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What works in initial teacher education?

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I recently drew attention to the fact that, in England, initial teacher education (ITE) was under attack, contrasting ITE with the British government's preferred term of initial teacher training (ITT), and highlighting their 'market review' of ITT (Newman 2022). At the time of going to press with those comments, the government's response to the short (5 July 2021 to 22 August 2021) consultation had just been published by the Department for Education (DfE 2021), and so I suggested that a detailed consideration of the government's response would be needed.

Not surprisingly (and bearing in mind that a consultation does not necessary lead to consensus), the main proposals of the market review were broadly adopted, with a one-year postponement of the implementation timeline. The debate (if such there is) has now moved on, with the accreditation process for ITT providers having taken place, where only those providers who applied and showed that they were willing and able to implement the government's ITT plans were accredited to be ITT providers from September 2024 onwards. Only accredited providers can recommend to the government Department for Education (DfE) the award of qualified teacher status (QTS). These government-imposed plans include, as a mandatory element for all teacher education and training provision in England, use of the Core Content Framework (henceforth CCF) (DfE 2019). This includes 'Learn that' statements, supposedly informed by the

‘best available educational research’ (DfE 2019, 28), and ‘Learn how to’ statements ‘drawn from the wider evidence base including both academic research and additional guidance from expert practitioners’ (DfE 2019, 28). The CCF ‘sets out a minimum entitlement for trainee teachers and places a duty on providers of initial teacher training – and their partner schools – to meet this entitlement’ (DfE 2019, 7).

No doubt, detailed analyses of the CCF and its role in teacher education and training will develop but a few points are worth making here for an international readership concerned with initial teacher education, as there are issues involved that raise questions about the education, training, and development of teachers, their roles, the role of the government, the purpose of schooling, and about developing children (and teachers) as informed and thoughtful citizens.

The first of these concerns what can be thought of as the *style* of the implementation, and the explicit role of the government in setting the agenda and ensuring that the answers are suitable (Helgetun and Menter 2022). In this role, the government acts as the gatekeeper and decides not only what can be said but also who can say it. Here it is interesting to note the many linkages that exist between the key individuals and organisations in these developments (Heyes 2021; Hill 2023; Moynihan 2022). This approach to change in education is, in England at least, nothing new (Gilroy 1992; Graham 1993; Kelly 1990; Maguire and Ball 1994; Mutton, Burn, and Menter 2017; Rawling 2001).

A second line of criticism that may develop could be envisaged as concerning the *substance* of the CCF, and the argument that the CCF is dominated by knowledge of ‘what works’ and that it takes a narrow view of what ‘working’ means. Again, as with the style of implementation referred to above, the approach to substance is no surprise either for, in England, school-based experience in ITT has become privileged (Mutton,

Burn, and Menter 2017, 15), based on the view that teaching is a craft, and best learned on the job. Allied to this is the view that the CCF approach sees teaching as a decontextualised activity, and that it ‘is based on assumptions that teaching is technically simple, so long as the appropriate strategies are implemented faithfully’ (Knight and Sullivan 2022, 147). And what are the appropriate strategies that work best? For the answer to this question, we can turn to the ‘underpinning evidence’ (DfE 2019, 8) of the CCF, determined by the DfE and ‘independently assessed and endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)’ (DfE 2019, 8). This evidence and this endorsement have been critiqued elsewhere (Hordern and Brooks 2023). In these respects, some may consider that the CCF *lacks* substance as it has not been determined by the wider community of teachers or teacher educators and that it sees other types of critical knowledge and study as subversive or, at best, irrelevant. One example is the view that important issues (such as race) are rendered unproblematic or invisible (Rost, Sinclair, and Warner 2021). Are references to ‘children from disadvantaged backgrounds’ (DfE 2019, 9) or ‘barriers to learning’ (DfE 2019, 20) examples of deficit thinking which seek to direct attention away from wider socio-economic issues?

These elements now combine — style and substance; government control and school-based content — in the National Institute of Teaching, which is ‘the government’s £121 million flagship teacher training provider’ (Hill 2023). Why is the National Institute of Teaching needed? After all, even one of its advocates noted that:

England already has a diverse range of high-quality teacher training provision, with university departments of education and schools offering some or all of the ‘golden thread’ of professional development from initial teacher training through to national qualifications for executive leadership. (Moynihan 2022)

The answer?

Well, until now there has been no school-led organisation offering all of this with university status and degree-awarding powers. Likewise, there has been no organisation tasked with undertaking real-time research on what genuinely works. (Moynihan 2022)

Keeping in mind that there are different meanings of the term ‘research’ (Christie and Menter 2009), we leave our readers to reflect on the astonishing revelation that there has until now ‘been no organisation tasked with undertaking real-time research on what genuinely works’. In the meantime, we can take note of the requirement of the CCF that

Providers should ensure their curricula encompass the full entitlement described in the ITT Core Content Framework, *as well as integrating additional analysis and critique of theory, research and expert practice as they deem appropriate*. (DfE 2019, 4, emphasis added)

Of interest is the not-so subtle re-working of this in the government response to the market review report:

We are clear that the CCF is a minimum entitlement, not a full ITT curriculum, and providers should continue to exercise their autonomy in designing curricula appropriate for the particular subjects, phases and age ranges that their trainees will teach. Relevant subject-specific content, alongside critique of theory, research (including, where appropriate, their own) and expert practice, should be integrated into a sequenced and coherent curriculum that supports trainees to become effective teachers of their subjects and well-informed users of research and evidence in their classroom practice. We will not define an evidence base beyond that set out in the CCF *but will use our quality assurance processes to ensure that evidence used is coherent with the framework*. (DfE 2021, 8, emphasis added)

In this endeavour, of ‘analysis and critique of theory, research and expert practice’ (DfE 2019, 4), the *Journal of Education for Teaching* will continue to play its part, as it has done (with its present and previous name) for the past near half-century, drawing on the

interests, expertise, and experiences of our international contributors, reviewers, and readers.

And so I turn to introduce the range of contributions that follow.

From Hong Kong, May Cheng, Sylvia Tang, Angel Wong, and Fang-Yin Yeh highlight the notion of teacher buoyancy and discuss how teachers manage to persist in the face of ongoing daily challenges. They draw attention to some possible strategies that teachers find valuable and suggest how teacher education and development programmes (both pre-service and in-service) can incorporate approaches that can help teachers, especially early career teachers.

From Iran, Mohammad Reza Anani Sarab and Fatemeh Mardian consider the notion of reflection. From an analysis of a selection of papers, they conclude that many studies of reflective practice fail to capture the complexities of reflection and its potential for promoting transformative action. They argue for a new conceptualisation which they believe could be transformative and which gives teachers and future teachers the opportunity to see themselves as part of a larger social world.

Ann-Louise Ljungblad, from Sweden, invites us to consider the complexities of teaching. It involves, as she points out, far more than teachers knowing their subject and imparting it to their students. She points to the importance of using judgement and wisdom in unpredictable educational situations. Here we may note the analytical tools and the different aspects of the taxonomy of relational teaching. Taken overall, these descriptions remind us of the nuances and complexities of teaching and move us away from the view that teaching is to be understood merely instrumentally.

This then leads into the paper by Henrik Lindqvist, Maria Weurlander, Annika Wernerson, and Robert Thornberg, also from Sweden, who investigate the notion of teacher identity. Here they argue that many aspects of teacher identity are complex and

subtle, and that it can be challenging to work with those with different views. This was an aspect experienced by some of the student teachers in their study, and their feelings about some of their fellow student teachers.

Xunyi Lin and Jesus Alfonso D. Datu investigate perception of kindness among Chinese early childhood pre-service teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. They refer to work that discusses the importance of positive climates and cultures in schools, and how that can lead to positive academic and psychological benefits. They argue that this concern should be extended to higher education contexts and suggest some potential implications for further work in this area.

Dennis Hauk, Alexander Gröschner, Maralena Weil, Ricardo Böheim, Ann-Kathrin Schindler, Martina Alles and Tina Seidel from Germany investigate the issue of leading effective whole-class discussions. Drawing on research which indicates the value of promoting dialogic teaching, they suggest that teacher professional development can be important, and they go on to make some recommendations as to how that may be implemented.

Pauline Mak, Min Yang and Rui Yuan, from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau respectively, examine teacher competence. This, as they show, is a term that can embrace many different aspects. One that they highlight is the opportunity for pre-service teachers to engage in research or practitioner-inquiry during their teaching practice experience. They argue that this can be important in helping pre-service teachers develop not only the knowledge that is valuable, but also the strategies and dispositions, and the personal characteristics, to be effective teachers.

Lisa Murtagh and Louisa Dawes from England offer an autoethnographic account of their experiences as teacher educators during the COVID-19 pandemic and of how they had to wrestle with tensions between their roles within a higher education

institution and compliance with national government directives. Their experiences will no doubt strike a chord with many readers. The fact that the teacher education community as represented here was able to address the issues which arose should be, consider Murtagh and Dawes, a reminder that teacher educators can be empowered to act with autonomy and agency without compromising quality or compliance.

Continuing with the theme of lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic, we come to the paper by Carmen Carrillo (from Spain) and Maria Assuncao Flores (from Portugal). They draw on evidence from a literature review to highlight some of the innovative ways in which teacher educators responded to the situation, and how some of the innovations have the potential to enhance teacher education, if used wisely.

Hang Thi Thu Nguyen from Vietnam considers feedback given to pre-service teachers and asks whether the notion of ‘dialogic’ feedback characteristic of Western contexts is appropriate in a Confucian-influenced culture like that in Vietnam. Here one aspect highlighted is the important role played by school mentors; another is that there are aspects of directive and reflective feedback that the pre-service teachers found helpful. One question that arises is whether opportunities can be made for feedback to be given by university tutors and by peers, as well as school mentors. Another question that arises concerns the variety of approaches to feedback that are possible and how these might be used to maximum effect. These issues can inform our thinking about how best to develop feedback to pre-service teachers, wherever we are based.

Ann Jolly, Danielle Wysenski and Kristen Beach, from the United States, address the issue of professional development to build elementary teacher knowledge in literacy. They argue that teacher professional development can be important in developing teachers’ confidence and competence and suggest some further avenues for research to investigate how long the benefits of the professional development lasts, to

what extent professional development changes teacher practice, and whether it improves student outcomes.

From Germany, Matthias Krepf and Johannes König consider pre-service teachers' lesson planning. Here, as one of their starting points, they argue that whereas experienced teachers often take a holistic approach to teaching, pre-service teachers often see teaching as a chronological sequence of partially connected events. This, they contend, can have implications for how pre-service teachers plan their lessons. They see their paper as contributing to the development of a meaningful empirical model of how the process of lesson structuring can be measured.

This brings us to a 'Research in Progress' report by Sally Wai-Yan Wan, Suzannie Leung, Suet-Ying Yuen, and Charles Chun-Yin Leung from Hong Kong. They report on work investigating the implementation of differentiated learning through school-university partnership programme. Their method of developing an understanding of in-service teachers' perceptions included art-based approaches, including drawing and storytelling. Might this be an approach that can be adopted elsewhere by others?

Finally, we come to two book reviews. The first, by Weiping Wu and Mengyao Wang from China, is a review of a book on intercultural approaches to education. The second, by Yi Xie (also from China) is of a book on international student mobility. In both reviews, the reviewers give a detailed picture of the structure and content of the respective publications, and the links to be made to relevant theories. They highlight what they consider to be the strengths of each publication, as well as issues that might be taken further. We thank them for their valuable reviews.

Both book reviews (and the books reviewed), and the other contributions to this issue, highlight how invaluable are the insights and perspectives of those from around the world. As evidence from this journal and others testifies, the realities of becoming a

teacher and being a teacher, and of educating future teachers, are far from straightforward (Knight and Sullivan 2022). Returning to the Core Content Framework discussed earlier, and to the question that forms the title of this editorial, it is indeed the case that the ‘complexity of the process for becoming a teacher cannot be overestimated’ (DfE 2019, 4). But simplistic approaches to ‘what works’, which focus only on the ‘curricula appropriate for the subject, phase and age range that the trainees will be teaching’ (DfE 2019, 4), on covering ‘any foundational knowledge and skill that is pre-requisite for the content defined in this framework’ (DfE 2019, 4), and which seek to curtail critical engagement with perspectives beyond those endorsed by the government, run the risk of ignoring the complexities and nuances of interacting in the complex social worlds of schools and of education.

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