



Teacher Education or Apprenticeship Training? Reflections on the Effects of Field-Based ITE on Teachers' Work

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Leon Benade

Auckland University of Technology

The Initial Teacher Education (ITE) terrain in New Zealand is complex, varied, and populated by an increasing number of providers and options. Of interest here is field-based ITE or employment-based ITE, which has been a common practice in the ECE sector since the 1960s (Whatman et al, 2019). A recent polemical New Zealand Initiative report (Johnston & Martin, 2023) attacking the New Zealand Teaching Council was also highly critical of traditional, university-based ITE. Instead, its authors advocated a more dispersed system that would allow a free market of school-based ITE provision, regulated by multiple professional registration bodies (Johnston & Martin, 2023). Two notable examples of field-based ITE that cater to the secondary sector are the well-established Teach First NZ (<https://teachfirstnz.org>) and the newly-established Auckland Schools' Teacher Training Programme (<https://www.schoolbasedtraining.org>). Both are characterised by an appeal to career-changers, financial support of student teachers in the programme (including tuition costs), and an emphasis on practical experience in the classrooms of a host school as an alternative to the standard approach of university classes with two 8-week spells of practicum experience in schools. While options such as these provide a seemingly attractive alternative, I offer here some reflective counter thoughts as these programmes have, I suggest, a fundamental influence on the formative creation of teacher identity, and ultimately, teachers' work.

Freidson (2001) pointed out that the development of professionalisation is consistent with the recognition that professional forms of labour require high levels of critical discretion and decision-making: the profession is an "occupation [that] uses in its work a complex body of formal knowledge and skill that commands abstract concepts or theories and requires the exercise of a considerable amount of discretion" (p. 83). This is one of the considerations that has supported the growing professionalisation of teachers, a process described by renowned international philosopher of education, Gert Biesta (2023). He traces the development of Educational Studies and aligns it with the amalgamation of Colleges of Education and universities, whereby teaching became a graduate profession. This shift was intended, in part, to free student teachers from narrow practical concerns, to engage in more abstract levels of critical thinking and personal development. Embedded then, in the (traditional) professional preparation of teachers, is the time and opportunity to reflect on deeper issues, such as the aims of education, away from the workplace, where there is little time for the luxury of reflection.

Professions also have occupational control of their work, determining standards, conditions and content of their professional education, in part because the nature of their work is esoteric, non-routine and unpredictable, hence requiring specialised preparation (Freidson, 2001). The field-based, apprenticeship models referred to above are therefore subject to critique on at least the following counts. First, they place the control of the development of new members of the occupation in the hands of a small elite of schools who have taken upon themselves the right and duty of the professional preparation of new teachers. Effectively, a new form of inequality is set to arise, as a monopoly practice is being created to supplant what should be a public interest in the development of a teaching workforce dedicated to the public good. Instead, a closed programme of teacher preparation has been created to meet the needs and demands of a select group of schools that are able to marshal the resources to enable them to replace professional education away from the workplace.

Second, the apprenticeship model articulates a greater concern with narrow, technical competence. Moreover, it takes the view that professional practitioners and workplaces are better placed to provide professional education (or, more accurately, I suggest, 'training') than can be provided in professional education contexts away from the workplace, such as universities. This is not a new narrative by any means and is often articulated in terms of spurious 'theory-practice' binaries. This narrative suggests that theory has no place in practice settings, and that all one will learn away from the workplace is impractical theory; or that the theory learnt in a university classroom can never be implemented in a school classroom. This focus on the alleged purity of the 'practice' of teaching and the dismissal of 'theory' as having any relevance to teaching, is an unhelpful binary that devalues considerations of the purpose of schooling and of the aims of education. Bridging this divide requires opportunities to reflect on the dialectical relationship between theory and practice, which is what a professional education away from the workplace makes possible.

Professional education, undertaken, at least in some measure, away from the workplace, provides the neophyte the cognitive and reflective tools that will endure through the career development phases, alerting the new professional to contradictions, challenges and conflicts in the workplace. The third point of critique therefore is that an apprenticeship within a professional vacuum that shelters the novice from experiencing both the development of critically reflective practice and wider teaching experiences amounts to a highly limited form of professional preparation. The student teacher, instead of being alerted to a wide range of professional possibilities and eventualities, is being carefully coached to adopt 'the way we do things here'. Technology and technological thinking have influenced education and in turn, thinking about the aims of education—the technological world is, by definition, a utilitarian world, where the focus is on finding the most efficient tool to complete a task, rather than considerations such as what might be the effects of that technology. Utilitarian approaches give rise to a focus on short-term ends and developing the means and methods of achieving these.

A professional education away from the limitations or sanitised perspectives of a particular workplace can also prepare a student teacher to adopt a social justice perspective that will support the new teacher throughout a career that may cross over a range of socio-economic contexts. A fourth critique of the apprenticeship model therefore is that the formative education of an emergent

professional practitioner in a self-contained bubble (the host school) that is sheltered from critical considerations of a wider world limits the learning opportunities of a new practitioner and brings into question whether that person can lay claim to being a well-rounded professional. A nascent professional is required to step back from the world, holding it in suspension, to better comprehend what it is the world is saying. This requires time to slow down so as to develop the capacity for critically reflective practice—yet, such opportunities are curtailed when the totality of the professional learning experience is locked into the workplace. Let me emphasise this point by returning to Biesta, who suggested ‘subjectification’ as one of the three domains of purpose in education. For Biesta, “the idea of subjectification is our freedom as human beings and, more specifically, our freedom to act or to refrain from action” (2020, p. 93). The absence of subjectification (the process of developing freedom as an individual) amounts to nothing more than training—and this is, in effect, what an apprenticeship, workplace-based model of professional preparation is.

Removing the development of professional educators from the purview of universities means that ultimately, New Zealand will have a teaching workforce bereft of critical ideas concerning child development, theories of learning or social and philosophical issues. Instead, the nation will have a teaching workforce that concerns itself with the most efficient methods of instruction and control. There will be limited scope for professional educators capable of contesting the latest fads emanating from the Ministry of Education, for example. Rather than a workforce of critically reflective practitioners, there will instead be compliant teachers well versed in the highly-contextualised habits and routines drilled into them during their apprenticeship training—indeed, how could this be called a ‘professional education’? Such closeted preparation is unlikely to focus on the development of autonomous intellectuals, as might be suggested by Biesta’s notion of subjectification—the development of the individual who knows when to act and when not to act; in other words, a person able to exercise discretion and to recognise wrongs. Freire referred to ‘humanisation’: the ontological vocation of each person to become more fully human (Freire, 1970/1996). Put differently, he could not envisage the human as a completed project. Yet, it is precisely the premise of apprenticeship models that these programmes will turn out completed, ready-made, teachers.

Such approaches, I suggest, will not prepare the profession for dealing with the many policy challenges on the horizon: an interest in the ‘science’ of learning, a focus on behaviour strategies, developing ‘common practice models’ and other forms of homogenisation are all a step closer. Being locked into the modes and styles of thought of practitioners who themselves have found little time to be critically reflective since their own induction to the profession, will do little to develop the intellectual autonomy I have referred to here.

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