
Who will defend teacher education? - Lee Davies

Parity of esteem was one of the principal concerns for the five thousand members participating in the research. That means parity of teaching status between the highly skilled and experienced Further Education teachers and trainers who provide high quality vocational and practical education, and their counterparts delivering 'academic' learning, most commonly in schools but also in Higher Education.

IfL members call on the Wolf Review to make the case for Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills status (QTLS), the professional status conferred by IfL on qualified teachers and trainers in Further Education, to be accorded parity with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Only by allowing IfL members to work alongside their school teaching colleagues as peers will Government and the education system recognise and get the most from the distinct expertise of teachers and trainers of vocational and practical subjects. As an IfL member told me:

'FE teachers come in to teaching with industry recognised qualifications and experience, they then train as teachers. Why then are they not afforded the same status as school teachers, who can come to work in FE but if my expertise is needed in school I am not recognised as the qualified teacher I am – in my opinion more highly or appropriately qualified than the school teachers I work alongside.'

We will only truly match the aspirations of Hayes and Gove, and value the vocational, practical and craftsperson, when an FE qualified teacher can walk out of wherever vocational learning takes place and teach in a school or academy recognised as the qualified teacher she or he is.

IfL wants to see a framework that leads to a more comprehensive and mutually recognised 'professional teacher status'. This would offer flexibility and transferability. It would ensure we retain the distinctive features of our Further Education and skills sector and the importance of vocational routes into the teaching profession in our sector. Is teacher education important? I believe it is.

In IfL's initial response to the Wolf Review, we make the case that Further Education attracts the best vocational experts into teaching and training roles. These experts undertake ITT in-service 'on-the-job'. They gain essential teaching skills and a teaching qualification accredited by a Higher Education institution or national awarding body. Once qualified, teachers and trainers are supported by IfL through the process of professional formation. This enables conferring QTLS status by demonstrating how effectively they use the skills and knowledge acquired through ITT in their professional practice.

For IfL members, becoming a professional teacher or trainer is an essential second area of vocational expertise. It goes beyond their first career in industry. I believe that the nation needs the highest quality vocational education and training. This shouldn't be provided by those with vocational skills and knowledge 'having a go' at teaching or training, probably based on copying how they were taught decades earlier. It should be provided by highly skilled teachers and trainers, people able to ensure high quality vocational learning for young people and adults of all abilities.

In early 2007, I spoke at an education conference. We were coming to terms with the realities of equipping our teachers for the future agenda. I sat on a panel with a number of FE dignitaries. The first question from the floor was the hardy perennial: what makes a brilliant teacher? A brilliant teacher, it was argued, is firstly a subject expert. The respondent went on to explain that some of his most inspirational teachers were not teacher trained. Indeed, his best teachers draw heavily on their vocational or academic excellence, more so than their skills in teaching and supporting learning.

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I couldn't have disagreed more. In making my point, I told a story. I am a plumber. As a young indentured apprentice, I was captivated by my master's skills at working sheet lead. Ron, with 40 years experience, could make the metal talk as he worked and formed it. He was a truly excellent lead-worker. In nearly 30 years, I've met only a few plumbers close to matching his skill.

In the months before I started the block-release college part of my training, I learned little from Ron. It wasn't for want of us trying. I wanted to learn and Ron clearly wanted to teach me. But we were increasingly frustrated at my inability to pick up and master the skills he ably demonstrated in the workshop. He was gifted and his talent inspirational. What, therefore, was wrong with me?

I discovered the answer early on in college. There was nothing wrong with me. At college, I had the benefit of being taught by a highly skilled plumber. Not someone specialising in a single aspect of plumbing as Ron did, but an expert in all areas of the plumbing craft who, more importantly, knew how to break down complex tasks into elements that could be easily mastered. He was a qualified teacher. It didn't matter that he hadn't worked on significant restoration projects or saw lead as an extension of himself. He knew what I needed to learn and could develop those basic skills in me.

I remember returning to the workshop after a period of block release at college for Ron to show me a particularly difficult piece of positional welding and for me to copy it reasonably faithfully. 'Bloody hell lad [I paraphrase] someone has knocked some sense into you!' Not so. An expert plumber who knew about teaching and learning had taken the time to work from first principles and ensure I had grasped the fundamental skills of lead-work. Vocational pedagogy, I think we call it. Equipped with these skills, I could watch and learn from those more highly practiced in this area and use my basic understanding to interpret new and wonderful things.

Hopefully, the point in this little diversion is obvious. The most outstanding and inspirational expert can support little by way of learning if they don't understand the process. We must ensure our teachers, trainers and tutors are experts in their subject area and highly skilled in teaching and supporting learning. One without the other is not excellence. Professional development should focus on both areas of their dual professionalism as teachers.

What is an excellent teacher? Someone skilled and knowledgeable across the breadth of their subject, who understands and values how people learn. Someone who recognises both aspects of their professional identity, what they teach and how they teach it, and strives for excellence in both.

So, is teacher education important? Absolutely. But don't limit it to the pursuit of the initial teaching qualification. The teacher education journey is not a one or two year sprint towards a qualification; it is a career-long journey towards professional excellence, starting with initial teacher training. That is the strength of the IfL's model, where QTLS status, earned post-qualification through professional formation and maintained through a career-long commitment to CPD, encourages teachers and trainers to continually refresh all aspects of their professional identity. Being qualified to teach is not enough, but it is the start of the journey to professional excellence.

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Dennis Hayes

SCETT chose the title of our 2010 conference, *In Defence of Teacher Education*, to gently prod those who use the terms ‘teacher education’ and ‘teacher training’ interchangeably. Though many are unaware of it, there is little left of what traditionally constituted teacher ‘education’ in initial teacher training. We now need to remind ourselves that teacher education once meant studying the field of knowledge that constituted education as an academic subject involving the study of the distinct disciplines of philosophy, history, sociology and psychology of education.

Everyone knows which agencies and agents are directly responsible for this loss, the TDA, Ofsted and successive Governments. Over the last two decades, the Government and the now disappearing quangocracy, took control of both teachers and teaching. This undermined teaching as a profession, and eroded the autonomy of teachers to make their own judgements in the classroom and to speak authoritatively about the nature education to the wider society.

The result was to deprofessionalise teachers. This was possible because the Government and associated bodies reduced teacher education to nothing more than training to meet the narrow standards they approved.

The previous New Labour Government precipitated a significant shift. This reflected the disappearance of ‘education’ as a professional subject, as it migrated over to the ever-expanding field of ‘education studies’. But most importantly, it marked a change in the end point of that training, a change in the nature of schooling. The school became the site of a social engineering project, covering everything from citizenship behaviour to diet. When children’s behaviours weren’t changing enough, the project turned to manipulating their emotions.

History may come to view this period, when politics became synonymous with education, as one of the most deplorable in the history of education. The tragedy was that most teachers were compliant with this political onslaught. If they voiced criticisms, it was not usually for educational reasons. It was because they favoured a more radical form of social engineering. They wanted more inclusion, stronger community cohesion and deeper environmental awareness.

The most telling and far from trivial instance in this shift under New Labour was when the term ‘education’ disappeared from the name of the department responsible for schools. The Coalition’s resumption of this term when it created the *Department for Education* was a small but welcome step.

But the Coalition has done more than this. In conversations, consultations and speeches, Michael Gove clearly stated his desire to return to something like a traditional subject-centred education. He put forward clear arguments for his educational stance.

Many people were pleased with this move. The Coalition seemed to be creating a space for much needed debate about education. Michael Gove had thought seriously about the subjects pupils should study. Sadly, he has not given equivalent thought to *educating* teachers. In this, he continues the process of turning teacher *education* into skill-based training. He has forgotten that we need an *educated* and not just a trained workforce.

Who will defend Higher Education? - Dennis Hayes

Before running with the fads and fashions he outlines in his White Paper, Mr Gove should not merely undertake the usual consultations. He should engage his team in serious discussions with people who know something about the theory of education.

Those responsible for education policy need to be reminded that in Europe, the study of the science of education has a high priority. They need to appreciate that a passion for a subject may not be all teachers need. For example, in primary schools it is important to understand how children actually develop. We owe it to our children to ensure they are taught not only by the best and brightest, but by those who know what education *is* and how it differs from training.

The Coalition Government and some academics are critical of the standards-driven teacher training of the past twenty years, which was imposed on the profession by successive Governments. But before sending the troops into our schools, they have to understand the importance of teacher *education*.

Without the debate necessary to bring about a theoretical understanding of teacher education for Michael Gove and those responsible for education policy, there may, in the very near future, be nothing resembling education available for our children. Those who are only trained will not be able to educate.

That is the paradox of the Coalition's education policy. The Coalition wants to have education in schools run by trained teachers rather than educated teachers. As Toby Marshall, a SCETT Officer says, they 'intend to send people in to teach subjects who have no idea what a subject is'. The Coalition might do more damage than New Labour to education and children. They must begin to understand the contradiction at the heart of their education policy.

Who will fight for teacher education? The only answer is the few individuals - and perhaps the organisations they belong to - who are prepared to think seriously about what education *means*.

The fight for teacher education is an intellectual battle. We are ideally placed to win this battle. After all, it's us who know what runs in education, not Government.

Rania Hafez

For nearly twenty years, teacher education for Further Education has flourished. Higher Education Institutions have been actively involved designing and delivering programmes anchored in educational theory and vocational practice. These teacher education programmes recognise and develop the professionalism of FE teachers.

The Coalition's current plans to cut funding for HE-based courses threaten to do away with all of this. Instead, the Coalition wants to turn the clock back two decades. This was a time when Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for FE was simply a matter of survival kits. At this time, new teachers were only offered in-house, competency-based programmes, whose content was often determined by the whims of college managers.

Turning the clock back would be a tragedy. It won't only damage FE teachers, but also the colleges and communities they serve. Cutting funding for HE-based teacher education will undermine teacher professionalism. It will rob the FE sector of intellectual rigour and relegate its teachers and students to the margins of education. This is because it will starve teachers of any real intellectual content as they prepare for the teaching role.

It might be argued that despite HE involvement, for the past decade Government prescription has already constrained teacher education through imposing badly conceived and articulated standards. Teacher education has been micromanaged and under-funded. So *as it stands* it is not worth defending. There is some truth in this. However, for the most part, teacher educators in HE have developed programmes with distinct institutional and local characteristics. The results may have been experimental, varied and often idiosyncratic. But, the set-up has allowed some teacher education to exist alongside training. This has taken the form of a sort of 'hidden curriculum'.

It is time for that hidden curriculum to come out of the closet. It should be presented openly and defended as the teacher education that is necessary alongside training. Trainee teachers on my programmes at the University of East London don't just develop practical skills, such as writing lesson plans, devising assessments and managing behaviour. They also read and debate educational theories from Plato and Rousseau through to Dewey, Bourdieu and Friere. Alongside learning how to develop thinking skills in their students, their own thinking is challenged and developed. They study the history of education and analyse educational policy to better understand the sector and be prepared to play an active role in its future.

This is not just the self-serving pleading of an academic with a vested interest. Defending teacher education for FE is not primarily about fighting Government cuts. It is more about challenging the instrumentalist view that the vocational curriculum is simply training for employment. On this view, FE teachers are simply vocational experts who need little more than on-the-job training in classroom management and institutional policies, with a smattering of 'pedagogy'. This view deprives teachers of an intellectual basis for their role as *educators*. It completely undermines their professionalism.

FE is a rich and complex sector. It has a great historical, social and political legacy. This has enriched not just education but the wider society and world of work. FE teachers are the keepers of that legacy. Their preparation to take on that mantle should include an immersion in the history, sociology and philosophy of education. FE teachers deserve an education; not just training.

What can Higher Education offer teacher education?

Gary McCulloch

Considering what Higher Education has given to teacher education, the famous scene from the film *The Life of Brian* comes to mind. The People's Front of Judea are wondering what the Romans have ever done for them. Its members find the answer is a great deal, actually.

The same is true of the contribution of Higher Education to teacher education. Similarly, this contribution is all too easily forgotten. It is taken for granted and overlooked. Yet it has provided the basis for academic standards, helped to consolidate and develop subject knowledge and established routes to professional status. No less importantly, Higher Education has generated frameworks of understanding for teacher education to understand its purpose: its underlying theories, values, general mission, foundations from the past and its vision of the future.

My starting point in helping remind us about these fundamental contributions is Émile Durkheim, the great sociologist who lectured to future teachers at the University of Paris over a century ago. Durkheim's course on the history of education directly addressed the relationship between theory and practice as it related educational changes to their longer-term historical context.

The account articulated in the first chapter of his key work, *The Evolution of Educational Thought* (1977), is a classic formulation of the rationale for history and theory as a part of educational studies in general, and training teachers in particular. Durkheim argued that secondary education was undergoing major reforms. He proposed that for these to succeed, it was essential that the teachers carrying them out understand them fully and give them life.

According to Durkheim, 'It is not enough to prescribe to them in precise detail what they will have to do; they must be in a position to assess and appreciate these prescriptions, to see the point of them and the needs which they meet' (Durkheim 1977: 4). Rather, he continued, the teachers had to be familiar with the problems involved in the education for which they were responsible, no less than with the methods by which it was proposed to solve them, in order that they might be able to 'make up their own minds with a knowledge of the issues involved' (Durkheim 1977: 4).

Durkheim concluded that this kind of initiation could only be derived from studying educational theory. This study should be undertaken while the intending teacher was still a university student to be of maximum value. Moreover, he added for good measure, studying the past provided the soundest basis for understanding educational theory. This was especially since, in his view, 'it is only by carefully studying the past that we can come to anticipate the future and to understand the present' (Durkheim 1977: 9).

At first sight, the White Paper on education produced in November 2010 by David Cameron's Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government, *The Importance of Teaching*, undermines these ideals. It echoes the mournful litany of official documents over the past thirty years that have called incessantly for a more practical curriculum in teacher education. This corresponds with its emphasis on teaching as being a craft, for skills learned 'on-the-job' (DfE 2010: 19), its criticisms of 'passive learning' and the idea of 'sitting and listening to a presentation' (DfE 2010: 19).

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Of course, the usual antipathy to theory is also there. Indeed, one is reminded once again of Brian Simon's lament of 'why no pedagogy in England?': the lack of a science of teaching as a base, and the amateurish and pragmatic approach to educational theory and practice that has prevailed, according to Simon, for the past century and more (Simon, 1985).

But then one looks again at the White Paper, if one is optimistic, and it's possible to detect the fading embers of something else. The idealisation of teachers that underpins the document as a whole brings with it an endorsement, intentionally or not, of a strong role for Higher Education. To raise the status of teachers requires the authority of Higher Education. The emphasis on recruiting the top graduates into teaching entails a strong basis in Higher Education. The implicit logic of the White Paper emphasises the importance of Higher Education.

And then one glimpses something more, in the language used to describe teaching at the end of Michael Gove's Introduction. Teaching, it is claimed, is a noble calling, a vital profession and uniquely important service. Later in the text of the White Paper, too, we find that 'Head teachers and teachers enter education because they are guided by a sense of moral purpose and a desire to help children and young people succeed' (DfE 2010: 21).

Perhaps this is mere rhetoric, but it evokes a memory of a once-powerful mission. It is the language of values and vocation, which embodies a cultural and social purpose. For many years, Higher Education emphasised its cultural role in socialising teachers into a culture of education that was conscious of its mission and heritage. It was also aware of its social mission to advance the educational futures of the young.

It is this broader vision and sense of purpose that the teacher training reforms of the past thirty years have slowly drained away from Higher Education. We need to stir these embers, and help them become a flame.

This will mean reconstructing the importance of history and theory in educating teachers. It will be a challenge to find a way to include these features alongside a necessary emphasis on methods and subject knowledge, but a new attempt should be made to do so. Only this way will it be possible to infuse teachers with a sense of passion and purpose, to show why their vocation is so important.

Higher Education can inspire our future teachers with its poetry as well as its prose, and has a proud history of doing so. The heritage of Émile Durkheim demands nothing less.

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Shirley Lawes

There is little to defend in the system of initial teacher training that has existed in England since 1994. Introducing a competence-based assessment framework and shifting to a school-focused training programme has produced a generation of teachers who are competent practitioners within quite narrow confines.

Our current model of teacher training is consistent in its capacity to produce a conformist and compliant workforce. New teachers may be skilled in the classroom. However, they lack any real theoretical knowledge that would enable them to take a critical distance from practice and have a principled understanding of education as a value. It is not enough for teachers to know *what* to do and *how* to do it. They need to know *why* they do what they do.

Classroom competence is not all that matters and teaching is not simply a craft. Initiation into teaching requires more than practice and observing other good teachers. There is a substantial body of knowledge about teaching and learning, which all new teachers should be introduced to. At a time when there is a distinct lack of clarity about what education is, or should be, we need teachers who are educational thinkers. We need teachers who know more than how to 'deliver' 'effective' lessons, who can rise above the perceived imperative of examination results, league tables, Ofsted inspections and a micro-managed school culture because they have principled views on education that come from theoretical and professional knowledge, and expert knowledge of their subject discipline.

The Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) remains the preferred route into teaching for most new entrants to the profession. That is because they recognise Higher Education has something distinctive to offer. Sadly, Higher Education teacher educators have become *trainers*. They see themselves largely as mediators of Government policy. They understand their role as providing guidance and supporting classroom practice. They offer principled guidance on practice that is at best pre-digested theory. Such educators don't see themselves as leaders of educational thought. Given the majority of time in the PGCE year is spent in school, student teachers rapidly become immersed in surviving in the classroom. Their early intellectual aspirations are replaced by a preoccupation with developing the practical skills, dispositions and attitudes required to become qualified teachers.

The move to Master's accreditation of PGCE has gone some way to mitigate the prevailing idea that teaching is a practical occupation. It has placed higher intellectual demands on student teachers. However, teacher trainers themselves are in many ways ambivalent about the role of theoretical knowledge and its place in teacher training and education. The development of reflective practice, which is now a central feature of courses, has become the professional comfort zone for teacher educators. Such people are wary of reducing teacher training to the achievement of practical skills. Reflective practice has enabled them to retain the illusion there is a theoretical content in their courses. But this signals a shift in the way educational theory is understood.

Theory is now seen as an *intellectual process* rather than propositional knowledge. Practice is redefined as theory through 'reflective practice'. We are left with a subjective view of teacher professionalism. This is promoted and 'theorised' by teacher educators. It paradoxically undermines

Who will defend teacher education? - Shirley Lawes

our own position, because although ‘reflective practitioners’ may draw on and refer to theory, they are not contributing to its development except in some ill-defined and personal way. Rather than defend the *status quo* in initial teacher training, it is time to re-examine fundamentally the contribution Higher Education (HE) should make to teacher education. We should make an unequivocal case for educational theory as the foundational knowledge-base of the teacher.

The present Government seems set to exclude HE from any significant involvement in teacher training. Its sights are set firmly on school-based and school-led programmes. The basic tenets of current policy are that with the prerequisite level of subject knowledge, the craft of teaching is best learned by being immersed in school, observing expert teachers and learning entirely through practical experience: the sitting-by-Nellie approach. Even if this were true, what current policy-makers ignore is the context in which they make their proposals.

On the face of it, when you walk around at break-time, or glance into classrooms during lessons, schools look much the same as they always have done. But in fact, both in terms of the curriculum and broader school culture, over the past decade what constitutes education and how it is implemented have been transformed. Both the nature of schools and what it means to be a teacher in them have changed fundamentally.

The raft of legislation and policy initiatives that has invaded schools in recent years is unprecedented. Education has become a vehicle of social policy and social engineering. This has gone largely unchallenged, and is equally supported by the present administration. Initiatives that started out as policy diktats, such as Every Child Matters, SEAL, personalised learning, assessment for learning, brain gym, critical thinking, thinking skills, and cross-curricular themes such as health eating and environmentalism, have all been absorbed into school culture. They have had a profound effect on teachers, teaching and our conception of education.

We have seen the rise of managerialism, which has transformed schools. This involves a burgeoning responsibility for data-collection and micro-managing teaching. Further, the content of subject disciplines reflects an instrumental view of knowledge. The purpose of education has assumed a necessary link with the economy. Education for its own sake, it seems, is untenable.

This is the context in which the Coalition Government proposes its reform of teacher training. This reform is one where ‘trainees’ will be initiated into teaching without any broader view of education. They will learn no theory of education that might enable them to situate initiatives in context and at least have an intellectual, critical purchase on policy.

If we abandon the idea that HE has a fundamental role in the initial training of teachers, a new generation of teachers will teach future generations of children without having any understanding of educational theory. New teachers will have little idea what education means. The consequences will be entirely negative and hard to reverse.

What can Higher Education offer teacher education? - Michael Young

Michael Young

There are two important starting points in the discussion about teacher education. The first is that every profession assumes its new members will have studied at university. The second is that in different ways, all professions rely on their specialised knowledge - whether to advise, treat, teach or otherwise support their clients, patients or students. There is no good reason why the teaching profession should be any different.

It remains true that, despite the growth of Government and private research institutes, universities are the main producers of both new knowledge and the specific specialist knowledge at the core of any profession. For teachers, this knowledge involves their subject knowledge and their pedagogic knowledge.

Teachers mostly acquire their specialist subject knowledge during undergraduate and graduate degrees. However, subject knowledge is not a static thing passively passed on to teachers and their students. It is dynamic, a changing historical body of knowledge. It needs upgrading at various points in teachers' professional careers. The further professional development of teachers should therefore involve not just Faculties of Education, but other university departments associated with their specialist subjects.

Teachers' pedagogic knowledge contains three elements. The first is conceptual tools for interrogating teachers' specialist knowledge for its pedagogic and curricular relevance for pupils at different stages. This is the process sometimes referred to as 're-contextualisation'. The second is a knowledge-base for evaluating their practical experience in schools. Finally, the third is access to the educational disciplines - history, sociology and comparative studies in particular - for reflecting on the wider responsibilities of members of a profession. This also equips teachers to engage in debates about educational policy.

The balance between these elements will vary. Initial education will need more emphasis on the first and second elements of pedagogic knowledge, whereas further professional education will place more emphasis on the third. For some teachers, their career interests will take them out of the classroom into educational research, educating teachers, school leadership and management and curriculum development. All teachers need opportunities to explore these fields at an early stage in their career.

Universities have not always fulfilled their responsibilities to teachers as well as they might. Sometimes this has been because they have too readily responded to Government pressures to over-emphasise the practical problems of classroom control and management. Sometimes it is because they have engaged less than critically with new technologies and other fashions.

Perhaps the major weakness of universities over the years is that they have not pressed hard enough for teacher education to be a two-year Master's degree, rather than a one-year programme. This could resolve the complaints which say either *too much theory* or *why no theory at all?*

What can Higher Education offer teacher education? - Alka Sehgal Cuthbert/Toby Marshall

Alka Sehgal Cuthbert

Whether or not we know what teacher education *should* be is an important question raised by this debate. We must have a good understanding of what we hope to defend if we're to have a good chance of succeeding.

As a teacher, the crucial issue for teacher education is how best to foster a sense amongst teachers that we're involved in something more fundamental and important than the immediate dictates or requirements of Government, business, parents or pupils.

Another way of asking this question is: what's unique and special about education? Only when we have a clear idea of the answer to this question can we confidently assert our authority and make claims on others to trust us.

This question can't be addressed in the classroom. Many helpful insights and techniques can be learned through observing colleagues, especially more experienced teachers. But whatever is learned in such a manner is applicable to the particular context of being a classroom teacher. It also has to be internalised and rearticulated by each individual teacher. To achieve the latter, implicit values and assumptions are brought into play, consciously or otherwise. These values and assumptions are more abstract, and less easily recognised or understood through practice itself.

To properly understand practice, an intellectual education in the foundation subjects is required. Universities are the best place for this.

In this respect, the White Paper is seriously misguided. It is wrong to suggest that teachers only need to be in a classroom with mentors to become better teachers, or indeed, teachers at all.

Toby Marshall

Teachers can't be made, designed or engineered. Teachers, to use a mechanical metaphor, auto-construct. In other words, they make and are constantly remaking themselves throughout their professional lives. Sometimes reading a book in the summer holiday will stimulate change, or a conversation in a staff room, or, more rarely nowadays, staff training. But whatever the trigger, it is always the teacher themselves who actively decides to change.

This might appear a rather bland point to make. But sadly, it's a necessary one. Recent attempts to 'make' good teachers have typically approached teachers as if they were programmable drones, to be deployed in some horrific youth containment exercise. New Labour's ministers and their mandarins in Whitehall - and, I might add, far too many compliant teacher educators - sought to develop teaching machines. In this managerial dystopia, edu-machines were activated by OfSTED's pedagogy punch card, whose instructions read as follows: all drones must start with learning objectives...followed by Q&A...an activity...learning checks...and a plenary.

What can Higher Education offer teacher education? - Toby Marshall

Thankfully, real teachers haven't taken the guff that goes by the name of 'best practice' too seriously. They've been getting on with their job: engaging young minds in the wonders of culture and ideas.

They've been doing this by exemplifying as individuals the critical intellectual spirit we hope the next generation will adopt. Those who follow teaching scripts handed down from on high can never be good teachers. Instead they are pseudo-intellec[t]s, fakers and impostors, who are acting out rather than embodying active and critical engagement with knowledge and the wider world. Students can easily spot a hypocrite.

However, none of this means teachers should be left in intellectual isolation or subject ghettos. Teaching is necessarily an individual act, where the teacher themselves is the medium of instruction. But education is social, and teachers have a great deal to learn from others. How should this be achieved?

The Coalition has a particular - and in my view wrongheaded - perspective on this question. Education Secretary Michael Gove has argued that teaching should be conceived as a 'craft'. He claims it is 'best learnt as an apprentice observing a master' (Gove, 2011). His recently published White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education, 2010) ratifies this narrow approach. It is at best philistine, and at worst actively destroys the very educational traditions Gove has rightly sought to defend elsewhere.

Teaching is far more than a simple craft skill. It is a social, political and moral activity. It therefore has an ethic that must be engaged with and understood. Teaching is also a cultural transaction that assumes the wisdom of adults and ignorance of children. The teacher's role is to mediate between these worlds. Teaching, most typically, involves distinct subjects. This means pedagogues need to know what a subject is and is not. Put this together and it becomes clear that all future teachers require an education in education. Training is simply not good enough.

Providing all future teachers with an education in education will not guarantee they become good teachers. Individuals alone retain responsibility for their practice. But it will ensure that all teachers understand what education is, and are fully aware of its cultural significance and complexity. For me, the best, and now neglected way of doing this is to introduce teachers to the great inspirational theorists of education, writers such as Paul Hirst, Michael Oakeshott and Brian Simon. This is what is missing from teacher training today.

Educating the educators will not resolve all the problems schools face. But it just might light some intellectual fires in the minds of next generation of teachers. In doing so, it will encourage them to light similar fires in the minds of the young.

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Endnote

Siôn Humphreys, SCETT Chair 2011.

The clearest message to emerge from the 2010 SCETT conference is that it's impossible to consider the future of teacher education independently of the bigger picture. This has been thrown into sharper relief in recent months by fresh debate over the curriculum, which has followed policy announcements and speeches made by the new Coalition Government.

One result of New Labour over the last decade has been the decline of any genuine debate about education, both in terms of policy-makers and within the wider society. This was a consequence of the Government's managerialist and centralised approach.

Yet alongside acknowledging the importance of debate about education, there's also an important pragmatic aspect to the issue. If initial teacher education doesn't adequately prepare entrants for their role as teachers, they will spend the rest of their careers playing 'catch-up'. This will in turn undermine the idea of continual professional *development*.

Indeed, these vital tensions around continuity and synergy surfaced in the discussion about knowledge and the subject-based curriculum. What became clear from this discussion is that the tendency to approach the debate along 'right-left' or 'reactionary-progressive' lines is both misleading and unhelpful.

This polarisation is still seen in some circles. For example, it's manifest in the popular reaction that because E.D. Hirsch's work is championed by some right of centre think-tanks, then it's 'guilty' by association - and hence should be ignored.

The lesson for those who want to defend teacher education is clear. We must engage in more of these debates. We must encourage a real reflection and evaluation of ideas on their own merits. This means we should guard against dismissing certain arguments or approaches out of hand simply because of their historical association with one sort of politics or another.

Unless there is a clarity and independence of thought, the profession can never hope to engage productively with upcoming debates about the nature and content of the curriculum. This will undermine not only the future of teacher education, but the future of education itself.

Siôn Humphreys, February 2011.

About SCETT

The Standing Committee for the Education and Training of Teachers (SCETT) was established in 1981 by the major teaching unions and professional associations. It is a registered Charity (No. 296425).

The constituent membership of SCETT is the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL); the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT); the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT).

Recently, SCETT has developed an extensive individual membership. Taken together, the constituent, associate and individual members of SCETT represent the interests of over half a million teachers in supporting and developing initial teacher education and training and in all forms of continuing professional development.

SCETT provides a forum for all the partners engaged in the education and training of teachers and in their continuing professional development, whether this takes place in schools, colleges of Further Education or in Higher Education Institutions.

SCETT is a democratic organisation. The SCETT Standing Committee is elected from its membership. Decisions about its policies, activities and programme are taken collectively.

SCETT's aims are:

1. To initiate and contribute to the formulation of policies for teacher education and to make recommendations accordingly to the appropriate bodies; to participate with appropriate bodies in discussion on matters of concern to teacher education;
2. To promote communication and collaboration between those representatives and others involved in teacher education and the teaching profession;
3. To encourage and initiate the promotion of research and development in teacher education.
4. SCETT provides an annual seminar programme and conference. It draws strength from its distinctive membership, which allows it to bring together a uniquely wide range of teachers, and education and training stakeholders.

Colleagues whose institutions or organisations are in membership enjoy a reduced fee for all seminars and conferences.

For further details about **SCETT** contact the Honorary Secretary, Professor Dennis Hayes.
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Visit the **SCETT** website: www.scett.org.uk

