

Rethinking Teacher Education

Collaborative responses to uncertainty

Anne Edwards, Peter Gilroy and
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Rethinking Teacher Education

Rethinking Teacher Education is a thorough and critical analysis of the ambivalences and uncertainties which face those in teacher education. The authors draw on their different experiences of teacher education to try to make sense of current practices and where they might lead.

The book analyses past and present constructions of teacher education and offers insights into how a re-evaluation might address teachers' positions in relation to knowledge, learners, economic demands and democratic values.

The issues addressed include:

- political and economic uncertainty and teacher education
- philosophical uncertainty and teacher education
- modernist policy solutions
- psychology: an agent of modernity in teacher education
- sociocultural and other collaborative responses to uncertainty

The book will be of interest to all those involved in teacher education, including sociologists, psychologists and philosophers of education.

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To my fathers David Gilroy and Dennis Francis
(PG).

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Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| CACE | Central Advisory Council for Education |
| CATE | Council for the Accreditation of Teachers |
| CSE | Certificate in Secondary Education |
| CSILE | Computer Supported Intentional Learning Environments |
| DES | Department for Education and Science |
| DfEE | Department for Education and Employment |
| DfES | Department for Education and Skills |
| EU | European Union |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| LEA | Local Education Authority |
| NBPTS | National Board for Professional Teaching Standards |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OFSTED | Office for Standards in Education |
| OPEC | Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries |
| PDS | Professional Development Schools |
| TTA | Teacher Training Agency |

Contents

| | |
|--|------|
| <i>List of tables and figures</i> | vii |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | viii |
| <i>List of abbreviations</i> | ix |
| 1 Three themes and one overview | 1 |
| 2 Political and economic uncertainty and teacher education | 10 |
| 3 Philosophical uncertainty and teacher education | 29 |
| 4 Modernist policy solutions | 53 |
| 5 Psychology: an agent of modernity in teacher education? | 83 |
| 6 Collaborative responses to uncertainty | 101 |
| 7 Rethinking teacher education | 124 |
| 8 Delivering deliverance | 135 |
| DAVID HAMILTON | |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 145 |
| <i>Index</i> | 161 |

Tables and figures

Tables

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 1 | International comparisons in mathematics and science at Grade 8, national score 1999 | 12 |
| 2 | Expenditure on defence, public safety and education as percentages of GDP, 1998 | 21 |
| 3 | Modernist reforms of teacher education: a summary | 80 |
| 4 | Features of a sociocultural pedagogy | 107 |
| 5 | A comparison of information-processing and connectionist models of mind | 112 |

Figures

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 1 | Teacher professional development as teacher training | 32 |
| 2 | Concepts in contextualism | 39 |
| 3 | Lakatos and scientific research programmes | 45 |
| 4 | The mediated learning of student teachers using lesson plans | 118 |
| 5 | A systemic analysis of mentoring in a school using activity theory | 119 |

Three themes and one overview

Introduction

One of us, Peter Gilroy, recalls that he was recently teaching aspects of the work of Thomas Kuhn, author of the seminal *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* on paradigm shifts. In talking about the psychological pain of living through a paradigm shift Gilroy suddenly realized that this description perfectly caught his own mood. He had previously put this down to some form of reverse culture shock. Having recently returned from a year's secondment to Singapore, he found that he was having considerable difficulty in settling back to his previous existence. He realized that what he was experiencing was a form of dissonance. That is to say, on the one hand he was researching and teaching the general field of the philosophy of change, with a particular focus on teacher education and professionalism, reaching conclusions about the contingent and shifting nature of knowledge in these fields. On the other hand he was living an academic life that involved him in a series of accommodations to the fact that teacher education, in England at least, was being fixed into apparent certainties. This recognition of what had been a tacit acceptance of academic contradictions is what bothered him. He came to the conclusion that, in effect, his professional life consisted of negotiating a series of ambivalences – and indeed outright contradictions – and it was this which was producing an uncomfortable feeling of inconsistency between what he professed through his teaching and writing and his lived experience in a department of teacher education.

This book is an attempt to describe, analyse and learn from sensations of dissonance in teacher education that all three authors are living through. We have each experienced teacher education in different ways. All of us are, or have recently been, involved in pre-service

and in-service teacher education. We have also all engaged in research on teacher education as an object of study. However, to each of these experiences we bring our distinct histories as teachers and as researchers in psychology (Edwards), philosophy (Gilroy) and sociology (Hartley). We draw on these disciplines to try to make sense of current constructions of teacher education and where they might lead. But while our analyses are focused on past and present constructions of teacher education within their wider cultural contexts, they are driven by a desire to offer insights into how a rethought teacher education might address how teachers are positioned in relation to knowledge, learners, economic demands and democratic values.

In short, we suggest that any rethinking should take into account how teachers are helped to enable learners to contribute to the new knowledge economy and to societal well-being. That said, the substance of our analysis is framed by the official government discourse, especially that for teacher education, and especially that within England. That discourse is performative. It sets out the importance of fine-tuning education so that it resonates with the new economy. It sets great store by ensuring that education furthers national competitiveness within an increasingly globalized economy. But notwithstanding this attempt to render teacher education (and, by association, schooling) as functional for the economy, we are nevertheless mindful that the United Kingdom and other advanced economies are not only capitalist but also democratic. Whilst our central concern is to suggest that contemporary official policy for teacher education will do little for an emerging, knowledge-based economy, we shall say also that an overly bureaucratic, system-serving and standardized prescription admits little diversity, a diversity which an education system within a democracy should embrace and foster, not suppress. In sum, we shall argue, primarily, that current policy for schooling and teacher education will fail in its own terms.

That is, we know from work-based research that the employment relationship is changing from Fordist rigidities and overt supervision towards post-Fordist team-working, devolved responsibility, negotiation and self-supervision. Yet contemporary education policy clings to what are Fordist classroom processes which will be hardly functional for that new economy which requires greater flexibility and creativity. Nor – and this is very much a subsidiary thread in our analysis – will this adherence to Fordist classroom processes do much to enhance democracy by recognizing diversity or by questioning the inequalities which are sometimes buried within difference. That this is a subsidiary issue

for us is not to diminish its importance. It is because official government discourses on curriculum and pedagogy are largely bereft of democratic ideals. Our concern is the official text, which we critique on its own economistic terms. Our rethinking, therefore, is stimulated by the kinds of dissonance we have just outlined. But it does not aim at a simple resolution of contradictions. Instead, the book has three major themes, which combine to challenge the simple certainties which are offered variously as the outcomes of and antidotes to the ambivalences and uncertainties with which teacher educators are living.

Theme one: policy, change and teacher education

Governments, perhaps by their very function, are drawn irresistibly towards certainties. They make policy. Politicians cluster around certainties like moths around a flame, accumulating them to create manifestos, policy documents and the paraphernalia of government. Over the last decade teacher education throughout the world has been at the receiving end of rafts of government initiatives which have been designed to bring order and control to education, a social institution which is central to a knowledge economy. Some of the tensions between policy certainty and lived uncertainty are outlined in a recent submission to the OECD: 'What is emerging from our analysis is the vision of an extraordinarily dynamic, flexible, productive economy, together with an unstable, fragile society, and an increasingly insecure individual' (Carnoy and Castells, 1997: 53).

Work, the family and society are undergoing profound changes. Education – and, by implication, teacher education – must make sense of these shifts. The changing of teacher education is a well-established project. In the USA the Holmes Group was formed in 1986 in order to provide a forum for university teacher educators in the wake of the criticism levied in President Reagan's *A Nation at Risk* publication. In Australia the Howard government is transforming the higher education system; in France teacher education has been radically overhauled; and, of course, the government's reforms of teacher education in England and Wales have become a byword for rapid and radical change.

One feature that appears to be common to many of these government-driven changes is the lack of any substantial rational support for them, other than perhaps the rationale of the market. Their agenda are offered in a discourse marked by transcendental certainties that find expression in a series of anti-teacher-educator slogans that

do little but capture an ideology in a sound-bite. Such slogans associate teacher education variously with the dangerous left, with out-of-touch academics and profligate wastage of public funds. It matters little that rational arguments can be advanced to show that such emotive statements have little purchase on reality, and are even self-contradictory. The purpose of such statements is not to play a part in the discourse of rationality but rather to take a leading role in the language of political debate.

Indeed, teachers, the very people who might have been expected to defend postgraduate training and the status it brings, chose to opt out of the fray. Why has teacher education failed to bring teachers to its defence? One response may be that offered by Bottery and Wright, who suggest that teachers lack a structural awareness of the conditions which frame their professional existence (Bottery and Wright, 1999). Doubtless teacher educators are in part culpable here. In an important sense both teacher educators and politicians have been talking past each other in a language that neither understands nor identifies with. The UK government's dominant discourse for teacher education is one of simple common sense. But teacher education, like any other professional endeavour, is complex. Yet this complexity, when it is expressed by teacher educators, is dismissed by government as just academic, bereft of what works, bereft of common sense. Teacher educators are being forced to simplify what is eminently complex and are therefore victims of what David Hartley (1997) calls a *discourse of duplicity*, while teachers watch from the sidelines, disengaged from battles between the advocates of simplicity and complexity.

Theme two: the loss of disciplines' certainty

One of the many challenges that has to be faced by teacher educators attempting to develop a teacher education which works with and on complexity is how to deal with the fact that the underlying assumptions of the foundation disciplines (psychology, philosophy, history, sociology) have changed. Until, say, the mid-1970s, the disciplines were sure of their pre-eminent position in teacher education. Although they may not have appeared especially relevant to the immediate practical concerns of schoolteachers, they were seen by many as providing a sound theoretical base to the practice of education, none more so than the psychology of education. Why, then, have the disciplines not taken a more active part in identifying what is valuable and unique to their contribution to teacher education?

One possible answer to this question is that the deafening silence from the foundation disciplines is a direct result of their bluff having been called. As emperors *sans* clothes it could be said that they have no defence to make because they offer no meaningful contribution to teacher education. However, we suggest it is useful to think of teacher education which is *for the practice of teaching*, on the one hand, and teacher education which is *about the institution of education*, on the other. It is the psychology of education which has attended most to the former *for teaching* issues, whilst the history, philosophy and sociology of education have provided the disciplinary basis for matters *about education*. In the reforms of teacher education in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s, these *about education* issues have been given short shrift, whilst the *for teaching* issues have gained prominence. However, in England at least, these *for teaching* concerns in teacher education have been relocated, to be addressed in schools where they are to be found in versions of craft knowledge which are rarely informed by psychology as a discipline.

But another way of responding is to say that the so-called foundation disciplines which inform teacher education are themselves undergoing a radical change: their previous certainties are seen as being irrelevant to the changed theoretical world. From that response follows the argument that current and developing versions of the foundation disciplines do have something to offer teacher education. Indeed, teacher education may operate usefully as a site where a broad spectrum of the social sciences play together to offer close-to-practice versions of their disciplines informed by the rules, meanings, beliefs and actions of their playfellows.

Working at the margins of one's discipline in an applied field in collaboration with other disciplines may, however, jeopardize one's position as a member of a disciplinary community. Some of these communities are more able to accommodate changing identities than are others. But, more often than not, educational versions of the foundation disciplines occupy a low status within their home disciplines and are therefore likely to have little impact on them. The comfortable certainties that once delineated the disciplines of history, philosophy, psychology and sociology in education have disappeared, leaving behind educational researchers and teacher educators grappling with ambivalent academic identities. Reactions to this instability have included their choosing to work in other fields, building strong alliances with home disciplines or recognizing that education as a field of study and a site of intervention can benefit from multidisciplinary insights.

In a sense, this disruption of disciplinary purity is simply a sign of contemporary culture. Culture in contemporary society is such that it weakens the purity of categories and identities. Consumer culture spawns many choices. Disciplines are the intellectualization of this culture, and we should not be surprised that their purity has been contaminated and new forms allowed to develop. Some philosophers may take an epistemological perspective, arguing that the disciplines represent *logically* different ways of understanding – ways of understanding which are culture-free. However, that is not the line we are pursuing. Instead, our second theme explores how working at disciplinary margins in multidisciplinary enquiry may allow us to see fresh horizons and possibilities which can inform teacher education and our changing relationships with knowledge.

Teacher educators, we suggest, are caught up in the identity shifts and adjustments at disciplinary boundaries in the academy. Equally, they are open to the criticism from quick-fix politicians that they, as academics in ivory towers, have nothing certain to say about the theoretical basis of practice. How can one answer the certainty of the politician with the tentative response of the professional who is dealing with complexities? Poised uncomfortably between the horns of a dilemma – of speaking out in support of a discipline, or of accepting that traditional conceptions of what constitutes a discipline have changed – it is tempting to say nothing. Here then is another source of dissonance, in that teacher educators know that what they do is of value, but they cannot easily articulate that value.

Theme three: the paradox of uncertainty

What can fill the vacuum of the discipline's certainty? One answer that we explore is that an understanding of the nature of knowledge might well provide some sort of base from which to identify where certainty might lie. Such an enquiry leads sooner or later into arguments advanced by postmodernists, one of whose central assumptions is that in living through uncertainties it is possible simply to accept the confusions, contradictions, paradoxes and inconsistencies that inevitably arise in such an age. There are at least two ways of addressing this assumption. The first is to point out that this is our 'natural' state and that it is up to teacher educators to find ways to accommodate to such an age. One example of this approach, following the work of Schön, would be the attempts by teacher educators to find ways in which the conception of teachers' practical knowledge can provide some sort of

flexible foundation for building a tentative home for their expertise as teacher educators. There is an obvious tension here, for no matter how one attempts to qualify that knowledge-base, it still appears to hark back to some sort of modernism. The challenge is to avoid notions of a 'knowledge-base' which are synonymous with simple fixed certainties, but to consider how teachers relate to the contestable and shifting knowledge available to them.

Another approach is to analyse carefully what kinds of certainty and uncertainty are being offered as representing modernism and post-modernism. Here, *postmodernity* is taken to be a chronological term, the age beyond the modern – indeed we are also inclined to the terms late capitalism or late modernity. *Postmodernism* is taken to be the cultural expression of contemporary capitalism; *postmodernist* (or *post-modernist theory*) is taken to be an anti-representationalist argument (not a theory) of two kinds: first, the pessimistic and nihilistic post-modernists who reflect in the dark abyss; second, the optimistic or critical postmodernists who use deconstructionism as a means to a political (or emancipatory) purpose. Later, we take *neo-Fordism* to be the flexible management style which is increasingly to be found within some sectors of the globalized economy. There are barely charted epistemological waters here, and in the absence of any substantial critique it is naturally tempting to assume that there is a simple dichotomy between the two positions (modernist and postmodernist theory), rather than a more complex relationship. It is this combination of an unexamined understanding of how to operate *qua* teacher educator, in a period of radical cultural shifts which are still not understood, coupled to a lack of understanding of quite what the relationship is between modernity and postmodernity, that provides another source of dissonance.

Overview

We intend to address these three themes as sources of the dissonance teacher educators experience directly.

Chapter 2, *Political and economic uncertainty and teacher education*, locates teacher education within the emerging redefinition of the welfare state and the new managerialism. In particular it explores two paradoxes: first, that between diversity of providers and the centralization of curriculum; and second, that between the globalization of markets and the resurgence of nationalism as a cultural phenomenon. How will teacher education position itself in relation to these paradoxes?

More generally, the chapter considers what 'flexibility' shall mean for teachers and for teacher educators.

Chapter 3, *Philosophical uncertainty and teacher education*, starts with the proposition that some sort of knowledge is passed on during the process of teacher education, and this chapter identifies issues raised by the epistemological justification for such knowledge. In particular it identifies the way in which the full range of teachers' continuing professional development (from initial teacher education through to post-experience) can be represented as a battlefield where the modernist and postmodernists meet to resolve and fight out their different interpretations of the nature of knowledge in teacher education. The dichotomy between these two extremes is resolved by an epistemology based on the notions of 'lived uncertainty' and the 'collaborative professional' (as opposed to the 'reflective practitioner'), which also allows for the missing value element of teacher education to be reintroduced to the debate concerning the nature of teacher education. The remaining chapters address the issue of how this uncertainty can be dealt with.

Chapter 4, *Modernist policy solutions*, describes and analyses how, since 1979, in Britain, and more latterly in other countries, the professions within the welfare state have had to do more with less. In some countries teachers have been blamed for a lack of economic competitiveness with the emergent Pacific-rim economies, and international league-table data on standards of mathematics and science have underlined what is seen as an underperformance by the more traditional capitalist economies. Back-to-basics and what-works solutions – both devoid of theory – have been imposed by governments. Reviews of teacher education by central governments (as in England and Wales), by the profession itself (the Holmes Group reports) or by independent think-tanks, have all caught teacher education in their gaze. These solutions have sought to render certain the uncertainties dealt with in Chapter 2. Examples are drawn from England and Wales (CATE and the TTA) and from the United States (the Holmes Group).

In Chapter 5, *Psychology: an agent of modernity in teacher education?*, we explore the following topics: how psychology has positioned itself as an agent of modernity by providing a rationale for governments' modernizing projects in education; how psychology might be most usefully critiqued; and how a more hermeneutic version of psychology might support teachers as they interpret and respond to the demands of practice. Throughout these analyses lies a concern with supporting teachers as they construct and use the intellectual and social resources available to them. To that end it is argued that multidisciplinary work