

TEACHER EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM REFORM - SOME ENGLISH ERRORS

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this presentation is to explore the relationship between teacher training and curriculum change. Let me remind you of the English context. We have a right-wing government and a failing economy. At least four million people are unemployed, including many young school leavers and a growing number of teachers. The government's response is to strive for industrial regeneration through a combination of policies, including privatisation of state industries, reduction of the power of organised labour, control of spending on social services and the promotion of schooling related to economic goals. The school system is a major target for financial and cultural control.

CURRICULUM REFORM - THE SIXTIES

There is nothing new in the government's interest in updating schools. Twenty years ago The Schools Council was set up to make available to teachers new curricula generated via national projects. At that time there was no coercion, or even pressure. The composition of the Council reflected the partnership tradition between central government, local government and teachers, and teacher autonomy was respected by all. What was offered was a supermarket of curriculum packages for the discriminating teacher consumer. The economic context was one of expansion, and educational investment reflected the optimism of the period.

CURRICULUM REFORM - THE SEVENTIES

By the time the seventies began the mood had changed, the economy was in trouble, and there was disillusion with the failure of the Council to persuade teachers of the need for change. The shelves of the supermarket were well stocked but not enough teachers were buying, and those who had were not using the packages in the ways intended by the project developers.

By this time there was a new community of academics involved in the problems of reform - curriculum developers, evaluators, disseminators, and theorists of educational innovation.

Whilst the sixties model of national innovation fell out of favour with these academics, to be replaced by a commitment to local networks of teacher curriculum developers and to investment in in-service training, the government took an even more centralised path with directly controlled programmes run by civil servants. This revealed the changed mood of government, and in particular the rise of a new ideology of managerialism. The government decided to invest in single-purpose task forces that would be powerful enough to engineer specific changes within realistic time scales.

So throughout the seventies there was a polarisation of curriculum reform ideologies between government and academia. The academic community - taking as its axiom that there is no curriculum development without teacher development, gave prominence to the teacher as the researcher and developer of his own curriculum. By the end of the seventies the concepts of "teacher as researcher" and school-based research had taken root.

Government meanwhile was busy closing the democratic Schools Council and replacing it with new agencies for curriculum development and examinations. At the same time it was pressing its own curriculum policy through more categorical funding and through an accountability movement aimed at breaking through the defences of the schools. This trend accelerated when youth unemployment reached a politically sensitive scale in the mid-seventies and began to preoccupy the Department of Employment. In the last ten years this Department has become a major sponsor of industry-related curricula in schools and colleges.

CURRICULUM CONTROL - THE EIGHTIES

The government has strengthened its hold on the schools, and the teachers are in disarray. Massive cuts in expenditure have deprived the schools of resources, teacher unemployment has weakened the unions, while youth unemployment on a huge scale has undermined the

defence of past practice. Although the managerial model of innovation favoured by government in the seventies was no more successful than its softer predecessor, it had the side effect of consuming all the available funds, thus predisposing schools to bid for government money under whatever label the government cared to offer it.

The eighties have seen the government take full advantage to attack the performance of schools and teachers as a prelude to further intervention, attacks which at one time would have been rejected by teachers confident of public support. But there is now more support for the government than for the teachers among parents who look to schools to provide their children with the credentials of employment.

CURRICULUM CONTROL - TEACHER TRAINING

Teacher training consists of specialist colleges and university departments. For the most part the colleges provide the three or four year course for the primary and middle school teachers, while the universities provide the one year postgraduate course for secondary school teachers. A number of recent amalgamations mean that some universities now provide both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching courses. Almost one third of teachers in England and Wales are graduates, and the system is moving rapidly towards an all graduate profession. Trainers enjoy substantial autonomy in the recruitment, selection and training of their students. Now that is about to change. Last year the Secretary of State for Education published a White Paper on teacher training, entitled "Teaching Quality", which introduced new proposals.

THE NEW PROPOSALS

At first glance the proposals seem bland. The major proposal is that the Secretary of State, who has the power to approve courses of initial training, will henceforth do so by applying a set of criteria. These criteria relate to the selection of students, the subject content of courses and links between training institutions and schools.

Such proposals do not in themselves raise the prospect of radical change. It is to the detailed arguments in the White Paper that we must look to discern the new directions for teacher training. And here we find a quite startling, and to me at least, alarming scenario. For

instance the Paper argues for the close involvement of practising teachers in the recruitment, training and assessment of students. Counterbalancing this extension of teacher power is an argument for local teacher employers to assess individual teacher performance on an annual basis and to weed out the incompetent and the unsuitable. Another innovation is that teachers will be qualified only to teach those age ranges and subjects in which they have been specifically trained, and that teacher appointments should no longer be made to particular schools so that employers can transfer teachers to those institutions most in need.

THE NEW PROPOSALS - A CRITIQUE

If we can assume that the Secretary of State's approval will be influenced by such values then it is worth teasing out their implications for curriculum development. In the first place it is quite clear that initial training will be shaped by an official view of the trainee as an apprentice. Those of us who see new teachers as the means of curriculum change and who view apprenticeship as an induction into obsolete practice see yet another door to teacher-led development closing.

It would not be so bad if this change at the initial training stage were accompanied by expansion of in-service training, but the White Paper, while commending in-service training, rules out even the possibility of resources for it. What is more, we need to note that in a parallel policy shift in relation to universities the government proposes to concentrate educational research funds in those universities which do not have a predominant commitment to teacher training. This is a blow to those like myself who have come to see some form of research-based teacher training as the main avenue of school self-renewal.

The new proposals contain a further danger. In a school system where teachers have freedom to review and change what they do according to their convictions curriculum development does take place and leads to a diversity of classroom practice. Although the extent and quality of this grassroots activity is less than many observers and governments would like it is still historically responsible for most of the major shifts in national practice that have taken place. Indeed it is this view that underpins the conviction that the most effective form of curriculum development is one that provides support rather than direction for teacher innovators. But many of the arguments emanating from

government over the past few years have sought to standardise both curriculum and pedagogy. The notion of the "core curriculum", the idea of fixed levels of pupil achievement, the accusation of political subversives operating within the teaching profession - the government has sought to promote conformity as the means of securing standards. In the sixties diversity was encouraged by the Schools Council and encouraged by an examinations system that was willing to be led by what teachers chose to teach. All that is changing rapidly.

In this light proposals for assessing teachers, weeding out the unsuitable, and making teachers vulnerable to transfer carry a coercive message when placed alongside the messages of efficiency and conformity. Teachers who are not free to fail are not free to experiment, and teachers who take on the additional task of training and assessing recruits have no time or energy left to engage in new ventures. Teachers who give offense, for good or bad reasons, may find themselves transferred to a less attractive institution.

I am not, of course, arguing that such outcomes of government policy are intended. Government wishes teachers to adopt its policy priorities with the kind of conviction that will lead to high quality implementation. Perhaps it will succeed, but I am extremely dubious. It is evident that England is moving quite rapidly towards the kind of centralised school system that dominates some of its continental neighbours. There is no evidence to suggest that such systems have a superior capacity to promote high quality schooling and much evidence to the contrary. And if there is one lesson to be learned from the Western experience of thirty years of government sponsored curriculum development it is that teachers make poor operatives of other people's ideas. It is a lesson that has yet to be learned by my government; it is a lesson that I hope your government can learn from the experience of others.

NOTES TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF TEACHER TRAINING
CURRICULUM RESEARCH AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

No-one would now deny that it is extremely difficult to radically change the curriculum practices of schools from the outside. Seduction, the way of the sixties, made little impact because teachers were unequal to the task of transforming the institutional contexts that held them

locked into their practice. Coercion, the way of the seventies, brings little else but minimal compliance. It fails to capture the allegiance of the teachers, and subversion of its values is assured. Effective curriculum development must adopt the school rather than the individual subject or the individual teacher as the unit. And the most effective form of curriculum development is self-determined. Schools must be supported in the process of self-renewal on the basis of self-study. This is no easy task, but teacher trainers and curriculum researchers could do more to help.

Now let us turn to teacher training agencies, and one long-standing criticism: the separation of theory and practice. The professional studies component of initial training has traditionally consisted of its constituent disciplines of history, psychology, philosophy and sociology of education. Students are expected to acquire these bodies of theory and apply them to the understanding of their classroom situations, a task that has consistently defeated them. Little wonder that the new proposals for a greater emphasis on basic classroom skills and the involvement of experienced teachers in the training process were widely welcomed as a move in the right direction. Unfortunately such a "solution" is likely to compound another problem in initial training, the tendency of teacher trainees, when placed in schools for teaching practice at a stage when they have little confidence and great anxiety about controlling the pupils, to adopt defensive patterns of behaviour. I see these two problems as related, but the solution to them depends upon developments elsewhere.

I spoke earlier of the new academic territory generated in the sixties by the curriculum movement. A new community of curriculum theorists became established in the universities, theorists whose theory was based on the close observation of new curricula in action, grounded theory of educational practice with little allegiance to the established and derivative disciplines that trainee teachers find so difficult to apply. Most of these theorists, in so far as they became involved with teacher training, did so only through in-service courses or teaching for higher degrees, but took that opportunity to draw their students into the process of field-based enquiry into school problems and practices. Many of these enquiries take the form of action/research in which curriculum problems are identified in particular schools, corrective action undertaken, and consequences carefully monitored with a view to further action.

The problem with this movement is the demands it makes upon the individual teacher attempting to add to his commitments, research skills of which he has no previous experience. It is an exhausting business.

Now let me try to pull together these strands. The school is the best base for curriculum research and development. This research and development activity should be led by teachers themselves. This is a task for which their initial training does not prepare them. Initial training courses teach theory in a general form that is difficult to apply to particular situations, leaving new teachers vulnerable to occupational socialisation of a non-developmental nature. Curriculum theorists have shown how to generate situational theory based on the close study of school practice, and this has begun to shape the content of in-service training of individual teachers. These teachers, lacking previous experience or training, find the activity exhausting.

When we pull the strands together in this way it seems possible to conceive of a system of continuous training which has as a major goal the development in teachers of skills that will enable them to undertake curriculum review and renewal. What this calls for is a radical transformation of initial training courses to bring them more into line with advances in curriculum theory and in-service training. An institution like my own School of Education engages in initial training, both undergraduate and post-graduate, in in-service training, and in school-based research and development. All these activities go on under one roof but are at present separated by traditional distributions of resources, responsibilities and personnel. Integration of these activities can only be achieved if we radicalise initial training.

What would such a radicalisation look like? In my view the answer to this is sharply opposed to the apprenticeship concept of the trainees. We should think, rather, of the trainee as a student of schooling, a critical and reflective observer and theorist of its contemporary conditions, practices and beliefs. I believe that initial training should emphasise investigation of local communities, study of children in non-school settings, case studies of schools and their practices. We should train students in investigating and reporting curriculum issues embedded in the realities of contemporary schooling, rather than, as we tend now to do,

induct them into ideal models of pedagogy that have little resilience when exposed prematurely to the operational culture. Such studies should be the main source of theory. I further believe that initial training along such lines would provide schools with a rich source of feedback that would assist them in review and renewal. I further believe that in time such a trend would lead to the integration of pre-service, in-service and school self-development activities into a unified system. And within such a system the isolation of academic theorising would break down as the roles of trainee, trainer and researcher become merged in a shared focus. Such a prospect has little chance of flourishing in England now in the context of government initiatives that I have outlined. What the merits of such a proposal and such a prospect are in Spain I leave to those who can make an informed judgement.

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