

## ***Asking the right questions: teacher education in the Republic of Ireland.***

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper locates contemporary issues in teacher education in the Republic of Ireland within the broad context of historical developments. The paper is in six parts. It opens with an exposition on the emergence of teacher training in pre-Independent Ireland which considers teachers' working conditions, the management structure of schools, and the curriculum of the primary teacher training colleges. The overall neglect of the Irish language in the schools, the modest attempts at teaching the language in the final years of British rule over the greater part of the country, and the emergence of the notion that teachers in an independent Ireland should play a key role in its revival, are then considered. This is followed by an account of the extent to which the preparation of teachers, both for primary and secondary schools, from Independence in the early 1920s to the beginning of the 1960s, was very much a matter of providing basic 'training'. The fourth part of the paper details significant changes in policy from the 1960s to the early 1990s which were aimed at enhancing the professional status of teachers through a move to 'teacher education'. The paper then goes on to consider a variety of major challenges currently being faced by teachers and the tensions which exist between these and government rhetoric on education, including teacher education. Finally, a series of challenges facing teacher education in Ireland in the future, as perceived by the present author, are considered.*

### ***The nineteenth century***

The National and Intermediate, or Secondary, education systems were established in Ireland in 1831 and 1871 respectively. The National system was formed in response to growing calls by the Catholic Church in Ireland for some form of schooling that would counter the incessant proselytising of, usually government funded, Protestant philanthropic societies. Intermediate schooling was, even as late as the 1950s, considered to be the concern of the few and widespread popular attendance only followed the introduction of free schooling in the mid-

1960s. The development of teacher education is closely linked to changes in the provision of schooling and the early establishment date of the National system in Ireland means that the history of teacher education there spans almost two centuries. Education at all levels was closely connected with religious bodies and during the nineteenth century Catholic and Protestant communities established and operated schools, although the system was, ostensibly, 'mixed', or non-denominational.<sup>1</sup>

Overcrowded, poorly equipped and cold classrooms characterised schooling in early nineteenth-century Ireland while uncertainty of tenure, low social standing and poor remuneration characterised the teaching job. While in 1839, 524 teachers received formal training<sup>2</sup> the number had dropped to 289 by 1870.<sup>3</sup> Four years after the establishment of the National school system in Ireland (1831) teachers were described as being 'in general extremely ignorant'<sup>4</sup> and in 1835 the *Report of the Commissioners of National Education* proposed the creation of five professorships in teacher education.<sup>5</sup> The need for training was agreed upon from the beginning, the difficulty lay in what body should oversee it.<sup>6</sup> When the national system was established it was ordered that a teacher would be sanctioned by the Board only if he had 'received...instruction in a model school in Dublin, to be 'sanctioned by the board.'<sup>7</sup> The model schools then, were officially designated for the purposes of teacher education and it was here that aspirants would be inducted into the practical elements of teaching. The Commissioners hoped to establish a total of thirty-two such schools, with a central teaching college located at Marlborough Street, Dublin. Aspiring teachers would spend time in one of the provincial institutions before finishing their training there.

A combination of insufficient funding and political indolence meant that it was not until 1845 that effective steps were taken towards the establishment of model schools nationally. In that year, the Commissioners drew up a plan for the establishment of provincial schools which would each train six male and two female teachers annually with a pupil enrolment of 100. The first school was opened in 1848 and twenty-five were eventually established. Because the government would not sanction training institutions other than their own, many untrained teachers operated in schools throughout the country. The Catholic authorities opposed the non-denominational character of the training institutions from the outset and issued an official condemnation in 1863 and again in 1867<sup>8</sup> although separate

Catholic training colleges were not founded until 1883, when St. Patrick's Training College for men and Our Lady of Mercy College for women were established in Dublin.<sup>9</sup> The persistent controversy surrounding the denominational nature of the training colleges, their inability to meet the demand for training and the eventual Catholic prohibition on attendance, all meant that too few teachers were trained, for too short a time, in too few colleges.

In 1845 the Board of Commissioners of National Education assumed the responsibility of owning school buildings erected with government aid.<sup>10</sup> The Protestant community saw this as a further erosion of their traditional dominance of provision in Ireland while the Catholic Church perceived the move as further unacceptable government encroachment in an area that, gradually, they were beginning to influence. The Commission's continued insistence that local managers would retain their authority as to the 'appointment and removal of teachers and their general conduct of the school' went some way to allaying the concerns of both parties.<sup>11</sup> Control of the model schools, however, rested solely with the Board and remained a cause of deep suspicion within the Catholic community who perceived them as a further means of state-sponsored proselytism.<sup>12</sup> The Protestant community was equally hostile, seeing in the model schools a further attempt to weaken the influence of the Established Church. The controversy was such that the 1870 Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (Powis) recommended that aid should be granted to training schools under the management of 'committees, voluntary societies and religious bodies on certain conditions and that the existing provincial model schools be discontinued'.<sup>13</sup> This represented a genuine setback to official hopes of a broadly non-denominational system and towards the end of the decade two further colleges for Catholic students were established in Dublin.<sup>14</sup> Finally in 1883 the government conceded and began funding denominational training colleges. Hence by the turn of the century there were seven teacher education colleges funded from the public purse.<sup>15</sup> The scheme for model schools petered out and the large denominational training colleges became the standard providers of initial teacher education in Ireland before the development of educational studies as a university and college discipline.

The curriculum of the teacher education colleges in the early 1900s was much influenced by the demands of a substantial school curriculum.<sup>16</sup> In 1904 the following subjects formed the Programme of Instruction for National Schools: Reading; Writing and Spelling;

Grammar; Composition; Arithmetic; Kindergarten; Manual Instruction; Drawing; Object Lessons; Elementary Science; Cookery; Needlework; Singing; Physical Drill; Irish; French; Latin; Arithmetic and Algebra; Geometry and Mensuration and Instrumental Music.<sup>17</sup> The establishment, in 1905, of a professorship in education at Trinity College Dublin, where lectures included: 'Psychology of Childhood'; 'Psychology for Teachers'; 'Essentials of True Education' and 'Educational Reformers' did little to ease the workload.<sup>18</sup> The 1908-9 session saw Marlborough Street Training College open with the largest number of male applicants since 1903 and a full complement of female students. The *General Report on the Training Colleges* for 1908-9 complained of the 'undue labour' imposed on the Professor of Method and called for a second appointment 'to cope with the heavy work'.<sup>19</sup> Again in the 1910-11 session the Commissioners warned that 'over-pressure from the over-crowded curriculum' was 'the greatest danger that has to be guarded against'.<sup>20</sup> In 1911-12 the colleges found themselves under continued pressure and despite the introduction of an entrance fee in 1911, the total number of applicants was still in excess of the number of places available.<sup>21</sup> The authorities at Mary Immaculate Training College Limerick, for example, complained that 'the strain towards the end of the session' became 'excessive...partly due to the number of examinations by the Board's Officers'.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Irish language revival*

The increasingly denominational character of teacher education in Ireland was coupled, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by an awakening of interest in Irish language and culture. Nationalist educators such as Patrick Pearse held that schooling under the British was a mechanism of cultural assimilation.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the Irish language had suffered decades of neglect. A brief survey of its position in the nineteenth-century is necessary in order to contextualise the importance of the language in discussions around teacher education at the period.

The language was not included in the syllabus, or allowed as a teaching medium, when the National system was established in 1831. Yet vibrant Irish speaking communities existed at this period in the west and south of Ireland. Even in Leinster, the traditional Pale area, strong pockets also existed. In Callan, Co. Kilkenny, for example, 31 per cent of inhabitants spoke Irish in 1831.<sup>24</sup> There was no public debate or

campaign on the place of the language in the new National Education System and the National Board was not inclined to countenance its use when requested,<sup>25</sup> causing the Catholic Archbishop McHale to describe the schools of the nascent system as 'graves of the national language'.<sup>26</sup> The initial refusal of the Board to allow for teaching through Irish resulted in the anomaly of children in *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking) areas attending schools where lessons were given only in English. Because the language of schooling was incomprehensible to Irish speakers, they were, in effect, denied that education which the English-speaking community received and the perceived worthlessness of the language was reinforced.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Irish was not permitted in the National School System until the 1870s and was only included in the curriculum of Intermediate (secondary) schools in 1878 after protests from Catholic MPs. The grudging accommodation made for Irish during the late nineteenth-century did not prevent it from becoming one of the most popular languages in secondary school and by 1906 it was the third most popular language in Intermediate school, preceded only by French and Latin.

In 1908 it was announced that, from 1914, Irish would be an obligatory subject for matriculation to the new National University of Ireland. This was the result of a protracted pressure by the Irish language organisation, the Gaelic League. While English remained the everyday language of life in Ireland, the regeneration of Irish became a key part of educational policy in independent Ireland. The language had assumed an almost mythic significance; a tangible symbol of distinctiveness in a profoundly anglicised Ireland.

Following Independence, primary school teacher education was placed exclusively in the hands of the denominational training colleges where Irish was to be the medium of instruction. The 1921 *Programme of Primary Instruction*, published by the Irish National Teachers Organisation, called for the 'framing of a programme...in accordance with Irish ideals and conditions'...<sup>28</sup> However, at least two-thirds of the teaching body had no working knowledge of Irish and the government embarked on an extensive scheme of training. The initially ambitious plan for reviving Irish through the classroom was modified throughout the 1920s in the face of the universal dominance of English, inadequate pedagogical training and a short-sighted methodological rationale – bilingualism, for example, was almost wholly ignored in favour of total immersion.

The revival of the language remained a key component of educational policy for the next fifty years and contemporary discussions are increasingly concerned with its position within the context of European identity. The rule requiring that secondary school teachers demonstrate competency in Irish in order to secure a permanent teaching post has only been removed within the last ten years.

### *Inertia: 1930s – 1960s*

The 1930s witnessed keen competition for places in the primary school teacher education colleges. Places were allocated on the basis of the school Leaving Certificate and college entrance examinations and it was during this period that a syllabus was fashioned that remained virtually unchanged until the 1960s. A limited concentration upon 'practical' methodologies, an absence of significant research and an underdeveloped theoretical basis did little for the standing of educational studies as a discipline within the academic community.<sup>29</sup> The perceived part-time basis of the Higher Diploma coupled with the prescriptive relationship between the Department of Education and university departments further added to the academic ambiguity of teacher education. Nor was the period auspicious for encouraging school-leavers to consider teaching as a career. A difficult economic climate saw salary reductions for all public servants in 1933 and a government decision to force female primary school teachers to retire upon marriage did much to alienate a profession unconvinced by the claims that the measure was economically necessary.

It was against this background that the Minister for Education, Richard Mulcahy, convened the Council of Education, in 1950, with the limited brief of inquiring into the suitability of the primary and secondary curriculum. The council reported that there was no reason to make significant changes at primary or secondary level, describing calls for greater access to the latter as 'utopian' and economically unrealistic.<sup>30</sup> The provision of a largely academic curriculum by fee-paying secondary schools was widely accepted and was reinforced by Mulcahy's successor, Séan Moylan, who dismissed the notion of 'equal opportunities for all' as a flight of fancy.<sup>31</sup> Mulcahy became Minister for Education again between 1954–57, but the period witnessed no radical change in teacher education, curricular content, access or provision. Throughout the period schooling continued to be regarded as the acquisition of essential skills at primary level, while secondary provision was considered to be the concern of the few. Mulcahy's description of

the ministerial role as a 'very, very narrow one'<sup>32</sup> reflected the consensus that, ultimately, the education system was a self-perpetuating organism largely managed by private and church bodies.

### *The 1960s – changing times*

The complacent understanding of education in Ireland was forcefully challenged in 1966 with the publication of the OECD report, *Investment in Education*.<sup>33</sup> The report had been commissioned by the Fianna Fáil government in 1962 to survey the relationship between educational provision and 'manpower needs' for the next '10-15 years'.<sup>34</sup> It highlighted low rates of participation at all levels of provision based upon 'social group and geographical location',<sup>35</sup> urged 'the need for wider participation in education and for longer retention of pupils in the educational system',<sup>36</sup> and made a call for improved 'efficiency' of 'important parts of the educational sector'.<sup>37</sup> The report emphasised the need for forward planning insisting that 'educational planning must be regarded as a continuous process which in its implementation must be open to revision and regular readaptation...'.<sup>38</sup>

The publication of the report coincided with a time of considerable social change in Western Europe. In Ireland it was greeted by an increasingly articulate and affluent public that was less tolerant of social exclusion and ever more aware of the economic advantages of securing secondary, if not university, education for its children. The identification of the lack of coherence in educational planning was insightful and timely. The report exposed the weaknesses inherent in educational policy in Ireland, although only in so far as this related to the economy and participation. The value of the curriculum and the effectiveness of its implementation were not part of its remit. Hence, while a most significant study, the report had little immediate impact upon teacher education.

In 1962 the various departments within the primary school teacher training colleges had managed to secure greater autonomy from the State Department of Education in the design of courses, and five years later the Commission on Higher Education argued that the departments should be expanded and that academic research should inform their work to a much greater degree. These observations mirrored the increased interest in education at this period; numbers seeking entry to primary school teacher education courses increased, courses were restructured and teaching began to move towards an all-graduate

profession.<sup>39</sup> The emphasis upon research was reflected in the establishment of the Educational Research Centre at St. Patrick's College, Dublin. The university education departments providing initial teacher education sought to increase resources such as micro-teaching facilities and library holdings. Importantly, the Higher Diploma in Education for such teachers became a one-year full-time course, introducing greater coherency and consistency to what had hitherto been a part-time programme.

The less than flattering picture painted by *Investment in Education* contributed to the announcement, in 1966, of free post-primary schooling and the increased number of enrolments had obvious consequences for the university teacher education departments. Developments in resourcing, teaching and research at these departments were accompanied in 1974 by the introduction of the Bachelor of Education Degree for primary school teachers. Also, three of the primary school teacher education colleges became constituent colleges of the National University of Ireland, while three others, namely, the Church of Ireland College, Marino College and the Froebel College, became affiliated with Trinity College Dublin.

The primary school teacher education colleges now developed a culture of teaching and research more closely associated with the *mores* of university enquiry and the theoretical foundations of principles of teaching and learning became increasingly coupled with the more practical details of methodology and subject competence. This period also saw the establishment and development of Thomond College of Education, Limerick; an institution specialising in physical education and a wide range of manual and specialist subjects. The late 1960s and 1970s witnessed a number of further developments. The National College of Art and Design, which offered various programmes, including ones for the preparation of art teachers, became more independent of the State Department of Education and the specialist colleges for the secondary school training of home economics teachers at Sion Hill, Dublin and St. Angela's, Sligo, became associated with universities. The various developments noted were largely prompted by a Higher Education Authority report on teacher education in 1970 that recommended the further development of departments of education coupled with a greater emphasis upon research.

An associated development during the late 1970s and early 1980s was the emergence of post-graduate programmes in all education departments. Among these were the Diploma in Special Education at St.

Patrick's College, Drumcondra and a Diploma for Teachers of the Deaf at University College, Dublin. Such programmes have multiplied over the last three decades to include studies leading to awards of PhD, MEd and diplomas in Educational Leadership, Guidance and Counselling, Special Educational Needs and Educational Management. St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, presently offers a taught Doctor of Education programme and NUI Maynooth, will initiate a similar programme in autumn 2006. New professional bodies also emerged during the period, including the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) founded in 1976. This body has played a key role in encouraging and publishing research in Ireland and has served as a focal point for the educational community for three decades.

By the early 1980s there were just over 13,000 full and part-time secondary teachers and 18,276 primary school teachers employed in schools in Ireland.<sup>40</sup> Teaching had become an all-graduate profession and initial teacher education courses continued to attract highly qualified and committed applicants. This period was marked, however, by a pronounced economic downturn. Systemic innovation, particularly if financially demanding, is uncommon in such times and in-service, when provided, tends to become closely associated with curricular changes. Ireland was no exception. The 1984 *Report on In-Service Education of Teachers*, for example, which highlighted the gaping absence of in-service and professional development for teachers, did not result in the government taking any significant action,<sup>41</sup> although the same year did witness the forward looking *Programme for Action in Education 1984-87* published under Minister Gemma Hussey.<sup>42</sup> In 1987, Ireland's largest teacher education institution, Carysfort College, was closed and in 1991 the government undertook to close three of the five university departments offering the Higher Diploma in Education. The latter proposal was remarkably short-sighted and while never implemented, it is interesting to note that it was never rescinded. In June of the same year the *OECD Reviews of National Policies For Education Ireland*, praised the quality of teacher education programmes and the work of the teaching body.<sup>43</sup>

Against the background of the government's proposal the OECD report encouraged a more comprehensive and better resourced understanding of the teaching task. In particular, it stressed the need to re-conceptualise teaching in terms of initial teacher education, induction and in-service. The rhetoric of the '3 I's' has become a standard in Irish educational policy discourse, but implementation and resourcing remain

almost as elusive today as in 1991. It has been pointed out that 'this approach was...endorsed in major policy papers that followed.'<sup>44</sup> Endorsement however, is of questionable value when not translated into actual improvements for those in initial teacher education, teachers and school children. The OECD report, for example, recommended the establishment of a Teaching Council. While this was not a new proposal, such a Council was not established until 2006 – fifteen years after the report.

### *Rhetoric and reality: contemporary responses to the teaching task*

The remarkable performance of the Irish economy during the last decade has meant that the earning potential for school leavers and college graduates is unprecedented in the history of the State. Immigration, particularly from Poland and other central European countries, is changing the face of Irish society. The forecast is that the present economic success will continue until at least 2020, with an estimated population increase of one million by that time. These changes are reflected in schooling and those entering teaching today will work in schools with an increasingly diverse ethnic cohort; a phenomenon unknown just a decade ago. However, most of the challenges facing the teaching body are generic, such as funding, indiscipline and lack of professional support. Despite the strength of Ireland's economy, teaching remains a popular first choice career for graduates and school leavers, and initial teacher education courses are annually oversubscribed. Applications for the Higher Diploma in Education in the four National University of Ireland colleges rose by 22 per cent between 2001-02 and 2002-03. The following academic year witnessed an increase of 30 per cent.<sup>45</sup> The quality and commitment of entrants remains impressive. It is not unusual for applicants to post-primary teacher education programmes to have already gained some years teaching experience before securing admission to a diploma course. Teaching also remains highly regarded by the public, although modest remuneration increasingly reinforces the perception that it is a 'caring profession'<sup>46</sup>, a view that is highly contestable.

To some extent, the continued popularity of teaching represents an anomaly. Teachers continue to operate in many ways as they have always done. The profession remains characterised by the teacher as sole agent in the classroom, and team-teaching and associated activities is largely resisted. Learning remains methodologically circumscribed by the overwhelming influence of terminal state examinations that militate

against the use of less traditional learning styles. Significant programmes of in-career support remain absent, particularly in the area of initial teacher induction - a regrettable but perennial characteristic of the Irish education system. Even in the early 1990s commentators were warning that society must learn that 'there is no future in trying to prepare teachers on the cheap for a high demand...career.'<sup>47</sup> Calls for a more dynamic and innovative teaching profession should be met with appropriate official action: 'The future well-being of the teaching profession requires multi-faceted action on such aspects as pay, conditions, support services, facilities, career opportunities to reinvigorate teaching and make it an attractive career to caring and imaginative school leavers...'<sup>48</sup> Initial teacher education therefore required 'sustained attention.'<sup>49</sup>

Such a view has been under consideration for over twenty years. In 1984 the Fianna Gael government issued the *Programme for Action in Education 1984-87* outlining its key policy priorities. The document reflected and helped cultivate understandings of schooling that were more in keeping with the times. For example, the document expressed concern over gender stereotyping in school texts and the imbalance of women on school boards of management. While the document set out a wide range of challenges for the future, including problems of access for disadvantaged children, low achievement and early school leaving, the need to introduce new technologies into schools, the need to identify new modes of assessment and the imperative of developing the 'the innovative and entrepreneurial skill of our young people', it had little to say about how those in initial teacher education, or those in professional practise, might be prepared for these changes by way of systemic change within teacher education institutions, or increased resourcing. Hence, while teachers were expected to be agents of social change, there was little official recognition of how they might be supported in effecting these changes.

In the 1990s the teaching cohort, through the agency of its unions, became a 'partner' in social change by participating in a range of social and economic agreements initiated by the then government.<sup>50</sup> The decade was characterised by a succession of important debates around key aspects of education, including its relationship with the wider society and the ways in which it could promote and serve the developing socio-political consensus, at the heart of which were notions of enterprise, accountability, quality and equity. In 1992, Minister Niamh Bhreathnach launched *Education of a Changing World: Green Paper on*

*Education*, which included notions of equity and accessibility but also concepts such as enterprise, quality assurance, greater accountability and transparency.<sup>51</sup> In an effort to promote an entrepreneurial culture the Minister proposed that school boards of management should consist of one person with business expertise, and should issue an annual report, and that school principals should be designated chief executive officers. These suggestions originated in a spectacular indifference to, or ignorance of, the historic and cultural evolution of schooling in Ireland. Instead, the Minister's emphasis upon economics, transparency and quality chimed with the concerns of the post-Thatcher period.

*Education for a Changing World: Green Paper on Education* insisted upon the place of school as a preparation for the world of work. This represented a paradigm change.<sup>52</sup> The nature of that change was not critically assessed as desirable or corrosive. Rather, it was deemed vital that teachers respond to socio-economic fluidity, 'up-skill' in order to keep abreast of it and be positioned to help their students play a productive role in a society seemingly characterised mainly by mutability. The paper emphasised a greater need to highlight citizenship, tackle social disadvantage, readdress the 'overly' academic nature of the curriculum, find ways of allowing parents play a more meaningful part in the operation of schools, devise ways of addressing inspection, and also devise ways of maintaining teaching standards. The paper also recognised the need for ongoing professional development for teachers. It argued that there was a need for 'development programmes' aimed at creating more effective 'management' systems within schools and that teachers needed to upgrade skills in order to be able to facilitate new courses.<sup>53</sup> The paper also noted that the existence of unsatisfactory teaching 'must be accepted' and that while teachers should be given every possible support, ultimately withdrawal of recognition should be discussed as an option.<sup>54</sup>

Evidently the discourse surrounding teaching was changing and the notion of accountability – always politically profitable – was becoming a key focus of policy discourse. The Green Paper was less expansive, however, on initial teacher education. While the reality of challenging schools and struggling teachers was acknowledged, the option of reviewing the time allocation and resourcing for teacher education was passed over. Officially, it seems, the 'vaccination' theory of initial teacher education was accepted – a one early shot serving as protection for a lifetime.<sup>55</sup>

Reservations surrounding the Green Paper tended to focus on areas other than initial teacher education. Collectively, however, the educational establishment expressed concern about the absence of emphasis upon the arts, the overemphasis upon an entrepreneurial culture and the lack of overall costing of the proposed innovations. In reply, Minister Bhreathnach convened the National Education Convention, which brought together over forty interested parties, including parents, school principals, and teacher educators, to discuss ways of responding to the paper. It was a historic moment in the development of schooling in Ireland, reflecting the developing culture of 'partnership' initiated some years previously. In bringing together often discordant voices it promoted the type of engagement that should characterise democratic and inclusive discourse.

The convention accepted the reality of under-performing teachers, but pointed out, for example, that there was no systemic programme of induction for teachers in Ireland.<sup>56</sup> Again, while a number of strategies for supporting teachers already in service were suggested in the convention report, the issue of initial teacher education was not addressed in great detail. This was a missed opportunity given the recommendations of the 1991 OECD report praising the work of initial teacher education. The convention was anxious that the 'high quality' of applicants to teacher education courses should be protected, but was not expansive on the actual programmes.<sup>57</sup>

It is regrettable that the parties did not delve deeper into the relationship between initial teacher education and the experience of practising teachers. Given the changes envisaged by the Green Paper, the absence seems all the greater. Rather, the convention focused upon the need for continuing professional programmes. This was a legitimate area of concern as, other than the occasional 'fire-brigade' sessions designed to facilitate the introduction of a new syllabus, the teaching profession received very little formal, in-career support.<sup>58</sup> The convention insisted that it was 'imperative' that such support was prioritised and that an agency be established to promote in-service programmes. This resulted in the creation of the In Career Development Unit (ICDU) within the Department of Education and Science.

The convention was expansive on other ways in which teachers might be supported, although it is increasingly apparent that its concerns regarding the time taken up by 'routine and organisational matters', for example, were prophetic as teachers continue to grapple

with the onset of 'whole school evaluation' and school planning.<sup>59</sup> Again, given the recent findings of the government-instigated report on pupil behaviour, the convention's calls for support for teachers facing 'daunting difficulties', appear to have fallen on deaf ears.<sup>60</sup> The convention echoed the earlier concerns regarding the emphasis upon an enterprise culture and was critical of the absence of detailed financial costing in the Green Paper. Its comprehensive report, edited by John Coolahan, then Professor of Education at the National University of Ireland Maynooth, contributed significantly to *Charting Our Education Future: White Paper on Education*, issued in 1995.<sup>61</sup>

The latter White Paper emphasised the need for teachers to be adaptable to a climate of 'accelerating change' and accepted that they would need a programme of in-service preparation if they were to meet the Paper's aims of increased partnership with parents and greater accountability.<sup>62</sup> The Paper also emphasised that quality assurance procedures, including teacher appraisal, should be established in post-primary schools.<sup>63</sup> However it was all but silent on the issue of initial teacher education. Also, while it embraced and promoted the notion of 'accelerated change', it did not appear to identify any link between that and the preparation of new teachers.

Overall, therefore, the 1990s was a decade characterised by an absence of significant reviews of initial teacher education while, at the same time, very significant changes were envisaged for the teaching cohort both by government and by teacher educators. This omission has had tangible repercussions. Not alone has initial teacher education had to continue operating on the 'vaccination' principle due to official resistance to expanding and resourcing programmes to meet ever increasing challenges, but the teaching body has had to adapt to a plethora of social and systemic changes in the continued absence of the structured supports so often promised. This is particularly so in the areas of initial teacher induction, continuing professional development and school discipline.

### *The Challenge Ahead*

The absence of structured systems of support for beginning teachers was noted in 1991 when the OECD *Reviews of National Policies For Education* advocated 'proper support and monitoring of probationary teachers.'<sup>64</sup> The review argued that a nationwide system of induction was essential to safeguard the 'high standards of entrants' to teaching

and should involve the collective endeavour of all interested parties.<sup>65</sup> *Education for a Changing World: Green Paper on Education* stressed that initial teacher education should be followed by 'properly structured induction', but did not offer mechanisms for developing or resourcing such an initiative.<sup>66</sup> The *Report of the National Education Convention* suggested that a teacher's experiences in the first year of professional teaching had 'many long-term consequences' and described the absence of any systemic, organised or supported induction process as hardly 'propitious for success', adding that a national induction programme would be 'of great importance' in the formation of 'confident, professional' teachers.<sup>67</sup> Citing the Convention's 'general welcome' for a system of induction, the 1995 *Charting Our Education Future: White Paper on Education* announced that 'a well developed and carefully managed induction programme, coinciding with the teacher's probationary year' would be 'introduced for first and second level teachers'.<sup>68</sup> The Paper envisaged the first full year of teaching as a period when a wide range of new knowledge and skills could be mastered, including deeper understandings of school structure, curriculum application, classroom management, systems of assessment and reporting, self evaluation and the ability to identify strengths and weaknesses in one's own teaching. The suggestion that newly appointed teachers continue to be supported by a partnership of school and teacher education institutions should have generated more research and discussion.

The rhetoric of the White Paper did not result in significant action, although a number of teacher education departments initiated a needs-analysis on the viability of introducing induction. Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, began research in 1995/96, County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC) in 2001 and Coláiste Mhuire, Marino in 2002. The BEd at Trinity College Dublin presently includes issues on induction as part of its core syllabus and a National Teacher Induction Pilot Project at both primary and post primary level was undertaken jointly by the Department of Education and Science (DES), University College Dublin and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, in 2002. The final report was presented to government in 2005, although to date there has been no official announcement on the introduction of induction, notwithstanding that fact that induction programmes are being implemented on a voluntary basis in about twenty-five schools in Counties Dublin, Kildare, Wexford, Donegal and Galway, with substitution and travel costs being born by the DES. This is

developmental and a research-based undertaking and does not represent official provision for induction.<sup>69</sup>

A decade and a half have passed since the OECD Review urged the introduction of a national programme of induction. Despite provision in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the seeming need for teachers to adjust to 'accelerated change', the commitment made in the White Paper (1995) and the recommendations of the Expert Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education (2002), teachers in Ireland continue to enter the profession without any formal system of support. A recent OECD report has again highlighted the lack of induction and adds its absence to the list of factors that may discourage 'young, energetic teachers' from remaining in the profession.<sup>70</sup> The report states categorically that 'it is now incumbent upon policy formulators to draw on the current pilot projects...in the formulation of a general policy of teacher induction...'.<sup>71</sup> The results of the National Teacher Induction Pilot Project were very positive<sup>72</sup> and there is now a consensus between teacher educators and professional bodies that such a programme should be introduced as soon as possible.

Continuing professional development is also being addressed. In 2002 the Department of Education and Science convened an expert advisory group to make recommendations on continuing professional development for teachers. The group called for mandatory induction and insisted that the traditional understanding of in-service had to change. Rather than coupling curricular change with in-service programmes, the group insisted that support should be understood as being necessary throughout the teaching career. In this regard, the most recent survey of teacher enrolment in voluntary, award-bearing, professional development programmes found that 24 per cent of primary teachers and 23 per cent of post-primary teachers had completed such courses. This points to a substantial appetite among teachers for professional development. The recent *School Matters* report recommended that CPD become 'an integral part of the teaching profession' and that a National Framework be put in place to ensure this is achieved.<sup>73</sup> On this, it is noteworthy that, back in 1990, Coolahan pointed out that it was 'imperative' that 'favourable sentiments' towards issues of initial and continuing teacher support 'be converted into a positive and comprehensive plan.' No such progress, however, was made. Even now teachers wishing to take award-bearing CPD programmes receive little government support either financially or in

the way of reduced hours. Usually they cannot take time off from school and consequently have to attend courses in the evening.

Pupil behaviour is also an increasingly difficult challenge for those undertaking initial teacher education and the wider profession. In 2005 the government constituted a Task Force to report on the issue and its findings were published in March 2006. It pointed to the increasingly common characteristics of 'youth culture', such as preoccupation with the self, increasing loss of respect for authority, the influence of mass-media and consumerism, before going on to outline the nature of disruption in schools. This, it argued, varies from persistent 'low level' disruption to rare cases of extreme behaviour with 'indifference, apathy and passivity in between.'<sup>74</sup> The report points out that the 'bar' of acceptable behaviour seems to have dropped and 'behaviour that was exceptional some time ago is now normative.'<sup>75</sup>

The report is expansive on the many difficulties faced by students and stresses that, generally, their behaviour is laudable. Indeed, it cites levels of frustration amongst well-behaved students at the disruption caused by the few.<sup>76</sup> The report made a series of comprehensive recommendations and strategies for implementation, including the introduction of compulsory induction. It also recommends that pre-service teacher education programmes prioritise active learning methodologies and 'personalised teaching that engages the interest and ability of learners'.<sup>77</sup> Aspiring teachers should, it argues, be helped to develop a repertoire of 'coping strategies' for the 'new' realities of contemporary classrooms.<sup>78</sup> Also, it recommends that The National Framework for CPD should set out a 'system' for all aspects of the professional development of teachers.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, it suggests that pre-service teacher education courses should provide student teachers with a variety of teaching practice placements so that they can be exposed to the varying realities of contemporary teaching.

The findings of the Task Force raise important questions regarding initial teacher education. Many of the more offensive and excessive modes of misbehaviour are increasingly challenging for experienced teachers and, axiomatically, more so for new and beginning teachers. The report rightly points to the responsibilities that other agents and interested parties must shoulder in meeting the challenge of misbehaviour. The understanding of schools as sites of remediation is increasingly pervasive and it is essential that all interested parties take a meaningful part in ensuring that they remain places where the primary task of teaching and learning can continue and prosper unhindered.

As policy makers and the public increasingly look to schools as a panacea for social ills, so teacher educators and student teachers may find that there is less time to reflect upon core issues to do with the act of teaching and learning while they are more and more engaged in looking over their shoulders at the next social imperative coming down the track. It seems that, increasingly, Michael Oakeshott's delineation of school as the initiation of the young into the timeless conversation of learning and, even into a type of haven before the exigencies of modern living begin, appears charming but naïve.<sup>80</sup> Consideration of such a view makes the admission in the 1984 *Programme for Action in Education* that the government did 'not propose to set out a philosophy of education' appear even more disconcerting. Upon what would the Programme be based?<sup>81</sup> It was dubious precedent. The National Education Convention called attention to the absence and called for a declaration of 'educational principles'.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, *Charting Our Education Future: White Paper on Education* (1995) recognised the need to provide a 'philosophical rationale' that 'systematically informs policy formulation and educational practise'.<sup>83</sup> Government documents repeatedly refer to the 'skills' and 'competencies' of teachers; terminology based upon the notion that teachers are 'trained' and acquire certain 'skills' with which they then 'enact' the prescribed curriculum. Yet training and education are not the same. The former does not, necessarily, demand understanding or reflection and its ends are usually preordained. It remains incumbent upon teacher-educators to insist that while a 'well-trained teacher is useful' an 'educated one is better'.<sup>84</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The initial controversies surrounding teacher education in Ireland focused upon the place of religion, the predominance and programmes of the model schools, and the role of state in prescribing courses for student teachers. Church and State had different understandings of the role of the teacher, yet each party based its position upon the belief that teachers were agents of change, somehow powerful by their contact with the next generation. They were the vehicles by which worthwhile knowledge was transferred, or at least presented, to that generation. Consequently their dispositions, loyalty, training and competence were important.

The cultural revivalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century shared this belief. The Irish language would be revitalised if

embraced by school-children, who would grow to adulthood speaking the language as their vernacular. The notion of teachers as entrusted with worthwhile and transformative knowledge informed this view, which was simply the reversal of the cultural position adopted by the British administrations.

The perception of the teaching profession as an agent of social change continues to permeate discussions about initial and in-service teacher education and has been at the root of policy documents since the mid 1960s. While there is an obvious relationship between schooling and life after school, there has been a persistent unwillingness to recognise that teaching operates within a long established 'educational tradition', one that entails the transmission of culture and is a profoundly human transaction.<sup>85</sup> The teaching tradition has developed in much the same way as other worthwhile transactions, out of a common inheritance. Schooling has concentrated upon those aspects of human endeavour that have established themselves as indisputably significant, be they laws of physics or Hamlet's reflection upon the human condition. Historically it has been concerned with the immutable; with struggling to appreciate those aspects of human living that are pervasive, significant and worthwhile. It is this understanding that is increasingly at risk in an environment where teaching is perceived as an agent of social transformation and where its long evolving cultural identity is increasingly unrecognised. The absence of commitment to systemic, resourced and long-term professional support for teachers; unwillingness to countenance a more appropriate time-span for initial teacher education; absence of formalised support for beginning teachers and the creeping use of the metaphors of the marketplace are symptomatic of this development.

As we move into the third millennium, it seems pertinent to ask upon what and to what end will teacher education be based in the future. The pattern that has emerged of conceptualising the teaching profession as a body to implement changes dictated by social or economic imperatives demands further scrutiny. Perhaps teachers need to define and articulate their motivation and attempt to ascertain the extent to which this is a factor in deciding educational policy and teacher education programmes. Certainly the notion of teaching as primarily and inherently to do with a child's encounter with learning is becoming increasingly lost in educational discourse and is partly the outcome of the muddle that equates teaching with the 'caring' professions. Perhaps it is time, in Ireland at any rate, for teacher educators, to retrace their steps

momentarily and ask why it is that policy makers since 1922 have increasingly understood the teaching profession as a means to bring about wider social and economic change and whether this understanding has resulted in a burdened and fractured curriculum and an overloaded teaching body? Ultimately we may be staring at the trees in the vain hope of finding the woods. As ever, our pursuit should not simply be based on asking questions, but on asking the right questions.

## NOTES

- 1 See Donald Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment*: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1970, passim.
- 2 *Sixth Report by the Commissioners of National Education, 1839*, [246] H.C. 1840, 31. p. 150.
- 3 *Thirty-Seventh Report by the Commissioners of National Education, 1870*, [C 360] H.C. 1871, App. L. VIII. General Summary, p. 650.
- 4 *Second Report by the Commissioners of National Education, 1835*, [300] H.C. 1836, p. 17.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 See the evidence of James Carlisle before the Select Committee on Education in Ireland, *Third Report by the Commissioners of National Education, 1836*, [44] H.C. 1836, App. p. 62.
- 7 D. Akenson, *The Irish Educational Experiment*, App. pp. 339-400. The model schools were funded by the Government and under the exclusive control of the Board. While they were operated as ordinary national schools, it cannot be said that they were much like the schoolhouses throughout the country, as they were sometimes purpose built, fully equipped and generously funded. When Catholic opposition to them resulted in a ban on attendance by Catholics, either as trainee teachers or pupils, the advantages to pupils and the academic and practical assistance they provided to student-teaches, became the exclusive preserve of the Protestant community. The first model training school was established at Marlborough Street, Dublin, in 1834.
- 8 For the resolutions of the 1867 Bishops' meeting see, *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Vol. IV. 1867, III. p. 93. Resolutions Unanimously Adopted by the Catholic Archbishops and Bishops at a General Meeting, Held in Dublin on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd October, 1867.
- 9 In this year it was estimated that only one third of the national schoolteachers had received training. See Graham Balfour, *Educational Systems of Great Britain and Ireland*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1898, p. 109.
- 10 Previously they had simply granted funding, ownership remaining with the local patron but this arrangement had not been successful. See *Twelfth Report by the Commissioners of National Education, 1845*, [711] H.C. 1846, I. I. 4. p. 305.
- 11 Ibid., p. 306. See also *Fourteenth Report by the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland 1847*, [981] H.C. 1847-48, pp. 404-6.

- 12 In 1866 the schools produced only about 400 teachers, about 500 short of the required number. See D. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 305.
- 13 *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (Ireland) 1870*, Reports of Assistant Commissioners Vol. I. 1870, p. 531. It was many years however, before the Catholic hierarchy considered its training colleges benefited from equal treatment. The district model schools, which continued in existence after 1870 were, they complained, 'maintained at a very heavy expense to the State, mainly for the benefit of middle-class Protestants'. The Catholic hierarchy felt this to be unfair and claimed that denominational colleges should 'enjoy the same advantages in every respect as the mixed Colleges'. See *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Vol. X. 1889, resolutions of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland on the Education Question, I. (b) p. 664.
- 14 Vincentian Fathers, Drumcondra for males and Sisters of Mercy, Baggot Street for females.
- 15 Central Training College, Marlborough Street, Dublin; St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin; Our Lady of Mercy College, Carysfort, Dublin; De La Salle College, Waterford; Church of Ireland College, Dublin; St. Mary's College, Belfast; Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 *The Seventy-First Report of the Commissioners of National Education 1904*, [Cd. 2567] H.C. 1905, Table 58. p. 90.
- 18 See *The Alexandrian*, No. XVII. December 1905, p. 39.
- 19 *Appendix to the Seventy-Fifth Report of the Commissioners of National Education, 1908-9*, [Cd. 5062] H.C. 1910. Section I. p. 8.
- 20 *Appendix to The Seventy-Seventh Report of the Commissioners of National Education 1910-11*, [Cd. 7061] H.C. 1911, Section I. p. 11.
- 21 Ibid. Section I. p. 5.
- 22 Ibid., p. 14.
- 23 Patrick H. Pearse (1879-1916) Barrister, educationalist and Commander in Chief of the republican forces during the Easter Rising of 1916.
- 24 See 'The Strange Death of the Irish Language, 1870-1800' in Gerard O'Brien (ed.) *Parliament, Politics and People, Essays in Eighteenth-century Irish History*, Irish Academic Press, 1989.
- 25 In 1834 an application for a teacher of Irish to be appointed to a national school was refused 'on the grounds that the request did not come within the framework' of the Board's plan of education in Ireland. In 1844 a school manager was refused permission to teach Irish during ordinary school hours. See D. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment*, p. 381.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 In 1953 Micheál O'Guiheen, recorded, that in his youth, an inspector who visited the Great Blasket island 'hadn't a word of Irish...but to our misfortune he had plenty of English...' Micheál O'Guiheen, *A Pity Youth Does Not Last*, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 12. Giving Evidence before the Royal Commission on University Education, 1902, Douglas Hyde remarked that Lady Gregory had visited the islands and 'found on one...that the only person on the whole island who did not know Irish was the schoolmaster.' Gaelic League Pamphlets, No. 29. *Irish in University Education, Evidence Given Before*

- the Royal Commission on University Education, 1902, p. 20, Dr. Douglas Hyde Examined.
- 28 Introduction, *National Programme of Primary Instruction*, INTO, Dublin, 1921.
- 29 See J. Coolahan, Development of Educational Studies and Teacher Education in Ireland in *Education Research and Perspectives*, C. Whitehead & T. O'Donoghue (eds.), University of Western Australia, Vol. 31, No. 2., p. 39.
- 30 Séamas Ó Buachalla, *Education Policy in Twentieth Century Ireland*, Wolfhound Press, Dublin, 1988, p. 68.
- 31 Dáil Debates, 126, 1743. Seán Moylan, Fianna Fáil Minister for Education 1951-1954.
- 32 Dáil Debates 110, 1093.
- 33 *Investment in Education*, Report of the survey team appointed by the Minister for Education in October, 1962, Stationary Office, Dublin, 1966.
- 34 Ibid., xxix (b).
- 35 Ibid., 6.134, p. 176.
- 36 Ibid., 16.8, p. 390.
- 37 Ibid., 16.14, p. 391.
- 38 Ibid., 16.3, p. 387.
- 39 See J. Coolahan 'Teacher Education in the Nineties: Towards a new Coherence', in *Teacher Education in the Nineties: Towards a New Coherence*, J. Coolahan (ed.) ATEE, Ireland, 2001, p. 4.
- 40 See J. Coolahan, *Irish Education: History and Structure*, p. 235 & 238.
- 41 *Report of the Committee on In-service Education*, Government of Ireland, Dublin, 1984, p. 13.
- 42 *Programme for Action 1984-1987*, Government of Ireland, Dublin, 1984.
- 43 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Reviews of National Policies for Education, Ireland*, Paris, 1991.
- 44 J. Coolahan, Development of Educational Studies and Teacher Education in Ireland in *Education Research and Perspectives*, C. Whitehead & T. O'Donoghue (eds.), University of Western Australia, Vol. 31, No. 2., 2004, p. 44.
- 45 Government of Ireland, Central Statistics Office. See also J. Coolahan (ed.) *Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, Country Background Report for Ireland, 3.3.1, OECD 2003 p. 26.
- 46 Ibid., p. 27, 3.1.3.
- 47 J. Coolahan 'Teacher Education in the Nineties: Towards a new Coherence', in *Teacher Education in the Nineties: Towards a New Coherence*, J. Coolahan (ed.) ATEE, Ireland, 2001, p. 7.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 On understandings of 'partnership' see Richard Pring, Political Education: relevance of the humanities, *Oxford Review of Education*, 25 (1 & 2) 1999, passim.
- 51 *Education for A Changing World: Green Paper on Education*, Government of Ireland, Dublin, 1992, p. 3.
- 52 Ibid., pp. 3-5.
- 53 Ibid., p. 167.
- 54 Ibid.

- 55 N. Postman & C. Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, Penguin, London, 1976, p. 32.
- 56 *Report of the National Education Convention*, J. Coolahan (ed.), p. 85.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 During eleven years of secondary school teaching, the author received two sessions of in-service support, both of which were preparatory programmes for the introduction of curricular changes.
- 59 Ibid., p. 88.
- 60 Ibid. See *School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools*, M. Martin, Government of Ireland, 2006.
- 61 *Charting Our Education Future: White Paper on Education*, Government of Ireland, Dublin, 1995.
- 62 Ibid., p. 133.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 *OECD (1991) Reviews of National Policies For Education, Ireland*, Part Three.
- 65 Ibid., p. 110.
- 66 *Education for a Changing World: Green Paper on Education*, 6.4.
- 67 *Report of the National Education Convention*, J. Coolahan (ed.), p. 86.
- 68 *Charting Our Education Future: White Paper on Education*, p. 133.
- 69 'The Rhetoric and Reality of Teacher Induction in Ireland'. B. Walsh, J. Harford, R. Dolan, Paper presented at the annual conference of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland, Dublin, April 2006.
- 70 *Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers, County Background Report for Ireland*. J. Coolahan, OECD, 2003, p. 63.
- 71 Ibid., p. 78.
- 72 See 'Second Level Teacher Education in the Republic of Ireland: Consecutive Programmes', S. Drudy, in *Teacher Education in the Republic of Ireland: Retrospect and Prospect*, Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS), Andy Burke (ed.), 2004, p. 34.
- 73 *School Matters: The Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools*, M. Martin, Government of Ireland, 2006, p. 126.
- 74 Ibid., 63.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Ibid., p. 66.
- 77 Ibid., p. 126.
- 78 Ibid., p. 127.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 See Michael Oakeshott, 'Education: The Engagement and its Frustration' (1972) in Timothy Fuller (ed.) *The Voice of Liberal Learning*, Yale University Press, USA, 1989, passim.
- 81 *Programme for Action in Education 1984-87*, 2.1.
- 82 *Report of the National Education Convention*, J. Coolahan (ed.), p. 7.
- 83 *Charting Our Education Future: White Paper on Education*, p. 4.
- 84 Richard Pring, The Context of Education, *Philosophy of Education*, p. 72.
- 85 Ibid.