Passing the Baton: 
Strategic Succession Planning in ACT Public Education, 2003-2012
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Introduction
This paper examines the issue of generational change in the teaching workforce of the Act Department of Education, Youth and Family Services (DEYFS), in the context of one of the strategic imperatives of its Strategic Plan 2003-2005: “Developing Our People.” Availability of staff is a critical issue at several levels:
- School leaders
- Classroom teachers
- Relief staff

Although the matter received prominent attention in the ACT in 2002, the Australian Secondary Principals’ Association already had data in 1999 collected over the five preceding years indicating decrease in number and quality of recruits. Moreover, the recent Commonwealth report on teacher demand and supply shows that the median age of teachers is 45 nationally. This is significantly higher than for other professions (Chart 2.1, page 16.) Retirements will occur in large numbers in the next ten years (not just the next five, as mentioned in some commentaries), placing teacher recruitment under greater pressure even if previous intake levels were maintained. The concern is not confined to the government school sector. The IEU (Independent Education Union) strategy paper in 2002 referred to “a crisis of confidence in the teaching profession.”

The Challenges: Overview of Available Data

According to the government-commissioned Retirement Intentions Survey for the ACT Public Service, DEYFS may lose 50% of its staff aged over 45 in the next five years. Most will be school-based. Probably rarely in Australian history has an organisation had to replace half its mature workforce in 5 years and many more in the next 5 years. A team comprising Lance Chapman, Kate Sutherland and Frank Keighley has held meetings with the (at that time, in March 2003) Directors, Schools Operations, Narelle Hargreaves and Craig Curry, with the Director, Human Resources (Anne Thomas) the Manager, Organisation and People Development (Christine Lucas), and with the Secretary of the AEU (ACT Branch), Clive Haggar, to canvass the issues and consider how the teaching service should respond to the workforce projections. Existing information is contained in the ACT Government’s Moving Forward document on succession management, although this is now somewhat dated (from 2001, under the former Liberal government), and in brief form in recent documents such as the Strategic Plan 2003-2005, referred to in the introduction above.

Since the time of those interviews, significant new publications have been released, in particular the MCEETYA report on Demand and Supply of Primary and Secondary School

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1 DEYFS (2003)  
2 Burgess (2002)  
3 ASPA (1999)  
4 IEU (2002B)  
5 Piazza (2002)  
6 ACT Government (2001)  
7 DEYFS (2003)
Teachers in Australia and the interim report of the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education. Some data is currently not yet available, such as the report of the MCEETYA Taskforce on Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership. Apparently, there are draft papers from this taskforce but they are unavailable for release at the time of writing.

Goal and Objectives

The general goal for the change process would be to act in strategic succession planning so that the government school system continues to provide high quality education services for our community and improves its capacity to meet the goals of the ACT Government Schools Plan and Strategic Plan. The sub-components of this goal would be to identify ways for the system to:

- Reduce number of teachers who retire in the next five years
- Replace those who retire – very difficult in Maths, Science & some others
- Replace key retiring school staff who make crucial contributions in school-level educational leadership and classroom teaching, including principals, deputies, executive teachers, librarians, learning assistance teachers, Maths and Science teachers, and IT specialists (especially in programming, for secondary colleges where students in Years 11-12 are enrolled in the ACT), and ensure that their replacements have appropriate expertise
- Design effective induction, enculturation and training of new recruits
- Preserve the energy and enthusiasm of those leaders and experienced staff who remain in our schools and who have responsibility for inducting and supporting large numbers of newcomers
- Train and support new leaders, who will be relatively inexperienced
- Manage, preserve and develop knowledge (including wisdom, not just information)

Contextual Analysis

Generational change is occurring. Due to the rapid expansion of the ACT in the 1970s, a large number of teachers were recruited in this period. “Veterans” (born before 1945) and “baby boomer” (broadly defined, those born after World War 2) generation are about to retire. Large numbers of experienced outgoing teachers are being replaced by inexperienced incoming teachers - the “brain drain” referred to in The Canberra Times front page headline of 27 September 2002. The ACT system did not recruit as many people born in the 1960s and after (see chart below). As a result, there are fewer in the system in the middle range of experience than we had in the past. The new generations in the workforce (part of “Generation X”, born in 1960s and 1970s and part of “Generation Y”, born in 1980s) will present both challenges and opportunities to the leaders and managers of our system.

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8 MCEETYA (August 2003)
9 DCITA (2003)
At the time of the retirement intentions survey, 53% of ACT teachers aged 45 or more intended to retire within the next five years.\(^1\) The age distribution among those aged 45 and over in the current DEYFS workforce was 30% aged 45-49, 44% aged 50-54, 19% aged 55-59 and 6% aged 60-64.\(^2\) The report provides no age distribution figures for those aged under 45. However, the Connors report provides an overall age profile. The chart on the right is based on this data.\(^3\) The median age of teachers in the ACT is about 53 – higher than the national figure mentioned in the introduction to this paper.

How are the new generations different from the baby boomer generation in their skills, attitudes and values? There will be pluses and minuses, and exceptions – despite statistical trends, one should not stereotype. See Zemke et al.

We must ask not only who is going out and who is coming in, but also

- What is the system like that they are entering?
- What are the current and likely future needs of the society they are serving?
- What are the values, strengths, emerging agendas and future challenges that will be faced (over and above the HRD situation) by the ACT Dept of Education?

The time frame under consideration is ten years (2003-2012).

Other factors that can be expected to impact on the situation will include:

- The declining population of school age children, which might alleviate the coming shortage but will also reduce federal funding for government schools in the context of new funding formula
- A trend among parents who can afford it, particularly in outlying suburbs, to choose private school education – reduces the public education lobby
- Fewer voters with children, so education may get a lower priority in the ACT budget, as contrasted to health services for baby-boomers\(^4\) – the challenge is to convince voters that a well-educated workforce benefits all
- Impending large-scale retirements in the rest of the ACT public service, which compounds the problem, as other departments will be actively recruiting university graduates

\(^{11}\) Piazza (2002:44)  
\(^{12}\) Piazza (2002:52)  
\(^{13}\) Based on Connors (2003:66)  
\(^{14}\) CT 10 Feb 2003, p.3, quoting a study by the Australian Council for Social Services
Two evident issues

Strategic succession planning raises the issue of organizational change - how does the organisation need to continue to change and develop? The teaching service needs to be a fully committed learning organisation and to be informed by literature in areas such as systems thinking. One of the implications, to which DEYFS is currently giving consideration, is the optimal structure and composition of the future workforce. For this reason, departmental officials are using the term “succession management” as distinct from “succession planning” to refer to a broader review that does not necessarily seek to replace like with like in the transition from the outgoing generation to the next group of leaders. In this paper, the term “strategic succession planning” has been used to encompass the idea that we recognize that the context and needs of the organisation are dynamic.

Beyond the question of recruiting or identifying successors to the current generation of leaders is the matter of induction and professional development. In the AHSY Report, Lance Chapman recommended that the Department should identify a group of exemplary practitioners, leaders in their fields such as principals, deputies, classroom teachers, registrars, with particular areas of outstanding expertise as listed in Section 8 under “Some elements of existing corporate knowledge in education”, and put these people through a custom-designed semester course at UC in principles and practices of adult learning, so they can effectively pass on their ideas and expertise to others throughout the system.

Key Educational Needs of the ACT Community

Two key documents to take into account are the Government Schools Plan 2002-2004 and the Strategic Plan 2003-2005. Other available information includes ACTAP (ACT Assessment Program) for literacy and numeracy data, and data from the School Development process, which is now undertaken on a three-year cycle (formerly five years). Some needs that could be identified as priorities, and could have implications for strategic succession planning, include:

1. Challenge and assist students to achieve excellence in all the multiple intelligences
2. Engage all boys more fully in their learning
3. Prepare young people for a workforce needing more and more IT understanding and expertise
4. Broaden and develop literacies, including visual, critical & information literacy
5. High quality work experience & vocational education from Year 9 at latest
6. Prepare for active, effective local, national & international citizenship
7. Wide-ranging numeracy applications
8. Enterprise education
9. Address the ADHD and Autism epidemics
10. Obtain better and more equal outcomes with indigenous students
11. Counteract racism eg post-Tampa and post-Bali “otherizing” of Muslims

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15 Eg Senge (1992)
16 Phone interview with Christine Lucas, 28 March 2003.
17 Chapman (1998)
18 Taking account of literature on adult learning or andragogy, such as Knowles (1998).
19 Including some goals in ACT DEYFS Education Plan 2002-2004
12. Address the needs of marginalized, at-risk children and adolescents for high-level educational outcomes

13. Effective drug and sex education

14. Preparation for possible enforced leisure: un- and/or underemployment

15. Greater involvement of, and improved reporting to, parents

What is corporate knowledge?

Corporate or institutional knowledge is information that resides in an organization because of who is there. It is part of the picture in developing a strategic succession plan. Some of the themes, issues and questions that could form part of this picture are:

- What has succeeded and why, what has been tried and failed, and why it failed at that time
- Why we do the things we do – rationale & experiential bases for our practices
- How policies and practices evolved – eg inputs to curriculum development
- Avoiding re-inventing the wheel
- Pragmatism & rational caution – avoid ideological extremes & bandwagons
- Alertness for unintended and undesired outcomes of innovation
- Recurrent patterns and predictable outcomes (déjà vu for some veterans!)
- The big picture – how it all fits together – systems thinking
- Ability to locate and retrieve corporate knowledge
- Establish networks that enhance work effectiveness for members
- Oral history and mythology of the organisation, eg heroes and icons

Some elements of existing corporate knowledge in education

On the Department’s website, in the A to Z Directory, there is a link called “Induction (Staff) - Checklist” and another called “Induction (Staff) – what every employee needs to know”. What these documents appear to lack is a priority treatment of what might be considered critical areas for professional development relating to the core business of schools. Apart from the need to update the lists by adding the new strategic plan, which is not listed at the time of writing in April, one could expect links to some of the areas listed below. The online environment has become an essential resource for placing information at the disposal of the workforce in schools, including school leaders, and one way of doing this effectively is to ensure that the vital and mission-critical information is easily accessible through a variety of portals. The “induction” links would be one of these. What an organisation communicates about can be taken as one register of its priorities. If the location of the photocopier and the procedure for completing a leave form is included, and the key competencies and curriculum frameworks are omitted, then possibly the induction framework should be reviewed.
Curriculum design

Frameworks, Profiles, Across Curriculum Perspectives

Key Competencies

Teaching, learning, assessment and reporting

- Authentic learning, authentic assessment, rich tasks
- Bloom’s Taxonomy and other resources on fostering higher-order thinking
- Cognitive development, eg Piaget
- Challenging and supporting gifted and talented students
- Community-based learning
- Cooperative learning
- Criterion referenced assessment
- De Bono’s Six Thinking Hats
- Developing enterprise
- Developing Numeracy across the curriculum
- Diagnosing and catering for preferred learning styles
- Effective values education including drug education
- Exhibitions, Productive Pedagogies, Authentic Assessment including “round tables”
- Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences
- Information literacy
- Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)
- Productive pedagogies
- Remedial reading and scaffolding literacy
- Special education

Student welfare and management

- Glasser system and alternatives
- Protective behaviours
- Mediation and conflict resolution
- ADD/ADHD student support
- Professional assault response training (PART)
- School counseling

Principles and practices of effective adult learning

Application of information technology

ICT competencies

Networked information management
Critical use of Internet and avoidance of plagiarism
Recruitment and deployment of staff
Induction of beginning and returning teachers
Financial and assets management
Accrual accounting
Looking on the Bright Side!
Applying a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis for strategic planning, the impending retirements can be seen to present both opportunities and threats. The main threat is the loss of corporate knowledge and skills (see 6 above - “What is corporate knowledge?”).
The opportunities are also important.

- Some of those retiring will, to various degrees, fit one or more of the following descriptors: tired, even burnt out; cynical and disillusioned; bored and frustrated by lack of career mobility; in a rut and blockers of change; technophobic; alienated from teenagers and children. These should be encouraged to go!
- Skilled recruitment, including incentives, could bring in teachers with new energy, optimism and enthusiasm; up-to-date skills; an affinity with students; willingness to learn and adapt.

Some ways to preserve and extend corporate knowledge/skills
An essential component in strategic succession planning is the repertoire of mechanisms for preserving and extending corporate knowledge and skills. Some of the possible ways are listed below. As has been mentioned, one of the most accessible and cost-effective methods is to make information available online, and of course to tailor it for intended audiences (most executive teachers will be less interested in SBM – school-based management - than registrars). However, it needs to target important matters, and to be readily accessed through a variety of channels. We have all had the experience of searching the index of a book for an item that is not listed, and then discovering that it was the subject of an entire chapter. The same problem can and does occur in online environments. However, other mechanisms are also available, and many of these are existing provisions that can be put to good effect as part of strategic succession planning.

Developing People

- Professional Pathways
- School Review and Development
- Consultants – current and former employees
- Intensive induction programs
- Enhanced leadership training for prospective and actual new leaders, eg through ACT Centre for Teaching and Learning Technologies (CTLT), based on the ACT Capability Frameworks\(^\text{20}\)
- Mentoring and coaching of prospective leaders
- Encouraging networking across generations

\(^{20}\) See Principal Selection Project, Progress Report Number 3, August 2003 – package is nearing completion.
• Purpose-designed courses at University of Canberra
• Shadowing of people about to retire
• Expanded and targeted Teacher Fellowships

Managing Knowledge
• Audios
• CD-ROMs
• Print publications
• Videos
• Handover time and protocols – to aid outgoing leaders to orient incoming ones
• Online resources, like ActivatEd in the ACT, and the national EdNA website
• Professional libraries for teachers and pre-service teachers, like the CTLT Library and the UC’s CRC in the ACT
• Resource lists – recommended reading, Internet resources etc
• Augmented website – online links to essential information (see section above) and to examples of best practice in ACT and other states
• Face to face interaction

Conclusion
ACT DEYFS, like other government school systems in Australia but arguably even more so, given the age distribution of its workforce, faces a major challenge in preserving and enhancing educational excellence in our system in the face of large-scale impending retirements. This paper has outlined some of the strategies that could assist. The size of the challenge is a matter for debate, because forecasts about impending retirements and recruiting opportunities cannot be made with any certainty. Retirement decisions will be affected by a range of considerations including financial advice and lifestyle. Similarly, there is debate about the role of salary in determining recruiting levels. At this stage, staffing officers advise that known vacancies can be filled based on applications received. What is not known is the percentage of offers that will be accepted. A margin has been allowed for recruits who do not accept offers. However, there are unknown factors such as the outcome of industrial action in NSW that could affect salary relativities. The DCITA report refers to the desirability of teaching as a function of public perceptions and the need to promote a career in education as being intrinsically worthwhile. This view is also reflected in the NSW “Teach – and make a difference” campaign. In the long term, however, relativities within the sector are probably less crucial than relativities in relation to other professions. This is something that requires political will, which depends in turn on public opinion and the importance that the community accords the education of its young people. Ultimately, succession planning is a community issue, that requires a shared view about what is valued by society.
References

Australian Sources


Mackay, Hugh. Reinventing Australia. The mind and mood of Australia in the 90s. Angus & Robertson, 1993.


Overseas Sources


