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ENVISIONING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN TEACHER EDUCATION AND EQUALIZING OPPORTUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

The National Standards for Qualified Teacher Status were introduced by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) as a national curriculum for teacher education in England and Wales in 1998. At this time the TTA was under severe attack for its neglect of equal opportunity issues by the Commission for Racial Equality. It is argued that the roots of this neglect lie in the design of the National Curriculum and in the philosophy underpinning narrowly conceived technical competence-based models of teacher education. At the heart of the problem is a dominant view in government agencies of teaching as a mere technical craft rather than as a profession. Also there is a lack of a shared sense of purpose about the aims of education itself, which is distinctive in the international context. Alternative models and systems that link the aims of education to the wider society are considered and proposals for the reconceptualisation of teacher competence are indicated.

INTRODUCTION (1)

The following story is taken from the World Studies 8-13 Teachers Handbook (Hicks and Fisher, 1985).

A tale about a galactic traveller (2)

There is a tale told of a certain galactic traveller who visited Earth and collected various samples of sea water to carry out research on the oceans. Before returning to his own rim of the galaxy, however, he happened to find himself at a football match, an event which he watched with amazement. How, he wondered, could he possibly make sense of what was going on?

He decided to do the same for football as he had for the oceans: he would take a sample. He thus trained the zoom lens of his movie camera onto just one footballer and recorded every single movement the player made, in fact every step and leap and breath he took. Occasionally a round object came close to the player's feet, and the player would kick it, occasionally the player would appear to collide with another player. All these events were recorded faithfully on film.

The galactic traveller returned in due course to his own planet and his own laboratory where he analysed the samples of sea water, and published a book on the composition of the Earth's oceans. He also

developed his film of the football player, examined it frame by frame, and as a result evolved an elaborate and elegant theory about, so he thought, the basic nature of football. He published his findings and - it is said - won many awards for his distinguished contribution to galactic science.

I believe that the lesson to be drawn from the above applies on a number of levels to current thinking about teaching and teacher education by the British government and some of its agencies. In particular, I would like to begin by considering the response of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) when reacting to accusations of inertia by Sir Herman Ousley of the Commission for Racial Equality at the time of the inquiry into the murder of black London teenager Stephen Lawrence (Ghouri, 1998a). A TTA spokesperson is reported as justifying the lack of action by emphasising the TTA requirement that newly-qualified teachers teach all pupils to the same level notwithstanding individual differences. However the reported comment that 'I am happy that we have gone to the heart of the matter, Which is what are teachers like at the end of training?' betrays a particular view of teachers and teaching. In adopting such an approach there is a real danger of reducing what is seen to be the role of the teacher to a set of competences at a basic technical operational level - rather like the footballer's skills of dribbling, passing and crossing - necessary - but not sufficient. This is a theme that is returned to after giving consideration to the contemporary political and recent historical context in England and Wales.

THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CONTEXT (1)

In considering the future of teacher education at the present time, I believe that it is relevant to consider the wider social and political context in which schools and institutions of teacher education are placed at this time. In particular I wish to draw attention to what Prime Minister Tony Blair had to say in his speech to the 1998 Labour Party Conference, where he argued that:

The centre-left may have lost in the battle of ideas in the 1980s, but we are winning now. And we have won a bigger battle today: the battle of values. The challenge we face has to be met by us together: one nation, one community.

When a young black student, filled with talent, is murdered by racist thugs, and Stephen Lawrence becomes a household name not because of the trial into his murder but because of inquiry into why his murderers are walking free, it isn't just wrong: it weakens the very bonds of decency and respect we need to make our country strong. We stand stronger together.

But where is Mr. Blair's vision of 'the battle of values' when it comes to education policy? Whilst accepting a need to improve levels of achievement, I want to argue that there is a lack of vision in relation to 'values' in education at the present time. Further I propose that the reasons for this lie in part in the recent social, political and historical context in relation to the National Curriculum and also, in the perspective of some of the key government agencies, such as the TTA. In particular there are problems about the way in which the National Standards for teacher education have been prescribed.

A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE RECENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT (1)

Consideration of the recent changes that have taken place in teacher education cannot be made in isolation from those happening in the National Curriculum for schools in England and Wales, just as any future changes to the school curriculum will imply corresponding changes for teacher education. Following a systematically orchestrated campaign from right wing pressure groups throughout the 1980s, political intervention in the school curriculum reached a high point at the Conservative Party conference in 1988, with the famous statement from Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher:

Children who needed to count and multiply were learning anti-racist mathematics - whatever that might be.

It was in such a climate that the proposals were put to the Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, on the composition of the mathematics curriculum. These proposals stated that it was unnecessary to include any 'multicultural' aspects in any of the attainment targets. This position was supported by arguing that those proposing such an approach

with a view to raising the self-esteem of ethnic minority pupils and to improving mutual understanding and tolerance between races, were afflicted with an attitude that was 'misconceived and patronising'. Tooley's (1990) support for such a position and his associated critique of arguments put by those in the mathematics education community he labelled as 'multiculturalists' is both misleading and flawed in several respects. He misleads by his mischievous suggestion that the 'multiculturalists' wished to dictate to teachers: e.g. he asserts that 'the failure to 'compel "multicultural" examples' is not 'a great handicap' of the National Curriculum. In fact the pressure at that time was in precisely the opposite direction and compulsion was never part of the agenda of the so-called 'multiculturalists' in the first place. In his reflections on this context Woodrow (1996) has pointed out that the concerns of teachers, following the Swann Report and the tragedy leading up to the MacDonald report, have been dissipated as a result of the introduction of a National Curriculum in which there is 'no internationalism ... no celebration of a pluralist culture and no sense of diversity'. Tooley also creates a false dichotomy between those teachers 'who prefer to raise the political consciousness of their pupils, rather than their mathematical attainment'. Can it not be the case that teachers of mathematics can do both? Is there not a case to be made for considering the contribution teachers of mathematics might make in terms of citizenship and democracy?

Set against this background it is not surprising that the debate around issues of social justice and equal opportunities in the classroom came to wither on the vine during the last decade in England and Wales. Further it is not surprising that schools are now seen, by the African and Caribbean Network of Science and Technology (ACNST), to be failing black pupils in the 'status and power' subjects of science, mathematics and technology (Ghuri, 1998b). It does seem that Tooley's (1990) expectation that the National Curriculum proposals 'have the potential to tackle that problem' of underachievement has proved to be unfounded. Rather the ACNST research points towards the lack of role models for young black people e.g. 'black British scientists'. It does seem that Tooley is also mistaken in his view that the use of exotic stereotypes such as the San people of the Kalahari desert is an appropriate and sufficient level of response to this problem.

THE PROBLEM (1)

My starting point in the debate is to agree with those critics such as Sir Herman Ousley and the ACNST that indeed there is a problem with both the National Curriculum for schools and with the principles and practices underpinning the system of teacher education at this time. In particular, I argue that the heart of the problem is the lack of a shared sense of purpose about the aims of education in this country, which has given rise to conflicting interpretations by government agencies that appear to contradict each other.

It would seem that the issue of the lack of a shared sense of purpose is recognised by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in identifying working practices on policy formulation as an area in need of reform and in drawing attention to the wider international context. In relation to the national curriculum review for schools, the Chief Executive of the QCA, Nicholas Tate, has stated recently that:

In taking forward this agenda, QCA will involve teachers and other partners in the education service. One lesson we learned from the first version of the current curriculum is that unless there is shared understanding of why changes are being made, and a commitment to them, they are unlikely to succeed. The forthcoming revision is a much more limited exercise, but the principle still applies. The exercise will proceed collaboratively, with full consultation, and on the basis of firm evidence that it works. (Tate, 1998)

In relation to the latter there is the recognition by the QCA that the National Curriculum for England and Wales is distinctive within the international context for its lack of 'a clear and explicit rationale' and associated set of aims. This aspect is also characteristic of the National Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in England and Wales that were introduced by the TTA in 1998. The National Standards replace the 'more general competences' and categorise the requirements for newly qualified teachers under the four headings of:

- (Subject) Knowledge and Understanding;
- Planning, teaching and class management;
- Monitoring, assessment, recording, reporting and accountability and
- Other professional requirements.

Within this document there are tightly defined standards covering the first three sections which focus on Subject Teaching. However the fourth section is a curious combination of categories including professional duties, legal liabilities, working relationships and the like. Nowhere in this document is there a clear rationale and associated set of aims for education and teacher education in particular. With particular regard to issues of equal opportunity, these are referred to at the micro level. So for example, under the heading of 'Teaching and class management' those to be awarded QTS must set 'high expectations for all pupils notwithstanding individual differences, including gender, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds'. What I want to take issue with is the relative lack of emphasis on such issues that is implied. The implication is that such issues are at the 'football boot' level of our galactic traveller i.e. seen as a technical skill such as passing, dribbling and crossing the ball. However issues of fairness and social justice imply not simply technical competence but rather an attitude of mind. This is an issue related to values and the wider aims and purposes of education. The seminal work of Shulman (1986) is surely most relevant here. In particular there is the distinction to be made between 'mere craft' and a profession. With regard to the latter, a professional is seen to be concerned not only with the 'how', but also with the 'what and why'. In Shulman's words:

The teacher is not only 'master' (my quotes) of procedure but also of content and rationale, and capable of explaining why something has to be done. The teacher is capable of reflection leading to self knowledge, the metacognitive awareness that distinguishes 'draftsman' from architect, bookkeeper from auditor.

As Shulman points out, this sort of reflective awareness of how and why one performs complicates rather than simplifies action and makes it less regular and predictable. The implication of the reduction of the teacher's role to that of mere technical competence implies a view of teaching that is 'trivialised, its associated complexities ignored and its demands diminished'. Unfortunately the technical craft approach is the one that is favoured at this time by government agencies in England and Wales, as exemplified by the prominence given to the views of Reynolds (1998). Although he may be accurate in his claim of the lack of a widely shared science of teaching in Britain, his view of science is a very mechanistic and limited one. In fact he refers to a 'technology of teaching' and outlines a 'training cycle' which seems to have little to do with the 'what and the why' that underpins the professional view of the role of the teacher.

THE ALTERNATIVES (1)

The lack of a shared sense of purpose in our education system stands in sharp contrast to the sense of consensus that can be seen in other educational systems. For example with regard to the notion of Didaktik in the German and Scandinavian traditions the overall aim of the education system is that of 'Gebildete' which can be broadly translated as 'educated personality'. This means, for example, fostering a sense of egalitarianism and having a curriculum that relates to the central problems of living and is relevant to the key problems of society. There is an emphasis here on attitudes and values, which seems to be singularly lacking from the UK context. This aspect has been highlighted by Moon (1998) who argues that 'standards do not exist in a vacuum' and that the imposition of standards without values 'can easily become standardisation, the very process that a vibrant and dynamic culture has to avoid'. He highlights the educational systems of Scotland, Germany, France, USA and South Africa to illustrate the willingness in these countries to 'link the education of teachers to a values system'. So for example, the Scottish model, which was developed following extensive consultation, includes in its guidelines 'a set of attitudes that have particular power in that they are communicated to those being taught'. Included in these is:

- a commitment to views of fairness and equality of opportunity as expressed in multi-cultural and other non-discriminatory policies.

In the South African context the task of reconstructing the education system was preceded by widespread consultation over values, which led to the identification of five core 'socio-political' values and five core 'pedagogical' values. The former consist of 'democracy, liberty, equality, justice and peace' and the latter are made up of 'relevance, learner-centredness, professionalism, co-operation and collegiality and innovation'. With regard to equality and justice in particular there is specific reference to equity, redress, affirmative action and the removal of gender and racial bias. The contrast with the situation in England and Wales at the present time is stark.

THE WAY FORWARD (1)

In my view the issues that need to be addressed for the future fall under three categories of need:

- for the development a shared sense of purpose about the aims and values of education, as these relate to both schools and teacher education
- to reform working practices between the various stakeholders in the way in which policy is developed
- to reconceptualise the notion of teacher competence as currently set out in the National Standards

The first of these has been the main focus of this paper. However the starting point for such a project would be a key factor in developing such a shared sense of purpose. A rightful concern would be around the question of 'Whose values?' and also of the threat of the imposition of an authoritarian agenda. However one might look to the communitarian agenda for a starting point and in particular to Etzioni (1995) who argues that we might start with those values that are widely shared. These include that 'the dignity of all persons ought to be respected, that tolerance is a virtue and discrimination abhorrent and that peaceful resolution of conflicts is superior to violence'.

In relation to the second issue, as Moon (1998) has pointed out 'no other country combines institutionally based quality assurance systems and peer review through a structure of external examining with a formal, detailed and periodic government inspection.' The research carried out by Ashcroft (1998) highlights how this has become one of the major issues in teacher education today. She points out how the regulatory framework is seen to be 'threatening and oppressive', 'energy sapping' and limiting the potential for innovation.

Thirdly with regard to competence it is necessary to reconstruct outmoded thinking around this notion by looking to other education systems and fresh ideas. In terms of contemporary thinking in this field particular attention should be given to developments within the European context. In particular there is a need to reconceptualise teacher 'competence' much more broadly. In this regard the work of Buchberger & Buchberger (1998) is particularly relevant. They argue for an 'integrative transformative science' of the teaching profession that pays due attention to the 'general aims of society' as well as curricula, content and learning situations. These and other associated ideas are discussed and developed further in Hudson (1998) and Hudson (1999).

Finally in conclusion, I wish to argue that the need to emphasise such aspects of the professional role of the teacher becomes acutely more important in the future. In particular, this is the case in the light of the accelerating shift in the balance of the global economy towards the Asia-Pacific region, with all the implications that has for future social harmony in all the countries of Europe.

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NOTES (1)

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