

Challenges to university autonomy in initial teacher education programmes: The cases of England, Manitoba and British Columbia

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Abstract

Since the middle of the twentieth century in England and Canada responsibility for the design and delivery of pre-service teacher programmes has been located primarily in universities and their Faculties/Schools of Education. Operating within a tradition of university autonomy, the governance of these programmes is nonetheless constrained by the accreditation and certification requirements of the state and the profession and the pragmatic demands of teachers' work. Over the last two decades, a variety of provisions have been made to regulate the pre-service preparation of teachers in both countries that have afforded quite different roles and authority to the state, the university, and the teaching profession. It is the interplay of these pressures on the governance of initial teacher preparation in three different jurisdictions—England, Manitoba and British Columbia—and the characterisation of teacher preparation associated with each, that is the focus of this article.

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1. Introduction

How best to recruit and prepare new teachers has always been a subject of debate, inevitably embedded in a larger discussion of the purposes of public schooling. The concept of “policy settlements” offers a useful way of framing an examination of the ways in which such competing visions for initial teacher preparation have found expression in

practise. Jones (2003) describes policy settlements as fairly lasting sets of arrangements that define how competing and conflicting educational expectations are reconciled and which expectations receive policy priority at any given time. Acknowledging that these are always limited and conditional reconciliations of different interests, he notes that: “they have inherent tensions and limits. They are shaped by conflict as well as agreement. They do not finally prevail” (p. 9).

From this analytical stance this paper examines the destabilisation of an existing post-World War II educational settlement in both Canada and England that had assigned to the universities primary

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authority in the governance of initial teacher education, and the ongoing efforts to establish a new policy settlement in initial teacher preparation.¹ In the case of England the argument is made that this has essentially been completed and that the new settlement is one dominated by central government control. With the two Canadian case-studies the challenge to the authority of the universities has, to date, been less radical, and whilst it is argued that in Manitoba the universities continue to be the most influential force in the governance of initial teacher preparation and in British Columbia the teaching profession, through the British Columbia College of Teachers, has come to exert a new level of influence, it may well be that the Canadian context is still one of flux.

2. A conceptual framework

This examination of the governance of initial teacher preparation follows Dale's (1997) distinction between issues of: (i) what is involved in the governance of initial teacher education; and (ii) how and by whom these activities are carried out. In taking up the first set of issues, Dale's distinction between activities associated with *funding*, *regulation*, and *delivery* is adopted, while in exploring the second set of issues this paper uses Gideonse's (1993) notions of *political*, *institutional*, and *professional* modes of governance.

2.1. Dimensions of governance: funding, regulation and delivery

2.1.1. Funding

Traditionally the funding of university-based initial teacher education has derived primarily from

¹Our focus on initial teacher preparation in Canada and England has both intellectual and pragmatic origins. First, and most importantly, it is grounded in a belief in the value of comparative analysis and the benefits that can come from an examination of the ways in which educational policies and practices are constructed in different national contexts. A more pragmatic reason is that this work is part of a broader ongoing academic link between the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba and the School of Education at the University of Nottingham.

In this paper, the term "initial teacher preparation" is used as a way of subsuming the contested terminology of "initial teachers education" (ITE) and "initial teacher training" (ITT). When we are discussing Canadian programmes we will usually refer to "initial teacher education" and when discussing English programmes "teacher training".

a combination of government grants and tuition fees—with the former usually accounting for the lion's share of the costs (Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD), 2004). This balance tends to vary in relation to both current policy stances towards the public funding of post-secondary education, and supply and demand pressures for teachers. Of particular interest to this paper are the mechanisms by which government funds are allocated to teacher education programmes and the degree to which control over these funds provides a direct policy lever for directing the practise and outcomes of these programmes.

2.1.2. Regulation

Regulation—defined simply as the standards and rules for conducting business—is taken up here in relation to two overlapping concerns: (i) regulations related to individual teacher candidates and their entry into teaching; and (ii) regulations related to initial teacher education programmes. Furthermore, since effective regulation carries with it not only the notion that the regulator has a vision of required practise and outcomes but also some mechanisms for enforcing compliance, attention is also given to issues of accountability.

2.1.2.1. Admissions. In jurisdictions such as Canada, where all initial teacher education programmes are housed in higher education institutions, it is the capacity and admission criteria of these institutions that provide an early filter on entry into the profession. In some instances, decisions on the number of students admitted into an initial teacher education programme may be driven exclusively by Faculty of Education decisions related to such issues as existing resources, demand for places, and the status of the Faculty of Education within the university. In other jurisdictions—and England here would provide a good example—the government through its funding and regulatory powers attempts to tightly articulate the number of places in initial teacher education programmes with a predicted demand for new teachers (Fig. 1).

2.1.2.2. Certification. Certification constitutes the formal efforts of the state to regulate entry into teaching and to define the knowledge and skills expected of beginning teachers, as well as where that preparation must occur and how the knowledge and skill is to be demonstrated. Until the 1980s, in much

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