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TEACHER EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM REFORM - SOME ENGLISH ERRORS

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INTRODUCTION - THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

The aim of this presentation is to explore the relationship between teacher training and curriculum change. Economic competitiveness is now a number one priority in almost all industrialised nations and the effective schooling of the work force is a manifest preoccupation of most governments. In countries like England where the control of the curriculum has for fifty years been characterised by a "partnership" between government and teachers in which the teachers have had the dominant role in determining what and how they teach this preoccupation has led in recent years to increasing intervention by the national ministry in the affairs of schools and a deteriorating relationship between the partners as a result.

In the view of the government curriculum has become too important to be left to the teachers or even to their local government employers, whilst in the view of the teachers economic goals are threatening to undermine their commitment to the education of the individual pupil through the maximisation of their cognitive and expressive powers. The scene is now set for a confrontation between a determinedly interventionist government and those local education authorities and teacher organisations who see themselves under threat. One of the additional features of the scene that adds spice to the confrontation is the presence of a new "partner", the Department of Employment which over the past ten years has become increasingly involved as a sponsor of work-related curricula.

Let me remind you of the political backdrop. In England at the present time we have a right-wing government and a failing economy. At least four million people are unemployed, including a substantial proportion of young school leavers and a growing number of teachers. The government's response to economic decline is to strive for industrial regeneration through a combination of interlinked policies, including privatisation of state industries, reduction of the bargaining power of organised labour, strict control of public spending on social services and the

promotion of curriculum perspectives directly related to economic realities. The school system is a major target for fiscal efficiency and cultural, if not political, control.

CURRICULUM REFORM - THE SIXTIES

Let me say at once that there is nothing new in the government's interest in promoting curriculum change, in updating school practices to meet the needs of post-war society. Twenty years ago an ad hoc agency, the Schools Council for Curriculum Development and Examinations, was set up with the precise task of stimulating the country's 440,000 teachers to review their practices and to make available to them alternative curricula generated by the Council via a comprehensive range of curriculum development projects. But at that time there was no element of coercion, or even pressure. The composition of the Council reflected the partnership tradition between central government, local government and teachers, and teacher autonomy was held by all to be sacrosanct. What was offered during the first decade of curriculum development was a supermarket of curriculum packages for the discriminating teacher consumer. The economic context at the time was one of expansion, and educational investment reflected the optimism and buoyancy of the period.

CURRICULUM REFORM - THE SEVENTIES

By the time the seventies began the mood had changed, the economy was in trouble, and there was widespread disillusion with the alleged failure of the voluntaristic ethic of the Council to persuade teachers of the need for change. The shelves of the supermarket were well stocked but not enough teachers were buying, and those who had were not using the packages in the ways intended by the project developers.

By this time the curriculum landscape had become considerably enlarged and differentiated. Curriculum development on the scale of the sixties had encouraged the generation of new academic territory and specialisms in the institutions of higher education - there was a whole new community of academics involved in the problems of curriculum reform - curriculum developers, evaluators, disseminators, and theorists of educational innovation among them.

Given the admitted limitations of the approach to change through national projects on the centre/periphery model new prescriptions were avidly debated and pressed upon government paymasters. But the pathologies offered by the new academics tended to differ sharply from the deductions reached in ministry circles, and it was these deductions that were to count in the decade that followed.

Whilst the centre/periphery model of innovation, with its package philosophy and implicit claim to teacher-proof resilience fell out of favour with the academics, and with the now ailing Schools Council, to be replaced by a commitment to local networks of teacher curriculum developers and to investment in in-service training, the government took the path of directly controlled, highly focussed R, D and D based on categorical funding and strict accountability, as in the paradigm case of the National Development Programme in Computer Assisted Learning, a five year programme run by civil servants. This programme revealed the changed mood of government, and in particular the rise of a new ideology, managerialism through a tough-minded systems approach. The government would buy its way into the curriculum through single-purpose task forces that would be powerful enough to engineer specific changes within realistic time scales.

Teacher training had low priority within this plan apart from the in-service induction of programme users. Initial training of teachers, the pre-service component, hardly figured at all in the thinking of either group, despite the fact that the curriculum development movement of the sixties had been hampered by its disconnection from the hundred or so colleges and university departments responsible for the initial training of teachers.

So throughout the seventies there was a polarisation of curriculum reform ideologies between government and academia. The academic community, taking as its axiom that there is no curriculum development without teacher development, was extending its notion of a partnership with teachers, giving more and more prominence to the teacher's role as the researcher and developer of his own curriculum. By the end of the seventies the concept of "teacher as researcher" had widespread currency among academics involved with in-service education and individual school-based research had become a popular option with teachers pursuing second degree qualifications through secondment or part-time study.

Government meanwhile was busy forcing through the demise of the Schools Council and replacing it with separate agencies for curriculum development and for examinations located in the Ministry under closer political oversight. At the same time it was pressing its own curriculum policy imperatives through more categorical funding, and through spearheading an accountability movement aimed at breaking through the established insulation of the schools from public scrutiny. The siege economy became translated into the siege curriculum, a trend accelerated when the problem of youth unemployment reached a politically sensitive scale in the mid-seventies and began to preoccupy the Manpower Services Commission, a massive new quasi-governmental agency set up in 1974 as an adjunct of the Department of Employment. In the last ten years the MSC has changed from an organisation largely devoted to the training needs of adults to a major sponsor of industry-related curricula in schools and further education colleges.

CURRICULUM CONTROL - THE EIGHTIES

There can be little doubt, as we survey the present scene, that a previously unthinkable transformation has taken place in the power relationships pertinent to curriculum change. The government has strengthened its hold on the schools, and the teachers are in disarray. Massive cuts in expenditure on education have deprived the schools of resources for development other than along the lines urged by the ministries, teacher unemployment has unnerved the unions and eroded their bargaining power, while youth unemployment on an unprecedented scale has undermined the continuing defence of past practice. Although the managerial model of centre/periphery innovation favoured by government in the seventies was no more successful than its softer predecessor, it had the side effect of consuming all the available funds for curriculum development and starving schools of resources for alternative development, thus predisposing them to bid for government money under whatever label the government cared to offer it.

The eighties have seen the government take full advantage of this softening up process to launch increasingly frank attacks on the performance of the schools and the performance of teachers as a prelude to further intervention, attacks which at one time would have been vigorously rejected by a teaching profession confident of public support. But in

a period of recession all contributory services are acceptable scapegoats for failure, and the teachers have not escaped censure. There is more public support for the government posture than for the teachers' defense among parents who traditionally have looked to schools to provide their children with the credentials of employment.

CURRICULUM CONTROL -- TEACHER TRAINING

During the last two or three years, having established to its own satisfaction that the performance of teachers leaves a lot to be desired, the government has been engaged in a build-up to exercising greater control over the system of initial training. The build-up has consisted of a succession of reports and discussion documents emanating from the ministry, mostly produced by the five hundred strong body of national school inspectors, and all of them implicitly or explicitly critical of the training system. The critique has been wide-ranging, from allegations of basic incompetence on the part of a substantial number of newly trained teachers, through the alleged failure of teachers to respond to demands for a careers orientation towards their subject, to a general mismatch between the subject qualifications of teachers and the subjects they are called upon to teach. The convergent conclusion of these reports was that the teacher trainers were doing a poor job of recruiting, selecting, and training.

This system of teacher training consists of some seventy specialist colleges, locally based and controlled, and twenty-seven university departments. For the most part the colleges concentrate on providing the three or four year undergraduate course for the primary and middle school teachers, while the universities provide the one year postgraduate course for the secondary school teachers. There used to be considerably more institutions, but with falling rolls and rationalisation a number of amalgamations have reduced the total to the present number, and mean that some universities now provide both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching course. Almost one third of teachers in England and Wales are graduates, and the system is moving rapidly towards an all graduate profession. Although the national ministry has statutory and regulatory powers over the system the trainers have enjoyed substantial autonomy in the recruitment, selection and training of their students, free from bureaucratic interference from above or substantial school involvement in the training process.

Now all that is about to change, perhaps marginally, perhaps dramatically, it is too early to know for certain. This time last year the Secretary of State for Education published a White Paper on teacher training, entitled "Teaching Quality", which summarised the findings of the previous investigations and introduced new proposals.

THE NEW PROPOSALS

At first glance, and leaving out of account the trends and issues adumbrated in the previous sections of this presentation, the proposals seem relatively bland. For instance, the major proposal is that the Secretary of State, who already has the power to approve courses of initial training, will henceforth do so by applying a set of criteria based on advice from a consultative committee. These criteria relate to the initial selection of students, the level and amount of subject content of courses, professional content, and links between training institutions and schools. Further proposals include the reconstitution of so-called professional committees to monitor training provision at the individual institution level. Such committees already exist, and are widely representative of local interests, but had become over time a mere rubber-stamping formality in the world of the teacher trainers. Now they are to be re-invigorated. Finally the White Paper proposes that teacher training institutions adopt course patterns which enable them to identify and discard at an early stage students who are academically able perhaps but professionally unsuitable.

Such proposals do not in themselves raise the prospect of radical change. It is to the detailed arguments and advocacies contained in the White Paper that we must look to discern the new directions for teacher training that the government intends to pursue. And here we find a quite startling, and to me at least, alarming scenario depicted. For instance the Paper argues for the close involvement of practising teachers in the recruitment, training and assessment of students. Counterbalancing this extension of teacher power is an argument for local teacher employers to assess individual teacher performance on an annual basis and to take action on this basis to weed out the incompetent and the unsuitable. Another major innovation is that teachers will be qualified only to teach those age ranges and subjects in which they have been specifically trained, and that teacher appointments should no longer be made specific to particular schools so that the employing authorities can transfer teachers with specific skills to those institutions most in need.

THE NEW PROPOSALS - A CRITIQUE

If we can assume that the Secretary of State's approval of teacher training courses will be heavily influenced by the degree to which they adopt and embody such values then it is worth teasing out their implications for the future of curriculum development. In the first place it is quite clear that initial training will be constrained by an official view of the trainee as an apprentice teacher, his performance shaped by the dominant culture of the schools. Those of us who have conceived of new teachers as the principal instrument of curriculum change and who view apprenticeship as an induction into obsolete practice see yet another door to teacher-led development closing.

It would not be so bad if this change at the initial training stage were accompanied by expansion of in-service training, but the White Paper, while commending in-service training, rules out even the possibility of resources for it. What is more, we need to note that in a parallel policy shift in relation to universities the government proposes to concentrate educational research funds in those universities which do not have a predominant commitment to teacher training, thus further diminishing the innovatory potential of teacher training agencies. This is a blow to those academics like myself who now, in the light of a virtual withdrawal by government of support for teacher-led innovation, have come to see some form of research-based teacher training as the main avenue of school self-renewal. The proposed separation of university departments into those which research and those which train is less than conducive to such an aspiration.

The new proposals contain a further danger, perhaps more significant in the light of the failure of successive resorts to externally inspired innovation efforts. In a decentralised school system where teachers have freedom to review and change what they do according to their convictions curriculum development does take place and differing professional convictions lead to a healthy diversity of classroom practice. Although the extent and quality of this grassroots activity is less than many observers and governments would like it is still historically responsible for most of the major shifts in the national practice that have taken place. Indeed it is this view that underpins the conviction that the most effective form of curriculum development is one that provides support rather than direction for teacher innovators.

But many of the arguments emanating from government over the past few years have attacked this uncontrolled variation in the system and sought to standardise both curriculum and pedagogy across the nation. The notion of the "core curriculum", the idea of criterion levels of pupil learning in prespecified domains, the accusation of political subversives operating within the teaching profession - the rhetoric of the government has sought to promote conformity between schools and teachers as the means of raising standards. In the sixties diversity was encouraged by the Schools Council and other agencies of innovation, and legitimated by a responsive examinations system that was willing to be led by what teachers chose to teach. All that has been changed, both curriculum development and examinations having been centralised in Whitehall under exclusive government funding with reduced budgets.

Seen in this light then proposals for assessing teacher performance, weeding out the unsuitable, and making teachers vulnerable to transfer carry a distinctly coercive message when placed alongside the messages of efficiency and conformity. Teachers who are not free to fail are not free to experiment, and teachers who take on the additional task of training and assessing recruits have no time or energy left to engage in new ventures. Teachers who give offense, for good or bad reasons, may find themselves transferred to a less attractive institution in a less desirable location.

I am not, of course, arguing that such outcomes of government policy are intended by their designers. I do not believe that this government, or any other, wishes teachers to become compliant operatives of its curriculum machine. Surely it wishes teachers to adopt its policy priorities, but to do so with the kind of conviction that will lead to high quality implementation. Perhaps it will succeed, but I am extremely dubious about such a possibility. It is evident that England is moving quite rapidly towards the kind of centralised school system that has dominated some of its continental neighbours since the inception of state provision. There is no evidence to suggest that such systems have a superior capacity to promote high quality schooling and much evidence to the contrary. And if there is one lesson to be learned from the Western experience of thirty years of government sponsored curriculum development it is that teachers make poor operatives of other people's ideas. It is a lesson that has yet to be learned by my government; it is a lesson that I hope your government can learn from the experience of others.

NOTES TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF TEACHER TRAINING,
CURRICULUM RESEARCH AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

I must make it clear that the scenario I am about to sketch has little chance of coming about in England now. The government has made it clear that it intends to pursue a quite different path, one that in my view demonstrates a lamentable failure to grasp the possibilities of effective curriculum development that have been revealed by two decades of involvement with the curriculum problem. The scenario is a personal one, based upon my own involvement, firstly with initial teacher training, subsequently with curriculum development and latterly with in-service education and curriculum research. My aim is to explore possible linkages between these largely compartmentalised territories, to draw them together in a unified form.

Let me propose a necessarily crude and simplistic analysis of some key problems in each of the relevant institutions - schools, teacher training agencies, and educational research centres. First, the schools. No-one would now deny that it is extremely difficult to radically change the curriculum practices and beliefs of the teachers. So far the school curriculum has successfully resisted quite massively funded external stimuli - both seduction and coercion have failed, though in different ways. Seduction, the way of the sixties, made little impact because even those teachers who were seduced by the new packages found themselves unequal to the task of transforming the institutional contexts that had held them locked into their previous practice. Coercion, in the form of purchasing power, brings little else but minimal compliance with the wrappings of the new curriculum merchandise. It fails to capture the allegiance of the teachers, and subversion of its values and therefore of its purposes is assured. The general conclusion of those in a position to observe and analyse this pathology is that effective curriculum development must adopt the school rather than the individual subject or the individual teacher as the unit. A second conclusion is that the most effective form of curriculum development is self-determined. Schools must be supported in the process of self-renewal on the basis of self-study. This is no easy task, but teacher trainers and curriculum researchers could do more to help.

Second, the teacher training agencies. One long-standing and abiding criticism of teacher training courses, shared by both students and practising teachers, is the separation of theory and practice. The professional studies component of initial training has traditionally consisted of an introduction to its constituent theoretical perspectives, the borrowed disciplines of history, psychology, philosophy and sociology of education. Students are expected to acquire these bodies of theory and apply them to the understanding of their classroom situations, a task that has consistently defeated them. Little wonder that the proposals of the Secretary of State for a greater emphasis on the mastery of basic classroom skills and the closer involvement of experienced teachers in the training process were widely welcomed as a move in the right direction. Unfortunately such a "solution" is likely to compound another problem in initial training and would seem to preclude the possibility of solving the theory/practice gulf in a different, and I would argue, a more effective way. The second problem to which I refer is the tendency of teacher trainees, when placed in schools for teaching practice at a stage when they have little confidence and great anxiety about controlling the pupils, to adopt defensive patterns of behaviour which immediately distance them from the pupils and restrict the possibility of developing through close interpersonal contact, a more adequate understanding of their needs and problems. I see these two problems as related; but the solution to them lies in taking account of developments in curriculum research that have largely been located outside the teacher training corps. I spoke earlier of the new academic territory generated in the sixties by the curriculum development movement. A whole new community of curriculum theorists became established in the universities, theorists whose theory was based on the close observation of new curricula in action. In short what was generated by the curriculum development movement was grounded theory, a theory of educational practice with little allegiance to the established and derivative disciplines that trainee teachers find so difficult to apply. Most of these theorists, in so far as they became involved with teacher training, did so only through in-service courses or teaching for higher degrees, but took that opportunity to draw their students into the process of field-based enquiry into school problems and practices. Many of these enquiries take the form of action/research in which curriculum problems are identified in particular schools, corrective action undertaken, and consequences carefully monitored with a view to further action.

In a growing number of research centres in England you can now find networks of practising teachers participating in collaborative forms of school based research and development with academics attempting to further the advance of grounded theory. The problem with this otherwise admirable movement is the demands it makes upon the individual teacher researcher attempting to add to his teaching skills and commitments the acquisition of research skills of which he has no previous experience. It is an exhausting business.

Now let me try to pull together these disparate strands. The school is the optimum unit for curriculum research and development. This research and development activity should be carried out by the teachers themselves. This is a task for which their initial training does not prepare them. Initial training courses teach theory in a general form that is difficult to apply to particular situations, leaving new teachers vulnerable to occupational socialisation of a non-developmental nature. Curriculum theorists have shown how to generate situational theory based on the close study of school practice, and this has begun to shape the content of in-service training of individual teachers. These teachers, lacking previous experience or training in curriculum research and without the collaboration of school colleagues, find the demands of the activity exhausting.

When we pull the strands together in this way it seems at least possible to conceive of a system of continuous training which embodies as a major goal the development in teachers of research skills (albeit at the level of low technology) that will enable them to undertake curriculum review and renewal. What such a scenario calls for is a radical transformation of initial training courses to bring them more into line with the possibilities revealed by advances in curriculum theory and in-service training. Such a prospect is considerably enhanced by the institutional amalgamations of teacher training colleges and university departments of education that have characterised the reorganisation of the training system in the last decade. An institution like my own school of education, for instance, now engages in initial training, both undergraduate and postgraduate, in in-service training of every kind, and in school-based curriculum research and development. All these activities go on under one roof but are at present mutually insulated by traditional distributions of resources, responsibilities and personnel. Effective integration and cross-fertilisation of these activities can only be achieved if we re-conceptualise the aims and the content of initial training.

What would such a re-conceptualisation look like, what new activities and roles would it imply for the trainee and for the tutor? In my view the answer to this is sharply opposed to the apprenticeship concept of the trainee advocated in the Secretary of State's White Paper, with its heavy emphasis on classroom practice under the eye of an experienced teacher. I would suggest that we should think in terms of the trainee as a student of schooling, a critical and reflective observer and evaluator of its contemporary conditions, practices and beliefs. I believe that a substantial proportion of initial training should consist of guided investigation of local communities, extensive study of children in non-institutionalised settings, case studies of particular schools and their curriculum practices. We should train students in observation, interviewing and reporting on curriculum issues embedded in a growing understanding of the realities of contemporary schooling, rather than, as we tend now to do, induct them into ideal models of pedagogy that have little resilience when exposed prematurely to the operational culture. I further believe that initial training conceived and carried out along such lines would provide schools with a rich source of evaluative as well as descriptive feedback that would assist them in review and renewal. I further believe that in time such a reconceptualisation would facilitate the integration of pre-service, in-service and school self-development activities into a unified and mutually supportive system. And within such a system the separation of academic research in the grounded theory tradition would break down as the roles of trainee, trainer and researcher become merged in a common purpose. As I have said, such a prospect has little chance of realisation now in England in the context of policy initiatives and pressures that I have outlined in this presentation. What the merits of such a proposal and such a prospect are elsewhere I leave to those who can make an informed judgement.