

TOMORROW'S HISTORY TEACHERS: WHAT KIND OF TRAINING  
SHOULD THEY BE GIVEN?

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Secondary teachers need not only adequate subject expertise but also to have studied how to make their subjects accessible to pupils of different ages, needs and levels of ability, not least through lively teaching; how best to assess and promote the progress of their pupils; and the place of their subject within the whole school curriculum, and its applications in adult and working life.<sup>1</sup>

No one can reasonably take exception to this sentence in the British Government's 1983 White Paper, Teaching Quality. It encapsulates the challenge facing those whose responsibility it is to prepare future generations of secondary school teachers. Behind this coolly rational appraisal of secondary teachers' needs loom technological changes and attendant economic, political, and social pressures demanding responses in the training sector of the educational system that are clear, sensitive, thorough, and comprehensive.

This article uses the White Paper's statement of needs as a basis for suggesting recommendations for courses in the initial preparation of teachers of History in secondary schools. Before doing so, however, it comments very briefly on initial training in England and Wales, focusing exclusively upon the route to teaching now officially favoured, the one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education.

The PGCE course is taken after students secure their first degree at university or polytechnic or other institution of higher education, although not necessarily immediately afterwards. Some students between first degree and teacher training pursue academic research; others get married and raise children, or take up other jobs, or go abroad, or find themselves unemployed.

Government initiatives are leading to changes nationally in teacher training, and these include a lengthening of the PGCE course to 36 weeks. At the time of writing, however, courses are less than this. Thus in the Division of Education at Sheffield University we began the 1983/84 academic session in late September, some four weeks after the local schools began and will finish in mid-June, several weeks before the schools commence their holidays, a total of 30 weeks. It should be noted that this does not include two weeks spent by our students in primary schools before the beginning of the course.

In essence an initial training course has two major components, "Theory" and "Practice". The latter refers principally to the students' Teaching Practices (TPs) in local schools but may now also refer to what is termed at Sheffield University "School Experience", during which in a variety of ways students are gently initiated into the role of secondary school teacher before their Teaching Practice proper begins. "School Experience" also includes, later in the course, "Intensive" days or half days when a number of students may operate in one school, individually or in teams.

Some training institutions have one Teaching Practice (a full term); others prefer two practices, each covering a significant part of a term. Sheffield University organises practices in the autumn and spring terms, this year lasting six and eight weeks respectively. The latter includes the half-term school holiday. In certain institutions "Practice" may include micro-teaching programmes where these are arranged on a substantial scale.

"Theory" includes the philosophical, psychological, sociological, and historical input. In the Division of Education at Sheffield University, using a model with parallels elsewhere, this involves confronting the student teachers with a common core of significant educational issues in a programme extending over the three terms, and experienced by them during the time they attend the university and are not in schools during Teaching Practices. The programme is known as "Professional Studies Seminars" (PSS), and includes such

issues as pastoral care, mixed ability grouping, language across the curriculum, multiethnic education, and the teacher and the law. The basic method of organisation is a small group of about 10 students drawn from a range of disciplines. Membership of each group remains the same throughout the course, and discussion is centred around units of material, which are prepared by individual members of staff and revised every two years under the aegis of an editorial committee.

"Theory" also includes Method work. In recent years there has been an increasing tendency to emphasise classroom practicalities, such as lesson planning, the preparation and use of materials, and the assessment of pupils. The use of the workshop approach is popular. With the steady evolution of PSS and of the individual Method courses at Sheffield University, the point has now been reached where tutors feel the need to concentrate on strengthening links not only, within "Theory", between PSS and Method work but also between "Theory" and what happens when the students go out into the schools.

Students are assessed on both classroom performance and on written work. Continuous assessment via coursework coexists nationally with formal written examinations. In the Division of Education at Sheffield University there are no examinations and coursework is the rule, the students producing three essays of varying length for the PSS course, and a variety of assignments for their Method area. Those students not on a "double main" course will have a second Method course; some attend a third, but may simply audit it.

Stimulated by the Department of Education and Science, teachers in the secondary schools are playing an increasing role in initial training. This trend is likely to grow in strength. Supervision of students on Teaching Practice is usually shared between school and training institution, the number of visits by supervisors from the latter varying from institution to institution. Ways are being sought to increase contacts between tutors and school teachers not only in the actual design and running of PGCE courses, but also in interviewing candidates for them. Pressure

is growing for tutors to refresh their experience of classroom realities, perhaps by some form of exchange with their colleagues in the schools.

The recommendations below are divided into six elements following the stimulus of the White Paper, and are preceded by what seem to me important observations by Her Majesty's Inspectorate.

1. ...adequate subject expertise...

The Department of Education and Science, under Sir Keith Joseph, the Secretary of State, is eager to see the "matching" of qualifications with the actual teaching to be done by an individual probationer teacher. One can sympathise with the desire to avoid a situation where a specialism may be poorly taught by a teacher trained in another subject and possibly lacking the enthusiasm to overcome his deficiency. However, there is more to this problem than carefully checking a student's academic record to see if it fits the job he is being called upon to do. Presumably, the great majority of student teachers on main Method courses have a degree of at least lower second-class quality; many will have "upper seconds" and a minority first-class degrees. The drawback is that mere possession of a degree does not mean that a student is knowledgeable where it matters - in the classroom. Method tutors cannot offer History courses; there is not enough time for Method itself. So the assumption is that the student teacher, with a first degree, is "a historian", and, moreover, one eagerly prepared to resolve the problem of gaps in his knowledge. This is not a small matter if a student's undergraduate bias has been towards politics and international relations in the 20th Century and on Teaching Practice he is expected to deal with the Pyramids, the growth of the medieval town, Martin Luther, and changes in the textile industry in 18th Century England. Those students pursuing History as a second or even third teaching subject present even more of a problem. Not all of the suggestions below can realistically apply to them. Perhaps the conclusions that stand out are that we need to be particularly careful when taking on such students, and that, having accepted

them, to recognise that they need especial care. A danger then might be that concern for such students interferes with attention directed towards those on the main method course. What then should be the minimum qualifications for entry to a History Method course when students' first degrees are in other subjects? The schools in which the students will obtain posts are keen, in a world of falling rolls, to have teachers who are generalists rather than narrow specialists.

#### Some recommendations

A History Method course should have these features:

- (a) Student analysis of the nature of History: philosophical, methodological, and historiographical. Such analysis should receive practical expression in rationales for their own courses offered during teaching practice and for their assignments. It is vital that, no matter how disconcerting, students face up to the implications of their own philosophies.
- (b) Most, perhaps all, assignments to be chosen within periods or on problems they have not previously studied.
- (c) Resources search strategies designed not only to increase student ability to locate suitable material, but also to include some concentration upon explicit principles on which choices can be grounded. Resources to include the use of the locality, physical and human, and the experiences of the students' own lives and those of their pupils.
- (d) Not only practice in narrative exposition without notes, but also practice in both responding to questions and generating questions (which would also help to spotlight the need for greater pupil involvement).
- (e) Availability to the method group of all members' work - assignments and teaching practice files of lesson plans - in all cases submitted in such a way that other students can quickly and easily read them.
- (f) Preliminary course reading, specifically directed for actual course use.

2. ...how to make their subjects accessible to pupils of different ages, needs and levels of ability, not least through lively teaching...

...If, however, there is a tendency towards conservatism in our schools then it must be acknowledged that teacher training has failed to make an impact upon it.

..There is scope for more small group work which genuinely involves student participation and for less reliance upon the set lecture and the tutor-dominated seminar. There is also a need for more direct attention to the students' understanding of language transactions in the classroom and of the way that these influence the quality of their teaching. Not only do most secondary students have very little explicit work on language in their course, but its influence is rarely considered in subject method courses...it is clear that learning in secondary schools would be greatly improved if all teachers had a better understanding of such matters as the use of oral language in the classroom, reading for learning, the appropriateness of texts, and varieties of writing.

...The aim is not to produce teachers with allegiance to a given approach to teaching, but with a repertoire of teaching styles that will allow them to vary their practice according to the needs of the occasion.<sup>2</sup>

Of all the sensitive points touched upon in the above extracts by Her Majesty's Inspectorate, perhaps the first is the most serious. "Small group work", "understanding of language transactions", "appropriateness of texts", "repertoire of teaching styles", all are dependent upon not just the school context in which our beginner teachers find themselves, but upon their ability to actually introduce changes. Strategies for overcoming obstacles to changes, no matter how small, are important. This may be the crucial inter-face between initial training and in-service work necessitating the use of only those schools in which the permanent teaching staff have a strong and proven commitment to professional development.

Some recommendations

A History Method course should have these features:

- (a) Planning a programme for pupils coherently based on principles that can be clearly identified by all involved; and paying especial attention to the less able and the gifted.
- (b) Classroom management: not just tips for keeping order, but close investigation of the relationships between particular content/methods

and class discipline, and between particular content/methods and personal relationships.

- (c) A switch of emphasis at an appropriate stage in the course from "teacher performance" to encouraging students to develop the ability to establish and maintain successfully pupil work in pairs, small groups, and plenaries.<sup>3</sup>
- (d) Examination of the role of language; teacher/pupil talk in classrooms; concepts and generalisations; questioning skills; precision; listening skills; analysis of textbooks and other written materials.
- (e) Small-scale curriculum innovation: problems of introducing new content and new techniques, and possible strategies for overcoming them.
- (f) Regular involvement, in a variety of ways, of serving teachers, and the siting of some method work in schools.
- (g) Deliberate exploitation in method work of educational research.
- (h) Presentation techniques as an aid to accessibility; from the use of printing and cutting up neatly material for posters to deciding what to seize upon for graphic impact.
- (i) Students' happy handling of audio-visual equipment, including computers, grounded in consideration of explicit criteria determining choice and exploitation.
- (j) Working out how to begin lessons imaginatively. This comes last here, but its importance cannot be over-estimated if the motivation of learners is to be taken seriously.

3. ...not least through lively teaching...

This is a challenging one and must hinge on successful interview techniques.

Though HMI were asked to concentrate their assessment on skills acquired through training, it was difficult in many cases to separate these from the personal qualities of the teachers, and this suggests that the selection of suitable students for training is as important as the content of the training itself. 4

The significance of this issue is being reflected by the demand that practising teachers be involved in interviews. Sheffield University Division of Education

is currently experimenting in this area. Bearing in mind the criticism that there is "a tendency towards conservatism in our schools", as well as the need for "lively teaching", K.M. Evans' point deserves re-iteration:

"The rule should be: select according to what cannot be changed, and then train what is changeable." 5

Some recommendations

A History Method course should have these features:

- (a) Practice in the thorough and detailed investigation of the effectiveness of their own teaching; self-evaluation strategies incorporating not only checklists of questions but also the acquisition of data on pupil perceptions.
  - (b) Simulation exercises; role-play; and drama. In this connection there is considerable merit in History student teachers pursuing courses in Drama as a second subject.
  - (c) Observations and analysis of different types of teaching: good, bad, and indifferent - including seeing the tutor in action and their fellow students.
  - (d) Method work closely linked with selected schools so that student teachers can be more easily encouraged to take "risks" - "not a risk of life <sup>or</sup> limb, but a risk of success or failure." 6
  - (e) Team teaching by students.
  - (f) Micro-teaching.
  - (g) Speech improvement; and some consideration of the effects of non-verbal behaviours. This is a neglected aspect and yet one which could boost confidence considerably.
4. ...how best to assess and promote the progress of their pupils; ...

... The aim is thus to develop in the student a view of assessment which rests on notions of progress and growth. This is most likely to be achieved by co-ordination of various elements of the whole course, with tutors working as a team or in close cooperation. ...

Nowhere in the report ( Aspects of secondary education in England ) is a lack of match more evident than in the programmes devised for less able pupils. Perhaps the most discouraging aspect is the unduly low expectations that teachers have of these pupils, as have the pupils themselves. 7



Given that, as Fred T. Wilhelms says, "the quality of the next step depends on how well that feedback is blended with basic purposes and converted into decisions,"<sup>8</sup> and given the massive variation in marking procedures that seems common in our schools, the importance of studying assessment in initial training can hardly be exaggerated. The slow achievers need to know as clearly as possible what is being demanded of them (and as with justice speed is essential); the able need to know why their work has been judged to be good - for it is not always obvious to them.

#### Some recommendations

A History Method course should have these features:

- (a) Marking and assessment strategies, within a broad evaluation perspective.  
This would include the highlighting by the students of "feedback" in teaching programmes during T.P.; and also, intramurally, explicit and systematic sharing of tutor and student commentaries on tutor and student work, and the display of examples; plus the study of good work from the less able and not-so-good work from the able.
- (b) Methods of reporting on individual pupils' performances to school colleagues, and, particularly, to parents; and record-keeping, particularly when individualised learning techniques are being used.
- (c) Highly focussed student-teacher "research" into pupil progress and the effectiveness of their own teaching as major components of school-based assignments.
- (d) Clarification of objectives/criteria for judging pupils' work.
- (e) Change of emphasis in T.P. files from general evaluation of lessons to the "pursuit" of selected pupils, preferably the slow achievers.
- (f) Collaboration with colleagues (psychologists, sociologists) in the university department, and in the history departments in schools in analysing pupil work and making decisions about approaches.

5. ...the place of their subject within the whole school curriculum, ...

The student should be encouraged within his method course to view his own subject in its curriculum context and to apply his understanding of the whole curriculum to it, if there is to be any real impact on his teaching.

...leaders of professional courses should be encouraging a continual openness of mind and devising means by which <sup>the</sup> students can become sensitive to the needs and interests of other phases.

Narrow perspectives are to be avoided. Yet the desirability of this aim should not cloud the difficulties which accompany its pursuit in a scenario in which the student teachers worry first about the quality of their relationships with their classes and the dangers and difficulties of not knowing enough and then about their own seeming lack of imagination and inability to have lots of ideas. Here again is a crucial inter-face between initial and in-service training. Are we doing enough to encourage the creativity that can generate and sustain enthusiasm on the part of teachers?

Some recommendations

A History Method course should have these features:

- (a) Regular and deliberate use of educational theory from elsewhere in the PGCE course, particularly "Curriculum Studies" input.
- (b) Syllabus construction in the light of specified school aims. Schools are now obliged to state aims in prospectuses and these can be useful touchstones.
- (c) Encouragement of students to become generalists; inclusion of integrated humanities component; identification of connections with other subjects as opportunities arise.
- (d) Encouragement of students to take their non-method theory assignments from the Curriculum Studies area. e.g. They might choose to analyse an innovatory national project or one school's integrated studies course.
- (e) Some reporting to, and possible assessment by, student-teachers in other subject areas of work done by History student-teachers.

(f) The inclusion of some prescribed experience/assignment work in primary and/or FE institutions.

(g) Encouragement of students during teaching practices to seek out good practitioners in other disciplines and observe their methods. A Geography teacher or a Biologist or a Craft specialist might be able to "open the eyes" of History student-teachers.

6. ...and its applications in adult and working life.

This is where the public face of History appears, and if the subject is to be secure in secondary schools this face needs to be acceptable. It is not the passage of time, but the conservatism mentioned earlier that has wrinkled that face and the days when a simple cosmetic job would have been enough have gone. Where Politics is seen as a ready alternative and Peace Studies become popular, rejuvenation of History is required. Three aspects, work, politics, and leisure can be identified behind the suggestions here.

Some recommendations

A History Method course should have these features:

- (a) A more prominent role for science and technology; for example, in assignment demands and as the focus of seminar discussion.
- (b) A deliberate focus upon controversial issues, including the treatment of minorities, the place of women, and the consequences of war and peace.
- (c) More emphasis on oracy; particularly to work on the development of pupils' questioning skills and cool and evidenced argument.
- (d) Consideration of what might constitute a relevant History curriculum for particular groups in particular geographical areas.
- (e) Use of film and TV; museums; field-work and archaeology; historical fiction; computers.

A holistic strategy

The recommendations in this article demand a level of resourcing apparently not available currently within the English educational system, and a level of commitment on the part of tutors, school teachers, and students that may be unattainable. They also demand, if only by implication, that the content of undergraduate History courses and the structure of the probationary year, when the former students begin their careers "for real", be openly acknowledged as problematic. This article takes initial training as far as it can possibly go, some will say too far; beyond this point only a holistic strategy involving first degree course, initial training, and probationary year has any hope of successfully laying the foundations for the emergence, in adequate numbers, of the kind of History teachers we need in the 21st century.

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Note

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