

Part 3

Education Policy, Reforms and School Leadership

GILLIAN L. S. HILTON

CHANGING POLICIES CHANGING TIMES: INITIATIVES IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

Abstract

For many years now in England the ways to train for the profession of teaching have been varied, but most teachers have been prepared through partnerships between universities and schools. Now, proposals by the Secretary of State for Education are attempting to virtually remove teacher education from universities giving it into the control of schools, based on the belief that teaching is merely a 'craft' not an academic discipline. The resistance to this idea from the majority of the profession is huge but will the practitioners be heard?

Key words: Teacher education, School based programmes, Teacher education policy, Teacher educators

Introduction

Olssen et al (2004: 2-3) state that

There was a time when educational policy as policy was taken for granted... Clearly this is no longer the case. Today educational policies are the focus of considerable controversy and public contestation... Educational policy-making has become highly politicised.

In the present context of Europe and even in the global situation, education is at the forefront of change and is often seen as the cause of any country's problems and failings. Politicians at European and country level produce reports, call for change and heap blame upon those responsible for the education of our young people. The aftermath of the riots in England in the summer of 2011 resulted in a call to change education and claims that too many schools lacked discipline. This is despite Ofsted reporting positively on the improvement of discipline standards in schools in recent years. An interesting response from Kelly, Editor of the Times Educational Supplement (the main education paper for teachers in England) claimed that 'when teachers go away for a long break leaving only politicians, parents and police in control – society collapses' (Kelly, 2011:4). This response may be somewhat extreme, but it mirrors the frustrations of those in the teaching profession at the habit of our political leaders of too easily blaming educators for the ills of society, with little recourse to research or even debate.

Good policy stems from good research, produced by independent researchers who do not set out to prove what they believe as being true. Gorard (2010) criticises much educational research in the UK as being flawed and lacking in rigour. Unfortunately therefore, if this claim is to be believed, far too often our politicians base their policies on flawed research, the opinions of like-minded 'experts' and even on ideas taken out of context from another society. Good examples of this are the former Labour government's obsession with the success of Finish schools in the PISA league tables, resulting in a scramble to bring all teachers in England to Master's level qualifications and the present coalition's determination to open Free Schools, based on the USA Charter schools and the Swedish model, which has not been particularly successful, when the Dutch model was worth examining.

Teacher Education Policy in England

Policy developments in recent years in the UK, with regard to education, have changed the picture from one where the individual was shielded as far as possible from market forces (Gewirtz, 2002) to a standards based, accountable, market led view (Tomlinson, 2001), stressing competition rather than co-operation. The school league tables make public the test achievements of schools in national assessments, allowing little for differences in intake or social makeup of the student body, whilst Ofsted reports are made public on their website. Bell and Stevenson (2006) point out, that institutions do not implement policies without resistance, but rather change and adapt them subtly or even challenge them outright. This they believe tends to occur where the values expressed in the policy are at odds with the values of the institutions and the staff involved. Gewirtz and Ball (2000) however, stress the compulsion of the modern education manager to perform in the market, with institutions forced to stand out from their rivals by offering something different and special to add value. The previous Labour government continued the market forces approach to education favoured by earlier Conservative administrations, but according to Furlong (2005) changed the idea of how to develop the teacher as a professional from one where this was left to the individual via study during initial teacher training and experience, to one where the state determined what were the effective ways to teach, to learn and to assess. Added to this he believed was a removal of professional development away from universities to schools resulting in a lowering of the importance of the development of a professional and of initial teacher education itself.

Research (Reynolds et al., 2002) into the effectiveness of schools and teachers has demonstrated that the teacher is at the heart of improving student performance and many observers believe that the obsession of politicians with standards in tests such as PISA SATs and GCSEs has eroded teachers' professionalism as there is so much imposed outside control. Whether this has resulted in any real improvements in achievement over the last few years is questionable. Little consultation occurs with those really involved, the teachers, teacher educators or even the students, when strong ideologies and media misrepresentations take over.

Those in the teacher education profession have, over the last years, done their best to accommodate the ever changing regulations, including the standards required to receive qualified teacher status and had hoped with the advent of a new government in 2010 for less interference and a little peace to consolidate the

outstanding and good training about which Ofsted was reporting. It was not to be. Once again the Ministry had a name change and new Secretary of State for Education produced, after six months of the coalition coming to power, his White Paper '*The Importance of Teaching*' (DfE, 2010).

Secretary of State Gove's recent proposal regarding the training of teachers given in a speech to the National College in June 2010 put forward the views that teaching training should be moved 'out of college into the classroom' and that teaching is not an academic study but a craft that can best be learnt 'as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman' (TES, 2010). In addition he intends to raise the entry standard to the profession only allowing those with higher level degree classifications to be admitted and that all prospective teachers pass a maths and English entry test before starting a course. In addition there is to be an expansion of *Teach First*, the scheme that involves a six week intensive preparation period for high flying graduates from top universities, who after this quick preparation are deployed and paid as untrained teachers in challenging schools. The ideology behind these changes is expressed as being an attempt to free schools from the control of local government education departments and also central government, removing the mesh of regulations introduced under the previous Labour administration. The main question which arises from this proposal is; who will be responsible for developing the professional aspects of a teacher's knowledge? This has in the past been the responsibility in the main of university education departments, with even the school based routes to teaching (there are a wide variety of these in England) using expertise from university staff to provide theoretical backgrounds on areas such as learning and teaching, behaviour management and professional responsibilities in addition to subject knowledge studies. Understandably these proposals have received some very negative responses from teachers, unions and universities. One teacher writing to the TES online forum said

I'm hugely insulted by this. I don't trim hair cut wood or knit! I use an array of methods to accelerate students' learning whilst conducting research into new methods, before disseminating them to the community (TES, 2010).

Moving training almost completely into schools and taking power and money from university education departments to create a learn at the feet of the master apprentice approach, has followed what Reid (2010) describes as the normal approach for policy reform, by asking for consultation on the details, but not on the conceptualisation of the ideas put forward. This approach is directly opposed to the ideas of authors such as Fullan (1999, 2001, 2003) who points to the need to involve those implementing change from the outset if the initiative is to be successful. Is then the dominant model of policy, one imposed from above, out of date and unworkable in modern society where rapidly changing contexts may render universality as out-dated and inefficient? Following the status quo will not give the innovative, theoretical basis for action so needed by teachers who are preparing children for an uncertain future. We need to change to progress, but then the questions need to be asked; is teaching something that can be learned at the feet of a Master with little recourse to understanding of why some ideas succeed and others do not and is it possible to use policies successful in one context in another with little adaptation? Approaches that work in an inner city school with many children who are from ethnic minorities, with parents whose command of the English

language is limited, may not be suited to middle class children coming from homes where high aspirations are the norm and books and technological equipment are readily available. So can we learn from one teacher in one school how to approach all children? Is there something more than this to preparing teachers? As Evans et al (2011) profess, teachers in schools do have professional knowledge developed over years, but some are working in schools where theory is not valued, research is not consulted and professional discourse on theoretical ideas does not occur. With the day to day challenges of teaching how much attention will be given to the underpinning of actions by knowledge gained from the study of theory and research findings? Furlong's (1990) research with trainees suggests that they do not reject theory, but the only place where this kind of discussion takes place is in university based training.

Other complainants are the universities who see their role in teacher education reduced to a minimum and with it the valuable funding they receive (though some of this is passed onto their partner schools who undertake practice supervision and mentoring). Instead, they will be paid by schools to add whatever theoretical elements schools want for the training they are providing. This, it is believed by some of the older universities, will lead to the closure of many education departments in universities; with the subsequent reduction of research activity, as employing lecturers to work in schools on a limited basis will not be cost effective. It will also result in redundancy for many teacher educators, very costly for universities already in severe financial straits with government funding changes. According to Schultz (2011:34) there is a mistaken belief that institutions of Higher Education are not in favour of practice preferring to adhere to a theoretical approach. He refutes this idea insisting that teacher education professionals see theory and practice as matching sides of a whole, because excellence in pedagogy has to be firmly based in theory.

Cunnane (2010) reported in *Times Higher Education* that The University Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) has also expressed fears that schools will not be able to cope with producing the numbers of teachers required as the time needed to undertake the task effectively would be burdensome to schools, especially smaller ones and adversely affect quality. They were also concerned with a possible reduction in the quality of the teachers produced if training was put into schools with only minimal input from universities.

Conclusion

To produce a professional teacher takes time and can only be achieved if that professionalism is founded on a good understanding of educational theory, not merely subject knowledge and from then the prospective teacher can also learn how to apply that theory in practice situations. Many teachers and teacher educators in England believe that the proposed policy changes are 'based on a simplistic and narrow view of the role of the school and teaching resulting from politicians' memories of their experiences in what was almost certainly an elitist school experience' (Evans et al., 2011:3). Training our teachers needs the input of theory from those who have studied and critically analysed it in depth as well as practice of how to apply that theory and see others applying it, followed by critical analysis of and reflection on its worth in the current situation. Without this our teacher training will simply not be good enough. It is essential too that students experience a variety

of practice conditions in different schools and these proposals seem to ignore this need. Politicians therefore, whose time span in a role can be cut short by an election, or more often by promotion or demotion, or a cabinet reshuffle must realise that the timespan of their policies is much more than their stay in the power base and that poor policy decisions can affect the education of a generation of children long after they have been removed from office and have been forgotten about. Kozminsky (2011:7) insists that any policy maker who wants a successful implementation of their proposed policy change needs to base that policy on ideas and 'processes that engage teachers and teacher educators'. Without this she believes that the professionals will feel that their identity has been challenged and fail to support proposed changes. Many within the teacher education profession in England agree with this but the reforms are moving forward with little response to our concerns. This raises another question: is the reason our opinions are constantly ignored by politicians caused by our constant and long standing compliance to their whims? Teacher educators await the future with disappointment and concern that yet again we are seen as the problem, not part of the solution in improving standards for our teachers.

References

- Bell, L., Stevenson, H. (2006) *Education Policy: Process Themes and Impact*, Oxon, Routledge.
- Cunnane, S. (2010) 'Moving teacher training from universities will 'risk quality'', *Times Higher Education* 12th November pp 4.
- DfE (2010) *The Importance of Teaching, White Paper*, London, DfE.
- Evans, A., Hawksley, F., Holland, M. (2011) 'International Perspectives on the theory – practice divide in Secondary Initial Teacher Education', Paper given at the Association of Teacher Educators in Europe Conference in Riga Latvia August 2011.
- Fullan, M. (1999) *Change Forces: The Sequel*, London, Routledge/Falmer.
- Fullan, M. (2001) *The New Meaning of Educational Change (3rd edition)*, New York, Teachers' College Press.
- Fullan, M. (2003) *Change Forces with a Vengeance*, London, Routledge/Falmer.
- Furlong, J. (1990) 'School based training: The students' views' in M. Booth, J. Furlong, M. Wilkins *Partnership in Initial Teacher Training*, London, Cassel.
- Furlong, J. (2005) 'New Labour and Teacher Education the End of an Era', *Oxford Review of Education*, 31, (1) pp 119-134.
- Gewirtz, S. (2002) *The Managerial School: Post-welfarism and Social Justice in Education*, London, Routledge.
- Gewirtz, S. and Ball, S. J. (2000) 'From 'welfarism' to 'new managerialism' shifting discourses of school leadership in the education marketplace', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 21(3) 253-68.
- Gorard, S. (2010) 'Accessing and understanding Research in Education' in J. Arthur and I. Davies (Eds.) *Education Studies*, Oxon, Routledge.
- Kelly, G. (2011) Editorial: Schools could teach the politicians a thing or two about crowd control, *TES* 12.08.2011:4.
- Kozminsky, L. (2011) Professional identity of teachers and teacher educators in a changing reality. Keynote address at 36th Annual conference of the Association for Teacher

- Education in Europe, Latvia University Riga 25th August 2011, Teachers' Life-cycle from Initial Teacher Education to Experienced Professional Conference publication, Riga, University of Latvia.
- Olssen, M., Codd, J., O'Neill, A. (2004) *Education Policy: Globalisation, Citizenship and Democracy*, London, Sage.
- Reid, A. (2010) 'The Politics of Educational Change' in J. Arthur and I. Davies (Eds.) *Education Studies*, Oxon, Routledge.
- Reynolds, D., Stringfield, S., Schaffer, D. (2002) 'Creating world class schools; What have we learned?' in *World Class Schools; International Perspectives on School Effectiveness*, London, Routledge/Falmer.
- Schultz, D. (2011) Practice in Teacher: Education: Preparing Teachers for Work and Life in an Educational Community, Keynote address at 36th Annual conference of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe, Latvia University Riga 27th August 2011, Teachers' Life-cycle from Initial Teacher Education to Experienced Professional Conference publication, Riga, University of Latvia.
- TES (2010) 'Theory be damned. Just follow the 'how to guide'', TES Magazine 19th November pp 10-17.
- Tomlinson, S. (2001) *Education in a Post-Welfare Society*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Dr. Gillian L. S. Hilton
Middlesex University London
United Kingdom
G.Hilton@mdx.ac.uk