

TEACH^R

Good? Different? Assessing the idea of an atypical Clinical Teaching Model of initial teacher education, using SWOT Analysis

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Abstract

Is a Clinical Teaching Model, characterised by a school-embedded, employment-integrated, alternative mode (SEAM), an opportune path for initial teacher education? A SWOT Analysis is used to address this question and engender discussion, as it relates to Christian faith-based schools.

Introduction

The quality of teachers and educational programs are the driving force that underpin nations' social capital, economic competitiveness, and progress (McGivney & Winthrop, 2016, Hanushek & Woessmann, 2007). Currently, and over the latter part of the 20th century, this realisation has led to increased attention and focus on the initial preparation of teachers and their work. The move towards the professionalisation of teachers' work and current emphasis on professionalism and performance is noteworthy. This can be seen in the present regard for and status of teaching and the mandated requirements to enter the teaching profession (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011).

However, a 'high' view of teaching has not always been this stance. Colonial North America (Butts & Cremin, 1953) provides an interesting (but pejorative) historical case in point:

teachers and schoolmasters were not guided by any particular professional or long-term motivation. Teaching ... was looked upon as a waiting station until something better came along. ... Young prospective clergymen would teach school for a time while waiting for a call to a pastorate ... Then there were always the adventurers and misfits who had tried other

enterprises unsuccessfully and then turned as a last resort to teaching in order to keep body and soul together ... (p. 133)

Sweeping changes have occurred since those times in all developed countries regarding how teaching is perceived, the qualifications required, and how these are attained.

Becoming a teacher

Historically there have been various models of preparing teachers. These models have changed substantially and developed over time, becoming qualitatively more 'demanding' and being increasingly regulated by local, state, or national jurisdictions. This is evidenced for example in higher course entry requirements; length, breadth, as well as in-depth courses' content; and mandatory degree and professional qualifications—among other aspects—as teaching has met almost all criteria for a profession except, notably, control of the workplace. Table 1 sets out some fundamental parameters and their elements that have shaped past and continue to shape present models of teacher preparation. It is evident that Table 1 can accommodate different permutations of varying levels of simplicity or sophistication to fit different perceived needs and contexts.

In Australia, presently, to become a qualified primary teacher requires a Bachelor of Education degree (a BA, plus a Master of Teaching is also a variation), whilst secondary counterparts generally need a BA/BSc (or other Bachelor degree in a teaching specialty area) plus a pedagogical qualification at the bachelor or master's degree level to meet Australian professional standards for teachers. The academic courses of study are normally undertaken at universities or accredited tertiary institutions, where students, excepting those in distance education mode, spend most of their learning time, with practicums being completed at

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schools.

The above has been the standard pattern for organising initial teacher education for some time. There have been some minor adjustments in some jurisdictions to this *mainstream model* to address teacher shortages in specific subjects, regional and/or indigenous needs, as well as in entry qualifications.

A non-standard pathway to becoming a teacher—one that does not follow the norm—has

emerged during the last decade. The Commonwealth government has financially supported an employment-based pathway offered by Teach for Australia (TFA). The scheme allows “*individuals to work [in schools] while they complete their teaching qualification ... [TFA recruits] high performing individuals and places them in schools that need them most*” (Robinson, 2019) (emphasis supplied).

The aim of the scheme is to place eligible candidates, who have completed degree courses at the Bachelor level applicable to secondary schools’ learning areas, specifically in state government secondary schools located in low socio-economic communities in suburban, regional or remote areas. These schools typically find it difficult to fill staffing positions. TFA participants receive a salary *during* their two-year-training, which integrates pedagogical, curriculum and professional studies, provided by a partnering university, with their supervised classroom teaching. On successful completion of their training, participants receive a Master of Teaching degree and are required to serve in a disadvantaged school for an agreed time period. The significant difference between an TFA student and an ITE student enrolled for a MTch degree (for example, advertised by the University of Melbourne, among others) and not following a TFA path, would be ineligibility for school employment under current regulatory requirements, until *after* they had successfully completed the course, in contrast to their TFA counterparts.

In many respects, the path that TFA has followed in training teachers conforms to a distinct model of training professionals, to which the discussion now turns.

The Clinical Teaching Model (CTM)

What is CTM? The literature provides no authoritative definition, perhaps because of its varied application across professions, mainly in the fields of nursing, medicine, and allied health. Generically, CTM may be described as a learning approach in an actual, ‘real world’ workplace setting to develop professional expertise. In an environment that is characterised by reality, complexity, and experiences, CTM involves the interplay of theory and practice that incorporates the application of tested knowledge and multiple skills—including cognitive, social, technical and practical,—that lead to practitioners developing thorough competence and ultimately performance excellence.

What ‘contours’ does CTM assume in an initial teacher education setting? In this model of ITE, the workplace—the school, vis a vis the university—becomes the central point of learning for ITE students. An example of a specific Clinical Teaching Model, recently reported in the media

Table 1: Some basic parameters and elements of past and present models of teacher preparation

Parameters	Possible Elements (Examples)
COURSE ENTRY	Life experience, vocational skills, high/secondary school award, degree
COURSE LENGTH	1-12 months, 1-2 years, 3-4 years, additional
COURSE DESIGN	Pre-school, primary/elementary, secondary, adult education
COURSE CONTENT	Curriculum areas; professional, pedagogical & practical content; specialist knowledge areas; school practicums
TEACHING AREAS	Literacy, numeracy, general curriculum, specialist subjects, special needs
COGNITION LEVEL	Knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis (education that includes basic and higher cognition levels)
SKILLS RANGE	A spectrum of mental, social, emotional and organisational skills and competencies
TEACHING FORM	Instructing, training, mentoring, coaching, educating
COURSE DELIVERY	Face-to-face, distance, on-line
COURSE PROVIDER	Businesses, local bodies, schools, institutes, colleges, universities
PROVIDER TYPE	Private, public, church-related and/or faith-based
AWARD GAINED	Certificate, diploma, bachelor’s degree, higher degree
MODEL	Apprenticeship, mentorship, institutional professional preparation, a dual or eclectic model

“*In this model of ITE [CTM], the workplace—the school, vis a vis the university—becomes the central point of learning for ITE students.*”

(Robinson, 2019), has numerous distinctive, essential features as summarised below.

Before embarking on a description, this specific example should be differentiated from the TFA program. Eligibility, in this instance, does not depend on a University degree; it is a non-government supported program and participants are required to pay fees. At present, program enrolments are relatively low (in comparison to TFA's); a faith-based organisation offers the program and participants do not attend University. But there are also some similarities with the TFA program; these will become evident in due course.

The described CTM operates in conjunction with Alphacrusis College and co-operating faith-based schools, in the context of an accredited four-year tertiary level program. It gives priority to hands-on, in-classroom experience that is much more extensive than any 'regular' practicums. A school becomes the home base for participants who regularly work with, and are mentored by, an experienced classroom practitioner. Lectures—the theoretical components of the course—are delivered by a private provider, at the school; not at a university. Interestingly, participants are paid as assistant teachers during their course, on a pro-rata basis, up to two days a week, on a scale starting at \$61,375. However, under this program participants are not eligible for Commonwealth government support. Total cost of the degree is approximately \$60,000; with each subject costing \$1,900. The program represents a niche approach—not a main pathway—to meet school-specific needs and covers the ITE of primary and secondary teachers. Currently the program, as reported, enrolls 19 students.

How should one appraise such a CTM as reported and outlined above? It is proposed that a SWOT Analysis—all-be-it limited in extent—may be an appropriate methodology in assessing the usefulness of the CTM concept *per se*, that is, looking at it as an *ideal type* that stresses or refers to certain elements common to cases of a given phenomenon. The central and common elements, in this case, are the use of a school-embedded, employment-integrated, alternative mode (SEAM).

The approach described above appears an interesting one and warrants further attention, principally for two reasons. First, because it relates particularly to faith-based schools and second because enrollees in the program, unlike TFA, are not required to have tertiary qualifications. This may be considered a different and unorthodox ITE path. It should be clearly understood, however, that the *specific* program associated with the institution is *not* under scrutiny here (for an evaluation see Twelves, 2019). It is the idea of a Clinical Teaching

Model that takes a SEAM (CTM/SEAM) path for initial teacher education, with participants not attending a university, that is being evaluated *per se*.

SWOT Analysis

Credited jointly to the Harvard Business School and Stanford University, SWOT Analysis is a useful management strategy (Gurel, E. & Tat, 2017).

[It] identifies the critical *threats* and *opportunities* in its competitive environment. It also examines how competition in this environment is likely to evolve and what implications that evolution has.... [A]nalysis helps an organization identify its organizational *strengths* and *weaknesses*. It also helps an organization understand which of its resources and capabilities are likely to be sources of competitive advantage.... [italics supplied] (p. 994)

Strengths and weaknesses of, as well as opportunities for and threats to CTM/SEAM will frame the appraisal and discussion that follows.

Strengths

One of CTM/SEAM's obvious strengths is its long-term mentoring aspect. It operates not merely for a 4-6 weeks practicum, or a semester, but for the length of the entire course! This *modus operandi* addresses a significant deficiency in many ITE programs, as identified in a recent report by the Grattan Institute that asserted universities needed to include more supervised classroom professional practice hours in initial teacher education, a strategy improving preparation for effectively engaging their future students in meaningful learning opportunities (Goss, Sonnemann & Griffiths, 2017). The report also recommends a strengthening of "induction programs for all beginning teachers, and insuring they are led by expert mentors" (p. 4); furthermore, that opportunity for collegial collaboration and feedback exists for all teachers.

Research shows that support and collegiality are critical in the first years of teaching (Buchanon, 2013). It is evident that short-term practicums are unable to cater for the development of authentic, professional, collegial relationships between mentors and mentees, let alone genuine collaboration with other staff members, whereas a four-year CTM/SEAM program, can. Feed-back from mentors can be immediate and frequent, when required. In a sense, the model regards mentees as junior members of staff, who can benefit from long-term support and who are able to build up a network of relationships.

Similarly, familiarity and connections with primary/secondary students and their learning needs and dispositions will become almost routine for ITE students who, particularly in faith-based schools, will also grow into and identify with the culture,

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ethos, and ‘special character’ of their workplace and the system or faith tradition to which the school belongs. On this note, it should be recognised that the preparation of teachers involves more than competencies and should include the development of specific attitudes, and values. An O.E.C.D. report (2018) sees a need for teachers everywhere to demonstrate self-regulation/discipline and social and emotional skills such as empathy, self-efficacy, collaboration—among others—to meet the complex demands of society. Furthermore, in a faith-based school context, it is expected that teachers should be able to articulate a personal worldview that informs their professional practice and one which is in harmony with their professed faith tradition.

Attrition of beginning teachers is an acknowledged Australian phenomenon. It is estimated that up to one third of neophytes leave the teaching profession within the first five years (Moore, 2019). The explanations given (Bahr & Ferreira, 2018), which are also voiced in the UK (Tickle, 2018) include perceived heavy workloads, challenging student behaviour, an ‘obsession’ with standardised testing together with a lack of autonomy and an excess of record-keeping. It is reasonable to argue that being given a well-qualified mentor, over time, ITE students can be taught strategies to cope with increasing workloads and various challenges during their four-year CTM/SEAM course, without experiencing the unexpected, sudden shock often felt by university graduates on commencing their full-time teaching service. A similar argument can be made regarding the management of student behaviour.

In other challenging areas, the modelling of an experienced mentor will always be critical until the mentee has reached a level of confident autonomy. Overall, the process will be one of *gradual* intensification of work and personal and professional development, rather than being ‘thrown in at the deep end’. Strategies of this nature should address what the Australian Education Union (2018) has been calling for, “Investigating ways to increase retention rates for the teaching profession and avoid “burn out” among early-career teachers” (p. 25).

The two-year, work based TFA model of initial teacher education showed encouraging early results. Principals reported (Dandolopartners, 2017) that “associates” (the preferred term for TFA participants):

- Outperform their peers [in conventional, non-employment-based programs] on all Australian Professional Standards for Teachers measures, surveyed by Dandolo [the evaluating organisation], after both have spent two years in the classroom.
- Demonstrate behaviour consistent with proficient standards 12% more frequently

than their peers, and highly accomplished standards 18% more frequently than teachers with similar experience. (p. 12)

It appears valid to claim that the strengths reported in the two-year TFA program would likely be amplified in a typical four-year CTM/SEAM program operating in Christian faith-based schools. In the latter, ITE students may form strong bonds with mentors, not unlike the relationship that existed between the apostle Paul and young co-workers, such as Timothy; a teaching/learning bond which is clearly evident in the New Testament epistles, (1st and 2nd Timothy) that not only benefitted Timothy’s own spiritual formation, but also the learning community entrusted to him.

Program size does matter, but ‘big is not necessarily best’. Small CTM/SEAM programs should ensure that participants receive individual attention, that their perceived needs—on a wide spectrum—are met, and that they don’t feel lost, as they might among the many hundreds of peers on a university campus.

Another strength is that regional areas should benefit from this program. If participants, whose home is in a non-urban region, are trained at a regional school, they are likely to stay in that region, especially if they have a strong commitment to their faith tradition, worship at a local Christian congregation and have formed strong bonds within the community.

Whilst the above are some perceived strengths, what might some weaknesses be in a CTM/SEAM model, functioning in a Christian faith-based school?

Weaknesses

“Small” may be characterised as “beautiful”, but it may also come with limitations. These may be evident in the lack of diversity of experiences and a scarcity of ‘rich’ interconnections that a relatively small pool of individuals might not be able to provide. *Depth* of relationships and experiences should ideally be balanced by *breadth*. In contrast, large institutions and organisations, whether schools or universities, may be judged to be able to provide a better balance between these two categories.

An example of lack of diversity of experiences for ITE students in a CTM/SEAM context, might be role plays. These represent one type of activity where students become more active participants in the learning process (Kilgour, Reynaud, Northcote, & Shields, 2015). It becomes problematic to conduct such exercises and experiences in cyberspace, although not impossible in an IT virtual reality world.

A legitimate question to ask is: In an CTM/SEAM situation, do ITE students have access to

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the quality of necessary resources readily available at universities, such as laboratories, libraries, IT facilities and specialist support (to mention a few)? In many cases, regrettably, the answer is not likely to be in the affirmative. It should also be recognised that the implementation of a faith-based CTM/SEAM model would prevent ITE students from gaining valuable experience in public schools; again, a lack of diversity of experience that may place limitations on their future employment and teaching service.

Practicality and affordability may be other issues. Whereas small faith-based education systems may be able to take advantage of a CTM/SEAM model, larger systems may find it difficult to operate in 'real-world' situations. For instance, the large number of placements involved in suitable schools, and experienced mentors required, quite apart from the financial implications, would make the model impractical. For the model to work effectively in larger systems would require the outlay of large sums of money to train qualified mentors and provide them with appropriate remuneration, at a time of widening demands already made on teachers, that include higher expectations and increasing workloads. Additionally, teacher unions are likely to raise objections on these grounds.

The very nature of the model, unfortunately, raises the suspicion that it represents a return to an apprenticeship or craft perception of teaching. Emphasis appears to be on practice *vis a vis* theory. A valid case may be made for *craft* as a useful metaphor for teaching in terms of a repertoire of practical skills and proficiencies—a special kind of pedagogical know-how developed through experience and reflection. However, *unless practice is informed by sound theory*, the quality of practice may be questionable. Ideally, there is a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice. An academic knowledge base is an absolute necessity for all professions, including teaching and it is even more important as teachers engage in advanced professional studies in their career. Thus, a lingering question remains: Does the model lay the groundwork for further professional development and study programs at, for instance, the post-graduate level?

Also, there is the matter of career expectations. The issue for committed Christians may become that initial teacher education *in and for* specific communities that may be socially, economically, environmentally, geographically, or otherwise disadvantaged, while gainful to those communities, would require a willing 'servant ministry' attitude from participants. Are the latter able to commit to the challenge of, and stay in such a teaching ministry in the longer term? There is the possibility that unrealised expectations of participants or schools,

after considerable 'investments', might become problematic and turn out to be disappointments.

A further weakness should be recognised as arising in a CTM/SEAM setting. There is the likely tendency to prioritise school matters over academic requirements in relation to the formal teaching qualification. In other words, the urgent is given priority over the important; one must not be neglected at the expense of the other.

Having dealt with some strengths and weaknesses, the discussion now turns to opportunities.

Opportunities

The CTM/SEAM approach to ITE may not be suitable for a large non-government education system. However, for (very) small Christian education systems, it may be a means to provide a desirable 'end-product' and thus cater for a 'niche market'. The opportunity exists (not without risks, of course, as pointed out above) to enrol participants in the course to meet identified staffing needs and for school staff to be personally involved in participants' long-term professional and personal development. Mainstream ITE institutions are unlikely to be able to compete in supplying such 'tailor-made' graduates, as suggested by recent research (Ferns, 2018):

Graduates and students [including a group of BEEd primary] in all case studies expressed concern with a lack of preparedness, dearth of information, and an absence of support from the university in sourcing potential employment and preparing for recruitment processes. (p. 218)

Perceived shortcomings in one ITE sector, clearly provide opportunities for another.

According to a recent creditable report, the paradigm of universities' monopoly on access to information, resources, and qualifications is being challenged by rapid advances in technology and mass education (Ewan, 2016). There are thus good prospects that academic components of a CTM/SEAM model can be sourced from a range of single or multiple national and/or international accredited providers on-line. Consequently, the opportunity exists to construct quality curricula that are innovative and agile, address perceived needs, and are within budget limitations without compromising quality. The benefits of flexibility of academic content and sources are evident, but will require careful planning, co-ordination and continuous expert administration, as a business model of this kind would employ very few academic staff and faculty.

Such an approach takes advantage of students often regarding themselves (as do education providers) as consumers in the market-place (Ewan,

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2016). This is consistent with a global environment of open education, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), open educational resources that are in the public domain, and the proliferation of educational providers and global online learning platforms such as Coursera, EdX, Learn2Study, among others, some of whose courses are free.

The dynamics of an educational environment that is in transition may give rise to opportunities that 'are there for the taking'. Having considered opportunities, it is instructive to examine likely threats.

Threats

Operating in a competitive environment implies facing both internal and external pressures. Internal pressures may come in the form of scarcity and/or quality of human and financial resources. On this point, it has been asserted (Ewan, 2016): "Minimum standards of administrative infrastructure that will be required to operate in disaggregated environments where smaller non-university providers do not have the critical mass to provide infrastructure, consortia might need to be encouraged" (p. 59).

Thus partnerships, perhaps with like-minded providers, would avoid the dangers inherent in 'going it alone'. Simultaneously, such collaborative efforts should ensure quality control of ongoing programs. The probable flow-on effects of implementing a remunerative employment-based CTM/SEAM program should also be carefully weighed up. Its implementation may affect the affordability of school fees and levels of student enrolment.

It is the likelihood of external pressures, however, which would pose a more serious and immediate threat. For instance, a serious downturn in the economy is likely to affect a small private ITE provider to a far greater extent than a provider backed by the government, as is evidenced in the wider business world. Also, consumers in the market can 'vote with their feet' for various reasons, including being attracted and persuaded by competitors' 'slick' marketing or historic prestige.

Another barrier, ("threat" may be too severe a term to use) may deserve consideration. One of the responsibilities of the Tertiary Education Quality & Standard Agency (TEQSA), as its name suggests, is to regulate and provide for national consistency and excellence in higher education across Australia. With emerging approaches to higher education increasing, TEQSA may adopt more conservative policies and regulations to forestall innovations that are judged to be 'irregularities' or 'aberrations', but which make a claim for recognition. Furthermore, state jurisdictions such as the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) may exercise additional quality controls. NESA has the regulatory function to

approve ITE programs and oversees the processes of accreditation (2018) of all teachers in the state, ensuring that all graduates meet the Australian Standards for Teachers. (I am indebted to former colleague Dr Peter Beamish for some observations and suggestions in this area.)

It becomes evident that any sudden, unanticipated political changes and priorities that have consequences on the TEQSA and/or NESA level may stretch the resources of small faith-based systems, operating ITE courses in a CTM/SEAM mode, beyond their human or financial limits.

It is helpful, at this point, to coalesce the different facets of the SWOT analysis and provide an overall evaluation of a CTM/SEAM approach to initial teacher education as it might apply, especially to a Christian faith-based education system.

Conclusion and reflection

Observations and assessments fall into several broad categories.

First, 'one size does not fit all'. Uniformity or diversity *per se* do not qualify as preferred options unless the need, context and the capacity to deliver are carefully considered. If these three 'boxes are ticked', a CTM/SEAM approach seems advantageous over a conventional ITE model. In essence, if the process and end product meet the expectations of consumers and stakeholder/s as well as the criteria set by the regulator, the choice of a model that appears atypical does not prevent it from having real merit. The model is not put forward as a panacea; however, if it fits needs, why not use it to advantage.

Second, work and employment-integrated learning is generally experienced as relevant and authentic. The dichotomy of theory at a tertiary institution and practical experience at a school is averted. Through experiencing the regular, everyday life of a teacher, CTM/SEAM ITE students can decide early (not after several years of study) whether they are 'cut out' for this exciting, and challenging profession.

Third, the model under consideration presents distinct advantages for 'special character' schools. The development of certain values, attitudes, dispositions, and a faith-based worldview do not fall within the orbit of a secular university; whose assignment is to prepare ITE students for a profession rather than for a teaching ministry. The traits, virtues, characteristics and categories mentioned are best developed 'in-house', which the model has the potential to deliver.

Fourth, having endeavoured to see *possibilities* in the most positive light that the model presents, one must also be realistic. The model is analogous to providing a custom-built product (not unlike home schooling) that is competing with a well-

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known established brand that, although by no means perfect, has stood the test of time, with a continuously reliable supply line. The ‘elephant in the room’ becomes feasibility—practicality, affordability, and availability of qualified human resources. The changes required to implement a large-scale CTM/SEAM approach would be considerable, with no guarantee of cost-effectiveness. With there being no strong high-profile advocates of the approach, lack of a shared vision, and the continued existence of prior and competing models, change theory would not rate the future of the atypical model as bright.

Fifth, one should also look at the bigger picture. We are witnessing a continuous and rapidly changing global learning landscape. This impacts students and teachers alike; indeed, in teaching/learning interactions, there are often role reversals! Future classrooms—“learning spaces” might be a more accurate term—will call for teachers who are continuously developing knowledge, skills and competencies so that they can teach effectively and facilitate learning in a technologically advancing, ‘post-truth’ world. Never-the-less, teachers will still be called to exhibit time-honoured attributes and qualities that make us authentically human. The corollary is that as the processes of educating new generations of students change, so will the role of the profession and how to prepare for it. However, despite (or because of?) these challenges, in uncertain times, decision-makers in faith-based systems tend to be conservative and stay with the known rather experimenting with an atypical model.

Finally, after a SWOT analysis should we bestow the attributes of “good” and/or “different” on the concept of a CTM/SEAM approach to ITE? We may also be ‘tempted’ to speculate about its use-by-date. There is no question that the approach *is* “different”. It stands in contrast to the current mainstream model of ITE that caters for an enrolment of approximately 30,000 students in Australia (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018). Emphasis on a school-embedded, employment integrated, non-university based pathway with a different pedagogical approach constitutes a *significant* difference. However, whether it qualifies as “good” is questionable. There are too many misgivings: limited scope and diversity; perceived reversion to a trades training approach; doubtful affordability and cost effectiveness; and the threat of shifting regulatory barriers and changing political goal posts (a danger for small systems rather than larger ones). All of these tend to negate, counter or cancel CTM/SEAM’s ‘promises’ and positives.

Ultimately, whatever one’s viewpoint, in a constantly changing world it is likely that the approach may simply be one of the many markers

in the historical evolution of initial teacher education. Whether it is merely a minor one—a deviation—time will no doubt tell. **TEACH**

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