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## Teacher education under attack

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One man's vision is another man's *déjà vu*.

Edgar Stones, *Quality Teaching*, 310

Since its inception by its founding editor Edgar Stones, in 1975, the *Journal of Education for Teaching* (formerly known as the *British Journal of Teacher Education*) has been a forum for original, rigorously presented, and ethically researched articles with international significance for the academic field of teacher education. We make no apology for the notion of an academic field of teacher education which we believe is to be differentiated from a narrower notion of teacher training, the term that UK governments have preferred over the past several decades.

In the very first editorial of the *BJTE*, Edgar Stones referred to the mid-1970s as a time when politicians and bureaucrats were 'cutting huge swathes into teacher-training institutions in Britain' (Stones 1975, 1) and noted that many proposals were based on doubtful understandings of the issues and on no evidence at all (Stones 1975, 1). Such proposals were, Stones argued, an attempt by the government of the day to rule by diktat. These were themes on which he subsequently elaborated (Stones 1992).

Reviewing many of the journal's editorials since 1975 (which became *JET* in 1981 to reflect more accurately an international focus) provides a sobering overview of the attempts by UK governments of varying political persuasion to take control of teacher education (Gilroy 2002). As Gilroy (1996, 5) wrote in his Editorial, 'teaching and teacher education have suffered sustained attack by successive governments'. He continued:

Two main features of the attack have been the denigration of theoretical and research-informed elements as part of teacher education and the desirability of training in schools instead of institutions of higher education. The arrogance of the authorities imposing this educational ideology is matched only by their ignorance of how people learn and the ex cathedra nature of their pronouncements. Thus we are told that the best way to learn to teach is to get into school and do it. Teaching is a low-level skill to be learned on the job. The only theory that is important is the theory related to the subjects to be taught. (Gilroy 1996, 5-6)

Re-reading this 25 years on, it is shocking to see that the very same approach is taken in the 2021 UK government's *Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Market Review Report* (DfE 2021a). This review amounts to nothing less than a further attack on teacher education

(now, as a result of devolution, only in England). The review stated:

Our aspiration is to create a truly world-class system of initial teacher preparation that is grounded in robust and up-to-date evidence, which equips teachers with the professional knowledge and expertise that they need to begin their careers and prepares them for their early career induction, once qualified. (DfE 2021a, 3)

Such an aspiration might seem laudable (at least, superficially) although at the very least, it ignores the possibility that England may already have just such a system. That does not mean that we can be complacent about current provision; in fact, the evidence is that providers are far from complacent. However, the proposals in the report reveal that what is envisaged is in fact an attempted government takeover of the content of initial teacher education, how it is to be structured and delivered, how it would be assessed, changes to the demands for school-based aspects of the programme, and a decoupling from academic rigour (University of Oxford 2021b). Teacher education is to be reduced to teacher training, ‘designed to develop particular professional behaviours rather than a critical understanding of the role that will support wise and informed decision making when in post’ (Rolph 2021, online).

This notion of teacher *training* is very far from the values and principles that underpin the notion of teacher *education* (UCET 2020). Not surprisingly therefore, the proposals in the report have elicited much critical comment. Responses have come from individual universities and university departments such as, for example, those from the University of Oxford (2021a; 2021b), the University of Cambridge (2021a; 2021b) and the Institute of Education (UCLIOE 2021); from groups such as the Universities’ Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET 2021), the Russell Group (2021), the University Alliance (2021), MillionPlus (2021); school-based providers such as the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT 2021), teachers’ organisations such as the Chartered College of Teaching (CCT 2021) and trade unions (NASUWT 2021), and the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Teaching Profession (APPG 2021).

We commend these responses to our readers. The overwhelming view is that the ITT market review is fundamentally flawed in its approach and in its recommendations. Such criticisms noted, for example, that the report itself, in calling for a robust evidence base for teacher training, notably lacks evidence (robust or otherwise) to support its findings (Russell Group 2021). What limited evidence is forthcoming is almost exclusively from the government’s own publications, and from its inspection service, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED). As the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2021) has pointed out, the review peddles government-favoured approaches to teaching where, for example:

all trainees who teach early reading must be taught about systematic synthetic phonics ... It is also important ... that time is not used teaching them alternative approaches. (DfE 2021a, 13)

BERA also pointed out (BERA 2021) that evidence is needed for the model of learning described as ‘human cognitive architecture’ (DfE 2021a, 16). In fact, much ‘evidence’ promoted by the market review seems to be regarded as incontestable when the opposite is the case: see, for example, Courtney (2017); Wrigley (2020); la Velle (2021). And barely a mention is made of the extensive evidence, not least in the annals of this journal (la Velle 2020b), of the important role of universities in the education of new teachers.

The autonomy of universities to design, teach, assess, and to supervise is threatened (Russell Group 2021). In England, universities pride themselves on their autonomy and some have already indicated that losing what remains of that autonomy in teacher education would lead them to reconsider their involvement. Also pertinent is the link between teacher ‘training’ and teacher ‘education’, the latter term highlighting that many pre-service teacher courses are linked to an academic qualification and involve research and research-active tutors (Russell Group 2021). All in all, the report proposes:

An over centralised model of teacher training based on limited evidence [which] threatens the professional status of teaching and the nation’s contributions to the international research and evidence base in the field. The international reputation of English teacher education will suffer as a result, with high-quality applicants choosing to study in the other UK nations or abroad. (Russell Group 2021, 12)

At the time of writing, the government’s response has just been published (DfE 2021b). A detailed examination of that response will be needed to see whether the UK government has re-thought its approach or made only minor modifications.

In 2001, Stones and Gilroy wrote: ‘The one consistent thread [of UK governments’ views on ideas about teaching] over at least the past 20 years has been the attack on theory in teaching’ (Stones and Gilroy 2001, 5). A further 20 years on, it is an attack that continues. So too does the ‘important work of JET as the provider of researched evidence to inform practice’ (la Velle 2020a, 259).

I turn now to the articles that follow, with that theme of ‘researched evidence to inform practice’ in mind.

The paper by Melese Astatke, Cathy Weng, Eshetu Desalegn and Jin-Hwei Su reports on their survey of Ethiopian teachers to find the extent to which they heeded advice from their teacher educators during their initial training. The findings were not positive. The paper discusses the reasons for poor uptake of advice and the quality of advice given. There are important implications here for policy development, curriculum design and professional learning opportunities.

From China and Australia, Yue Yin and Guanglun Mu offer a perspective on alternative teacher preparation programmes and how extracurricular activities can be developed. With a focus on rural areas in China, they examine the possible tensions between different perspectives but show how teachers work to improve the life chances of their pupils. They invite us to question the supposed superiority of elites and prevailing discourses of ‘low-performing’ education.

Nataša Simić, Milica Marušić Jablanović and Sanja Grbić from Serbia address the issue of teacher motivation in their context. They report on their findings and also suggest adaptations that may be made in taking forward such research in other contexts. They highlight the need for intellectually fulfilled, enthusiastic, but realistic teachers who can act as role models for their pupils. This encourages us to think about the important links that can be, and need to be, made between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’.

Vesna Milanovic and Dragica Trivic (again, from Serbia) reflect on chemistry teachers’ understandings of the nature, history, and philosophy of science and the ways in which such understandings can help develop teachers give meaning and contextualisation for the science curriculum, with positive effects on their pupils’ understanding.

Khin Saw and Buxin Han in their study, report into prospective teachers’ academic success in Myanmar. They highlight the complexities involved in making judgements about the likely success of student teachers, with the recognition that teaching is not just about academic attainment but also involves communicating and working with others.

Hui Lin, Mary Hill and Lexie Grudnoff from the University of Auckland in New Zealand investigate the emotions of Special Educational Needs Coordinators and argue that these emotions form an indispensable part of their self-identities and in the development of their roles, not least as advocates for children with special educational needs. The passion of those teachers shines through in their findings.

Research by Carla Solvason, Geoffrey Elliott, and Harriet Cunliffe from the University of Worcester in England into how trainee early years educators understood the notion of ethical responsibility, found that many did not appreciate that dimension of their future work. They argue that there is a need for teacher educators to make such concepts explicit. In addition, they ask us to reflect on whether in many cultures, teaching has become conceived as purely instrumental, with insufficient attention paid to the ethical and moral dilemmas that teachers will face during their careers.

Edward Howe (from Canada) considers the benefits of music education. At a time when the value of music education is under threat in many contexts, he provides us with a reminder of the importance of music for many, and of how many teachers contribute their expertise and enthusiasm to communities outside the immediate formal context of their work.

This issue concludes with three shorter articles, and two book reviews. In their Research-in-Progress paper, Lisa Kim, Laura Oxley and Kathryn Asbury from the University of York in England give a timely update on the sort of qualities that make a great teacher during a pandemic. They highlight the significance of teachers caring for pupil well-being and dealing with uncertainty. In the next Research-in-Progress paper, Adam Poole from Beijing Foreign Studies University in China reports on some early findings concerning teacher professional development, reminding us of the many different contexts in which teachers work and of the demands they face. In their Research-in-Practice paper, Sangeeta Sharma and Poonam Vyas from the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, in Pilani, India, consider how non-verbal cues, often taken

for granted in traditional teaching sessions, have to be considered anew in the light of the increased use of online teaching during the recent pandemic.

We close this issue with two book reviews, one by Rosamonde Birch from the University of Dundee, Scotland, and the other by Tom Hamilton at the University of Stirling, also in Scotland. We thank them for their valuable insights into the texts they have reviewed.

All these papers and reviews show how the world-wide teacher education community can learn from and be inspired by each other. JET will continue to argue for theoretically based and research-informed teacher education. Our readers can be assured that its name will not be changing to the *Journal of Training for Teachers*.

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