

Two year trained — stigma or star?

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DES Circular 2/83 'The Initial Qualifications', comments on the continuing shortage of suitably qualified teachers of CDT (paragraph 4, page 2) and states:

'The Secretaries of State consider it important that there should continue to be suitable training opportunities for mature entrants and believe that shortened B.Ed. courses have an important part to play in securing the objective.'

In consequence, a number of institutions now offer such courses and it is likely that a considerable proportion of Design and Technology teachers entering the profession in future will do so by way of this route.

What are the problems associated with the design and implementation of shortened courses in Design and Technology? Who is attracted to such courses and how do schools react to them?

It is our aim to explore such issues by means of a case study which seeks to represent the views of tutors, teachers and students on a two year B.Ed. degree which commenced in 1984. Findings are therefore tentative rather than definitive and formative rather than summative, but it is hoped that they shed light on a style of course and type of student both of which are becoming more and more common in the Design and Technology area.

Context

Sunderland Polytechnic offered a one year Certificate in Education (Technology) for almost ten years. It recruited mature students with appropriate technological qualifications (B.Sc., HND/HNC, City and Guilds Full Tech. Cert).

A one year course cannot fully prepare students for their roles as teachers, but the combination of conscientious staff and highly motivated mature students resulted in a commendably high level of classroom competence on final teaching practice. This was undoubtedly one of the strengths of the course but ironically it was inter-related with what some staff saw as its major weakness.

'With such a short course, teaching practices of one type or another were always imminent and students

tended to focus on those elements of the course concerned with practical teaching skills, perhaps at the expense of the related theoretical issues. Not that students rejected the important relationship between theory and practice, but a view of the teacher as a questioning, analytical and reflective person who applies educational knowledge in making informed judgements and in evaluating alternative solutions to educational problems was not as evident as it might have been in a longer course.'

Module Leader

This is part of the 'quart into the pint pot' syndrome which applied to all one year initial teacher education courses, but especially to those which are multidisciplinary and in which the nature and methodology of the subject must be explored.

From the student viewpoint, the greatest weakness of the one year course was perhaps the final qualification:

'Listening to staff room conversations on my first teaching practice I began to realise the importance of a degree. It seemed to have a status in school which I had not anticipated.'

One Year Course Student

This view, expressed by many students, is reinforced by the steady trickle of ex-OYC locally based CDT teachers who have joined the part-time in-service degree course. In this respect the 'stigma' of the title certainly applied to the One Year Course.

The Two Year B.Ed. Degree

'Shortened course' is in many ways a misnomer, for students entering the course have two years full-time study (or part-time equivalent) in an appropriate subject behind them, usually at HND/B.TEC Higher Level. This course builds on this work and on the students' industrial experience during the two years of mainly pedagogical study.

A number of course-related issues perceived as important by staff, students and/or schools are explored below.

Student Intake

From the outset a major concern of staff was the ability to recruit sufficient students who could meet the rigorous

entry criteria at a time when, for various reasons, teaching in secondary schools was for many not an attractive prospect. The academic regulations for the course demand qualifications at HND/HNC or equivalent level in an appropriate subject area and at least one year's industrial experience. Prospective students must also demonstrate their potential and commitment to teaching at interview. Were such people available? Could they be attracted from industry?

The course has in fact recruited well, with an intake of 16 students in 1984 to almost 30 in 1986. Their background is wide-ranging; the first cohort of students included electrical, marine, mechanical and production engineers, as well as design draughtsmen, a toolmaker, a laboratory technician and an architectural assistant. The oldest recruit was 45 and the youngest 23, with an average age of 29.

The continuing quality of the intake has surprised some staff:

'I was impressed with One Year Course students, but I think that the Two Year B.Ed. people are even better. My worry is that the pool will dry up, but it shows no sign of doing so.'

Education Tutor

Reasons for the continuing supply of suitable candidates include the special grants available to CDT students and the fact that the development of the course has been paralleled by the decline of manufacturing industry in the north-east of England. While only a small proportion of our applicants are unemployed when they apply, many are in industries which have a recent history of contraction and face a very uncertain future. Others have left their original occupation usually engineering and are not finding job satisfaction in other fields. The depressed nature of the regional economy means that the course is seen as a lifeline to many applicants, and staff involved in the admissions process approach it with mixed feelings, the following view is perhaps typical:

'While it is most satisfying to be able to offer a new start to some applicants it is saddening when one has to reject candidates whose job prospects within the region seem very bleak.'

Course Leader (1983-85)



Course Process

Students join the course with a wealth of knowledge and experience of particular specialisms, industry and life in general. One of the challenges to staff is the utilisation of their individual experiences for the benefit of other students:

'I think we have developed a well-structured course relevant to students' needs as teachers, but I think we could make more use of their individual expertise, almost as much in the generic area as in their specialist studies. For example, a lecture on curriculum change revealed a wealth of experience of innovation in industry, much of it applicable to the school situation.'

Education Tutor

Structured discussion forms a useful method of enabling students to communicate their experiences to others. However, such an approach demands small groups and with increased numbers there is a temptation to increase group size and perhaps lessen the effectiveness of the process.

While the previous experience and expertise of students is a valuable input to the course it raises the almost contradictory problem of achieving common and quite diverse goals with students from a wide range of backgrounds. The course demands a band of expertise and knowledge ranging from almost fine art to pure science, together with an insight into numerous other subjects, including ergonomics, the social aspects of design

and industrial archeology. As well as this 'knowledge' students must also develop problem-solving skills and the ability to foster these attributes in children. Such elements can conflict with the students' initial training and background:

'Whilst most of our students have HND's (or their equivalents) in a range of (mainly) engineering subjects we have found that the marine engineers, electronic engineers and civil engineers have different strengths and weaknesses in subject knowledge. There is little homogeneity in terms of content. For example, expertise in working with wood and plastic or communicating graphically is often limited, and even within 'engineering' their knowledge

is very compartmentalised. Coupled with this problem is the nature or manner in which our intake has been educated. In the main their training has been aimed at producing skilled craftsmen/engineers who are working in predictable situations producing predictable solutions. They have been through apprentice schools which have produced good craftsmen through good training techniques.'

Technology Tutor

Much of the course work is different. Frequently students, during the initial stages of the course, find it difficult to come to terms with the 'grey'ness of education in general and of 'designing and making' in particular. The open-ended philosophical discussion surrounding aims and objectives can cause problems as can having a number of effective solutions to a design situation. Students are looking for the 'correct answer', but they soon become aware of the differences in approach as one student pointed out in an evaluative questionnaire:

'Technology, as taught in schools, is vastly different to an HND in Production Engineering.'

Staff in college and school speak highly of the attitude of students to the college-based course and to teaching practice. Mature, motivated and conscientious are words commonly used and the following statement is typical of the staff view:

'It is very rare to find one of our students who isn't committed to working hard. They work long hours and are frequently frightening in their intensity to obtain the best from the course. This attitude probably comes from their maturity and in some cases the considerable sacrifices they have made to train for their new profession.'

Technology Tutor

Students' single-mindedness towards the task of training for teaching can, however, create problems in that there is an expectation that all aspects of the course will be immediately relevant to the classroom and workshop, resulting in more general, but often fundamental, issues being perceived as less important. While there is evidence of this attitude,

particularly in the early stages of the course, it has not been a significant problem, due perhaps to the course structure, which is focussed on the school and closely relates theory and practice, the strong consensus of purpose among staff and the opportunity for reflection which the second year provides.

Stigma or Star

The reputation of the Two Year B.Ed. degree is to a large extent dependent on teacher and LEA perceptions of particular courses and even individual students. It is therefore pleasing to report that the course under discussion has gained a good reputation in the region, schools recognising the value of this type of student:

'We like these students. They have a lot of credibility with pupils. They go into the classroom on a different plane to most young students straight from school.'

Teacher responsible for students
(Secondary School)

While the ability of students to get jobs is not a valid criterion on which to judge a course in a shortage area (all students obtained posts with little difficulty), first impressions from LEAs are reassuring. For example, after interviewing a number of students from the course one adviser made the comment:

'What I like about your students is that they know what they are about.'

LEA Adviser

The student viewpoint as to the adequacy of a two year course has been researched in some detail. While there seems little doubt in the minds of students that two years are sufficient to understand the nature of the subject as taught in schools and to become competent in the skills of teaching, this is sometimes qualified by comments about the heavy workload and the importance of further teaching experience. One student also made the following comment which will be echoed by some teachers:

'The rate of change in Technology is so fast it is difficult for any length of training to be adequate!'

The preceding account is written by two committed members of the course teaching team and therefore it may exhibit weaknesses intrinsic to 'insider' evaluation. It is, however, a commitment built up over a number of years in which they have become convinced that the mature student entering teaching by way of a two year B.Ed. has much to offer schools in general and CDT departments in particular. This view is reinforced by recent work done by Brennan (THES 29.8.86) in which the analysis of data from the CNAAGraduate survey suggests that mature students can benefit more from higher education than school leavers with 'A' levels and:

'Rather than indicating low academic standards, the proportion of mature students on a course is likely to indicate high academic standards.'

Bibliography

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D.E.S. The Initial Qualifications, Circular 2/83.