Education in the Age of the Information Superhighway: An Investigation into Initial Teacher Training in Canada

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Abstract

This article discusses particular aspects of current Canadian teacher training that seem healthy practice to an experienced school-teacher from the United Kingdom. With the UK government increasingly interested, some would say determined, in moving the funding of initial teacher training away from universities and to schools, my visit to Canada, and specifically to Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at The University of Toronto, focuses on those practices that appear supportive of deep learning for beginning teachers in helping them to develop their own sense of the purposes of education and ways in which they might become agents of change.

Keywords : comparative initial teacher training programmes, social justice, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, United Kingdom and Canada

Résumé

Cet article traite certains aspects de la formation actuelle des enseignants au Canada qui semblent être une pratique salutaire selon un enseignant expérimenté du Royaume-Uni. Avec le gouvernement britannique de plus en plus intéressé, certains diraient déterminé, en déplaçant le financement de la formation initiale des enseignants loin des universités et des écoles, ma visite au Canada, et plus particulièrement à l'OISE de l'université de Toronto, se concentre sur les pratiques qui semblent favorables à un apprentissage en profondeur pour les enseignants débutants, afin de les aider à développer leur propre sens des objectifs de l'éducation et les façons dont ils pourraient devenir des agents du changement.

Mots-clés: comparaison des programmes de formation initiale des enseignants, justice sociale, Centre de recherche en éducation de l'université de Toronto (OISE : Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), Royaume-Uni et Canada

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My intention here is simple. I believe that the purpose of education should be changing right now. Politicians, administrators, and those in the teaching profession more widely need to think through the challenge of providing a valuable educational experience in our times.

I believe that there is potential in the very notion of change. Change must always be a part of success. There is a need for change even in the highest performing schools. School leaders must always be looking for ways in which they can develop the collective understanding within their school as to what the purposes of that school are. Ethos needs to be built around the immediate needs of the local environment and also upon the consideration of recent theoretical development; a fixed idea of what is right will soon become dated and restrictive. The successful Head of Department realises when the high-performing team that has been established and developed needs to be pulled apart and the process of developing a new team needs to begin.

Our children are reliant upon the education system to help them understand the world in which they live. That world is changing at a fast rate. Is the UK education system adapting to meet the needs of these children?

We do not need to look for some notional state of excellence that is fixed and 'right.' The challenges we face are not fixed. The ideologies and political standpoints around the world are not fixed. Successful educational systems, if they are to approach new sets of developing circumstances, must be about change and the ability to keep moving forward.

If children want information today, they can go to the internet, the most important tool of communication since the printing press. It is overwhelmingly in the English language and appears endlessly capable of supplying information about any given topic. Information is not only accessible but it has become increasingly easy to seek out without any concerted effort. The bonus to the child is that he or she can take control of content and can range as widely as he or she wish. They have, if you like, taken control of the mouse from teachers and examiners. Schools no longer hold the keys to information. Information has exploded and it has become democratic.

Under this newly emerging set of circumstances, the purpose of schools can no longer be to impart knowledge.

So what shall we teach these future generations, whose jobs, we are told, have yet to be invented? Change is so fast that we don't know what we are 'preparing' our students for. We continue to support a curriculum that is largely unchanged from the late 19th Century. The answer surely lies in the processes of learning rather than the more instantly measureable—and decidedly short-term—outcomes of examinations. Chris Lewis completed a study about the skills required to be a success in business. He identified the need for positivity, bravery, determination, self-belief, creativity, and sheer energy. Do we explicitly teach any of these? Do we even plan for them?

In his "Poetics of Teaching," David Hansen offers us the aim of 'hopefulness' as an outcome to the educational process. Hansen encourages a curriculum model that invites teachers to prepare the 'attitudes, dispositions, outlooks, and orientations...' of students. Teachers should really be teaching how to learn, rather than a set body of knowledge. Politics and circumstance will always manipulate the content of subjects, and teachers must be brave enough to stand outside this unpredictable pedagogical environment.

What can you remember of the facts that you learned at school? I am sure that most people can remember virtually nothing of the content of their schooling. However, we did leave school with a 'qualification' in subjects. If the remembering of facts is transitory, as I believe it is, then what does it mean to be well-educated? What is important about going to school and how should teachers approach the act of teaching?

One of the challenges that lie ahead is that of training a new generation of teachers capable of responding to this evolving information superhighway. How do we root children culturally and give them the ability to be tentative and selective with the information that is everywhere around them? Teachers surely need to be empowered to be capable of, and then trusted to, preside over all this information. My idea is supported in Ian Gilbert's book of essays, "Why Do I Need a Teacher When I've Got Google?" As well as sifting information with pupils you have

> a powerful role in helping them develop their communication skills, their creativity, their curiosity, their ability to work well in a team, their confidence and self-esteem, their sense of what is wrong and what is right, their ability to deal with adversity, their understanding of their role as a citizen of the world – in other words all the things the computer can't do yet – then you have a powerful role for the twenty-first century teacher. (p. 71)

The transfer of information as a focus for schools is an increasingly redundant focus. Information has become democratised. Teachers do not 'own' it anymore. The teacher that doesn't understand this, or doesn't adapt to this, is doomed.

If we accept that new approaches are needed and that the communication of information is secondary in importance to thoughtful method, then we must investigate how we are to teach. The training of teachers is of vital importance here. What shall we tell beginning teachers is the business of teaching?

Beginning teachers in the UK are going to need support if they are not to be overwhelmed with the current emphasis upon exam performance and league tables. This would seem to be the primary way by which the value of teaching is presently measured. The very tracking of student data needs to be handled with great caution. Students do not necessarily learn incrementally in the way that data systems require. Are we really going to suggest to beginning teachers that the business of teaching is achieving a good set of grades? This will mean a narrow concentration upon the curriculum required to jump through the hoop of the examination. This is a sure-fire way to create a 'norm' that will stultify the sense of the manifold nature of genuine inquiry so necessary in creating successful learners.

My interest in developing the debate about initial teacher training has led me to organize a visit to Canada to see how initial teacher training is conducted there. A global exchange of ideas strikes me as a good idea for the UK education system. Because Canada organizes its educational framework at the provincial level rather than the federal level, it is often left out of international comparison data. The very fact that there is no national education policy is of interest in itself. What can we learn from the Canadian system of teacher training?

In his article "Why Teachers Must Become Change Agents," University of Toronto professor Michael Fullan indicates that "teaching at its core is a moral profession" (p. 1). Certainly, the young people that I have interviewed over the past 10 years for places on the postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) course at The University of Nottingham have

collectively spoken about wanting to make a difference to the lives of the students. Surely, by this they don't just mean to teach those future students some facts to help them pass their exams. The job of the teacher education programme must encompass supporting student teachers in finding their own personal vision of what teaching should be and why it is important to society. This sense of vision needs to develop outside the parameters of individual systems in schools. Beginning teachers need to define their own ways of instigating change by looking at the ways education operates and deciding how to move it forward. This sense of inquiry is important for all teachers; the teacher that questions what they are doing will be a lifelong learner capable of meeting new demands.

A personal philosophy of teaching comes from within rather than from the codes and practices of schools. Indeed, it is the active initiating of personal philosophies that can drive forward change in the codes and practices of schools. This sense of defining the role of teacher as extending past the classroom to a collaborative sense of responsibility for healthy change is, for me, part of the responsibility of the teacher training programme.

I am interested in discovering what the core messages of Canadian teacher training programmes are. With what sense of the profession and its importance will a newly qualified teacher begin?

Some Opening Remarks

It seems to me that education is complex and not easily quantifiable in the way that governments would like to measure and judge. Can we quantify friendship or the arts or the natural world? I think not. Similarly, I believe that an education cannot be viewed from the perspective of getting students to pass tests. These tests are no more than a barometer reading of a student's developing abilities. Teachers must not narrow the purpose of education to the passing of tests to make their school look better than the next.

Furthermore, education is a moral pursuit. It is more than learning facts or even behaviours. When a child learns to bully, I am sure that you would agree that this is not an education. Education is cultural, moral, and aesthetic. We would counsel the bully that society does not accept such actions, that it is not a 'right' course of action and that it is not a pleasing or beautiful act.

Education must be about inquiry. We must imbue our students with a sense of critical inquiry. Beliefs, including those that the teacher presents as truths, should be subject to active reflection and to the possibility of revision. Critical receptiveness rather than passive acceptance is a key life-skill. I believe that knowledge will come not from accepting a teacher's word but by truly believing for one's self. Investigating 'truth' with a teacher will lead to genuine ownership of knowledge. I feel that this approach will lead to a sense of wisdom and autonomy of learning suitable for the challenges and decisions that life will undoubtedly provide.

Paul Standish remarks that "teachers are not technical operatives who do not need to understand the operations that they are performing. The understanding they need is internally related to practice" (Hare & Portelli, 2005, p. 27). This is an intensely important perspective for two groups of people: the governments that treat teachers like operatives and the teachers who behave like these operatives.

Our beginning teachers need to be armed with clarity in their own vision of the purpose to which they wish to put the act of teaching, before they step into a classroom. Once in the classroom they need to be guided by experienced and supportive colleagues who have both time

and commitment enough to make a real impact upon the thinking and actions of the beginning teacher.

And so, to Canada to see how the education of beginning teachers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) is conducted.

Schooling in Canada

The first point to note is that education in Canada is not organized at national level. The country is made up of 10 provinces and three territories, each of which takes responsibility for its own educational policies. Whilst this raises obvious concerns, from a British perspective, about uniform standards, it certainly allows educators to respond to local rather than national agendas.

To give a simple account of the workings of education in Canada is not really possible because of the diversity of approaches and controlling bodies. In each province, district school boards run schools but are not involved in decisions about educational content that individual schools wish to pursue. To add to the regional mix, there are also some autonomous schools that exist outside provincial control. In Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, and in the three territories, there are religious school, largely Catholic in nature. There are also a very small number of private schools. One further sub-group of schools is those run by the First Nations settlements.

The leaving age varies between 18 in Ontario and New Brunswick and the rest of Canada, where education is compulsory to the age of 16. Education is available in English and in French throughout Canada. Schools offer both academic and vocational courses.

Canada has a highly diverse ethnic mix in its population. Inward migration is focused upon the three largest cities: Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto. These cities are the destination for 75% of immigrants, with 40% of these new settlers not being familiar with either of the official languages of Canada (English and French). Because of this rich mix of people, much of the focus of Canada's educational policy is about social justice and citizenship.

Much like the UK, primary school teachers are expected to teach across a range of disciplines whilst secondary school teachers are prepared to specialise. The expectation is that a secondary school teacher will be able to teach two subjects.

Statistically, Canada holds up well in terms of international comparison of student achievement. Above-average numbers of students leave high school with good qualifications and strong numbers return to pursue education at college or university. Canada devotes a relatively high percentage of GDP to education. Parental satisfaction with schooling is high and the profession of teaching is highly regarded.

Leithwood, Fullan, and Watson (2003) collected four broad purposes of education in Canada: learning to learn, preparation for work, responsible citizenship, and instilling values.

An Example of a Teacher Training Programme

The OISE website sets out some of the thinking behind the course: "A key feature .... the cohort learning community structure, a design informed by research on effective teaching and learning in teacher education." The emphasis here is on learning to be a teacher rather than learning to be a teacher of a particular subject. The teaching of subjects is just one of seven strands of the course and beginning teachers are grouped across phase and subject to create a range of experiences from which to learn.

"Equity, diversity and social justice are foundational principles of the program." This is a recurrent theme in Canadian education, and I would say in Canadian life more generally. The website asserts that the mission statement emphasizes the importance of inclusion of all ages and backgrounds in access to educational opportunities. The themes of equity and social justice are explicitly considered in the coursework elements of the programme.

"Recently, we have highlighted teaching for deep understanding or, as we prefer, teaching for depth, to provide a strong professional foundation for our graduates." The sense of 'deep learning' surely extends to the beginning teacher and the opportunities that the university-based course facilitates. In their cohorts, beginner teachers have the opportunity to engage in team-building activities and in reflecting upon the experiences of theoretical learning and the practicum.

Conclusions That I Have Drawn from my Visit to Toronto

During my visit to OISE in June and July of 2011, I interviewed a number of key staff, some of whom are referred to below.

Kathy Broad and Mark Evans are Associate Deans, David Montemurro runs the Secondary phase courses, and Eleanor Gower is in charge of the Schools Placement Partnership.

Additionally, I spoke with William Peat—Vice Principal of Hillfield Strathallan College in Hamilton, Ontario—and also with Damian Cooper, educational writer and speaker with a leading interest in the role of assessment.

1) A focus upon social justice and the link to the on-going discussion about what it is to be Canadian.

On the day that I arrived in Canada, it was the final game in the National Hockey League's Stanley Cup. Game 7 of 7 was to take place in Vancouver with Boston as the visitors. Large screens were erected in the downtown area and an anticipated crowd of 100,000 began to arrive. Vancouver lost the game and the scenes in the streets turned ugly; stores were looted, cars turned over and burnt, and further violence ensued.

If this kind of thing had happened at an English football ground, the perpetrators would be dismissed as thugs and hooligans. It would not open a debate about what it is to be English or an inquiry into collective blame in the way that Canadians immediately began a public discussion about their collective responsibility. This kind of aggressive and aimless violence does not suit the Canadians' self-perception; they are decent, friendly, and tolerant people.

> As a Vancouverite, I am truly disgusted by the behavior of the people who participated in the violence that erupted last night. Vancouver is a gorgeous city; it's a shame that something like this has tarnished the image of Vancouver, and by extension Canada, as a friendly and hospitable place. Please note that the disgusting behavior of groups of people last night after the game is not representative of all the people of Vancouver. Hundreds of volunteers, organized through social media, are downtown or will be heading downtown this weekend to clean up the mess that was left by those thugs/hooligans/idiots. ('Nat,' an online commenter after the Vancouver hockey riot)

In the aftermath of the night before, people began to write apologetic graffiti on the boards that protected the shops. Volunteers flooded onto the streets of Vancouver to help with

the cleanup effort. Watching the news footage of this story, it was clear that there was something very cathartic about this response.

Central to education policies in Canadian provinces is the idea of equity of opportunity, tolerance of diversity, and a strong sense of citizenship. The first Pan-Canadian Accord in 2006 aimed to establish values and ideals for the teaching profession across the provinces and territories. Middle and centre of this newly proposed set of principles were the ideals of "respect, inclusion, globalisation and diversity" (Gambhir, Broad, Evans, & Gaskell p. 9)

Canada's population is diverse and to make a community/country that values a sense of rich ethnicity is a challenge. Educators have certainly risen to this challenge. There is a healthy respect for the seemingly divergent concepts of community and diversity as motivating factors behind schooling. Citizenship is at the core of Canadian educational philosophy. Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez—an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at OISE—writes, "To be inclusive means to embrace difference as the central value to be encouraged and from which the production of culture begins, rather than as the central problem to be managed and through which culture becomes inert" (OISE, 2011, p. 9).

I stood at the opening of Kerrville Street Festival on Saturday, June 25th, 2011 and listened to the provincial mayor celebrating the fact that there were over 400 different ethnic groups in the area, living together harmoniously and prosperously. This diversity needs to be catered for in schools.

Frederick M. Hess, writing over the border in the United States proclaims that we should "revel in a world of schooling that embraces competing pedagogies, missions, and approaches" (2008, p. 38). He argues that we are not in the business of trying to create homogenous people and that we need to help create diversity. This is exactly the message I received from Damian Cooper, Canadian educational speaker, during his visit with me.

Culture should not be viewed as an entity, which unfortunately I think it mostly has been. Culture is a moving, shifting process that can be made by teachers and their pupils. Engagement with cultural learning can be an agent for tolerance, valuing of diversity, and the beginning of community. This perspective of equity is alive and well in Canada.

This does not mean to say that there are no challenges moving forward. Toronto's teacher ethnicity does not represent its wider ethnicity. This is an issue that the School Boards are seeking to address. David Montemurro told me that there are disproportionately large numbers of Black pupils that are under-achieving in Toronto. Providing Black teachers as role models is a priority.

The courses at OISE very explicitly deal with the issue of equity in a diverse community. Focus is placed on preparing teachers to be 'equity-minded adaptive experts,' beginning teachers that are ready to 'work with diverse students in urban, high-needs schools.' This was certainly a major concern for Eleanor Gower, in charge of practicum placements. She had taught in such schools for many years and was keen to have such schools involved with the teacher training programme. These may be the sorts of schools that UK universities shy away from forming partnerships with.

The emphasis at OISE is clearly stated. "Equity, diversity and social justice are foundational principles of the program." There is a clear contrast here with the UK. Inclusive education in the UK largely works at the level of integration. A focus upon becoming a teacher of a subject is in the foreground in the UK. This naturally relegates the importance of the teacher as social educator.

My feeling is that we have much to gain from a closer reading of the core values of Canadian education policies and their emphasis upon the need for equity and social justice. In comparison, the way that schools in the UK dealt with the subject of citizenship a few years ago is, on reflection, simply shameful. Citizenship was disappeared into policy documents that were generally never read, valued or acted upon.

In my introductory remarks I mentioned the fact that teaching is a moral profession. We can support the building of healthy respect for diversity. This must be done in an explicit nature to be successful. The University of Toronto's publication *Inquiry Into Practice: Reaching Every Child Through Inclusive Curriculum* is an excellent example of teachers and educators discussing their commitment to this cause.

Attempts to Find Deep Learning

2) There is no evidence to suggest that a much more relaxed accountability than in the UK is at all detrimental; indeed, the range and flexibility of assessment in Canadian school goes some way to suggesting the opposite.

The difficult word in this heading is 'accountability.' How do we employ this word and what does it actually mean? Governments, education authorities, and, sometimes, head teachers and line managers want to use the word to mean integrity and quality assurance. Accountability for them means an appearance of standards.

Ann B. Vibert, in her short essay "What is Accountability?," writes the following:

> The consequences of accountability discourses for integrity and quality in schooling: teaching to the test, raising standardised test scores by inviting the poor kids to stay at home, producing banal mission statements and binders full of meaningless statistics, and planning for improvement rather than improving, are all we should expect when it is the appearance of *quality* that we are after. (Hare & Portelli, 2005, p. 119)

Whilst this is a fairly damning indictment of the US situation, it sounds rather familiar to UK schooling. Surely in education we don't need this sense of accountability that belongs in the market driven world of business. Education should be a collective endeavour. Do we really want our kids to do better than theirs? Accountability would be better replaced with the word responsibility. I want teachers to take responsibility for the learning, deep learning, of their pupils.

The profession of school teaching is very well regarded in Canada. It costs $7,000 to train at OISE and yet they are oversubscribed by four to one, even in a time when there are plenty of teachers about already. The qualifications of those entering the profession are high and the levels of trust demonstrated by administrators are excellent. Dropout rates are very low at OISE and, on the whole, anyone leaving tends to self-select, realizing that teaching is not the right option for them. The grading of beginning teachers is based on a culture of supporting progress rather than pass/fail mentalities. Retention rates in the teaching profession more generally are high, although beginning teachers often have to wait a while to make their way into the profession.

Teachers devise their own programmes of lessons based on broad and general outlines from the Ministry of Education. Teachers create their own tests for pupils. The purpose of testing is in the main to help assess the way forward, looking for the next step in the development of the pupil. Teachers make the assessments and they award the grades. General standard normative tests are rare across Canada; British Columbia has standardized testing (State testing), but this is

very much the exception. Professional development time is set aside for discussion of the individual needs of pupils and collaborative action engaged upon.

There is little normative 'one size fits all' testing, little assessment from external sources and yet, the standard of education in Canada is high, based on comparative data of student achievement.

Mark Evans observes,

- Canadian students score well on Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), TIMMSS, and other international rankings of student achievement.
- Recent surveys show that 91% of 25 – 34 year olds have obtained senior secondary education (this is a number of students feeling a sense of success that is far greater than the UK).
- In comparison to other countries, the gradient of inequality in attainment is relatively low.
- 54% have tertiary education, compared to the international average of 32%.

Here we have an environment in which teachers are trusted to devise curriculum, organize and adapt means of assessment to support learning, and then to award grades. And, achievement is very high! Rather than treat this model of education with suspicion, we should be looking at the healthy respect for the professionalism of teachers and their ability to create and deliver an educational programme that gets 'results,' both in terms of appropriate and useful educational experiences and in terms of terminal results.

Canada is not alone in this seemingly, from a UK perspective, relaxed approach to checking up all the time. Finland has come top of the above-mentioned PISA scoring system for most of the last 10 years. What is the magic formula for Finnish education? Ingredients include: all teachers have a Masters Degree, compulsory schooling doesn't begin until age seven, no national testing, no inspections, no league tables, the government looks at 8 – 10% of the pupils work to check on performance. This system is far removed from the current UK situation and it is thriving.

Finland and Canada do not actively pursue and threaten their teachers with the consequences of failure. The profession is regarded highly and that level of respect and trust is rewarded with the delivery of high quality education.

The opportunity to undertake this study has allowed me to see past the UK system and look at what is possible in the global world of education. Our current emphasis on competition and driving up results is not what most of the rest of the world is doing. We are not really preparing for the needs of the new global environment in the ways that other countries are.

3) *The liberating sense of a collaborative rather than competing schooling system at both the level of schools and teacher training institutions.*

Sharing of good practice is essential to progress. This concept is embedded in the new Learner Document that outlines the skills that new graduates on the B.Ed. course must begin to demonstrate. Under the heading 'Teacher Identity,' beginning teachers have to "recognize their potential as collaborators, mentors, and leaders within a variety of professional contexts." Under the heading 'Learning and Teaching in Social Contexts,' beginning teachers will "participate meaningfully and actively in professional learning communities."

David Montemurro, of OISE, described the beginning teacher cohorts that act as tutorial groupings on the courses. Teacher candidates are purposefully mixed across disciplines so that a staffroom type atmosphere is created. David argued that to have teachers from different curriculum areas is important because teachers from different disciplines 'think' in different ways. Therefore, all teacher candidates are exposed to these different perspectives and mindsets. The cohort becomes the teacher candidates' 'home base,' a place where they feel happiest to discuss and reflect upon the experiences that they are having on the course at university and the experiences they have in the field. This rich exposure to a range of ideas, frustrations, perspectives and reflections can be weighed up and can add to the growing personal sense of the purposes of education that each individual teacher candidate is developing. Beginning teachers leave OISE with a healthy understanding that they can work with others to develop all aspects of their on-going professional learning journey.

This collaborative element to teacher training in universities is important if the beginning teacher is to see the potential for change, and for them to become agents of that change. Training based entirely in a school will not afford the beginning teacher time or opportunity to see past the immediate locale of the school itself.

At the level of schools where I went looking for competition, I went looking for schools trying to do better than their neighbours, I went looking for the severe measures of administrators for under-achieving schools, I went looking for the inspection regime, and I found none of this. I found schools that worked collaboratively to enhance the weaknesses detected at particular schools. I found sympathetic and well thought-out plans to resource the needs of inner city schools. It might be hard to believe, but there was no stigma attached to difficulties in schools, just a determination to draw in expertise and resources across the city to help a department or school progress. The only competition that I found at all was when William Peat, Vice Principal at the independent school in Hamilton admitted that they had to put on lots of exciting extra-curricular activities so that they could compete with other local independent schools. But that is money driven and not really an educational consideration.

There is no brutal competition such as we are experiencing in the UK at the present time. The focus on improvement is not on being better than your neighbour but on being better at providing educational opportunities for your pupils. There are no discussions behind closed doors about how to drive up results by hook or by crook. And where does this healthy collaboration get Ontario? Recent PISA statistics placed 15-year-old Ontario students amongst the best readers in the world. Only Shanghai, as an international jurisdiction, rated higher. Worrying about your neighbours' achievements again demonstrates the provincial approach the UK has to schooling. Perhaps we should invest more in collaborative schemes to help make improvements for everyone. At this time, the opposite is happening in the UK; schools are being encouraged to go it alone, become an Academy and move outside the 'control' of the local education authority, thereby losing the connections that have been built up by the newly redundant consultants and advanced skills teachers. If we are all going it alone, where is the incentive to collaborate?

Damian Cooper comments about system-wide change that "threats, budget cuts, teacher testing, intimidation, and humiliation tend not to work!" Instead he cites the work of DuFour and Eaker (1998), who champion Professional Learning Communities.

> Professional learning communities use evidence and intuition in order to work and talk together to review their practices and to increase their success... In a professional learning

> community, the culture changes- everyone sees the bigger picture and works for the good of the whole community. Professional learning communities bring together culture and contract. (see Cooper, 2010, p. 78)

The advisor on education to the Obama administration, Linda Darling-Hammond, looked to collect the best learning practices globally. Three of those elements that she identified are important here:

- Daily time for professional learning and collaboration among teachers
- Supportive induction programmes for new teachers
- Extensive formal and informal in-service opportunities

Collaboration time for teachers every day sounds expensive. But it only sounds expensive if you don't value the idea or see its potential to deliver strong education. When Principals and Head teachers say there isn't enough money for an initiative, what they mean is that they don't want to invest in it. Schools have huge budgets, there is enough money, just not for things that aren't a priority!

But what if, in each school in a district, teachers are using their precious preparation time duplicating what their colleagues are doing down the road? Collaboration can save hours of wasted time and can involve the discovery of best practices. Just as importantly, it creates an environment that places learning and developing stronger curriculum at the heart of teacher practice.

Strong Features of Initial Teacher Training

4) The emphasis in teacher training programmes on becoming a 'teacher' rather than a teacher of a subject; the very idea of training English teachers or Maths teachers, etc., indicates the narrower perspective of what a teacher is in the UK.

The old witty remark that goes along the lines of " 'Hi, I'm a teacher.' 'Oh yes, what do teach?' 'Children!' " presumably doesn't work very well in conversation in Canada. The emphasis here is on becoming a teacher of children rather than, as is the case in the UK, training based around the idea of becoming a teacher of a subject. Whilst PGCE courses in the UK certainly devote many hours to the art of teaching, the emphasis is certainly different and leads to a different impression from the Canadian model of what becoming a teacher is all about. Canadian teachers are being trained for their careers with a wider sense of what teaching might be because of this more conceptual emphasis.

Of the seven strands of the B.Ed. course, only one is explicitly to do with the subject disciplines that the teacher candidates choose to develop. Because of the cross-curricular make-up of the learning cohorts, a good deal of time is spent in the company of student teachers from other subject disciplines. There is a real contrast here with the UK, where the students largely move within subject disciplines and certainly assume that the subject-specific cohort is their base group.

Whilst at the point of admission in the UK we spend a good deal of effort checking competences in subject knowledge, I think that there is a greater assumption made in Canadian teacher training courses that the teacher candidates bring subject knowledge with them and it is the purpose of the course to present models of why to teach and how to teach rather than focusing on what to teach. The choice of a second subject is left to the teacher candidate; whilst

the disciplines tend to be related, there is nothing to stop a teacher candidate from selecting diverse disciplines. David Montemurro commented that there are quite a lot of Math and Phys. Ed. candidates at the moment.

5) Explicit attempts to discuss the theory/practice connect, including the specific initiative of seconding teachers to the university programmes is surely a strength in keeping courses relevant.

One of the features of initial teacher training at OISE that stands out for me is the way in which the course leaders are keen to constantly connect the theoretical work that takes place at the university and the practical elements of the course. The 'theory/practice disconnect' is, of course, an issue with which we are familiar. It stems from the fact that teacher candidates want to get into teaching straightaway. They are anxious to prove to themselves that they can 'do it.' Obviously, the key here is preparation. Teacher candidates are going to make a much stronger start if they have some theoretical and practical learning before standing in front of a class.

I do think that the focus upon training to be a teacher outlined under the heading above supports the idea of good teaching being based upon some theoretical approaches and a set of base knowledge. The teacher as learner is also an important emphasis in the OISE course, as is the sense that this qualification is just the first step along a pathway of developing practice across a whole career.

The more that I think about the practice of seconding teachers from local partner schools, the greater the benefits of this initiative seem to be. The teachers that put themselves forward for these developments in their careers are interested in the theory/practice connect. They bring with them recent field experience that will help to keep the course relevant and purposeful. During their time working on the course at OISE, and in returning to their schools, they are genuinely engaged points of contact. Kathy Broad told me that often the teachers return to their schools to promoted posts from the one that they left.

6) The determination to approach the training of teachers with an ethos of the holistic rather than technical operative at its core.

Clearly, this is not a point of comparison between the approaches of Canadian and English teacher training courses in universities. It is a point that unites them.

With cuts to university teacher training looming, I dread the thought of the beginning teacher in the UK being plunged straight into a school with nothing more than copies of the staff and faculty handbooks and 'a rather world weary on the verge of retirement and shackled with the new teacher' mentor! The Head teacher has decided to keep the money accrued from the training pot and has put it in the general fund because the heating system is on the blink. There isn't much money for professional development this year and plenty of staff in the queue ahead of the fresh face. Even if the mentor is replaced on retirement with someone who is mad keen to help, is there a guarantee of their competence? No, this sort of thing wouldn't happen. Right?

There is a difference between schools and schooling. Canadian teachers' training is the responsibility of universities and, with a supportive political environment, their work is flourishing.

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