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‘On the brink’ or ‘designing the future’? Where next for Lifelong Learning Initial Teacher Education?

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Abstract

This article highlights and analyses the challenges immediately facing Lifelong Learning Initial Teacher Education (LL ITE) in the UK which have arisen as a result of the policies and actions of the UK Government. The context of the LL sector for teachers and teacher education is explored, and how this has led to a restrictive culture of teacher professionalism. Using research carried out by the author, the article profiles LL Teacher Educators, their working context and values, and their attempts to model a more expansive professionalism. Evidence of the recent achievements of LL ITE is analysed and the dangers to these achievements presented by recent government changes and proposals are highlighted. The article concludes that LL ITE is ‘on the brink’ in terms of survival, and proposes how LL Teacher Education can move forward into a more optimistic future.

Key words

Post Compulsory Education; Further Education; Lifelong Learning Sector; Teaching and Learning; Initial Teacher Education; Policy; Professionalism.

Introduction

At the time of writing, Lifelong Learning Initial Teacher Education (LL ITE) is on the brink of a possible disaster, probably a new beginning and certainly a journey into new and uncharted territory.

This article firstly introduces the extremely difficult situation which LL ITE finds itself in midway through 2012. The key characteristics and the professional context of the LL sector and the teachers working within it are summarised, and the difficulties teachers face developing and expressing a positive professionalism. Using research carried out by the author, the article then defines LL Teacher Educators, profiles their working context and values, and suggests they are modelling a more expansive professionalism with the teachers they train. In considering the current situation facing LL ITE the article provides evidence of achievements made over the past decade, and how these are in danger of being undermined by recent government changes and proposals. The article concludes by proposing positive ways forward for LL Teacher Education to a more optimistic future.

Defending Teacher Education

In 2011 the Standing Council for the Education and Training of Teachers (SCETT) published *In Defence of Teacher Education* as a response to the Coalition Government’s White Paper for schools, *The Importance of Teaching* (2010). SCETT (2011) argued that the Coalition Government ‘looks set to reverse the emphasis that has developed over the last sixty years’ where teacher education, ‘led by Higher Education’ has proved to be a highly successful approach to providing initial training for the UK’s teachers (SCETT, 2011: preface). The paper contends that government policy views teaching as a ‘craft’, mainly learnt in the workplace, and that ‘the

Coalition's implicit strategy of abandoning teacher education' should be questioned and resisted. SCETT assert that Teacher Educators believe *'that teaching is a real profession, rooted in subject-knowledge, rather than simply being a craft'* (SCETT, 2011: p. 9), and calls for Teacher Educators, teachers and professional associations to be *'united in resisting the "deprofessionalisation" of both teachers and teaching'* (ibid).

LL ITE is particularly in need of defending as we approach 2012/13, especially that which is validated, developed and co-ordinated by Higher Education (HE) Institutions, as the majority of the current provision is. Of all those qualified to teach in the LL sector, 55% have qualified through a university programme (LLUK, 2011: p. 29). For each of the three years from 2007/8 to 2009/10, more than 20,000 trainee teachers were registered on longer university teacher education programmes - i.e. Cert Ed / PGCE (LLUK, 2009, 2010 and 2011). There is a distinguished history of HE-based LL ITE going back over 60 years, and hundreds of thousands of teachers in the broader Lifelong Learning Sector (LLS) (Further Education, Adult Education, Public Services Instruction, Work-Based Learning, the Voluntary and Community Sector and Prison Education) have been supported to become qualified professionals to date.

At the time of writing, however, many of these HE providers consider their provision to be immediately at risk - for reasons to be explained in this article - with a loss of expertise which will prove difficult to replace. The article, which is a personal perspective from a long standing Teacher Educator, intends to stimulate debate and coherent thinking and agrees in principle with SCETT (2011) that:

'The lesson for those who want to defend teacher education is clear. We must engage in more ... debates. We must encourage a real reflection and evaluation of ideas on their own merits ... unless there is a clarity and independence of thought, the profession can never hope to engage productively with upcoming debates about the nature and content of the curriculum. This will undermine not only the future of teacher education, but the future of education itself.' (p. 29)

If we are to move away from the brink of disaster to a key role in 'designing the future', the community of practice of LL Teacher Educators needs to come together and ensure it is heard before it is too late.

The Lifelong Learning Sector

The LLS is notoriously difficult to define (Armitage et al, 2007; Crawley, 2010a; Keeley-Browne, 2007), has been re-named at least five times over the last 20 years, and been the responsibility of different government departments, ministers, quangos and funding organisations. Orr and Simmons (2010) describe the sector as having been:

'... subjected to unprecedented levels of state intervention and series of policy initiatives, relating to both strategic and operational matters. Virtually all aspects of FE are now highly mediated by the State. Keep (2006) argues that PCET in England is now the most highly-regulated and centrally-directed education system in Europe.' (p. 78)

LL sector students and teachers come from a great diversity of experience and backgrounds and the provision includes an extraordinary breadth of subjects, programmes, teaching and organisational contexts (Crawley, 2010a; Lucas, 2004; Orr and Simmons, 2010; TLRP, 2008). This makes the sector unique, but results in a lack of 'connectedness' which Blair (2009) describes below:

'An FE college juxtaposes many different spaces in a single real place: learners sit in refectories, some in overalls, some in tabards, some in football kit, some in smart clothes, some in everyday clothes, some with books, some with nail files, some old, some young, all different. The only thing they have in common is the space they are in.' (p. 98)

Professionally, LL teachers often have the status of second class citizens in UK education, and Richardson (2007) explains some of the reasons why:

'The shortfall compared to secondary schools in FE student funding per head is estimated at 13%...and in FE teachers' pay...at 9.5%...Beyond these direct, "real-time" school/FE comparisons, FE also receives less funding for its "second chance" work with students at Entry level, level 1 and level 2 when compared to schools.' (p. 409)

LL teachers experience limited professional influence or autonomy in their working lives (Coffield, 2008; Hyland, 2011; Orr, 2012). They would not recommend their organisation as a good place to work (Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2002; Learning and Skills Network, 2008); do not feel valued or cared for by their employer and can be seen as trapped in what has been described as '*restrictive professionalism*' (Avis and Bathmaker, 2006: p. 185). Despite this restrictive environment there is evidence that LL teachers maintain an open and outward looking approach, recognise the value of education to society at large, and work to improve '*the health, welfare, self-esteem and ongoing progression of students*' (Avis et al, 2011: p. 215). This more positive vision of teacher professionalism encourages teacher empowerment and criticality, is described as '*expansive*', and has been argued as a way forward for LL teachers out of the restricted and impoverished professionalism which persists across the sector (Avis and Bathmaker, 2006).

This array of interlocking elements produces a sector which is exciting, varied, dynamic and forward looking, whilst at the same time being overcomplicated, frustrating, challenging and full of inconsistencies, often within the same day.

A Definition Of Lifelong Learning Teacher Educators

Teacher education should be straightforward to define. One of the most recent publications for new Teacher Educators in the UK (Boyd, Harris and Murray, 2011) contains much useful advice and guidance for Teacher Educators in all parts of the education sector, but does not actually define teacher education or a Teacher Educator. In research carried out by the author with over 250 LL Teacher Educators (Crawley, 2009; 2010b), participants in discussion workshops about teacher education experienced difficulties defining a Teacher Educator, and they found it particularly difficult to distinguish between a 'good teacher' and a 'good Teacher Educator', as there can be many similarities. The US Association for Teacher Education's definition is:

'... Teacher Educators are identified as those educators who provide formal instruction or conduct research and development for educating

prospective and practicing teachers. Teacher Educators provide the professional education component of pre-service programs and the staff development component of in-service programs.' (ATE, 200 p. 5)

As a UK LLS Teacher Educator Exley (2010) takes us beyond the somewhat functional definition above when she suggests that:

'Teachers can provide experiences that facilitate learning, and therefore facilitate change, by offering both scaffolded active engagement and information as content. Teacher Educators, however, are also defined by the fact that they teach in ITE and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and will, therefore, need to be able to help those they teach to become enablers of learning and be sources of knowledge.' (p. 24)

Exley's notion of Teacher Educators as those who model teaching behaviour to trainee and other teachers is widely held (Korthagen, 2004; Loughran, 2007; Thurston, 2010) and does help to more clearly identify what is unique about the Teacher Educator role.

At its simplest I would argue that the role of a Teacher Educator is to teach and/or support trainee and experienced teachers in ways which help them improve their teaching, whilst also building and extending their own professional knowledge and vision. For this article a broad and inclusive definition of LLS Teacher Educators has been used, which is:

any teaching professional supporting the learning and development of trainees on any of the currently recognised awards for teaching professionals in the LLS.

The Professional Context, Characteristics And Values Of LL Teacher Educators

Ongoing research by the author (Crawley, 2009; 2010b) and previous work from others including Harkin, Cuff and Rees (2008) and Noel (2006 and 2009) has provided a good profile of LL Teacher Educators. There are significant numbers of teaching professionals involved, many working in Further Education (FE) colleges and universities and the broader LL sector. LL Teacher Educators often move into teacher education with considerable experience in the sector, the majority are over 50, from a variety of teaching and other backgrounds and tend to be as in Noel's (2006: p. 154) statement '*largely female, white and middle aged*'. The proportion of their time spent on teacher education is often less than 50%, and the other work they do includes teaching in their original subject area, managing programmes and contributing to organisational staff development. They have often come into teacher education in a circuitous way, usually by being recognised as a very good teacher, then having to make the transition to becoming a very good Teacher Educator with variable levels of support. No national figure of how many LL Teacher Educators there are exists, but with some 45,000 registrations each year on any type of teaching qualification by FE teachers for 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 (LLUK, 2009; 2010; 2011), it would appear reasonable that 30 teachers per Teacher Educator as an average provides a starting point, resulting in an estimated total of 1,500 LL Teacher Educators in 2012.

The scale of LL ITE is very large, although it is rarely accorded the respect its achievements deserve. 45,000 LL teachers were registered on LL Teacher Education courses in each of 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 (LLUK, 2009; 2010; 2011). In comparison, in 2009/10 there were just under 38,500 Primary and Secondary trainees (Smithers and Robinson, 2011). On an annual basis, for each of those three years, more LL sector teachers were engaged in ITE programmes than all of the Primary and Secondary teacher trainees combined. Very few people (including those working in LL ITE) will be aware of this comparison.

Teacher Educators are an under-researched group, and in particular LL Teacher Educators. As part of research undertaken by the author between 2009 and 2011, 250 Teacher Educators engaged in workshops and 161 responded to the largest survey of its type undertaken with this group in England. Questions were included about the characteristics, development needs and beliefs, and opportunities presented throughout the online survey to add free comments, which were enthusiastically taken up (some 287 comments or 4,500 words were added). These responses covered a wide range of themes but there were three particular priorities for teacher education which occurred more frequently than any others. These concerned the importance of:

- supporting teachers in managing their day-to-day teaching and its associated challenges
- developing actively critical teachers who are empowered to experiment and move towards excellence
- encouraging teachers to adopt an outward-looking vision of teaching and learning and its contribution to the community at large.

Below is a small selection of quotes from different respondents which illustrate those priorities:

"I think it is really important to have empathy with your students regarding all the challenges they face when taking on a new teaching role at the same time as writing academically sometimes for the first time."

"(Teacher Educators need) The empathy and critical ability to judge the balance between support and facilitated autonomy, as needed to help the trainee move successfully towards their goals as trained professionals."

"(Teacher Educators need) The ability to help others make sense of the external and internal factors that impact on their teaching/learner support roles...leading to understanding, political awareness and empowerment."

This brief summary gives strong indications that the values of LL Teacher Educators align strongly with the 'expansive' approach to professionalism discussed earlier in this article. The research further indicates that modelling a more expansive professionalism with the teachers they train forms a central part of their activity as Teacher Educators.

Where Does LL ITE Stand Now?

In 2003 Ofsted carried out a survey inspection of FE ITE and found the '*current system of FE teacher training does not provide a satisfactory foundation of*

professional development for FE teachers at the start of their careers' (p. 4). As a result of this report and the subsequent *Equipping Our Teachers* (DfES, 2004) reforms including the 2007 Further Education Workforce Regulations (DIUS, 2007), LL Teacher Education and CPD have introduced major developments which have led to significant improvements, and achieved a situation by 2012 where:

'... good progress has been made towards ensuring a qualified and expert teaching profession with new entrants to the sector enrolled on or have achieved a recognised teaching qualification.'

(BIS, 2012: p. 7)

and

'There is evidence from interviews with teachers, department and faculty heads and team leaders, that new staff systematically being enrolled on and obtaining the ITT qualification equips staff with increased confidence, the ability to use different teaching methods to support learners with varying needs and learning preferences, and increased reflective practice.'

(BIS, 2012: p. 8)

The effective support given through teacher education programmes has been a major contribution to the improvements, and 80% of all staff in the sector are either qualified or engaged in teacher education at the time of writing (ACETT/LLUK, 2010; BIS, 2012; Ofsted, 2010). One recurring problem which does however appear in Ofsted ITE inspection reports, evaluations and research is the inconsistency of employer support for their staff to become professionally qualified (ACETT/LLUK, 2010; BIS, 2012; Ofsted, 2010; Thompson and Robinson, 2008). The *Review of Professionalism in Further Education - Interim Report* (Lingfield, 2012) recognises this when citing Lucas and Unwin (2009):

'...many of the FE colleges surveyed offered little or no financial support to their staff undertaking mandatory teacher training, nor sufficient remission from their normal lecturing timetables to "reflect, to read...to dig deep into the theory; no time to think through what it all means".' (p. 20)

and

'The review panel concludes that effective in-service training arrangements in FE depend not only on the engagement of staff...but also on the wholehearted involvement of their employers. That involvement appears to be patchy, ranging from complete to minimal.' (p. 20)

Yet Lingfield's *Interim Report* (2012) adopts a highly negative stance towards teacher education. There is no mention of any of the extensive evidence of improvement from research (including from the same department that commissioned the review), and only negative comments are made, as represented by the examples below:

'Initial teacher training programmes appear to be largely generic and theoretical, rather than being related to the professional and occupational expertise of college lecturers.' (p. 14)

and

'There are doubts about the consistency of delivery of the qualifications ... the shortcomings found by Ofsted in 2003, which apparently remain common.' (p. 19)

Rather than recognising the evidence about progress made through the reforms and building new ways forward based on that evidence, the Interim Report proposes a removal of all regulation of teaching qualifications including the requirement for LL teachers to gain a minimum level of qualification. Most surprising however is the proposal for ITE to be self-regulated by the same employers who have regularly failed to effectively support their teachers in getting qualified.

In taking such an anti-teacher education, market-led approach, Lingfield's recommendations closely align to the managerial, restrictive and limited version of professionalism which the workforce reforms of 2001 and 2007 were seeking to move away from.

On The Brink

The recommendations of the Lingfield report are likely to reduce the scope and range of teacher education and its capacity to continue to lead the way in improving LL teaching and learning. They are however one part of a 'double whammy' which LL ITE faces. The second part is the looming increase in HE fees in 2012/13, and all ITE fees from 2013/14. As a result of changes recommended in the Browne Report (2010), and the Coalition Government's policy of transferring the cost of education and training from the public purse to the beneficiaries of education and training (i.e. the students), most undergraduate HE fees are increasing to between £6,000 and £9,000 per year from 2012/13. A consequence of this change is that a typical part-time in-service LL ITE course will see its annual fee increase from around £900 per year to around £3,000 per year in 2012/13; an increase of 325%. This unintended consequence, plus the removal of a requirement to become qualified and employers self-managing LL Teacher Education is certain to result in a reduction of LL Teacher Education. Given the evidence presented in this article, it is very difficult to interpret the Government position as anything other than anti-teacher education.

As if the double whammy above wasn't enough, the recently announced bursary scheme for LL ITE adds insult to injury. After indicating that bursaries for LL teacher trainees would be comparable to those for trainee school teachers in November 2011, the Minister of State (Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning) announced the level of those bursaries as £1,000 per year up to a maximum of £1,500 (for Skills for Life trainee teachers) per year for the 2012/13 year. For the same year, the most a school ITE trainee could be awarded is £20,000. As if any further evidence were required that LL Teacher Education is undervalued, it would appear that a LL trainee is worth just one twentieth of the value of a school teacher trainee.

Conclusion

We have arrived at a pivotal moment in the history of LL ITE. Despite working in a sector which achieves much, and despite leading major improvements in teacher education in an environment which continues to be particularly harsh, and despite promoting an expansive version of professionalism for teachers which is outward

looking and aspirational, LL ITE remains not just the poor relation, but seriously at risk of being decimated by an extraordinary accumulation of circumstances.

What then can be done in defence of teacher education? A number of writers have argued for a change in teachers' approaches to 'taking and making their own professionalism' by seeking greater involvement and encouragement of a more mature approach from their employing organisations, agencies and government (Coffield, 2008; Crawley, 2010a; Hillier and Jameson, 2004; Hodgson, Edwards and Gregson, 2007). It is powerfully argued that there needs to be:

'... a stronger role for the practitioners...at local level in planning provision and capacity-building for the future in order to harness valuable local knowledge and to meet the needs of diverse local communities.'

(Hodgson, Edwards and Gregson, 2007: p. 227)

and that

'... the sector needs to be managed on a more flexible basis that allows room for professionals to act according to their own judgment of the local situations.'

(TLRP, 2008: p. 19)

Frank Coffield, one of the most respected and powerful writers on the LLS, puts it succinctly:

'How can 200,000 professionals become so invisible when they are so indispensable?'

(Coffield, 2008: p. 8)

Coffield also points to a way forward which would benefit us all:

'Staff need to be involved as full, equal partners in the development, enactment, evaluation and redesign of policy, because tutors and managers are the people who turn paper policies into courses, curricula and purposeful activities in classrooms.' (p. 22)

What Should LL Teacher Educators Do?

A network of consensus amongst LL Teacher Educators, including national organisations such as UCET (The Universities Council for the Education of Teachers) and ACETT (The Association of Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training), is emerging around the idea that we should face the future challenges together, make our own professionalism, argue strongly as a professional community of practice about what we believe and advocate for the evidence of what works and why, when training LL teachers. There is confidence that LL ITE will survive in some form, but that the landscape will change, and it may well involve fewer HEI programmes. To conclude this article I would like to suggest some guiding principles which we may all be able to unify around:

- we need to be fully committed to a model of ITE and CPD which faces both ways (i.e. towards 'the inside' - supported teaching professionals in their practical teaching, supporting learners and working with / managing their own professional situation / colleagues; but also towards the 'outside' – the larger issues, concepts and values of teaching and learning, the community and the world beyond)

- LL ITE needs to diversify and deepen its range and scope and this will involve a more integrated induction>ITE>CPD curriculum
- we need to be at the forefront of new approaches to curriculum, delivery and support, driven by the entrepreneurship of ITE providers and Teacher Educators
- new partnerships, alliances and collaborations need to emerge around ITE, including a greater role for the private sector
- technology needs to be embedded as an effective tool in programme delivery and support
- we need to lead ideas and take opportunities for development, managing changes and innovation even within the currently challenging situation.

Our only way forward is to make our own professionalism for the future as the loss of quality, commitment and expertise which would result from any other approach cannot be countenanced. We must design the future, not return to the past.

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