

## TOWARDS A RESEARCH BASE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE (THE 1996 SERA LECTURE)

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The education of teachers in Europe is characterised by considerable diversity. The procedures for the recruitment of student teachers, the length of preservice training, the status of teachers during training, and the level of induction and ongoing support whilst teaching, for example, all vary greatly from one country to another (see Buchberger, 1992, 1994; and Eurydice, 1991). The curriculum for the training of teachers also takes diverse forms, and the effects of history, culture and context are clearly evident. In several Scandinavian countries, for example, where small populations are dispersed over comparatively large areas giving rise to small schools, and where there has been a tradition of schools serving a social, citizenship function as well as providing an academic education, the emphasis in teacher training is more values focused and person-development oriented than in many other Western European countries (Bengtsson, 1995). In contrast, French teacher education has tended to be quite subject-focused (DES, 1989), and in German speaking countries, the study of Didactics — theories of curriculum and teaching — has been a significant part of preservice teacher education courses (Kansanen, 1995). Nevertheless, in most countries, the distinctive components of subject study, subject application, general classroom management and organisation techniques, educational studies and school experience are generally present, though each is emphasised to very different extents (Galton & Moon, 1994).

In a sense, teacher education in Europe offers a fascinating natural laboratory for educational researchers to explore different ideas and programmes, and the effects of different forms of training. However, such opportunities have not been exploited until very recently, and interestingly the research on teacher education that has been conducted to date has often had little if any impact on policy and development. At the same time, it is interesting to note that in many European countries, teacher education, irrespective of its current form, has been engaged in a process of reform, often of quite a radical nature. The stimulus for these reforms has frequently been economic — in recessionary times, public services have been scrutinised for possible cutbacks or rationalisations. There has also been a strong ideological stimulus in the popular growth in notions of a market economy in public services, and teacher education has not escaped. In a recent review of teacher education research in Scandinavia, Ahlström and Kallos (1996) note that even in Sweden, which has traditionally been very supportive of education and teacher education, there is evidence of a market ideology influencing policy-makers' thinking. Significantly, it has been argued that one of the main factors in moving towards school-based teacher training in England, and also in the Netherlands, has been the commitment to opening up the teacher training market and encouraging competition (Adams & Tulasiewicz, 1995; Wubbels, 1992).

There is, then, a widespread reappraisal of what teacher education is and should be doing. The actual form of that reappraisal varies in different countries. In Sweden, a national committee has been established — consisting mostly of teachers, teacher educators and researchers — free to commission modest amounts of research and to seek consultation with different interest groups — eventually to make recommendations to central government for teacher education reform. In England, the government seems to seek advice from its own policy groups, such as

the Centre for Policy Studies, and then pronounces the way forward (see John & Lucas, 1994). In Scotland, teachers appear to have a much stronger collective voice, and much more community support, which enables some of the more ideologically driven reforms that occur across the border to be resisted.

What is apparent, however, in discussions of future directions in teacher education is a European-wide lack of evidence on which to base judgements. Policies are frequently driven by folklore, ideology and craft wisdom. There is little independent evaluation of alternative practices in teacher education, and little in the way of a theoretical base to guide the design of teacher education courses. If teacher education is genuinely to be reformed to improve the quality of teaching, we need not only to clarify our ideas about the nature of the teaching we wish to cultivate, but we also need to understand how people learn to teach and what supports that learning. There is an important role for research in contributing to a framework for understanding teacher development and evaluating attempts to improve what we do as teacher educators. This cuts across national boundaries and lies at the heart of the rational development of teacher education.

There are several partial models or theoretical frameworks which have had some guiding influence on teacher education. Donald Schön's (1983) model of reflective practice, for example, or professional socialisation models such as Colin Lacey's (1977) or Ken Zeichner's (see Zeichner & Gore, 1990), have influenced the development of some courses. However, we have no detailed theoretical understanding of the processes of growth from student to student teacher to newly qualified teacher to qualified teacher. As a result, and also because of the time and resource constraints that teacher educators commonly work under, teacher education is beset by a wide range of dilemmas. Teacher educators in different countries are commonly juggling competing external demands together with their own, sometimes contrary, understanding of how one might most appropriately educate and train teachers. It is a task full of compromises, in which the problems are often only partially understood, and where different interest groups express competing expectations. Designing and implementing a teacher education course is therefore very often more a matter of managing dilemmas than of realising in practice particular ideas or principles of teacher development. Dilemmas include, for example, balancing the need to provide students with a theoretical understanding of the teacher's work together with experience of the practical performance aspects of teaching; deciding the extent to which student teachers should be exposed early in their course to the practicalities of teaching so that they better understand the theoretical aspects of the curriculum or delaying that exposure so that they enter teaching with a more critical understanding of classroom processes; balancing an emphasis on helping students to replicate existing practice with a contrasting emphasis on innovation and improvement; focusing on the personal development of student teachers, or their subject understanding or their professional skills. There are many demands upon teacher educators, and the design of preservice training courses is inevitably a compromise amongst multiple competing pressures and expectations.

Such dilemmas appear to be almost universal in teacher education and leave teacher educators with many difficult decisions regarding the most appropriate strategies for improving student teachers' professional development. If the overall quality of teacher education courses is to improve, however, more comprehensive ways of conceptualising the processes involved in teaching and learning to teach are required. Research has an important role to play in this development, and several networks of researchers have recently developed which aim to pursue a range of practical and theoretical questions in this area. The Association for Teacher Education in Europe has developed several research-oriented working groups, the European Association of Teachers addresses such matters in its conferences, and

the European Commission has recently funded a European Network for Research in Teacher Education based at Umeå University in Sweden. The agenda for teacher education research is beginning to be established and many of its concerns cut across geographical and cultural boundaries.

As an example of what research might contribute to our understanding and practice in teacher education, one particular study will be drawn upon in the remainder of this paper to illustrate how our exploration of professional learning processes can lead to ways of understanding teacher education and to practical strategies in shaping its development. The study (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997) followed twenty student primary teachers over a two-year period, and attempted to identify the learning experiences they encountered and the factors that facilitated or impeded their development. Ten of the student teachers were in a conventional PGCE course and were later followed through into their first appointment, the other ten were in a two-year Articled Teacher scheme, which was a heavily school-based teacher training course — one of the fore-runner pilot schemes to school-based training. The study involved a series of interviews with the students and observations of their teaching. In examining the students' own reports of their learning, it was clear that students engage in different kinds of learning process. This often provided difficulties for students, first of all because the situations they faced involved types of learning that the students were not used to, and secondly because, as several of them eventually realised, learning to teach involved the coordination of different learning processes.

Five different types of learning experience were inferred from the student teachers' accounts. First of all, *knowledge accumulation* was the relatively straightforward learning of information vital to the task of teaching. The student teachers were bombarded with enormous amounts of information — about schools, about children, about the curriculum, about procedures and strategies. Much of this was simply factual detail that students needed to have readily available, and it was accumulated (or not) from college lectures, books, school documents, and conversations with teachers and tutors.

Secondly, there was *performance learning*. Part of the task of teaching is to perform, to act as a teacher in the classroom, and learning to perform is quite a different experience from learning about Key Stage assessment or the National Curriculum requirements. Performance learning required a detailed awareness of self and others and an ability to cue in to the various actions, movements, tones of voice, speech and gestures that were used to communicate in the classroom. Learning to perform as a teacher and to monitor and adapt their performance was for many student teachers a novel experience, involving learning processes that were more akin to those involved in learning to be an actor or counsellor.

Thirdly, learning to teach involved a lot of *practical problem-solving*. Planning lessons, thinking about how to cope with a particular form of classroom organisation, or arranging the day's activities all involved balancing various interests, opportunities and constraints in order broadly to achieve one's goals. Practical problem-solving was a very time-consuming activity for many of the student teachers, particularly early in the course, because, as Schön (1983) explains, practical problems are often *messy* and offer different ways of being perceived as well as diverse routes to solving them. Practical problem solving involved bringing together various areas of knowledge and experience, looking for patterns and explanations, and mentally rehearsing various strategies in attempts to define and solve problems.

Fourthly, student teachers *learned about relationships*. In the view of the students, negotiating and maintaining relationships in the classroom, and also to some extent outside of the classroom with other teachers and parents, was a significant part of the teacher's work. This may have some aspects in common with

performance learning, but when students were engaged in developing this aspect of their work as teachers, they also appeared to develop a sensitivity to themselves and others that is peculiar to the processes of establishing relationships. Students often perceived developing relationships as involving themselves as a person much more than performance skills. To relate well to children, it was often suggested, one had genuinely to like the children, to want to work with them and to be able to communicate that genuineness. Some students also suggested that there was some degree of vulnerability associated with developing a good relationship with the children, because one had to some extent to expose one's own personality and to let the children know who you are as a person. Many of the student teachers found the development of classroom relationships to be difficult. They were sometimes unable to appreciate how the good examples of teacher-pupil relationships and the pleasant co-operative working environments that they observed in school had been built up over the year, and took a long time to recognise the complex interplay of factors that made such relationships possible.

Fifthly, there were *processes of assimilation* in learning to teach. The students, particularly later in their course, were constantly drawing upon a diverse range of strategies, beliefs, values and information in their everyday work, and this presented considerable scope for dissonance. Even with experienced teachers, there is probably a fair amount of dissonance in their everyday thinking which may at times be a source of anxiety but which is also a source of learning. In the case of the student teachers, the dissonance was often high. The images they had of themselves as teachers did not match the kind of teacher they could see themselves becoming. The students found themselves juggling different images of themselves and teaching, searching for rationales and justifications in an attempt to develop a more coherent and comfortable understanding of teaching and of themselves as teachers. Interestingly, although the student teachers were regularly asked to provide examples of recent learning experiences and to talk about them, many of their most important learning experiences could not be represented as discrete events. Commonly, these were occasions when the students reflected back on a variety of different events, reliving situations and mentally rehearsing different interpretations, as a result of which some new understandings emerged.

As well as focusing on the nature of student teachers' learning experiences, the interviews also attempted to identify those factors that facilitated or impeded their learning. One of the major factors that students reported was the influence of the mentor or college tutor. Their interventions, particularly those of the former who tended to have closer contact with the students, often structured the students' experience and influenced their learning. For some student teachers, the mentor was the main source of information about teaching, the main source of advice and feedback about their own practice, and the main confidant and counsellor when things went wrong. In exploring the relationships between mentors and students, it was possible to devise a typology of the ways in which mentors (including college tutors when they also acted as mentors or supervisors of the students' school placement) influenced student teachers' practice. This is by no means exhaustive, but is proposed as an initial means of conceptualising professional development interactions between the students and their supervisors, highlighting the significant aspects of the mentor's work, and providing a basis for identifying the needs of mentors and college tutors in their own training. Six different processes of mentoring were evident.

(i) *Influencing by example*

In this case, the mentors influenced the student teachers by providing a model for the student to copy. It could be a model in the form of their own behaviour — a demonstration lesson or particular teaching strategy — or in the form of suggested

lesson plans, ideas for activities or specific recommended actions to take to overcome particular difficulties. The mentor was in this case the source of actions and solutions. The student could use these ideas or demonstrations as examples to copy, or as occurred more commonly, they were used as a basis for comparison. Students, after noting a range of different practices, could sift out ideas and strategies with which to experiment, piecing together their own particular approaches.

(ii) *Influencing by coaching*

This involved focused, ongoing support, requiring, for instance, careful observation and follow-up discussion together with repeated practice of particular strategies or skills or types of lesson. Distinguishing features of the coach were observation and discussion, the breaking down of a task into performable parts, and the attention to detail.

(iii) *Influencing through practice-focused discussion*

This might involve abstract discussions about teaching approaches or about theoretical ideas and their implications for practice, or more specific discussions about lessons that students have observed or taught themselves or particular aspects of teaching. The student teachers learned a great deal about practice through talking about it, and often became more aware of aspects of their own practice as a result of such discussion. Talking about practice also helped student teachers clarify their vision of how they would like to teach, setting goals for later attainment.

(iv) *Influencing through structuring the context*

Student teachers taught in classrooms in which resources and ways of working had already been determined by someone else. The children were used to certain activities being conducted in particular ways. The classroom itself, its furniture and its resources were arranged to support this style of working. To some extent the student had to fit in to someone else's style of teaching. Mentors therefore had a strong *indirect* influence on the practices that the student teacher adopted, or which were likely to 'work' in the given context; these structures could be fixed or negotiable, and they might or might not be a topic that was discussed within mentoring conversations themselves. Several of the students spoke of the need to 'fit in' to the class teacher's way of working because this was what the children were used to and as a result they would adopt the teacher's routines, mannerisms, and even the distinctive vocabulary which they used in communicating with the children.

(v) *Influencing through emotional support*

Students frequently experienced uncertainty and self-doubt in the process of learning to teach, and the support and encouragement offered by others was an important factor in maintaining motivation, involvement and the persistence to find solutions to experienced difficulties. Mentors were often viewed as an important source of this encouragement, and mentors themselves rated this aspect of their role highly. Having a supportive class teacher was certainly valued by the students, particularly early in the courses when some of them could easily have been discouraged by their own attempts at teaching. However, teachers who sympathetically recounted anecdotes of their own problems and difficulties or who advised students 'to go home and have a gin' at the end of a bad day were sometimes regarded as ineffective when the students in fact wanted help in analysing what had gone wrong and how their teaching could be improved in the future. Sympathy and encouragement had to be balanced with analysis and constructive feedback.

(vi) *Influencing through devised learning experiences*

Mentors (and college tutors) occasionally constructed particular school-based tasks to promote student learning. For example, they required student teachers to work with a small group of children with special needs to sensitise them to children's learning difficulties, or asked the student teacher to teach in a particular subject area so that they might become better acquainted with that content or ways of organising the class for that subject. In these cases, students were asked to undertake tasks with a particular personal learning outcome in mind.

Interestingly, it was found in this study that teachers tended to approach mentoring in the same way they approached teaching. The mentor who allowed pupils a great deal of freedom and experimentation in their own learning tended also to adopt the same liberal approach to mentoring. Similarly, teachers who were highly didactic with their pupils tended to be quite structured and prescriptive in their support of student teachers. By identifying the different ways in which mentors could influence the professional development of student teachers, however, it becomes possible to consider the demands upon mentors and the support that those supervising student teachers may require in order to carry out their work effectively. In particular, several features seem worth focusing upon in the inservice training of those involved in supervision. These include the development of a language to discuss teaching and to help in analysing student teachers' difficulties; developing one's own competence as a practitioner, able to demonstrate a variety of practices; developing the skills and willingness to appraise one's own practice; acquiring the interpersonal and counselling skills for mentoring; being able to set realistic targets for student teachers; and developing an understanding of the processes of professional growth. Through more focused professional development for the teachers and tutors involved in the supervision of student teachers, it may be possible to help them to shape more effectively the learning experiences of those in their charge.

To conclude, research clearly has an important role to play in unpacking the complexity of learning to teach. If we are to move beyond surviving the common dilemmas, we need a much clearer understanding of what student teachers learn and how they learn and what facilitates or impedes their development. Research in these areas can potentially inform course design and staff development in teacher education. However, steps towards improving the quality of teacher education also require research evidence to be more prominent in the deliberations of policy-makers. In a few countries, research is seen as a vital and intrinsic part of educational decision-making, but in others it is clearly subservient to the ideology of the day. There is a case for supporting greater dialogue amongst researchers, teacher educators, teachers and policy-makers. The ongoing development of a research agenda across Europe and the presence of various models for employing research evidence in educational decision-making, may hopefully lay the foundations for good practice and sound research to be widely and effectively disseminated.

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