

Rediscovering Teacher Education

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My first meeting with Alec Peterson was when he appointed me to my first full-time university post, at Oxford, some 27 years ago. I met Alec in his room in the department. No one else was present. We talked pleasantly for half-an-hour or so about a book I had just published. He then offered me a tutorship, to start in the following September, and I accepted. As in all my subsequent associations with him, Alec was courteous, direct, unbureaucratic and tolerant of my enthusiasms. He was director of the Department of Education at Oxford for 15 years, from 1958 to 1973. It was during this time that he initiated the work in comparative education for which the department is still well known; fostered the idea of the United World Colleges; played a leading part in the creation of the International Baccalaureate; campaigned actively for a broader upper-secondary education, and strove to inject a truly global dimension into the training of teachers and the work of the schools.

At the end of his life Alec wrote an article titled “Three Decades of Non-Reform” (1988), in which he documented no fewer than seven failed attempts to reduce sixth-form specialization in England and Wales (they order things differently in Scotland) and argued that this melancholy record owed much to the lack of a national curriculum, without which “a degree of consensus in favour of reform could never have led to its implementation”.

Today, the English sixth form remains unreformed. But one wishes Alec could have been spared for a few more years, for the campaigns that he waged, both at Oxford and after his formal “retirement”, are beginning at last to have a real impact on education.

The IB has widespread recognition. The numbers taking its examinations are increasing. In the context of a new national curriculum, there is greater hope that the growing consensus on the need for a broadened upper-secondary education will bear fruit. And the EC (described unkindly to me recently as a bottomless source of inaccessible funds), has through ERASMUS exchange arrangements, through LINGUA and by means of other such schemes, nudged British education towards a more European and international outlook.

Alec—the effort wasn’t wasted.

The Enterprise of Teacher Education

Last year, in the first of these lectures, John Goormaghtigh spoke movingly of Alec’s contributions to the IB. Given the location [Geneva], subsequent lecturers will also no doubt want to stress this aspect of his career. My own focus is elsewhere. His early IB and United World College work, his efforts on behalf of reform in the sixth form, his political activities—he was a leading spokesman on education of the Liberal Party for a time—were all undertaken while employed as an educator of teachers. It is of that enterprise that I wish to speak.

In teacher education, as in so many other fields of educational endeavour, there are neither quick fixes nor ultimate solutions. There is no single institutional or curriculum policy that, even if rigorously and vigorously pursued, will guarantee a supply of well-qualified, highly motivated, skilled and successful teachers. Rather, we are all engaged in a continuing conversation about the why, the

what and the how of teacher preparation. The language and temper of that conversation changes in response to external conditions; to new knowledge; to fresh demands on the schools; to altered economic, social and political priorities. It is a conversation more visible and with more participants at some times than at others. In the words of one recent author:

“The contemporary surge in interest in debate about teacher education is not without historical precedent. Nevertheless, when discussions concerning teacher education are splashed across the front pages of daily newspapers, the situation is afloat with opportunities to communicate. At least someone may be paying attention.” (Ginsberg 1988 p. 2)

It is not too fanciful to suggest that, on both sides of the Atlantic and in many European countries, governments and the groups that make up what is called “civil society” are rediscovering the importance of teacher education. More clearly than in the past, they perceive the cost of its inadequacies. Poor teaching may lack the manifest disaster criteria of incompetent surgery or faulty bridge design. It can, however, establish or fail to alleviate such chronic classroom states as low performance, depressed expectations, unfulfilled potential and unsocial conduct. No curriculum is teacher-proof. Competent school leadership is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for staff success. I was grateful to Alec Peterson for responding to and encouraging my own efforts to set up training courses for school heads at Oxford, long before these became a feature of every respectable in-service training programme—not that he was uncritical of the notion of leadership. In his 1957 Carpenter lectures (p. 59) he noted that:

“Leadership... remains a fetish among educationalists. There is a familiar story of an American mother who, filling in honestly a questionnaire about her daughter, answered the stock leadership question by saying that the girl had no particular qualities of leadership but preferred to accept the guidance of others. She was delighted to get a reply from the Dean, accepting her daughter on the grounds that she was admitting ninety girls that term, and that since eighty-nine of them appeared to be born leaders, it would be nice for them to have one follower.”

When governments and educational authorities set about radical reform, the energies, adaptability and commitment of the teachers are essential to the success of their endeavour. Somewhere on my shelves there is a book about architecture relevant to this point—a search has so far failed to find it, but the sense can be paraphrased. The author argues that no architectural style can succeed that is too far ahead of the talents and skills of the workmen who must interpret it in brick and stone and timber. Likewise for curriculum design and pedagogic theory. On this point Alec Peterson had no illusions. He commented that:

“Almost any definition of the qualities of any teacher, even of a village schoolmistress, reads rather like a joint character sketch of St Francis of Assisi and Leonardo da Vinci. There is an almost ludicrous contrast between society’s estimate of the average primary teacher, expressed both in status and pay, and the theoretical description usually given by educationalists of the qualities of character and intellect which the job requires.” (1957 p. 65)

The Importance of the Text

One of the duties of the director of the Oxford department was to deliver a lecture course on the ideas of the great educators (in the Mulcaster Room, named after one of Oxford's own). Such courses now seldom feature in programmes of initial teacher training. There is little time for close study of the famous texts of our trade. I understand well enough why they have been squeezed out. There are many skills to be acquired in the all-too-short year of post-graduate professional training. But something of value has been lost in the process. Indeed, one of the things that makes me uneasy about my task today is the difficulty of doing justice, through the spoken word, to the complexity and potential of the literature of our field. Speech (with its emphasis on unifying and securing the face-to-face approval of an audience that continuously offers feedback in the form of facial response and body language) fails to offer a text that might be systematically and usefully applied to the powers of intellect, experience and critical understanding that have helped to put those of you who are presently my listeners in the posts you currently occupy.

At Oxford in the sixties, initial professional training did include such textual analysis. I may have been doubtful about its value at the time, but now, whether from greater wisdom or the mere conservatism of age, I increasingly value and respect the focus and structure provided by close, shared and guided study of significant texts, as against the loose indulgences and convivialities of speech.

“Writing,” says Barthes (1979), “is that strange activity... which miraculously arrests the haemorrhaging of the image-repertoire, of which speech is the powerful and pathetic stream.” He quotes Kafka's journals:

“When I say something, this thing immediately and definitively loses its importance. When I write it here it also loses it, but sometimes gains another importance.”

And in our own field, Lee Shulman (1987 p. 15) has reminded us that:

“Although most teaching begins with some kind of text, and the learning of that text can be a worthy end in itself, we should not lose sight of the fact that the text is often a vehicle for achieving other educational purposes. The goals of education transcend the comprehension of particular texts, but may be unachievable without it.”

The Texts of Teacher Education

Those who followed the Oxford Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course in Alec's day—and since—can testify to how contemporary educational issues can be illuminated by the close study of seminal texts. In the last twenty-five years, however, the value of such work has been overwhelmed by the pressure of more practical matters upon the curriculum of teacher preparation and by the sheer weight of educational publications. In the framework of this discussion of teacher education, such publications can be seen as falling into four groups.

First, and most numerous, are those texts that, by either adding to or drawing upon research-based knowledge, advocate changes in the structure, content or process of teacher education; changes intended to improve its effectiveness in relation to either explicit or implicit criteria. Such texts can be characterized as *evaluative*, *reformist* and *programmatic*.

Second, there are the many studies of the historical, social and institutional contexts of teacher education. The province mainly of historians, of some species of sociologists and of students of educational administration, the prevailing character of such publications is *analytical, apolitical and non-evaluative*.

Third, there is a type of writing (the conclusions of which I am, for the most part, in considerable disagreement with) that focuses on the part that teacher education might play in stimulating or achieving broader processes of educational, social and even political reform. The theoretical focus, high quality, insightfulness and polemical character of some of the best of this writing attracts academic and scholarly interest out of all proportion to its significance for the process and content of teacher education. At the same time, because of the radicalism of its ideological base and sometimes overtly political character, such writing provides just the “evidence” that some critics of existing arrangements need to sustain their attacks on the teacher education enterprise.

Such attacks constitute a fourth category of contemporary writing on teacher education. They have been a significant feature of the increased visibility of the enterprise, not least because newspapers, radio and television thrive upon dissent and the polarization of opinion. Some contemporary English critics argue that the teacher education enterprise is not merely flawed, but fundamentally ill conceived. It needs to be done away with all together and replaced by some kind of school-based apprenticeship.

Others content themselves with assertions that initial training programmes contain too much theory, and should be more directly oriented to the needs of the beginning teacher in the classroom.

National treasuries look anxiously at the burgeoning cost of meeting the demand for higher education. They recognize that while it may be possible to ask for increased contributions to that cost from individual students and their families in those subjects and professional specialisms that show a high rate of return for the time and effort invested, this would not be practicable in the case of teaching. Why not, then, make savings through reducing the content and shortening the duration of initial training? This view runs counter to those professionals anxious about existing pressures on the initial teacher training (ITT) curriculum, and the need for courses to be increased rather than reduced in length.

Many Gateways, Many Paths

Whatever the merits of an apprenticeship-type training, it seems doubtful if any government is going to take the risks with teacher supply that immersion in the deep end for eighteen-year-olds would entail. Instead, we are likely to see a diversification of routes into teaching, such as is already occurring in England and Wales with the introduction of the “articled teacher” and “licensed teacher” schemes. Under the first of these, a graduate can earn a salary, less than that of a fully qualified beginning teacher but more than a student grant, over a two-year period of combined teaching and training. At the end of this he or she receives the same qualification as other candidates for the PGCE.

The licensed teacher scheme is more radical. It provides for men and women over the age of 26, with at least one year of full-time higher education, and other relevant experience, to be employed immediately as teachers, and to be trained on an in-service basis, under arrangements proposed by each employing local authority and approved centrally.

In his *The Future of Education* (1968) Alec Peterson spoke up for the greater flexibility in teacher supply. He argued that it should include provision for both “concurrent” and “consecutive” modes, the first in which professional training is combined with higher education, the second offering professional education for those who had already mastered the necessary subject matter in a first degree course or elsewhere. Such a pattern should also:

“...provide courses of varying length and content for prospective teachers who seek to enter the profession at different ages and with different previous experience. High academic experience should not be regarded as exceptionally important unless the entrant intends to teach academic subjects at a high level.”

Alec did not believe that it was a good thing for a man or woman to spend the whole of his or her life in the classroom. In *Educating our Rulers* (1957) he wrote of the dangers of teaching becoming an unvaried task of habit and routine. He remembered a master at one public school:

“...who had, from choice, because he thought it the most suitable play, taken the Classical Shell through the *Medea* every Christmas term for twenty years. The boys had copies of the play which were actually scored with the volume of applause considered fitting by previous generations for each one of the master’s preordained little jokes.” (p. 77)

Part of the problem, as he saw it, was the lack of opportunity to advance during a professional career in teaching (*The Future of Education*, 1968 p. 193). He saw the need for the increased differentials that at least to some extent have now been incorporated into salary scales in England and Wales, but that are still inadequate to provide motivation and to reward achievement. I share his concerns—not least, because the status of teacher education is tied directly to the status of teaching itself. If the latter is low, it can hardly be expected that initial training will enjoy high regard.

The Conditions of Change

In the decade and a half that has elapsed since Alec relinquished the directorship of the Oxford department, many changes have taken place in the climate and context of teacher education with consequences for the relations between universities, polytechnics, and local and central government. Already by the mid-seventies, with a Labour government in office in Britain, the *political* context was changing. In the ensuing years there has been a marked swing away from socialism towards market economies—perceptible even in countries where Labour or Social Democratic administrations are in office, and, within the last year, even in the command economies of eastern Europe. The schools are no longer seen as instruments of greater equality and social justice, more as places where skills, knowledge and (perhaps even more importantly) attitudes conducive to individual and national economic success are developed. On this point, Alec had not been optimistic during the sixties as to the part that schools might play in industrial regeneration.

“A leading industrialist said recently that if the universities were to contribute adequately to the economic life of the country, they needed essentially to produce enough men who said ‘Yes’ to the industrial process. Yet, by and large, the teaching profession consists of those who have said ‘No’ to it.” (Peterson 1968 p. 189)

Second, the *demographic* context has also changed. The seventies saw substantial reductions in many countries in teacher education places in colleges, polytechnics and universities. The children of the larger birth cohorts of subsequent decades are now flowing into the primary, and soon the secondary

schools, and generating anxieties in many countries about current and impending teacher shortages, especially where industry and public services are competing for well-qualified graduates.

Third, the *institutional* context for teacher education is very different. Very recently, a number of European countries have introduced significant reforms into the organization of teacher education—France and Spain being notable among them. Formally, at least, teacher education is now in most countries much more fully integrated with the rest of higher education than was the case twenty years ago. Only in a very few cases is it still entirely separate from universities or higher technical education, although there is still advocacy, notably in the United States and to a lesser extent in Britain, for teacher-education institutions that are quite separate from universities and general-purpose colleges.

Fourth, the hopes of the sixties and early seventies for more *programme autonomy* and professional influence over teacher education have in large measure not been fulfilled. Demands for accountability, fuelled by public concern about standards in the schools, have led to a marked shift towards more central supervision, including state-initiated testing of individual teacher competences.

Fifth, enthusiasts' hopes for a breakthrough in the *technology* of teacher education remain unsatisfied. The analysis of teacher behaviour, microteaching, IT/INSET and other innovations play a useful part in, but usually do not dominate, current programmes in which the methodology remains varied and eclectic.

In the face of a growing volume of work that taxonomizes teaching acts and attempts to devise criteria of greater classroom effectiveness, we need to be reminded from time to time that teaching is more art than science. Like painting, sculpture or music, teaching may involve the application of several technologies. It cannot itself be reduced to any one of them. In the three-volume set that he edited in 1965, *Techniques of Teaching*, Alec made clear that while he certainly did not reject technology in the classroom, or the mid-sixties shift of focus from teaching to learning and the associated concept of the teacher as facilitator rather than as instructor (which psychologists and students of early childhood education had advocated in the earlier years of the century as an antidote to the empty formalism of much elementary education), he still saw an important place for the communication of knowledge and skills. A teacher, if he or she is to be worth their pay, has to have something to teach.

The last decade has seen increasing concern with the *curriculum* of teacher education, with the content and sequence of what is taught and learned. There has been particular interest in how the various parts of a programme are made coherent within students' experience and teachers' practice, about the links between theory and practice and, in Lee Shulman's words, that all-important "intersection of content and pedagogy". According to the criteria being implemented by the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, student teachers in England and Wales must devote 25% of the two years' equivalent of subject study time in a four-year course of teacher preparation to this "intersection"(DES 1989).

Another aspect of such concern is whether the curriculum of teacher education should focus upon the schools, as (in Pat Graham's words) "the only agencies in Society whose main activity ought to be education" or, as the late Larry Cremin has argued, to look at the process of education as a whole, across a person's life span, and involving *all* the settings in which learning occurs (Bok 1987).

Sixth, the *professional* context of teacher education is very different from what it was in the mid-seventies. Since the status of teacher education is dependent not simply on the quality of its knowledge base but on the status of the occupation for which it prepares, teacher educators have commonly supported greater professionalism among teachers, with rewards and conditions set at levels that attract well-qualified, highly motivated entrants. The reality has been very different. On the whole, the status of teaching as an occupation has declined, as have relative rewards and conditions of service. As one head who retired recently has said, “I entered a profession, and left a trade.”

Simultaneously, teacher educators and accrediting agencies have been urging greater involvement by practising teachers in the design and implementation of initial training, not merely in innovative forms of practical experience, but in the selection and assessment of students, in choice of course content and in evaluation.

A New Structure for Teaching

If the state of teaching and of teacher education are closely linked, perhaps the future of both requires more radical change than has so far been proposed. Restructuring the occupation of teaching would involve many political and practical difficulties. It may nonetheless be worthwhile to suggest some of the desiderata that any such process would need to satisfy.

Any scheme would need to maximize recruitment; to offer incentives to, and appropriate rewards for, effort and success at each level of an extended and graded career structure, and better opportunities for progression between such levels; to provide sufficient specialist and general teachers to meet the requirements of the national curriculum; to encourage effective management of curriculum and resources within individual schools; to raise teacher morale and self-responsibility, and finally, to direct public money selectively to the achievement of these objectives, rather than towards untargeted support for basic scale improvements.

For the purposes of discussion, let me suggest a possible set of arrangements to meet these requirements—far too schematic and logical ever to command widespread support, but useful perhaps as a way of stimulating debate.

Teaching might have five levels of certification—initial, professional 1, professional 2, senior teacher and master teacher. The requirements for each grade would be centrally determined, but implemented locally and within schools. One of the chief merits of such a scheme would be to integrate current provision for initial training, the induction of new teachers, in-service education and training, and the still-to-be-achieved introduction of a national system of appraisal and evaluation.

To be granted initial teacher status would require (say) 25 credits earned by, for example, a three- or four-year BEd course or degree, plus PGCE or an appropriate overseas qualification. Other qualifications and industrial experience could carry up to 20 credits, the remaining 5 being acquired by locally provided training.

Initial grade teachers would receive salary increments for each of five years. During this period, they would have opportunities to meet the requirements for professional 1 status by successfully pursuing INSET programmes, by accumulating annual professional credits dependent upon successful appraisal and evaluation reports, and by discretionary credits awarded by a school or local authority for particularly effective performance.

Professional 1 status would require the accumulation of a total of (say) 35 credits (25 plus 10); the relevant salary scale would extend over a further five years. During this time further credits could be obtained by the means already indicated. Universities, polytechnics and colleges, and also commercial and charitable bodies that offer training, would be free to seek accreditation for their courses in terms of professional credits. A one-year masters degree in, for example, curriculum subjects or special educational needs or assessment, could carry between 5 and 10 credits. Shorter in-service programmes, either full- or part-time, would also be eligible for credit rating. Students who successfully completed such courses would have the appropriate number of credits added to those already acquired by initial training and during the preceding five years of initial teacher status. By acquiring further credits during this period to a total of (say) 50, these students would be eligible to move to the second professional grade.

Professional 2 status would extend over a further five incremental salary points, providing a total incremental scale for normal-age entrants to about the age of 37. This would be the career grade for some 60% of the teaching force. At least ten additional professional credits, acquired through annual appraisal, merit awards and further training would make 40% of teachers eligible for senior teacher status.

Local authorities and governors would be free to appoint any staff to headships of department or to deputy headships. It would, however, be expected that the choice would be from among candidates already holding professional 2 or senior teacher status. The senior I: teacher scale would extend over a further five incremental points. In this, as in other grades, outstanding performance could yield additional increments and accelerated promotion. Senior teacher status would be the terminal grade for about 25% of the teaching force.

Eligibility for master teacher status would be open to those teachers who had passed through initial, professional 1, professional 2, and senior teacher grades (either normally or by accelerated promotion) and who had at least 15 years' teaching experience. Such status would be obtained by the acquisition of professional credits as already outlined, plus appropriately recognized courses in the management of curriculum, personnel and resources.

While eligibility for headship of other than the smallest schools would depend upon the possession of master teacher status, not all master teachers could expect to become heads. In a large school the head, deputy and even the most senior teachers might be expected to have acquired master teacher status. In a primary school the head might be the only master teacher on the staff.

Arrangements could be made for provisional master teacher status to be given to heads of small schools, their performance in that role being a factor in any reconsideration of the status after a period in or relinquishment of a particular post.

These proposals are uncosted and, I recognize, far too "cut and dried" to fit the untidy world of employer/employee negotiations over pay and conditions of service. My main purpose is to urge consideration for some system that integrates initial preparation and in-service education and training with performance appraisal, career progression and salary in a way that is not achieved by any existing arrangements, and also to provide greater flexibility for recruiting non-standard entrants, eligible for professional credits on the basis of prior experience and qualifications, part-time INSET and exemplary performance.

What Alec Peterson would have thought of such schemes we can never know. They would go at least some way to meeting the needs he clearly identified for greater flexibility and variety in the modes of entry to teaching, and the employment status of teachers. And it was those qualities of radicalism and unwillingness to be tied to familiar assumptions that characterized so many of his own ideas.

Envoi

The Oxford Department of Educational Studies under Alec's leadership, and that of his predecessors and successors, has demonstrated an orientation towards educational knowledge and the importance of practical experience different from that of some other university departments of education in England and Wales. On the one side, there has been a long-standing commitment to ideas, as expressed through the writings and practice of the great educators, and in the comparative study of education systems. On the other side, practical work in schools has always played a major part in the course, in earlier times in the form of a middle term spent entirely in schools, more recently, through the pioneering work of Harry Judge [author of many books on education and former director of Oxford University's education department] and now, Richard Pring [professor of educational studies at Oxford University, known for work in philosophy of education], both, like Alec, experienced schoolmen, in actively drawing teachers into the process of training, much of which is now "school-based". In this, as in many other things, Alec Peterson was a man in advance of his time.

Through his writings and in his leadership of the Oxford department, Alec's contribution to teaching is still to be seen in the lives and work of the many hundreds of successful educators whom he helped to train, many of them now occupying senior positions in schools, in administration, and elsewhere in the education service. His knowledge and experience were rooted in some of the great traditions of English education. The vision that he had for its future is as relevant today as when he wrote these words twenty years ago:

"There will be no separation of elite and masses, of 'high' and 'low' culture; only an infinite gradation of human beings, all worthy of 'respect' as such and all participating to a greater or less degree, in the culture of the first universally educated society that the world has ever seen."

I am grateful for this opportunity to pay tribute to the memory of someone who, in the schools and universities in which he worked, in his writing, and through his pioneering work for the United World Colleges and the International Baccalaureate, helped to give real substance to this vision.

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