

Guest Author

In every edition of RSTE we publish a contribution from a guest writer who has links with the Cass School of Education. Professor Meg Maguire from King's College London has been a guest speaker at one of the seminars run by the Secondary Research Group at the Cass School of Education. Her research is in the sociology of education, urban education and policy. She has a long-standing interest in the lives of teachers and has explored issues of class, race, gender and age in teachers' social and professional worlds. Meg has conducted Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded research into the experiences of minority ethnic trainee teachers, post-compulsory transitions and multi-agency policy in challenging school exclusion in urban primary schools. In this article she offers some thoughts on the Schools White Paper (DfE 2010) and its potential impact on teacher education.

Where next for English teacher education?

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Old tensions, new tensions

'The teacher is the key actor in the process of educational transformation'
(Tedesco 1997: 23).

In this short piece, what I want to do is raise some questions and engage in some musings based on a consideration of the current proposals for reforming teacher education as outlined in the Schools White Paper (DfE 2010) entitled *'The importance of teaching'*. In what follows, I want

to briefly review the main proposals of the White Paper. I then want to suggest that much of what is being proposed is an amalgam of long-standing policies and strategies for reform of teacher education that have been reworked and tweaked to fit with current discourses of markets, efficiency and globalising necessities. Despite all the rhetoric and policy activity around new proposals for teacher education, one of the most surprising things about all this current 'policy noise' is the way in which many previous policies for reforming the sector are being resuscitated in the new White Paper. What might be some of the intended and unintended outcomes of some of the proposed changes to teacher education in England?

The White Paper (2010)

The White Paper is a complex and extensive policy document and includes a wide-ranging set of suggestions for reforming the work of schools and teachers. The promise of additional autonomy for schools and teachers is a welcome move, although it remains to be seen what this will mean in practice. However, in terms of the professional education and training of teachers, the paper is far more prescriptive – autonomy is certainly not on the agenda in this setting.

We want to continue to improve the quality of teachers and teaching, and to raise the profession's status. Part of the solution will be to recruit more of the most talented people to the profession. (DfE 2010: 20)

Briefly, the recommendations focus on the alleged need to improve teacher quality through 'attracting and training even better teachers' (Michael Gove, foreword to DfE 2010: 7). This will be managed by not funding recruits with less than a 2.2 degree from next September, the assumption being that

a 'better' class of degree leads to better teaching. There will be more rigorous 'basic skills' testing, even though it might be expected that these 'better'-qualified recruits already have command of these skills. There may also be more incentives for graduates in shortage subjects, to encourage their recruitment into teaching. There will be more diverse routes into school teaching.

Perhaps the most 'disturbing' suggestion for those of us who work in Initial Teacher Training (ITT), or who work in universities where this work is central to the mission of the department, is the call for more training to take place 'on the job' in schools – despite the fact that in the current secondary postgraduate route into teaching in England, 24 of the 36 weeks of the programme are already based in a variety of schools. Somewhat contradictorily, the White Paper contains plans to expand the School-Based Routes (SCITT), even though Ofsted (2009/10) has found that the university-based courses are generally of a better quality than those offered in schools. The White Paper also envisages a set of training schools, on the model of teaching hospitals, where schools will lead on pre-service and in-service professional development. One more set of initiatives is also in play in relation to ITT: that the 'Teach First' scheme be extended; that a new fast-track route, 'Teach Next', will recruit from professionals in other careers who want to move into teaching; and that the proposed 'Troops to Teachers' programme will provide funding to support graduates leaving the armed forces to move into teaching. At this stage, the numbers being proposed for these new routes are small; however, the impact of these proposals for additional routes lies in the discursive 'work' that they do as well as the way in which they potentially 'disturb' current patterns of pre-service teacher education and training.

Why is teacher education so susceptible to reform?

While there are many questions that can be raised about the substantive proposals in the White Paper, and there are some proposals that will be well received by schools, what I want to do is consider two issues related to reforming teacher education more generally. These are, first, that

teacher education has always been regarded by various Governments as a 'suitable case for reform' and, second, that allegations of 'necessity', low standards and economic expediency have consistently driven policy attention in the sector. The outcome is that, since its inception, teacher education has been continually worked on by policy-makers; it has been constantly reformed, and elaborated or cut back in different historical periods (Furlong et al. 2000).

For example, when Hencke (1978: 15) was investigating reforms to teacher education in an earlier period of cuts and closures to the training colleges, he claimed that many of the problems confronting this provision lay in its 'unwholesome beginnings'. He argued that as teacher training started in Southwark, 'a slum district of London', rather than in Oxbridge, right from the start it was denied status, resources and talent in England. At this time, teachers were only trained to teach in the state-provided elementary schools that predominantly served the working class. The job of teaching, for it was not a profession, was a non-graduate, intermediate occupation. Since its inauspicious start, teacher education has been characterised by an almost continual set of conflicts between the central and local state over who should control and manage this provision, as well as by demands for reform from the increasingly professionalised and unionised teaching force. Many of these struggles and contestations have centred on the academic profile of the teacher and the moves to an all-graduate profession; the curriculum of teacher education and its relationship to school experience; and the need to manage teacher supply, recruitment and retention (Menter 2008). In addition, in the English setting, becoming a teacher has always been surrounded by concerns about expediency and quality – and, not surprisingly, the state has always maintained its control of this key provision.

The reform of teachers and teacher education has always been driven by more than pedagogical concerns about raising quality and helping children to learn, important though these are. While there have been persistent and long-standing concerns with supply and demand, social control and the need to respond to the 'needs' of the labour market,

more recently there have been complex sets of pressures in relation to claims about market forces and international competition. In an internationally competitive marketplace, education plays a critical role in helping each nation to create and maintain a competitive edge – or so the argument goes. Thus, in response to aspects of the globalisation discourse, attempts have been made to tailor educational provision to the ‘needs’ of capital in many international settings. Many nations, aware of international comparisons such as TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), have been spurred on to reform their educational provision and raise their measurable levels of attainment. What has emerged is a new set of public policy demands for efficiency, accountability, effectiveness and flexibility – what Ball (2008: 41) has described as a ‘generic global policy ensemble’ – aimed at reforming public sector education provision. As Ball (2008: 53) asserts, ‘Education policy is increasingly subordinated to and articulated in terms of economic policy and the necessities of international competition’. The outcomes can be seen in current international preoccupations with raising standards and measured attainment, making state education more accountable in relation to internationally derived targets, and ensuring that curriculum, pedagogy and the teaching force are managed in order to ‘deliver’ these demands.

The White Paper (DfE 2010: 3) starts off with a letter from David Cameron and Nick Clegg, leaders of the UK Coalition government. The letter starts by rehearsing the 2006 PISA data and states that:

what really matters is how we’re doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country’s future. The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past.

Contemporary teacher education reform, and concomitantly the construction of a ‘new’ teacher for the ‘new world order’, is predicated on a range of suppositions: that schools have failed in the past, due in some part to inefficient and incompetent teachers, and that policy-makers and governments are best placed to determine what

makes an ‘effective’ teacher and a ‘good’ school (Fischman 2000). One way of ensuring teacher quality is to reform teaching at source by regulating and controlling pre-service teacher education. Many nations including the US, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and countries in Europe and in the Asia Pacific region, now seek to manage recruitment and pre-service training through the generation of lists of competencies that have to be met before the teacher can be licensed to practise in schools (Fitzsimons & Fenwick 1997). And many of these competencies include prescriptions about what constitutes ‘best practice’ that intending teachers are expected to adopt and perform in the practicum element of their course. The emphasis in these restructured courses is arguably on ‘teacher-proofing’ classroom practice. Thus, the stress, more and more, is on successful in-school experience, technical skills such as teaching literacy through centrally prescribed methods, behaviour management, familiarity with testing regimes etc. Other matters, such as commitment, values and judgement, are frequently sidelined, made optional or simply omitted; teacher education is constructed as a skill, and any political complexity is bleached out of the agenda (Cochrane-Smith 2004).

Put simply, the teacher is reconstructed as a state technician, trained to deliver a national curriculum, in the nation’s schools. Alongside this competency-based model of the technical skills-based teacher is a market model of the ‘flexibilisation’ of teaching work, a move towards individual contracts and pay negotiations including the use of non-qualified teachers and teaching assistants – where the teacher is positioned as part of the contracted labour force rather than as a professional partner in the process of education. All these aspects (and more critical and reflexive aspects too) are currently part of the PGCE programme in England. However, with a new government, it is time yet again for more reform of teacher education in England.

Borrowing from the past – not much is new

From my own experience of working in teacher education and higher education, what seems to be happening in the current English attempts at reforming teacher education, as laid out in the White Paper, looks to be derived from earlier policy attempts to reform teachers, their work and their

professional development (Hill 1991; Bales 2006). For example, over time, there have been a series of attempts to produce new courses that stress the 'doing' of teaching rather than 'thinking' about it. As Troyna & Sikes (1989) so presciently wrote of earlier plans to reform teachers in the late 1980s: Training students to be mere functionaries in our schools rather than educating them to assume a more creative and, dare we say it, critical role is precisely the name of the game at the moment. But should we abandon pre-service education courses entirely and hand the reins over entirely to practising teachers? We think not.

There have also been various schemes, driven in part by a shortage of recruits to teaching as well as by difficulties in retention, to enlist the services of different constituencies, such as John Patten's Mums' Army, which transmuted into Teaching Assistants (*The Independent* 1993). And even further back, at the end of the Second World War, many ex-servicemen/women were successfully drafted into becoming 'emergency trained' teachers because of staff shortages (Hansard 1949). It is evident that the construction of the teacher has always been context-dependent: the teacher is constructed out of local histories, cultures and politics. The teacher is also constructed out of economics and expediency.

Outcomes

So what could be some of the outcomes of the current attempts to reform teacher education in England? In some ways, while the economy is in difficulties and while we inhabit a period of 'austerity', secure jobs in education, with relatively good salaries and pensions, become more desirable. In times like this, dissent may be less easy to mobilise round some of these reforms and recruitment will hold up. Schools may well have to become more involved in teacher education in order to shore up their declining budgets. The transfer of funds from training institutions into schools may erode the expertise of higher education in this setting. Libraries may close, staff may lose their jobs, the accumulated knowledge of education and pedagogical studies may become eroded – at least to some extent – in the English setting.

In place of teaching as an academic and practical area of study, further moves towards reconstructing the teacher as a practical worker are being inserted through the new proposed routes into teacher training. If an emphasis continues to stress the role of the teacher as a semi-professional state technician, then it may be the case that some of those recruited to this task will leave as soon as more creative and less burdensome opportunities present themselves (Bartlett 2004). The cost of being made up as a new global teacher, and being performance-managed through more and more prescribed targets and measures of accountability may result in high levels of teacher turnover as well as the 'existential redundancy' (Rutherford 2008: 16) of the professional, ethical and decision-making teacher. Time will tell.

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