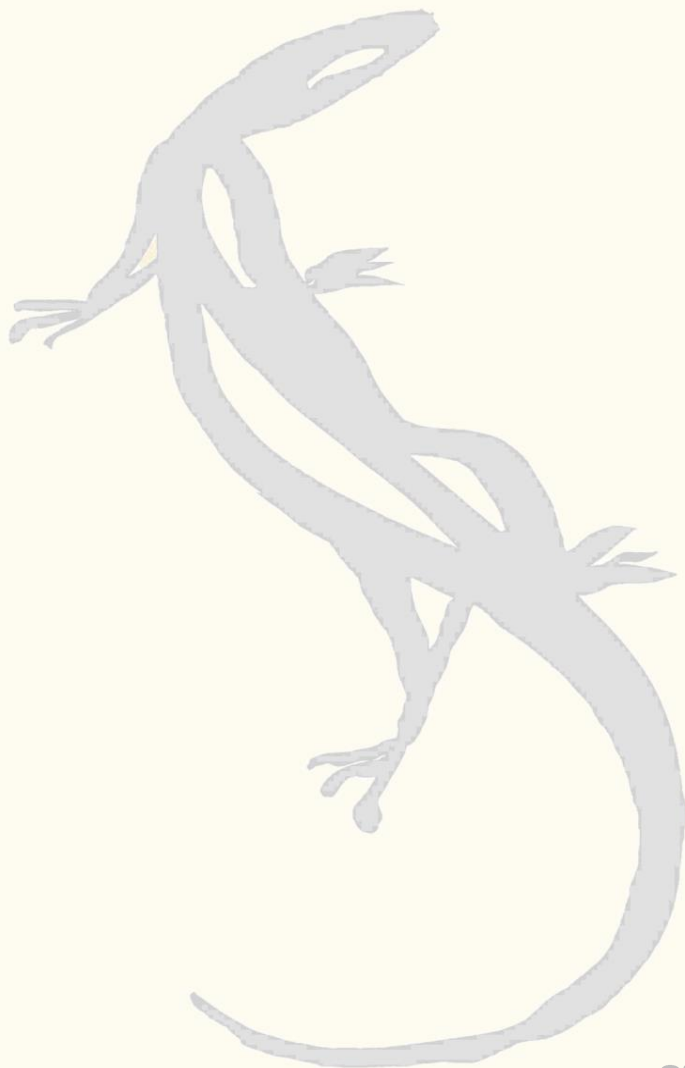


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The Australian Teaching Council and the Teacher Unions: Collaboration or Competition?

Barbara Preston

On 23 June 1993 the Hon. Warren Snowden, representing the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, Ross Free, launched the Australian Teaching Council (ATC).

The ATC has the support of the unions covering school teachers (the Australian Education Union and the Independent Education Union), the Commonwealth and several—but not all—school authorities (State and Territory governments and the non-government school authorities). Other stakeholders such as representatives of teacher educators, parent organisations and subject associations are also generally supportive. What exactly is being supported, and why, is less clear.

In this paper I provide a historical background to the Australian Teaching Council (ATC) and discuss issues which need to be addressed if the Council is to achieve its potential and be an effective agent in improving the quality of teaching in schools and teachers' working lives into the next century.

A central matter I take up is the relationship between the ATC and the teacher unions. This involves considering the problematic dichotomy between the 'professional' and the 'industrial', and the different natures of organisations most appropriate for representation of a profession compared with an organisation with responsibility for professional standards. In considering effective roles for the ATC issues concerning teacher education are considered, including the current representative structures for those involved, and the implications of federalism in Australian education. The ATC is concerned with teachers in schools—not teachers in nonschool

early childhood settings, technical and further education, universities or other adult education settings. Thus professional standards and representation for these other teachers are outside the scope of this paper.

Origins of the ATC

The recent origins of the Council go back to a 1990 report by a working party of the Australian Education Council (AEC, now the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) chaired by Dr Fred Ebbeck, which formally recommended:

That approval in principle be given to the establishment of a voluntary system of national teacher registration through a body representative of State/Territory teacher registration agencies which wish to participate and that the AEC appoint a task force to prepare a detailed proposal for implementation of the scheme (National Board of Employment, Education & Training (NBEET) 1990a, p.vii).

The discussion of this matter in the executive summary of the report noted that 'The report also draws attention to the desirability of the teaching profession itself taking the initiative to establish some standard-setting agency as in medicine, accountancy, law' (NBEET 1990a, p.iv). The AEC referred the report of the working party to NBEET. The Board took up the matter in its report, *The Shape of Teacher Education: Some Proposals* (NBEET 1990b), under the heading 'A National Professional Body' where it was suggested that the issues are 'broader than registration,' and recommended that:

The teaching profession should establish a national professional body representative of the profession as a whole, with its main concerns being quality of training, standards of professional conduct, professional development and the recognition and registration of qualifications (p.12).

During 1990 the idea was promoted that the Australian College of Education (ACE) should be recognised as the national professional body. Phil Meade, who supported this position, quoted Gregor Ramsay, then chair of NBEET saying in interview:

I'd like to begin by saying that one of the problems is that we don't have a clearly identified profession of either teaching or education. There's no overarching professional body as for example in the medical profession, or the legal profession, or the engineering profession, and therefore in some senses the profession itself has got to take some steps to make its identification much clearer than it's been until now. Indeed, in many respects, the professional role has been taken by default in a relatively unhappy arrangement by the union movement (Meade 1990, p.33).

The two themes of the inappropriateness of the teacher unions as professional representative organisations, and the notion that other professions (and their clients) are very well served by the existing bodies representing members of those professions, continue to underlie the debate.

Meade went on to say, 'Dr Ramsay further suggests that the Australian College of Education could develop into the peak professional body, and this has some support.'

The promotion of the ACE as the basis of the professional body faded as key members of the College indicated they were not enthusiastic, and the obvious problems with the proposal became more generally apparent: for example, the inconsistency between the necessary role and nature of the proposed professional body and the characteristics which current members value in the College, and the College's small membership which is least representative of practising teachers—as opposed to academics and departmental officials.

During 1991 the Schools Council of NBEET continued working on the matter, producing the discussion paper *A National Professional Body for Teachers* (Schools Council 1991), and

working collaboratively with the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL) later in 1991 and into 1992. (The NPQTL was a three-year, tripartite project involving the teacher unions, school authorities, the Commonwealth and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) which was established early in 1991.)

In 1991 the meetings of heads of government in special premiers' conferences led to a position supporting commonality or mutual recognition of professional qualifications between the States and Territories to facilitate the mobility of professionals and greater consistency between the various jurisdictions. This resulted in an apparent imperative for a system of national registration for teachers—otherwise the lowest common denominator would operate. The matter of national competency standards for teachers was also arising as part of the wider competency agenda, and a mechanism for developing, implementing and maintaining such standards was seen to be necessary.

Overseas initiatives related to teacher professionalism, especially the establishment in the United States of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, supported these local developments to give impetus to the development of what has become the Australian Teaching Council.

Work on refining the proposal was carried out by the NPQTL. A discussion paper was prepared (McRae 1992) and a conference of stakeholders was held in March 1992. The communique from the conference noted that (inter alia) 'This Conference has agreed that the option which can best benefit both the profession and community is the development of a proposal to establish a National (Australian) Teaching Council.' Through the rest of 1992 and early 1993 drafts of a constitution and other documents were prepared, various consultations were held, and the matter was discussed within the forums of the NPQTL.

At the 4 June meeting of the executive committee of the NPQTL it was agreed that all the parties did not support the implementation of the teaching council proposal after the 'employers' caucus' (the school authorities) indicated that they were not in a position to recommend adoption of the proposal. The Commonwealth, working with the unions and consulting with various other parties, then took the initiative, and on 15 June 1993 the Australian Teaching Council was incorporated as an association in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

A coordinating committee carried out the work of establishing the ATC until elections could be held and nominations made to fill the board of the Council. The membership of the coordinating committee included representatives of the Commonwealth, the unions and teachers' professional associations, the university deans of education (through the Australian Council of Deans of Education), and later the South Australian government school authority and the National Catholic Education Commission.

The Australian Teaching Council has a board of 65, of whom 40 are teachers from the government and non-government sectors in each State and Territory who were elected in October by teachers who had registered for membership by 23 August, and other members have been nominated by a range of organisations including teacher unions, other teacher organisations such as subject associations, school authorities, and organisations representing teacher educators, parents and other stakeholders in schooling. The board had its first meeting in December 1993.

The planning for the Council included the desirability of being largely self-funded after initial seeding funds from the Commonwealth and the need to establish a permanent secretariat in Sydney in 1994.

These plans have come to fruition and although there is apparently much enthusiasm for the ATC, there is much that remains problematic.

Representing the Profession Versus Being Responsible for Professional Standards

In general there appears a confusion between the structures and activities appropriate for *representation of the profession and those appropriate for responsibility in areas relating to professional standards.*

There has been a long-standing criticism of the traditional professions on the grounds of their monopolistic control over matters related to professional standards such as control of entry, standards of competence and standards of practice, and discipline (Metzger 1987, p.18; Preston 1992).

A number of the traditional professions in Australia continue to maintain such a monopoly, but there is a movement in opposition. Over recent years there have been significant developments where people who are not members of the profession concerned have been appointed to relevant bodies such as registration boards or disciplinary tribunals—notably in medicine and law. It is generally accepted that members of a profession have the expertise and the

understanding of the work of the profession which make it appropriate for the profession to have a majority role on bodies responsible for standards, but that other stakeholders in the work of the profession have a legitimate role too. In some cases a monopoly by the profession on standards bodies is not currently a matter of serious concern, though it may become so in the future. On the other hand, professional standards in areas such as medicine—and teaching—are matters of public controversy, in large part because of the heavily value-laden and often controversial nature of practice from the micro to the macro level, but also because of a range of historical, organisational and politico-social reasons. Here the demand for external participation on standards bodies is more pressing. It is such cases with which we are primarily concerned—they require distinct organisations for representation of the profession and for responsibility for professional standards.

Table 1 indicates the appropriate characteristics of bodies which represent members of professions, compared with bodies which are *responsible for professional standards.*

In summary, an organisation which *represents* members of a profession is essentially of the profession and for the profession. Its membership and, especially, its governing bodies, should be composed of members of the profession, and its central responsibility is to those members and to the furtherance of their interests. Those interests may be largely consistent with the interests of clients and the wider community, but need not always be so, and the profession may put its own interests behind or ahead of those other interests. A representative body is the body to which governments, the media and others in the community look when they want the views of the profession and when they want to better understand the profession—the organisation 'represents' in both the sense of putting forward the views and interests of the profession, and of providing the public face of the profession. As a body responsible for representing the profession from the workplace to the industry and national levels, the representative body must have a substantial and effective structure for member participation, for policy formation, and for accountability from the workplace to the industry and national levels.

In contrast, a body which is responsible for formally developing and maintaining professional standards is neither of the profession nor for the profession. It should involve in its decision-making councils individuals who are not

Table 1
Characteristics of organisations responsible for professional representation
and for professional standards

	Profession Representation	Professional Standards Organisation
<i>Basic nature</i>	Of the profession, for the profession.	Professional expertise, for clients.
<i>Example</i>	Union covering the profession; professional association.	Registration board; disciplinary tribunal.
<i>Central formal role and responsibility</i>	Represent and promote the interests of the profession, speak for the profession, negotiate on behalf of the profession. Responsibility is to the profession. Areas of responsibility can include the industrial as well as the professional, and often the distinction cannot be made.	Ensure high standards of professional competency and performance. Ultimate responsibility is to the clients of the profession and the wider community.
<i>Informal social role and status</i>	The body which governments, employers, client organisations, community organisations, and the media turn to when they want the views of the profession. High public profile helps effectiveness.	Provides reassurance to the community that high professional standards operate. Maintains a public profile in keeping with this role and the provision of expert advice in its areas of responsibility.
<i>Membership</i>	All members of the profession are eligible to be members, to be effective and credible the large majority of the profession should be members. In general those who are not members of the profession should not be members (except in an 'associate' or 'student' category).	Members of peak decision-making body should be drawn from and be representative of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the profession (usually a majority of positions); • employers of the profession; • educators of the profession; • clients/consumers of the profession's services; • special community interests (eg, representatives of groups under-represented in the profession or not well served by the work of the profession—eg, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders); • wider industry (other works or other sectors); • wider community interests.
<i>Structure</i>	As a representative organisation it requires an effective and complex structure to ensure that members have genuine opportunities for participation, especially in the policy formation process, and involvement in local representation.	Structure should be geared to effectively carry out its roles. There is no necessity to ensure opportunities for participation by members of the profession concerned, though structure and processes should ensure effective representation of the views of all parties involved, including the profession.
<i>Source of funds</i>	The profession in exchange for representing their interests and providing various services.	The profession in exchange for services such as registration; from other stakeholders (such as employers) as appropriate.
<i>Relationships between the two types of organisation</i>	Provides support/guidance/direction for members on the standards body; involves members in relevant policy development and implementation. Ensures that own role in representing members is not undermined, and that the two organisations are complementary and collaborative.	Accepts the general representative role of the representative organisation, and its wider brief to cover all matters where its members; interests and concerns are to be represented. Ensures that own responsibility to the consumers of the profession's services and the wider community is maintained, and that the two organisations are complementary and have a collaborative relationship.

members of the profession—especially representatives of clients, various relevant industry representatives and community representatives. Thus it is not exclusively ‘of the profession.’ The responsibility of the standards body is not to the profession but to the clients of the profession (and the wider community). Thus it is not ‘for the profession’. The standards body is not, and should not be seen to be, representative of the profession in either of the senses noted above. However, its effective operation would play a very significant part in assuring clients and the community that the profession is practising effectively, and thus it would support the public status of the profession. The standards body would not have general members as such, though members of the profession concerned and/or those who are registered or otherwise accredited by the body may have a particular status—such as forming the electorate for some (or most) members of decision-making councils, being eligible to stand for such elections or other mechanism for filling the profession’s positions on decision-making councils, being eligible to receive publications or be involved in particular activities not open to others. However, as the decision-making forums properly include individuals who are not members of the profession, the profession does not totally control the body—even if the profession ‘has the numbers.’ The standards body is essentially an expert body, not a representative body.

It is clear that the ATC most closely matches the characteristics of a body which has responsibility for professional standards, not a representative body as outlined above. This is quite proper.

Yet much of the rhetoric in ATC material is consistent with a representative body. For example, in the brochure distributed to teachers in mid-1993 to introduce the ATC to teachers (ATC 1993a), the dominant rhetoric is appropriate for a representative body which is exclusively made up of and controlled by teachers, and which is responsible to and serving the interests of teachers—not students, their parents and the wider community. Most notable is the key descriptor of the ATC as ‘A professional body of teachers, for teachers.’ There are also the statements that ‘The ATC is being established to provide a national voice for Australia’s teachers and to promote their professional interests,’ and ‘the ATC will unite the profession on a national basis, giving teachers a strong voice,’ and ‘the participation of teachers in the ATC can ensure the creation of a single, united professional voice

to speak on behalf of the profession.’ This reiteration of the ATC as the ‘voice’ of teachers implies that it is a representative body. The theme of the ATC as the ‘voice’ of teachers occurs again throughout the first edition of the ATC magazine, *The Council* (ATC 1993b), distributed as a ‘special election issue’ in November 1993. The title of the magazine is subheaded ‘A professional body of teachers, for teachers.’

The first sentences of the brochure are particularly problematic:

Engineers, doctors, architects and accountants all have the support of national professional associations. Teachers are the largest professional group in the country, yet they have no such body to promote and represent their professional interests.

There are several issues here, which continue the themes of the debate over the past few years.

First, there is the implication that what occurs in the other professions should be emulated. As noted above, there is much community disquiet with the operation of organisations associated with other professions. There is often a multiplicity of organisations. In most cases the standards bodies such as registration boards and disciplinary tribunals are separate from representative bodies. Even if only representative bodies are considered there is multiplicity and various inadequacies. For example, law has different organisations in the various States and Territories, as well as the separation between solicitors and barristers, and there are again other organisations which represent some lawyers industrially (such as the State/Territory and Commonwealth public service unions), while other employed lawyers have no industrial protection. In medicine the Australian Medical Association (AMA), often promoted in the debate surrounding the ATC as a body to emulate, can claim membership of less than half of those eligible, often has significant differences with the various colleges which represent medical practitioners on most professional matters, does not itself have a registration function, and is a trade union registered with tribunals.

Second, implicit here is the position that *one* organisation only is optimal and appropriate to cover both representative functions and responsibility for professional standards. There are several problems with this position. As already indicated, I believe that it is appropriate to divide these functions between two separate but complementary and collaborative

organisations, but as I consider in some detail later, it is not appropriate to separate representation on professional and industrial matters. The establishment of the ATC is adding *one more* organisation to those which are already concerned with teachers and their work, and whatever the benefits of the existence of the ATC (and I hope there will be many), there are the costs, such as lack of economies of scale, and perhaps confusions in public understandings of the different organisations' roles whenever there are a multiplicity of organisations. Most often more than one organisation has developed over time to represent the interests of a profession or perform other professional functions, and we need to appreciate where we are historically, and not assume we can begin with a blank page. For school teachers each State and Territory tended to develop its own organisations, different ones for government and non-government schools, perhaps also different for primary and secondary (and technical teachers), for different non-government sectors, for men and women, and so on. Union restructuring has brought us to the current situation of two national unions with branches in the various States and Territories. Those two unions, the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the Independent Education Union (IEU), claim membership of the very large majority of school teachers, and work together collaboratively in representing their members on professional and industrial issues. There are a number of specialist professional associations which teachers join in addition to their union membership, and there are standards bodies such as registration boards in a minority of systems. In general the organisations all work in harmony. It is in fact a very unified situation in the context of the diversity of Australian school systems (and the lack of unity among the school authorities and their responsible ministers evident in the outcomes of the July 1993 meeting of the Australian Education Council), and compared with other professions and teachers in many other countries. That brings us to the most important point.

The ATC and the Teacher Unions

Third, if teachers have 'no body to promote and represent their professional interests' where does that leave the teacher unions? With some minor exceptions the relationships between the ATC and the teacher unions is a deafening silence in the material associated with the Council.

Unionists can only be bemused when they receive material about an organisation which is

promoted by their unions but which implies that those unions have never represented their professional interests. They will wonder about their unions' high profile activities on professional issues which in a number of cases go back over one hundred years. They will wonder about the Australian Teachers' Federation's role on the Commonwealth Schools Commission for a decade, and the AEU and IEU's role on the current Schools Council, about their State/Territory branch's role on curriculum committees, various boards and working parties, about activity on professional matters within the forums of the unions, and their school level branch or sub-branch's role on school councils, various school level committees, and the day-to-day professional work of teachers. They will wonder about the future role of their union.

Many of them may wonder if it is worth remaining a member of the union if it has no professional role, while a body which claims to provide professional representation—and 'shouts to the skies' that 'teachers do an outstanding job' (to quote the national press advertisement of 19 June 1993)—can be joined for a fraction the cost of a union subscription.

The potential for the ATC to undermine the teacher unions is a significant issue. The promotion of a General Teaching Council (GTC) for England and Wales has been supported by many who also support teacher unionism, but it has also been seen as a means of reducing the power of the teacher unions and reducing the unionisation of the teaching service. For example, Dame Mary Warnock, an influential educationalist and philosopher who is not associated with the New Right, urged the creation of a GTC in her 1985 Dimpleby Lecture, arguing that 'teachers would gradually cease to be predominantly unionised, and instead would become professionals comparable to doctors or lawyers' (Demaine 1988, pp.256-7). (Again we see the idealisation of the medical and legal professions, and the false implication that the British Medical Association, in this case, is not a union.)

I will now consider the interrelationships between the industrial and the professional, and the role of unions, in some detail. My definition of professional work is based on the nature of *practice* (involving judgements requiring high levels of competencies drawing from complex knowledge, personal skills and dispositions, and carried out in circumstances where there is often no one right answer), rather than the public *status* of an occupation or individual as 'professional'

(Preston 1992). However, the discussion appreciates the role of the public status of 'professional'.

The Industrial Versus the Professional

Throughout the world, the industrial and professional have historically been pitted against each other. Employers, with the support of media and other interests, have appealed to teachers' sense of professionalism (or their desire to be recognised as professionals) to undermine teachers' conditions of work—true professionals will not take industrial action, will work longer hours if relief from face-to-face teaching is reduced, and will clean up their classrooms if cleaners' hours are cut back—their collective organisation through unions, their identification with the broader trade union movement, and their solidarity with the working class (Bessant & Spaul 1972, p.89).

In some periods teachers have seen a clear choice between professional identification and traditional forms of professional organisation on the one hand, and union identification and organisation on the other. Parry and Parry have argued that the conflict is largely inevitable—that teachers must choose between professionalism and unionism (Parry & Parry 1974, p.183). There are a number of reasons why their general proposition is wrong, whatever its particular validity in the specific context of England and Wales in the early 1970s.

First, organisations which represent the traditional professions and which have the public status of 'professional associations' can quite powerfully and militantly represent their members' interests—and can be legitimate, registered trade unions (even if those unions, such as the AMA, are not members of peak union councils and do not join the broader union movement). Militant action does not necessarily lessen professionalism, and is often necessary to ensure the conditions for high quality, effective professional practice, especially by employed professionals—even if it can also at times promote members' interests at the expense of clients and the wider community. What may be seen as 'industrial' concerns are the legitimate concerns of bodies responsible for professional representation. And, as has been noted above, archetypical 'professional associations' in the public eye such as the Australian or British Medical Associations are unions, just as involved in the industrial concerns of their employed members as any other union, and just as willing to take industrial action. While there are some professional associations, such as teachers'

subject associations, which have no industrial role, in general there is no clear or consistent distinction between 'professional associations' and unions covering professionals.

Second, while the union movement retains a solid base in the traditional working class, major growth has been occurring in the professional middle class, especially among public employees and the financial sector, but also among employed professionals elsewhere in the private sector. In addition, many jobs and industries associated with the traditional working class are being transformed so that higher level competencies and more autonomous decision making is required, taking on characteristics more closely associated with the work of the professional middle class. In other words, there is an increasing involvement in the union movement of professionals and workers with significant professional aspects to their work.

Third, unions which are publicly recognised as such, and which cover nonprofessional as well as professional workers, are involved in the 'professional' matters which have been seen as central concerns for 'professional associations'. Such matters include the nature and future of the work of members and the industry in which they work; the quality of members' work; involving members in decision-making about their work and their industry; the education and training of members and the recognition and reward of competencies and qualifications; seeking the improvement of the wider society in terms of social justice and quality of life, and so on. The integrated concern about such matters by unions comes under the broad umbrella of what is now called 'strategic unionism', a development which has gained a central place in the Australian trade union movement since the publication of *Australia Reconstructed* by the ACTU and Trade Development Council in 1987.

Representative professional associations have similar dilemmas to those of unions when members are accused of incompetent or otherwise unacceptable practice. The nature of practice in terms of autonomy, accepted management prerogative or self-employment, and the degree of esoteric technical issues involved, will indicate the appropriate roles of representative organisations (unions or nonunion professional associations) and employers for professionals who are not self-employed. Such matters are ideally dealt with by separate bodies responsible for professional standards (such as disciplinary boards) which include members of the profession, client and community representatives, and employers among others.

However the matter is dealt with, the individual concerned generally should have access to support and representation provided by their union or other representative organisation of which they are a member—such support does not imply condoning of the alleged unacceptable practice. Unions with professional members and nonunion professional associations also have similar dilemmas when the interests of members conflict with those of clients and the wider community. Unions have always dealt with such dilemmas—conflicts between members or categories of members, between members and those working in other occupations or unemployed, and so on. On the other hand, apparently purely ‘professional’ issues, such as curriculum policy for teachers, are riven with conflicts, with some groups (classes of members or students and their communities) benefiting and others losing from one position, others gaining or losing from alternatives.

There is thus no necessary conflict between the industrial and the professional, between unionism and professionalism—in fact the distinctions often cannot be made. And union involvement and identification are not necessarily inimical to professionalism.

There is generally little to gain and much to lose in separating the *representative* structures for the ‘industrial’ from the ‘professional’. Some occupations have historically developed in this way with two (or more) separate representative organisations. However, in times of strategic unionism, workplace restructuring, and the creation of leaner establishments, the separate organisations are either collaborating with each other, or they are wasting members’ resources on duplication and demarcation disputes while governments and employers are playing off one organisation against the other and the profession is incapable of taking authoritative initiative and leadership on issues with which it should be concerned.

For teaching, perhaps more than many other professions, it is practically impossible to separate the ‘industrial’ from the ‘professional’. Teachers’ conditions of work—class sizes, relief from face-to-face teaching, the organisation of teachers’ time and opportunities for collaboration, the physical environment of schools, facilities and resources—and decisions about them are intrinsically both industrial and professional. So too are matters such as hours of work, access to professional development and study leave, deployment and promotion criteria and processes, and dealing with issues such as harassment, stress, victimisation and apparent

incompetency or less than satisfactory work. Likewise, decision-making on curriculum and other educational matters from the school to the system and national levels, the wider social role of schooling and the teaching profession, all have industrial aspects intertwined with the professional. To seek to separate representative structures for the professional from the industrial is a recipe for chaos—or the disempowerment of teachers.

Yet material associated with the ATC (Beazley 1993b; ATC 1993a) indicates that the ‘industrial’ is the responsibility of the unions, while the ‘professional’—covering curriculum matters such as the Mayer competencies and curriculum profiles, as well as matters associated with professional standards—is the responsibility of the ATC.

Some Scenarios for the Future

To consider possibilities for the future we need to begin with where we are now. I believe that there are two sets of issues which are central to the consideration of an effective role for the ATC. These are the existing nature of professional representation, and the implications of federally structured responsibilities in education. The interrelationships between these issues, focussed on teacher education, is the central thread of my argument.

Australian school teachers have a high level of membership of two national unions which work collaboratively and have no significant demarcation disputes. The unions are generally recognised as the representative organisations for Australian school teachers, something well illustrated by the *1993 Agreement between the Commonwealth Government and the Teaching Profession through their Teacher Unions Providing for an Accord to Advance the Quality of Teaching and Learning* (AEU, IEU & the Commonwealth of Australia 1993), popularly known as the ‘Teaching Accord’ and covering a range of curriculum and assessment issues, educational organisation and program evaluation, professional organisation, teachers’ career structures and career development, including preservice and inservice teacher education.

While teachers are well represented by the unions, teacher educators are generally not members of those unions but are represented separately through the academic union, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), and bodies such as the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) and the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA).

This is, I would argue, one of the most significant differences between school teachers and many other professions where practitioners and educators of the profession (and researchers) have common organisations for professional representation.

The lack of common membership of representative professional organisations of most practicing teachers and education researchers and teacher educators has had, I believe, serious detrimental consequences for the quality of teaching and learning. There has been a lack of ongoing powerful lines of communication and integrative structures between the three groups. Each has worked too much in isolation from the practice, needs and knowledge of the others—most importantly, teaching practice has not sufficiently influenced and in turn been influenced by education research and teacher education but, also, education research and teacher education do not sufficiently support and inform each other. Some subject associations and other organisations with limited memberships do provide good links, but they are only partial in the coverage of even their own members' professional responsibilities. The potential of the ATC to fully address this matter is limited because of its nature as an organisation responsible for professional standards, not a representative body. However, it can play a part.

Not only is professional representation separate, but the representation of teacher educators is often not involved when it should be. For example, in the development of the 1993 ministerial paper, *Teaching Counts* (Beazley 1993a), which includes a significant section on teacher education and funding initiatives to facilitate the early retirement of teacher educators (p.12), the NTEU and other teacher educators' organisations, unlike the teacher unions, were not involved in its development. Similarly, in the Teaching Accord it is stated that to 'devise improvements in teacher education' there will be liaison with 'the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee and the Australian Conference of Directors of Education' (p.20)—none of the three teacher educators' organisations is mentioned in the Accord. These instances are a sad indication of the marginalisation of teacher educators, even though the three organisations have good structures, competent personnel and at times an effective profile. It is a marginalisation which is in part a consequence of the representative separation and the quite proper leading role developing for the AEU and the IEU in professional matters concerning school teachers. However, it is not an inevitable marginalisation.

There are many strategies, some already in place, for teacher educators to better ensure their involvement in decisions affecting their professional work and working lives in collaboration with teachers. The development of the role of the ATC in ways discussed below could be an additional strategy.

The second set of issues involves federalism. The Australian schooling system is to a very large extent organised on a State/Territory basis, with State level authorities responsible for the employment of teachers, teacher registration (where it is required), school and system organisation, curriculum and credentials. While there appears a long term trend towards greater national consistency, and in some areas uniformity, the outcomes of the July 1993 meeting of the Australian Education Council indicate that State/Territory autonomy continues to be a powerful imperative. Significant differences in matters related to professional standards will remain—for example, there appears little overall movement towards increased requirements that teachers be registered before they are employed (currently required by a minority of employing authorities).

School authorities are very mixed in their support for the ATC. Some, such as Victoria, are quite unenthusiastic regarding both its national focus and its orientation to the profession. Queensland supports the professional orientation but feels that the State is already well served by the Teachers' Registration Board. Others, such as the Australian Capital Territory and the National Catholic Education Commission, firmly support the Council. The Commonwealth also clearly supports it.

In contrast to the federal (State-based) schools system, university-based teacher education has, like all university education, a national and even international focus and framework, even though formal requirements for the employment of graduates—such as the length of initial teacher education—differs among the States and Territories, and local collaborative arrangements as well as local school curriculum and organisational differences lead to variations around the country. The ACDE and ATEA are generally supportive of the ATC, and have nominated members on the ATC board. Given these contextual features, what are realistic tasks for the ATC?

Broad research and development work can be related to defining professional standards, whether competency-based or not, and principles for implementation. Collaborative work in a

range of areas by the Queensland Teachers' Registration Board provides a possible model. However, for a national body such as the ATC more specific aspects of implementation (and thus of definition) will need to be taken up within the relevant agendas of, say, registration; planned experiences and appraisal for induction and probationary periods; aspects of work organisation and the deployment of particular teachers; outcomes for inservice professional development at various stages in teachers' careers; Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) (or similar) definition and recognition; defining minimum satisfactory standards of practice, and indicating ways to respond to 'less than satisfactory' allegations; and so on. The employing school authorities and the relevant unions clearly play an essential role in most of these areas because they have to do with basic aspects of teachers' employment, career structures and opportunities, and conditions of practice. The ATC may be able to carry out research and policy development with a view to best practice and national coherence, but it can have no authority in any formal sense—the relevant parties at the level of school systems can take or leave its advice. In most of these areas the differences among systems and the high levels of practical experience and specific relevant knowledge in the local authorities and unions means that the ATC contribution may be limited.

National registration or accreditation of teachers at entry or advanced levels are possible significant functions for the Council. Registration could be a very valuable function because of its position in the nexus between teaching practice and teacher education—as is apparent in the case of the Queensland Teachers' Registration Board. Registration may become an urgent priority, depending on developments regarding 'partially regulated professions' in the arena of Commonwealth/State relations. However, if no clear direction comes from that direction, registration may not be realistically feasible as a practically significant function until it can make a real difference to teachers' careers and has recognition by employers and the profession generally.

In the area of initial teacher education (and much post-initial teacher education) the ATC may be in a position to play a significant role, whatever the developments in registration. There is no adequate national forum for working through the complexities of developing the necessary high quality teacher education which involves genuine collaborative relationships

between university-based teacher educators and the school teaching profession. At this time there is great distance between the profession (individual teachers and their representative union officials) and teacher educators. Not only is there the lack of common representative structures already mentioned, but there is, as Jim Walker recently bluntly put it, 'a damaging amount of distancing, territoriality and even disrespect and hostility between potential partners in teacher education' (Walker 1993, p.7). In this context of distance the tendencies may be either of two directions: to totally dismiss the school teaching profession as irrelevant, not a 'partner' in the enterprise of teacher education (that part is played by employing authorities), a view put forward in the 1992 report of the Consultancy on Future Directions for the Institute of Education at the University of Melbourne (Maling & Taylor 1992; for a critique see Preston 1992); or to dismiss the relevance of university-based teacher educators and transfer teacher education (other than 'discipline studies') to the schools with little if any involvement of university-based staff from education faculties, as is being promoted in England and Wales. While both these possibilities are easy to imagine, the practical details of the third and best option—effective school/system and university partnerships involving teachers and teacher educators—are harder to conceptualise. Even more difficult will be overcoming the obstacles to implementation:

Some of these are cultural and structural: different views of teaching and learning, organisational structures, role definitions and reward structures; few incentives for professionals to become involved in collaborative teaching, research and development activities (Walker 1993, p.8).

The ATC can provide a significant forum for working through these issues—debating and arriving at broad principles; developing and testing frameworks; researching and evaluating particular models; documenting and registering agreements between the parties, and so forth.

To do this work with authority and effectiveness the ATC needs to give a more significant formal place to university-based teacher educators. This place can be on relevant working parties or sub-committees, but those forums must have authority appropriate to their role. University teacher educators also need to actively participate as members of the electorate for elected board positions and become involved in other activities for which they are eligible.

In addition to the necessary collaboration between the practicing profession and teacher educators, there is an increasing awareness of the need for much more substantial collaboration between teacher educators in education faculties and staff in other faculties who teach 'discipline studies' and other courses which are part of initial (and post-initial) teacher education programs. The ATC may be able to play a role in facilitating this collaboration.

Conclusion

Instead of competing with the teacher unions for the role of 'representative of the teaching profession,' the ATC must develop a distinct and useful function for itself. Within the broad area of professional standards one of the most obvious tasks before the Australian education community as a whole is the development of high quality, collaborative teacher education. The ATC is well placed to play a pivotal role because of its basic membership structure, its national basis, and its mandate in the area of professional standards. It does, however, need to be clear about what it is doing, and ensure that advice, working and decision-making structures, as well as work programs, are appropriate to its tasks. And it needs to be sure that stakeholders in schooling and the general community do not misconceive its role and activities.

Regarding the ATC's relationships with the teacher unions, implicit in the discussion so far are the three main scenarios for the future:

- The ATC and the teacher unions operating in a collaborative and complementary manner, similar to that outlined for the two types of organisations in Table 1, with distinct roles and responsibilities.
- The ATC having no clear role for itself distinct from the teacher unions, the unions further developing their role as representatives of members on professional as well as industrial issues, and the ATC fading into significance.
- The ATC having no clear role for itself distinct from the teacher unions, undermining the unions, causing them to lose support among teachers, yet the ATC being unable to represent teachers' industrial or professional interests, or to ensure their ongoing participation in the organisation. Teachers would then be less able as a collective profession to take initiative and show leadership, and they would be more vulnerable to various forms of mistreatment by employers. The consequent weakening of

the teaching profession will in turn weaken the ATC.

While there would be a general preference for the first scenario, wishing it will not ensure it happens. There will need to be vigilance and strategies to maintain and enhance the appropriate strength of the teacher unions (including their role in representing their members on professional matters), to ensure the effectiveness of the ATC in its more clearly defined role, and to ensure a collaborative relationship between them.

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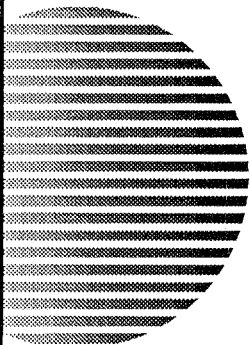
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