacher training received support. Apparently it helped with the selection of candidates for teaching and in their preparation for training college. While Directors might have favored continuing an apprenticeship form of training, the teachers' unions did not. In South Australia, the Director of Education, Charles Fenner certainly differed from the SA Public Teachers Union (SAPTU) over the question.

Teacher union opposition to junior teaching

Since its establishment in 1896, the SAPTU had sought to influence the public education system in a cooperative partnership with the Education Department. Despite a generally harmonious relationship, the Department was the dominant force and the union often appeared as dependent, defensive and compliant. By 1942, the refusal of the Department to even consider consultation on issues seen as significant by the union attracted strong criticism at its annual conference. One of the main issues was that of teacher training and the evasive responses of the Director concerning the practical teaching component. This led to confrontation between union and department.

The union had begun to see the pre-college training system as exploitative, a serious disadvantage to both to those teaching and the pupils taught by them in schools. Prior to the 1942 conference, the union had sent a questionnaire to junior teachers regarding their teaching and other duties. As a result, the conference passed the motion: 'That the Department be asked to discontinue the use of junior teachers in schools'. The conference pressured the state government to establish an Education Inquiry Committee to review all aspects of education in South Australia.

Campaign to influence Education Enquiry Committee

The union now had the opportunity to prepare submissions on the question. Simultaneously the union campaigned against the department's weak justification of junior teaching. The department had argued that the system assisted junior teachers to discover whether they had a faculty and liking for teaching, also enabling the department to discover whether junior entrants were capable of becoming good teachers. It argued that junior teaching was solely a training experience. The department stated that although the regulations provided for a junior teacher to work with 30 pupils, in practice, apart from the difficulties caused by so many male teachers being absent on war service, junior teachers were generally given light responsibilities.

This response ignored the realities. The union described the Education Department's defence as 'weaker than distilled water'. The union's survey showed that junior teachers usually worked the full day with too heavy a teaching and preparation load. The Director issued a departmental circular stating that as junior teachers were untrained, it was undesirable that they should have final responsibility for the progress of any child or class. The union insisted that junior teachers *were* fully responsible for classes and subjects and published this critical cartoon (see above) in *The SA Teachers Journal*, exposing the weakness of the Departmental arguments.

The cartoon illustrated better than any exchange of words what the 'fuss' was about, a system that allowed the untrained, three-quarters of whom should have been in college, to practice on children. Junior teachers had heavy teaching and preparation loads for which they were paid inadequately. The rowdy scene and the final comment pointed to the futility of putting the untrained in charge of a classes with the expectation that useful teaching and learning would occur. The union was flexing its muscles in a determined effort to gain greater respect for its representative role and to exert a stronger influence on policy.

In 1943 SAPTU presented its detailed submission to the Enquiry. A major part was a statement of how the system operated as described by the seventy-four junior teachers who had responded to the 1942 survey.

The submission provided clear evidence that young, untrained junior teachers in primary schools taught all day, mostly to mixed classes. Eighteen teachers in high schools had taken part in the survey and a summary of their work was also included. The submission was used to great effect before the Enquiry. Respondents in the survey often added comments:

Primary teacher (junior): *I am taking the place of a proper teacher but it is made harder for me with no training. The cheque I receive is meager payment. Domestic arts and sewing are obstacles I have to deal with but the Domestic Arts Inspector seems to expect as much from me as a teacher fully trained in this branch of the work.*

Secondary teacher 1 (junior): *A horrible job which has completely turned me off from teaching.*

Secondary teacher 2 (junior): *Discipline is hard to keep with pupils only a few years younger than me. A great amount of preparation time is needed for each lesson.*

The News, Adelaide's daily afternoon paper, reported that junior teaching in South Australia had been strongly criticized before the Education Inquiry Committee by the South Australian Teachers' Union (13 June, 1942). 'Answers to questionnaires sent to junior teachers reveal that, in most instances, the duties they perform are too heavy, that the Department exploits their services by giving them responsibilities that should be assigned only to trained teachers ... Most of them had to teach all day. They had no opportunity to observe the methods of experienced teachers'.

Other evidence gave the Enquiry deeper insights into how the system was operating. It was told that the system was in the interests of staffing of schools rather than that of junior teachers and that the department was fully aware of the situations outlined in the survey. Departmental requests to head teachers not to give full responsibility to junior teachers and to make their duties light were incapable of being fulfilled. A junior teacher in a small high school for example was often the only teacher in their subject field. In primary schools the head teachers had their own heavy class load so neither was likely to get or give adequate assistance or supervision. The claim that some teaching was a useful way of testing aptitude for the role was countered by reference to other professions such as medicine where trainees were not sent out to perform operations before beginning the training course.

The submission of the Women Teachers Guild expressed concern at the practice of giving girl 'raw recruits' responsibility for such subjects as needlework and domestic arts across a school or a full class. The S.A. Public Schools Committees Association (parent organisation) took up the issue of exploitation and reported that it had urged the department to desist from appointing junior teachers on the grounds that it was unfair to the appointee and grossly unfair to the children and their parents. It felt that junior teachers were both too young to take on such responsibilities and to be sent away from home, especially on low pay and allowances that left them with little for other expenses.

ACER intervention and the final Committee report

The Director of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Kenneth Cunningham, drew attention to the danger of junior teachers learning incorrect teaching approaches at the beginning of a career. He believed that Australia was probably the only country with this relic of the old monitorial system and South Australia was a particular problem as junior teachers were not attached to trained teachers for observation. Being given classes to teach likely perpetuated older outlooks and methodologies that were inferior to modern approaches that might be gained in a training college. A former Departmental psychologist explained that the main advantage of the system was that it supplied much needed staff but in doing so it both demeaned the profession and was likely to do harm to the children taught. Another psychologist outlined the possible emotional harm to the junior teachers themselves if, at this formative time of their career, they were put for a lengthy time under the care of someone neither suitable to train them nor able to demonstrate proper attitudes towards teaching.

In his submission, Dr Fenner said that he favoured the system because it assisted candidates to understand the lectures at the Teachers' College. He proposed retaining junior teachers as supernumeraries to observe, study and teach under supervision in approved schools rather than away from home. Apart from Fenner's submission, the case against the system was fully negative. Fenner provided no supporting evidence for his claims. The evidence tendered about the way the system had been used, and in the opinion of the Union abused, since 1931 ensured that the weight of opinion was against its continuation in any form.

The report of the Enquiry emphasized the chief argument against, the harm done by putting untrained, inexperienced adolescent boys and girls, straight from school, with no training whatsoever for the task and as young as 16, in charge of classes of children. It added:

No one suggests that surgeons and physicians should, without training, acquire their skill by practicing on their patients. Herein lies the chief objection to Junior Teacherships: children are 'practised on' by adolescents fresh from their own teaching, which means inevitably, by youngsters whose experience is limited, whose emotional development is far from completed, and whose training for the task is nil... We recommend the abolition of The Junior Teacher System.

While this seemed like a victory for the union, the department continued to prioritise its own needs and junior teachers continued teaching until sufficient trained teachers became available.

The end of teaching before professional training?

By the mid-1950s pre-college teaching had largely disappeared but places were still needed for those under age or under-qualified and the system became a holding bay similar to the supernumerary process envisaged by Fenner. With the introduction of an additional year of secondary education in 1965, such places were no longer needed and the junior teacher system finally ended.

While fully untrained people were no longer allowed to teach, the use of partly trained teachers continued in one form or another through to the present. The massive post war immigration program meant that apart from those being fully trained at the teachers college, large numbers of candidates with minimum secondary qualifications were given just one term of training in a school before taking on full class responsibilities. In 2014 graduates are being appointed in areas of special need with just six weeks of training followed by supervised teaching and theoretical studies over several years, a practice that attracts both support and condemnation from educators and teacher unions.

In 1966, it was noted that the junior teacher system had ended 'without a murmur from any quarter; it had passed unnoticed and almost unsung', a not unexpected outcome considering the criticism leveled at it by the victors.

Memoirs collected in the early 1990s from 91 junior teachers from 1940 to 1945, tend to show a more balanced account of the period than occurred at the time. Some 55 per cent, for example, accepted that they had been exploited, especially with regard to inadequate allowances, but tended to qualify this by explaining that they did not recall it being much of a problem at a time when they, at the least, had a job leading to a career or were doing their bit for the war effort. As for harm to children, many believed that despite being inexperienced teachers, their youth, high motivation, love for children and

determination to succeed had avoided overmuch disadvantage to their classes. As for themselves, many felt that, despite difficulties, they generally benefited from an experience that sharpened their perception of children's learning needs, confirmed their ambition to teach and prepared them well for practice teaching during their year or so at college. Indeed most respondents claimed at least a moderate measure of success and remembered their junior teacher period as a generally happy time—a rather surprising finding in view of the evidence put to the Enquiry.

With the abolition of pre-college teaching, any beneficial opportunities from extended exposure to the realities of school and classroom disappeared and short teaching rounds became the normal practical experience for several decades. In 1990, however, a national investigation into teacher training found that teaching in isolated periods limited the opportunity for students to experience the 'whole school' operation and that reform of practical teaching was needed. Further research in the new century found that beginning teachers were assuming employment ill-prepared for applying their academic skills in the classroom and unfamiliar with the nature and operation of school and classroom culture. On June 20, 2005, the Adelaide newspaper, the *Advertiser*, produced the headline: 'Many new teachers "underqualified": Out of their depth'. This sentiment occurs in other submissions to recent inquiries into the quality and adequacy of pre-employment teacher education in Australia.

Much about contemporary approaches to teacher training and preparation was rightly condemned in 1945 and lengthy pre-college teaching was left with a damaged reputation. Knowledge of this earlier period of junior, pre-college teaching should remain integral to the ongoing process of ensuring that beginning teachers are as fully qualified as possible in whatever conditions prevail.

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