

FE teacher training in Scotland and England, continuities and contradictions - a policy analysis

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Background

The paper compares and contrasts the policy context of Further Education teacher training (FETT) in Scotland and England by setting FETT a socio-economic that emphasises lifelong learning and competitiveness. This is followed by a discussion of FETT, facilitating a comparison of the two nations and enables an analysis of their responses to globalisation and lifelong learning.

Policy directed towards England is often presented as applicable to all four home nations (England, N.Ireland, Scotland and Wales), for example BIS' (2009) Skills for Growth uses the strap line 'Building Britain's Future'. Notwithstanding the preceding point the 'competitive settlement' is a feature of the policy context of both Scotland and England (Avis, 2009). In Rustin's (1998:7) terms 'competitiveness is the name of the game' that informs state policy. The presumption being that by developing human capital and the talents of all, economic and social well-being will be enhanced (Scottish Government, 2007; BIS, 2009). Paradoxically, at a time of capitalist crisis this theme has been re-emphasised (BIS, 2009). Developing the skills of the working population in a direction orientated towards emerging sectors of the economy is thought both to provide the route out of the current recession but also towards a fairer society (Ministerial foreword, Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, 2008, p3; Scottish Government; 2007). FE in both nations is seen as pivotal to the skills agenda as well as to social cohesion and inclusion. Notably, there are significant differences in the scale and range of PCET provision in these countries. In England, provision is more extensive and multi-layered, involving numerous agencies, including work-based and work-related learning (Avis, 2009; Holloway, 2009). In contrast, Scottish provision is predominantly focused on FE colleges, often excluding independent training providers and Government sponsored training schemes.

Research Questions

An exploration of FE/FETT policy continuities and breaks across Scotland and England, leading to a consideration of the limits and possibilities of the different state 'solutions' adopted, enabling us to tease out their progressive possibilities. The paper draws upon small scale illuminative case studies of FE teacher educators, exploring their experiences of the way in which policy is lived and mediated at the site of practice.

Methods

Whilst there is comparative work analysing the FE sector in the home nations (Hodgson, et al, forthcoming) as well as a body of work analysing teacher training in Scotland and England (Brisard et al, 2007), little work has specifically addressed a comparative analysis of FETT. Nevertheless across these two nations there are a similar set of issues concerned with pre- and in-service FETT, professionalism, skill development as well as the on-going CPD of FE teachers. The paper develops a comparative analysis of these themes and addresses the immediate policy context leading to a comparison of FETT in the two nations. Here questions of governance and regulation are raised. In England the use of occupational standards to underpin FETT has been criticised for mobilising a truncated and limited conceptualisations of teacher training, lodged within a more generalised critique of managerialism and performativity (Avis et al, 2010). In Scotland there is less emphasis upon the use of occupational standards to underpin FETT which has resulted in particular forms of cross-institutional competition which have led to a reduction in time allocated for FETT. Although Scottish ITT is informed by competency-based standards it is not directly shaped by them. The standards provide a framework to be included within teacher education without specifying how they should be incorporated. This leaves the institutional providers to design a curriculum 'informed by the standards'.

Frame

In policy terms, pedagogical approaches are thus seen as strongly 'developmental' in Scotland in contrast to those that are performative or assessment-driven (Menter et al, 2004). For Arnott and Ozga (2009) this is explained by the 'discursive strategies' underpinning Scottish policy formulation. At a more practical level a number of PCET policies are enacted through teachers' involvement in implementation studies with professional judgement in curriculum design being encouraged by the Scottish state (Scottish Government, 2004). A comparative analysis enables an exploration of the limitations and possibilities for the development of progressive and radical practice across the two nations, possibilities that might be overlooked without this dimension. Set alongside the policy analysis the paper draws upon small scale illuminative case studies of FE teacher educators. Focus groups, supported by one-to-one interviews, will be used to examine the orientations of FE teacher educators in a Scottish and English university. We explore the lived experience of these educators and will return to questions concerning pre- and in-service FETT, professionalism, skill development as well as the on-going CPD of FE teachers.

Research findings

Through a comparative analysis the paper enables an examination of the limitations and possibilities residing within the two systems of FETT, points of convergence and the way in which such processes can be understood through an examination of state strategies and mediation at the level of practice. In addition we draw out the implications of the analysis for FETT policy and practice.

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