A Note from the Series Editor

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The main focus of previous volumes was on the reflective action research projects conducted by Emirati students in their final year of the HCT B.Ed degree. Written by the trainee teachers themselves, these papers offer unique, perceptive and authentic insights into language learning in UAE government school classrooms and we will return to a similar format in the next volume, scheduled for June 2011. However, as a means of recognizing the 10th anniversary of the HCT Bachelor of Education program, this current work instead features reflections, perspectives and insights of the faculty involved in teaching and mentoring students in the HCT B.Ed over the past ten years.

Education Faculty have always had an integral role in the HCT program as it has evolved, playing an important part in the development, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum, through the extensive mentoring relationships with our students as they learn to be practicing classroom teachers, and by fostering and maintaining strong ties with schools and educators in every emirate. By linking a critical understanding of the local context to international best practice in teacher education, they have helped build the HCT program into the most extensive and innovative teacher education program in the United Arab Emirates.

In the voices of the faculty involved, this book, which has been several years in the making, seeks to describe, analyze and reflect on the genesis, implementation and implications of the HCT’s Bachelor of Education program on UAE education. As Nick Reynolds, co-editor of this volume, writes in the introduction, this work serves testament to their dedication and capacity of the faculty involved in this transformational program.

*Previous books in the HCT Teacher Education series:


I would like to thank my colleague Debbie Wheeler for coming up with the title of the current volume.
Foreword

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2010 marks ten years since the commencement of the Higher Colleges of Technology’s (HCT) Education programs and hence provides an appropriate vantage point from which to review and celebrate the achievements of the past decade and recount the beginnings of what has been a remarkable phenomenon.

The original HCT Bachelor of Education program, which enrolled its first students in the year 2000, was the fruit of a somewhat serendipitous meeting at an international educational development conference in 1998. At that event, then-HCT Directors Graddon Rowlands and Phil Anderson got into conversation with some senior members of the international development office of the University of Melbourne, Australia, and broached the possibility of inter-institutional cooperation on a new Education degree to prepare UAE female school graduates to become teachers of English in UAE schools as part of the Emiratization drive.

As a result of those discussions, my wife Liz Maxwell and I found ourselves on a flight to Abu Dhabi in August 1999, to embark on what proved to be the professional opportunity of a lifetime as the University of Melbourne’s consultant to the HCT on the development of its new degree.

On arrival at the HCT’s Academic Services in Abu Dhabi, the scope of the challenge ahead quickly became apparent. There was no curriculum in place, not even a draft one, nor any Education faculty members to teach it, had there been one. The strategy that recommended itself in order to address these interrelated challenges was to recruit a team of educators with backgrounds in school teaching from among the HCT’s existing English teaching faculty and have them undertake a postgraduate qualification in teaching English to young learners, for which the assessment task was to develop the course outlines and teaching material for the first year of the degree. Another key challenge in that first year of program development was establishing a working relationship with the UAE Ministry of Education and the Education Zones; this was critical to enabling our pre-service teachers to undertake their 30+ weeks of practicum in UAE government schools.

From those early days, the program and what became the HCT Education Division developed rapidly, with the modest number of 75 students who enrolled as part of the initial cohort in 2000, most of whom successfully graduated four years later, increasing to over 650 successful graduates in 2009. These highly sought graduates are regarded as a byword for commitment to quality, drivers of innovation, and openness to change. Meanwhile, new degree programs in educational technology, ICT education, career guidance and career counselling, and early childhood education, as well as diploma program to prepare classroom assistants, have extended the reach of HCT’s Education programs.

The relationship with the University of Melbourne has also remained strong, with biannual certification of the HCT’s Education degrees as equivalent in standard to Australian Education degrees, study tours to Melbourne as an optional component of the third year practicum, and
HCT graduates going on to complete post graduate studies at the University before taking up faculty positions at the HCT. Building on the firm foundation of this relationship, the HCT Education programs are poised to become the first outside the US to be accredited by the North American Teacher Education Accreditation Council, thus providing further evidence of its alignment with international best practice.

In conclusion, it is worth reflecting on the sources of the enduring strength of the HCT’s Education programs. Three key ingredients come to mind. These include the tremendous commitment to educational excellence on the part of the students studying in the program, reflected in their aspirations for schools and classrooms of the highest international quality that will provide the best possible education for future generations. A second ingredient lies in the talent and dedication of the staff, a factor that has been repeatedly remarked upon by the University of Melbourne in its biannual certification reports. Linking these two factors is the commitment of the Education Division to international best practice in teacher education. This is reflected in programs that combine theoretical depth and rigorous reflection with extensive practical experience in the field; it is reflected in programs that refuse to be seduced by notions of teaching as simply a matter of following recipes or implementing particular techniques in the classroom; and it is reflected in programs that recognize the uncertain and the tentative nature of knowledge that coexist alongside the expansive possibilities of learning. As educator, writer, and theorist, Deborah Britzman (2009, p. 40) puts it:

Learning disrupts the old ideas and, if all goes well, allows for new ideas to be enjoyed. Learning is also an emotional acceptance of our ignorance because we do not really know what will happen with this new knowledge, nor will we be able to prepare for the destruction of the old knowledge. Here is where progress is unconsciously equated with loss. Learning means understanding that knowledge does not exhaust what is unknowable and that we act from not understanding. We may then become receptive to what has not been thought or understood without evacuating the uncertainty. Only then can responsibility emerge. Reality becomes larger, not smaller.

I know that as HCT’s pre-service teachers and teacher educators continue their shared journey in the new world of pedagogy and practice in the UAE, they will not be intimidated by temporary states of ‘not knowing’ and will see ‘uncertainty’ as the necessary generative step required if genuine knowledge and new possibilities are to be created.

Dr Matthew Clarke,
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Reference