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## Less Idealism and More Realism : The Programme for Teacher Education

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is, literally, self centred. Schools are important institutions within society. Society makes demands on the school system which have to be accepted, or, if contested, contested in a manner which is likely to gain support outside the world of education.

Fielding's paper is a valuable contribution to this important debate if it helps to bring these concerns to the fore in the processes by which teachers' occupational competences are developed.

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## Paper 3

### LESS IDEALISM AND MORE REALISM: THE PROGRAMME FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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First, on a positive note, I wish to nominate three issues which are implicit in Fielding's paper which busy teacher trainers and educational researchers often set aside, possibly because of the disturbing consequences of thinking seriously about them. The first is that he is prepared to recognise the limitations, indeed failings, of contemporary teacher training\* programmes, in so far as available evidence indicates that training effects are rapidly 'washed out' when beginning teachers enter the classroom and that, setting aside periods of school-based practice, students are disenchanted with teacher training courses (for example, see Desforges & McNamara 1977; Shaw, 1981; Wilson, 1975). The second is that Fielding recognises that teachers must develop their skills and competencies within the context of the school. This is a theme which has certainly been reflected in official pronouncements on teacher training during the past decade and within the United Kingdom there is a groundswell in this direction (see, for example, DES, 1972; DES, 1983(a); DES, 1983(b)). Fortunately, Fielding goes further than the official documents in arguing that in order to claim full professional status, teachers must be able to locate their skills and classroom competence within theoretical contexts which provide a framework for thinking analytically and critically about practice. Thirdly, Fielding recognises that teachers are not fully qualified and competent after what may be a comparatively brief period of initial training. Becoming a well rounded and accepted professional is a process which continues throughout the career.

I wish to begin my response to Fielding's proposals by comparing his "model" of professional development with a somewhat cruder and less clearly articulated notion of teacher training which has a long and distinguished pedigree. It is the view that teaching is an 'art', or, to express it in different terms, that teaching is 'commonsense', an amateur activity,

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\* Throughout this paper "training" is taken to include the "education" of student teachers as well as skill training etc.

or a natural activity. By this I refer to the idea that people in many walks of life, such as parents, priests, sergeant majors and craftsmen, engage in teaching from time to time. One must bear in mind that some people have identifiable qualities or the knack, nous, or tacit skill which enables them to teach better than others. Typically, a class teacher will be able to operate more effectively in the classroom than an educated layman brought into the classroom 'off the street'. The reason for this is not that the teacher has a distinctive set of pedagogic skills of professional knowledge which sets him apart from laymen; it is simply that he has more experience of teaching. Via experience, he has learned how to cope with teaching in busy, crowded classrooms and he deploys commonplace skills within the particular institutional framework of the classroom where one adult must teach many children within the context of a set of exigencies, such as resource, time and curriculum constraints. This view has an established place in thinking on teaching and teacher training (see, for example, Stephens, 1967; Wilson, 1975; Loukes, 1976) and seems to be, in part, implicit in the recent statements emanating from the Department of Education and Science (1983) where there is a stress on (a) the prospective teacher's competence in an academic subject (defined in such a way as it matches a 'subject' normally included in the school curriculum) (b) the personal qualities of the teacher and (c) school-based training and the involvement of established practitioners in the training process. The roles of educational theory, educational research, the social sciences and academic educationists are discounted.

There is much to be said in support of this view, but there are also many drawbacks and there are those who would wish to supplant it with a view of teaching and the training process based upon a 'scientific' approach as exemplified by, for example, Gage (1972) and Brophy (1979). However, they have yet to substantiate their case. Despite a massive investment in research on teaching and teacher effectiveness and, except for a few findings which read like truisms, educationists have failed to establish a corpus of findings concerning teachers' behaviours and skills and pupils' learning (however defined) which have been established empirically, replicated and demonstrated to hold in different contexts. And, most importantly, located within theoretical models which can be invoked to explain how teacher behaviour effects pupils' learning within classroom contexts (see, for example, Doyle, 1980; Haertel, Walberg and Weinstein, 1983). Indeed, proponents of the "scientific approach" have questioned its contribution and application to the practice of teaching (e.g. Travers, 1973) and even if 'objective' or 'scientific' knowledge about teaching and

learning were to be discovered and established, it is questionable whether it could be (Fenstermacher, 1978) or ought to be (Tom, 1980) included in teacher training programmes.

I take Fielding's model for professional development to be an elaboration of the general view that the beginning teacher must, in the final analysis, work out for himself by the means of classroom experience how to become a teacher, albeit with the well-intentioned guidance and advice of experienced teacher trainers and class teachers. As such, I feel that his stage model incorporates some of the problems clearly associated with a too-ready acceptance of the view that teaching is a particular manifestation of a commonplace activity. I feel that the stage model may place too great an onus upon the practitioner to discover his own, subjectively-acquired approach to teaching. It is an essentially conservative approach to teacher training, whereby students may be tempted to adapt successfully to existing circumstances as they find them in schools. Students must, of course, learn to operate within contemporary schools if they are to be accepted as credible by their colleagues and there is no more pathetic sight than the radical who cannot control his class. But beginning teachers must also be prepared to challenge, criticise and innovate. Most importantly, I feel that there is a danger that Fielding may be read as removing from teacher trainers and academic educationists a responsibility for developing an adequate corpus of professional knowledge which can be incorporated within teacher training programmes. One wonders what, precisely, would be the syllabus content of the various stages of Fielding's programme. I am confident that he would not wish to, once again, merely 'repackage' the well-worn content with which we are dissatisfied but which has served us by default up to the present.

In my view, the essential task facing educationists is not the advocacy of ambitious models of the training process or even innovatory schemes but a more mundane endeavour of attempting to discover and articulate worthwhile knowledge and skill which can be justifiably included within training programmes (see, for example, McNamara and Desforges, 1978; McNamara and Desforges, 1979). I admire Fielding's essay but, while he provides us with a vision for the future, I wish to plant his feet firmly in the treacherous mud of ordinary classrooms.

Fielding is right to focus on the individual teacher and explore how he develops his role in the light of classroom experience and I am in sympathy with his prescriptive view that teachers ought to improve or

make progress as they become more experienced. But educationists (by which I mean those who no longer teach) must also explore how they can assist in a variety of activities which will lead to the development and dissemination of a corpus of professionally-useful knowledge and skill, which is both practically useful and located within theoretical contexts, so that, on the one hand, we can equip students with knowledge and skills which they can use to good effect in their classroom teaching and, on the other hand, develop in them the intellectual cast of mind which disposes them to think critically and reflectively about their teaching and appraise its effects upon learners. One does not expect the beginning dentist or architect to work it out for himself but we do recognise that in the 'real worlds' of dentistry and construction, novices must learn how to apply their formal knowledge and skill in practical contexts. The trouble with teacher training is that we have not yet established what that formal knowledge ought to be. Leaving aside subject specialities and curriculum content, beginning teachers tend to ignore and see as irrelevant the education part of their training courses. Our first task is to develop a content which has a potential for being useful and applicable. If Fielding is to avoid the fate of Icarus we must first help him design a set of wings which will survive the harsh glare of the real world of the classroom.

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