

Part 3

Education Policy, Reforms & School Leadership

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SCHOOL LED TRAINING: AN EXAMINATION OF THE SCHOOL DIRECT RECENT POLICY INITIATIVE IN ENGLAND MAKING SCHOOLS LEADERS IN THE EDUCATION OF TEACHERS

Abstract

The School Direct training initiative has had a marked effect on the production of new teachers in England. The role of university education departments has been curtailed, and the belief that learning from doing, is better than a more theory based approach has caused politicians to radically change teacher education processes. Challenges are also being experienced by schools and other training establishments. Long term effects are as yet unclear, but already the programme has resulted in the closure of some university departments of education and concerns that school mentors do not have the expertise to provide the depth of subject and educational theory required by trainees, or sufficient knowledge of education research. There are questions too about the variation in the quality of provision in those schools and consortia undertaking this new type of training. At present the major concern seems to be that this change could severely affect teacher supply.

Key words: teacher training, school direct teacher training, school-led training, teacher shortage

Introduction

The training of teachers in England has undergone a process of dramatic change over the past twenty years, whilst the requirements to become qualified to teach have moved from a competences approach, to a standards approach, changing four times over the past fifteen years. Government policy has shifted towards training in the school environment, with the mentor as a key figure in this process. This into-school movement, begun under previous governments, culminated in the expansion of school-based training, for example the Graduate Teacher Programme. The most recent change is to *school-led* training via the School Direct Programme, introduced in 2012 (Harrison, 2012). This change, the Government believes, gives an opportunity for schools to influence the way in which Initial Teacher Training (ITT) is delivered and therefore will ensure that the best potential teachers are recruited to the profession. The change is a response to the demand from schools for greater control and influence over the training of teachers, so as to allow schools to recruit

and prepare trainees for the subjects and phases needed. However, it has been a controversial initiative, as university departments have, to some extent, been sidelined (Elmes, 2012; Ward, 2014), as the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, embraced the idea that training at the feet of a practising teacher was of more value than the theory, he asserted, was fed to trainees by left-wing university tutors (TES, 2010). This echoed previous Conservative governments' suspicions of what trainee teachers were taught and how relevant this was to the classroom (Chitty, 2009). This distrust had arisen in the 1970s and become a hegemony for the political right-wing, supported by publications that came to be known as 'The Black Papers', which complained about left-wing 'scruffy' teachers, who were heavily influenced by university thinking. This viewpoint was even supported by some Labour politicians and many parents, who were themselves influenced by adverse reports of schools, common in the right-wing press at the time.

Teacher Training in England: the changing landscape

Training to teach in England is a complex process. Until recently, most training has been undertaken by higher education establishments who have, over several decades, begun to work more closely with schools in partnerships. Prospective teachers received input from tutors in higher education, designed to develop subject knowledge and an understanding of pedagogical approaches. Additionally, they were being introduced to current research, whilst schools provided practical experience in a real situation (Universities UK, 2014).

During the 1990s and the early 21st century, massive changes took place, namely:

- The introduction of school-based ITT routes, working alongside higher education such as the Registered Teacher Programme and the Graduate Teacher Programme.
- Establishment of routes to teaching such as the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) and Bachelor of Education (BEd).
- Teach First, recruiting highly qualified trainees from top universities into the profession for a limited time with the possibility of quick promotion. Training is a brief six weeks and the trainees then go into 'problem' or 'under-performing' schools, mostly in inner cities.
- School-centred ITT (SCITT), which metamorphosed into school-based, and has recently, with the introduction of School Direct, become school-led, with the focus on the training within the school environment, and therefore on the mentors within that environment.

With this recent initiative there has been an increase in the amount of time the students spend in school while they are training, and a marked decrease in the time spent in university (or with other providers such as SCITTs), who provide the theoretical input. Concerns have been expressed over the swift introduction of School Direct training (Ward, 2014) and questions asked as to whether schools have the time, or expertise, to provide adequate theoretical background, the ability to support students in the exploration and application of research evidence, or the undertaking of personal research in order improve their practice. This, it appears, is a marked feature of what are considered as the world's best performing school systems (BERA/RSA, 2014). Critics have attacked the lack of adequate planning in

the rushed introduction of the School Direct scheme, for example, Tatlow (in Richardson, 2013a) in her evidence to the House of Commons Education Select Committee, suggested that School Direct had been introduced without consideration for its effect on teacher supply. The Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) has criticised the large reduction in training places offered to elite universities, where much education research is carried out, and the resulting possible demise of their education departments (Ward, 2014).

Previously, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the pupil teacher approach had been a popular way of training new teachers, that is, learning at the feet of a ‘master’ and copying that person’s approach. This ‘apprenticeship’ scheme relied heavily on the quality of the teacher, which was seen as the major weakness in this method. As a result, there began a move into the Higher Education academic route for ITT. Gardener (1993) suggested that the weakness of this approach was that trainees had a lack of practical in-class experience. Cope and Stephen (2001 in Haggart & McIntyre, 2006) however, point to the increasing inclusion of the use of practising teachers in university teaching teams, in an attempt to relate theory more closely to practice. In the 1990s the PGCE became the most popular way of training teachers, but this was also criticised for its lack of true collaboration between schools and university education departments. However, this element considerably improved with the use and training of school mentors who liaised with HE tutors. There was, however, a clear divide between the theory taught in universities and the practice supervised by mentors, so there has been pressure for theory to become more practice-related and Spendlove et.al. (2010) believe that lately, theoretical pedagogical knowledge and concepts are being overwhelmed by the need to prioritise practice in the training. Wenger (1999) describes the two competing providers of training as separate communities of practice, which Edwards and Mutton (2007) point out creates tension between HEIs and schools. However, Darling-Hammond (2006, p. 300) claims that we have learned what we need to include in a successful training programme, namely

... tight coherence and integration among courses and between course work and clinical work in schools, extensive and intensely supervised clinical work integrated with course work using pedagogies that link theory and practice, and closer, proactive relationships with schools that serve diverse learners effectively and develop and model good teaching.

Whether School Direct training is providing this balance is questionable, as Darling-Hammond’s ‘course work’ element, i.e. the theoretical background to action in the classroom, seems to be disappearing at a rapid rate. Further causes for concern about the *school*-led approach are that teachers may lack up-to-date subject knowledge to pass onto trainees and that they are not sufficiently research aware, so as to encourage trainees to read, apply and conduct research in the classroom in an attempt to improve practice. UCET has consistently raised concerns about the lack of teacher involvement in research and the BERA/RSA (2014, p. 30) interim report on its role in teacher education stated this as one of its conclusions:

... there now needs to be sustained emphasis on creating ‘research-rich’ and ‘evidence-rich’ (rather than simply data-rich) schools and classrooms. Teachers need to be equipped to interrogate data and evidence from

different research sources rather than just describing the data or trends in attainment.

The question therefore must be asked, can schools and mentors equip trainees with these skills?

At the centre of this latest initiative is the mentor, who guides and directs the potential teacher towards the achievement of the government's required standards. The quality of those mentors is paramount for all trainees, but even more so when training is led by schools. Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) researching teacher's feelings about their preparation, found that those in traditional teacher education programmes felt better prepared for their role than those trained in alternative programmes, or those who were untrained. This finding does not arise from a study of school-led training, but introduces a note of caution, which at present the political class has failed to acknowledge, in their ideological push to side-line the role of higher education in the preparation of teachers. Certainly it is essential that mentors observing trainees do not revert to their 'default' model as illustrated by Johnson's study in 1994 (Haggar & McIntyre, 2006). This study offered an insight into the internal struggle that teachers have in teaching in a style reflecting their beliefs, and the model learnt for trainee teachers to observe. This raises the question of how mentors can be trained within the school situation to demonstrate and discuss with trainees a variety of teaching methods, not only the ones with which they themselves are comfortable. How well prepared these mentors are to use research and also, to undertake research in/on their own classrooms also needs to be questioned, as this underpins quality teaching. England, unlike many other countries, has not been proactive in the education and training of new teacher educators. There is an assumption that teachers can change from working with children to teaching students how to do the task, without any input from their employer. Similarly in schools, although mentors receive training, it is not clear if teachers are being sufficiently prepared to fill the dual role of teacher and teacher educator, added to the many other pressures they are faced with in the English classroom.

In addition to the above questions about the quality of mentoring, there are concerns that giving schools larger numbers of the allocated training places for new teachers could cause a drastic fall in the supply of new teachers in schools. The BBC reported in 2013 that only two thirds of these school allocated training places had been taken up and that, at the last minute, universities had been asked to cover the short fall (Richardson, 2013b). Elmes (2013a) also underlined the drop in numbers allocated to university training, a 12.8% reduction from the previous year. Sheffield University for example had suffered cuts of 76.2% over the past two years and Cumbria University was contemplating cutting staff due to a large drop in allocated numbers (Elmes, 2013b). As this allocation of training places to schools was raised again in 2014, there are now serious concerns that a shortage of teachers could be looming, for example in 2013 design and technology recruited only 48% of its target and computer science only 57% of the required numbers. However, the decline in allocations of training places for the School Direct route to universities has been further underlined at the beginning of 2015 as further places have been offered to SCITTs and to school based consortia, but not to higher education institutions. UCET's response has been one of disbelief, as all the evidence shows that universities are better at recruiting trainees than are schools and SCITTs. This move

appears again to be a considered attempt to wrest teacher education from higher education and place it with school based groups, with little evidence that this will produce better teachers, or even more importantly, fill areas of serious shortage (Elmes, 2015). Professor John Howson of Oxford University has raised serious concerns about the ability of the School Direct programme to recruit sufficient teachers to fill the country's need, particularly in areas such as physics and design and technology. If things did not improve, a possible serious crisis in teacher supply could occur, especially in the south-east of England. Howson believes this is partly caused by schools being more selective in choosing potential trainees than are university departments of education, acceptance rates being lower for School Direct applicants, around 16% compared to around 19% for university based training programmes (Morrison & Ward, 2014). Recent reports in the press have also indicated that in addition to financial losses for universities, whose training place allocations have been so severely cut, schools are now finding that, despite investing, with government encouragement in the creation of a consortia of schools to control training, in some areas, allocation of School Direct places for 2015 has been drastically lower for some school and training groups. THES, News (2014, p. 10) reported that partnership groups of schools had been allocated 4 places, having requested 20, making non-viable the newly created infra-structure and staffing they had, at the behest of the government in its desire to move training into schools, been established. In the same report the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), it was claimed, had been accused by Professor Strike Vice-Chancellor for Cumbria University as having a 'Byzantine approach' to the allocation of places as it appeared that if School Direct partners put in a reasonable request, based on sound information, the response was drastic cuts in allocated training places, whilst those who had bid wildly for great increases in places had been more successful. Howson, (2014, no page) suggests that every teacher needs the following: (author's brackets)

1. Knowledge of what they are teaching that is continually kept up to date; (could be called subject knowledge).
2. Knowledge of how to teach and assess the outcomes of what they are teaching; (pedagogy).
3. Knowledge of those they are teaching and what these learners bring to the learning process; (understanding how children develop and the context of learning).

Howson believes that point number 3 is the most neglected element in teacher education at present. Examining the School Direct approach against these points proves interesting, as research with trainees and mentors has shown that trainees are worried about a lack of comprehensive input on subject knowledge, whilst experienced teacher educators are concerned about the inconsistency of the provision now on offer (Hilton & Tyler, 2015).

Conclusion

Courtney and Little (2014) strongly criticise the deregulation of teacher training, claiming that neo-liberal philosophies adopted by some countries and the subsequent devaluing of teachers has not led to a rise in achievement, or in lessening of the effects of social class and parenting. These authors call for the retention of training based on pedagogy, rather than on ideologies with little evidence to support them.

The OECD 2012 PISA report stresses that the most successful school systems have a strong focus and investment in teacher training and within that system the role of the universities is essential to ensure quality (Paton, 2013). Universities UK (2014) has drawn attention to the fact that this school-led trend in England is not popular elsewhere, particularly in countries whose schools perform well in Pisa tests. In addition the report raises serious concerns over possible teacher shortages in the coming years, particularly in subjects such as science, maths, engineering and technology. Further concerns are about inconsistencies in quality and a lack of underpinning of practice by essential theory, particularly specific subject knowledge and research. It is already clear that universities are beginning seriously to question whether they have any future in teacher education and some have already taken the decision to withdraw from any further involvement. If this trend accelerates, then it may prove impossible ever to resurrect the partnership between schools and higher education for educating teachers. This would surely be to the detriment of the quality of teachers trained in England and also to the amount of research on teaching and schools undertaken. At least now the NCTL has realised the potential recruitment problems facing schools and training organisations. A request was issued on 21st January 2015 by them for providers to, not only bid for the development of flexible programmes, but also for fast track places to address the need for chemistry, computing and D&T teachers in secondary schools. This is aimed at individuals unable to commit to a full time course due to family/caring commitments or have other part-time working / volunteering commitments who would benefit from part-time training opportunities (NCTL, 2015) However, this approach could appear to be again an unconsidered response to a problem they have created and whether this 'fast track' approach will be successful in recruiting and retaining teachers remains to be seen. At present we appear to be turning in a complete circle in regard to how we train our teachers in England, though history demonstrates clearly that the apprenticeship approach failed in the past, and despite the provision of mentors and input from partners on education theory and research, we are in danger of going backwards and creating a problem entirely of our own making.

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