
Factory-farmed Teachers Will Fail Our Children

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ABSTRACT The White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* signals a further attack on the role of universities in educating future teachers. The author challenges the type of preparation that new teachers experience, and highlights the impact it will have for both school students and the future of the teaching profession.

The new-look training courses are trying to turn out fully formed teachers in a matter of weeks, when what they need is time to think and support as they develop. We can't dismiss the great educational thinkers of the past.

The increased focus on competition in education has produced a conveyor belt of quick fixes in systems across the globe. Start-up schools use pedagogical practices that trend like a Justin Bieber tweet. Children smile in videos on YouTube to attract prospective parents, and institutions hang banners outside their premises proclaiming 'We are Ofsted Outstanding'. With such branding, a teacher and the class can no longer be the island they once were.

The image of the traditional maverick – think 'Oh captain my captain!' from *Dead Poets Society* – still holds allure. It is a selling point for the strict new 'traditional' schools that are all the rage. But appealing to images of public school tradition when a school has been set up in an old office block is a stretch for even the most fertile of imaginations. Flat-pack furniture is a poor substitute for mahogany and teachers who have bought into a pre-packaged vision are unlikely to march children around the car park to illustrate the dangers of herd thinking.

New teachers are spending less time than before in universities, thinking, reflecting and questioning, and more time in schools under real pressure. In many institutions they are being relied upon to deliver exam results. In the absence of experience, prescription has become a necessity to ensure quality:

this can range from being told what to put on displays through to curriculum and pedagogy. In some places new recruits are trained not only in what to say but how to say it: a scripted curriculum means less risk.

In systems demanding such compliance, giving trainee teachers the time and space they need to grapple without crampons in the ideological chasm between educational schools of thought is counterproductive. Who has time to read Gert Biesta when there are targets to be met? Who can sit and ruminate over the failings of A.S. Neill's *Summerhill School*, or digest John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* when there is a person at the back of your classroom telling you to be more economical with language?

New-look teacher training courses are attempting to turn out fully functional teachers in a few short weeks and are therefore unlikely to point their overstressed fledglings towards educational theorists such as Henry Giroux, Jonathan Kozol or Dorothy Heathcote. Doug Lemov and his 49 techniques in *Teach Like a Champion* is the new teacher-training bible because it is infinitely more digestible and practical in a data-driven landscape demanding results.

Twitter in particular has become a weapon in the assault against university training. A small number of voices who are relatively unknown in the real world yet are disproportionately influential with government, Ofsted and the media. Some of these keyboard warriors have become one-note trumpets, decreeing that a belief in learning styles indicates teacher-training institutions are not fit for purpose.

With all this excitement, is it a wonder that young teachers on social media buy into the idea that blogs and articles are 'the best CPD' out there? Who wouldn't want to change the world by waving one's fingers over a keyboard? But, as skilful as it is to distil a thought into 140 perfect characters, or write a clever blog or three, it is ludicrous to consider that a teacher's best training is online.

The failings of the current system are being used as evidence of past failings of progressives in the education establishment. The message out there is that many of the greatest educational thinkers can be dismissed rather than expecting prospective teachers to consider why failings arise and make up their own minds.

With this persuasive, almost messianic narrative of change, young teachers can be forgiven for thinking they have discovered all the answers. However, in order to understand the complexity of the system we find ourselves in today, digesting the thoughts of writers from the great educational traditions of the past has to be part of the process.

Training future teachers to resolve individual questions of agency, authenticity, autonomy and curriculum is vital. We need to grow our teachers slowly and support them as they develop. A young teacher must still answer the very important questions: What is education for? What kind of teacher am I?

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