

The Application of Theory and Practice in the Early Years of Teaching

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The application of theory and practice in the early years of teaching is a topic that must be of vital importance to anyone involved in teacher education. Whether we are administrator, inspector, school head, teacher trainer or student teacher, we are surely united in our concern that the best possible transition should be made for those who pass for their studies in university to taking on full class-room responsibilities.

Recent studies in the United Kingdom show that this transition is much more complex than we once believed. It is a highly individual process, throwing up different problems and opportunities for each new teacher. A DES Report, *Progress in Education*, stated clearly in 1978 the need for structural provision. "However good initial training may be, it will be less effective if teachers newly entering the schools do not benefit from programmes of professional initiation, guided experience and further study". In England the "teachers newly entering the schools" include both graduates from three and four year BEd courses and those who have recently completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Education course. All of these will be qualified teachers and will come within probationary arrangements, the first year of paid employment in English maintained schools being deemed to be a probationary year.

In Malta I am well aware of the sensitivities attached to the phrase "the teachers newly entering the schools". I had originally thought that one would wish to apply what I have to say only to fully qualified teachers, but I have come to realise that some aspects of my paper may have bearing on the work phase within the student-worker scheme. It would of course be presumptuous of me to suggest just how far or in what ways my remarks about a British view of the transition from student to fully-fledged teacher can apply to the unique Maltese student-worker scheme. But I wish to present some ideas which are worthy of local consideration. And even when the first students have completed the new five-year course of training in Malta, thought will still be needed as to how best to help them as they take up their first permanent teaching appointments.

The DES Report already quoted refers to the need for programmes of "Professional initiation, guided experience and further study". These three parts together form the process of *induction*, which

is the theme of my paper. This word sprang to prominence in the James Report in 1972, forming a rightly emphasised part in the continuum of professional development, from initial training, through induction, to life-long inservice training. In the early years after the James Report, strenuous efforts were made to set up programmes of induction. In particular, two sponsored schemes, in Northumberland and Liverpool, made provision for induction programmes for all new teachers in their first appointment, and gave them release from their duties during the first year of teaching in order to benefit from such provision. The details of these schemes may be studied in the various writings of Ray Bolam, of the University of Bristol, who played a prominent part in their evaluation. Unfortunately many of the post-James induction schemes were short-lived, and although lip-service is universally paid to the importance of induction, the determination is still lacking to put such good intentions universally into operation. I shall draw my examples from the handful of local education authorities and individual schools who have pioneered effective induction schemes.

Why is it, if induction is seen to be so important, that so many new teachers take up their first teaching posts with such inadequate support and guidance? I believe there are four contributory reasons. It is easy for responsibility for induction to fall between three stools - the employers, the school and the institution. The induction needs of the new teacher are not always apparent: the admission of need for help by the young teacher may be at variance with the importance of appearing competent during the probationary year. With falling school rolls, the proportion of new to experienced teachers has declined, so that the problem can readily be overlooked. The cost implications of the post-James schemes have certainly deterred many employers during a time of financial contraction. The notion, for instance, of allowing all probationary teachers to undertake 9/10 of the full teaching responsibility, with additional staffing resources to the school to provide substitute teaching and professional back-up, has sometimes been perceived as too costly a luxury.

The inability to provide effective programmes of induction does not make our study of the induction process any less important. With this in mind, I shall develop the theme by attempting to answer four main questions.

What are the various expectations of the new teacher?

If we look first at the various perceptions of the new teacher we must be struck by the differences of views of initial teacher trainers, employers, schools and the young teachers themselves. Assumptions about the level of professional competence to be expected by the end of the course of training will be built in to the content and assessment of initial training courses, but they are rarely made explicit. Similarly, assumptions from the employers go far beyond a contract of employment. Interesting differences of view have come to light in a recent survey by Her Majesty's Inspectors called *The New Teacher in School*, published in 1982. HMI carried out a survey of 294 new teachers during their first year of teaching, using lesson observation by HMI and questionnaires to heads and new teachers as the means for gathering evidence. The expectations of heads of schools could be polarised as follows "they (new teachers) should know all the tricks of the trade in the professional teacher's book". "The school sees the probationer teacher as an apprentice qualified in academic terms but with much to learn in terms of practising in the school". However, interesting evidence was provided, in *The New Teacher in School* about the criteria by which heads judged new teachers' performance. As part of professional competence they looked for:

1. Ability to control, organise and manage a class.
2. Punctuality, good preparation, thorough marking.
3. A thoughtful approach to the curriculum - an understanding of the principles underlying schemes of work and of the inter-relationship of subjects.
4. An ability "to bring something new into the school", to be a source of new ideas, to make "a personal contribution".

The New Teacher in School also sheds recent light on how new teachers view their first appointment. Broadly speaking, the new teachers in the survey felt they had been well prepared to teach their own subject specialism, to understand the place of language in learning, and to teach mixed ability groups (in contrast to other surveys which have shown this to be an area for which new teachers have felt inadequately equipped). They generally considered they were underprepared to relate teaching to the world of work outside school, to undertake pastoral duties and to teach children with different cultural backgrounds and socially deprived children.

As we look at such varied range of expectations, we may reach two conclusions. The

first is that we cannot make all new teachers alike. David Warwick in his book *School-based Inservice Training* states the point clearly. "For a college to stamp a set of teaching methods upon all its entrants, like so many eggs through a factory, would amount to indoctrination not education". Secondly, we cannot expect the theory and practice elements of initial training to equip the new teacher for a life in teaching. I come back to the James Report. "No teacher can in a relatively short period at the beginning of his career be equipped for all the responsibilities he is going to face".

What are the needs of the new teacher?

What are the needs of the new teacher in relating the theory and practice of initial training to their work in schools? There is a growing literature resulting from surveys carried out in Britain and in Australia. In England, the papers of Ray Bolam throw a good deal of light on the perceived needs of new teachers, and the theme is taken up again in *The New Teacher in School*. The professional needs can be examined under three headings - encouragement, practical guidance and time. In describing their own needs, new teachers frequently emphasise the value of encouragement, starting with the shared awareness of their difficulties. The stresses and strains of the early years of teaching should not be minimised by those of us who are far removed from them, occurring as they do at a time of considerable personal demands, such as living away from home for the first time or adjusting to courtship and marriage. New teachers appear to value constructive mutual dialogue, with the clear articulation of praise and blame. Vera Dorner writes in an article in the *Cambridge Journal of Education* in 1979 "I like to see the person who is to judge me and hear him explain to me face to face what he thinks is good and bad. I'm not frightened of being criticised". Along with fair criticism, new teachers, value a recognition that they have something to contribute despite their inexperience, and we do well to remember that their youth, enthusiasm and freshness of visions are assets to be capitalised.

Encouragement alone would be inadequate. Practical professional guidance is a second essential. The guidance will need to be age-specific and related to the actual classroom in which the new teacher is working. It is no good knowing only generally about a particular reading scheme: it is necessary to understand exactly how it can be operated with the age group being taught. It is no good knowing only generally about the storage and organisation of science apparatus: the new science

teacher must know how this operates in her school and in relation to her science classes. More general considerations of class management and organisation need to be applied to an actual group of children. To know in general about coping with a severe nose-bleed or a minor epileptic fit is useful information, but it will be of untold benefit to the new teacher to be told in advance of potential sufferers, and to be given guidance on the coping mechanisms within the school.

The various evaluations of induction schemes which include a reduced teaching load in the first year consistently emphasise how valuable this is seen to be. New teachers for example working in the Inner London Education Authority of the London Borough of Enfield rate very high indeed the fact that each school with a probationary teacher is allowed an additional .1 of staffing to allow some teaching replacement of new teachers, and professional guidance from experienced members of staff. Schools in areas which are less fortunately placed - and the costs of such relief will always be a deterrent - have sometimes found ingenious ways of providing cover for new teachers' classes, so that in some way there can be time for reflection and systematic classroom-related study.

Who can best help teachers in the induction period?

Given the need for induction programmes, who then can provide them? The employing authority plays a crucial part. Administrators will make the overall policy decisions, including decisions about the use of resources which are as we have seen vital if new teachers are to have any form of lightened timetable. Inspectors from the employing authority will be essential suppliers of the professional expertise required by the new teacher.

Administrators and inspectors are shadowy figures for most young teachers, and it will be within the school that the question is most frequently asked - Who can help to provide the induction experience? Will this be the head, the deputy head, or some other person deputed to undertake this task? The head's approach will always be of utmost importance, sharing as he does decisions about teacher appointments and controlling the allocation of new teachers to their classes. The role of the head is frequently unenviable, and particularly so in the firmness which may be required with other more experienced teachers in the interests of ensuring a reasonably fair start for a new teacher. Most of the surveys refer directly or indirectly to the importance of a constructive attitude by the head. A typical comment from a successful new teacher is "I felt the head did not place me with the most

difficult class. He understood my difficulties and saw that I knew where to find the practical help I needed". In large schools it will be to the deputy head that the new teacher turns, particularly in specific matters about the timetable and the curriculum. Heads and deputies have an increasingly demanding responsibility, so the practice has grown up of deputing the induction of new teachers to another senior member of staff, sometimes referred to as the Professional Tutor. In large secondary schools this may be a head of department or year head, given some remission from teaching to allow time for the task. In a small primary school, the deputy head sometimes doubles for Professional Tutor, or another experienced senior teacher is appointed to the task, having already shown particular aptitude and willingness to train.

The employing authority and the school itself will be the major providers of induction, but no check-list of contributors is completed without mention of the training institution. It will be of crucial importance to the success of the induction programme that the initial trainers should have passed on information not only about the theoretical and practical coverage of the course but specific details about the strengths and weaknesses of the particular new teacher. Remarks will be very much more helpful than just marks if the induction programme is to build on the initial framework. The training institutions also have much to offer based on their experience in schools with teachers in training. Their expertise can contribute to the design and content of induction programmes, and if Professional Tutors are to receive training, the experience of teacher trainers can be brought to bear on constructive and analytical classroom observation. Even the most brilliant classroom teacher needs to adjust to the new tasks of helping to improve the skills of his inexperienced colleagues.

The best of all induction schemes will stem from a partnership between all three of these agents - employers, schools and training institutions. I can think of no context in which partnership could lead to more fruitful results than in tripartite partnership in the design and implementation of induction programmes for new teachers.

The more enterprising authorities and schools in the U.K. experimented with a variety of patterns. Some have gone for pre-induction activities - an extension of the general one-day visit before taking up appointment to include a specially designed two-day conference in the school before term begins, or a residential weekend prior to the new term. Others have put great emphasis on the production of a school Handbook, collating all the

information likely to be helpful to the new teacher: the most successful Handbooks are loose-leaf, as circumstances change so quickly. More have concentrated on a year long programme designed for the new teacher, partly in school, partly in nearby teachers' centres, and partly in other schools. The year-long programme would normally be planned by the Professional Tutor who might, as in the authority of Avon, organise meetings for new teachers weekly during the first term, fortnightly during second, and on demand in the third. Avon, I.L.E.A. and Enfield all appear to have built in the opportunity to visit other schools than that in which the new teacher is employed.

The structure and organisation of an induction programme will be less important than its content and approach, and recent handbooks on induction have emphasised the task of induction, by whomsoever or wheresoever they will be carried out. The next section suggests ten tasks for the person or persons responsible for induction.

How can induction be best provided?

1. **Introducing** - the new teacher:
 - to people in the school (the head, deputy, other staff, secretary, caretaker etc.)
 - to places in the school, such as the library, stock cupboard, apparatus store, areas for practical work like drying children's paintings, etc.
2. **Explaining** - administrative procedures, like marking the register, arrangements in case of absence.
3. **Interpreting** - the policies of the school, eg. in relation to record-keeping, marking of pupils' work, report-writing, contact with parents.
4. **Observing** - the new teacher on the job. "Popping in" may be helpful to begin with. Systematic observation of 20 minutes or more may be useful later.
5. **Discussing** - the lessons observed, getting the new teacher first to summarise the strengths and weaknesses of the period under observation.
6. **Arranging seminars** - particularly if there are several new teachers, on common behavioural and organisational problems. Other experienced teachers have much to offer. The Professional Tutor must be a good facilitator.
7. **Arranging visits** - to other classes in the school or to other schools. Class-swap can be helpful for the inexperienced as well as for the experienced.

8. **Liaising with others** - with the head and the deputy, the inspectorate, other teachers (especially those who take the view that new teachers need to be told to forget what they were taught in their training institution).

9. **Informing** - the new teacher of progress on all fronts. Feed-back is essential to progress.

10. **Encouraging** - the new teacher:

- to self-evaluate eg. analysing one activity which went well and one which went badly.
- to survive. Some of the best induction programmes end the year with a party to celebrate survival.

Much of the foregoing has described the relating of theory and practice in the first years of teaching in an English context. In two final conclusions I am certain we are on common ground. The first conclusion is that we are all *jointly* involved (teachers trainers, employers and schools) in enabling new teachers to relate their theoretical studies to practice in the classroom. This will remain true whether that relation of theory to practice occurs as in England during the probationary year, or as in Malta, during the work phase of the student worker scheme. The common tasks must be to seek the machinery through which the partnership can most effectively operate.

My second conclusion is that the task of inducting the new teacher into our profession is one which requires effort not only of intellect but of understanding. As we, the experienced teacher trainer, administrator, inspector, school head, set about our induction task, it behoves us to remember in George Target's words that "That raw young teacher is as young and as a raw as once you were, and probably better trained".

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