NATIONAL VISIONS OF INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION?
THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE INITIAL PREPARATION
OF SECONDARY TEACHERS IN ENGLAND, FRANCE AND
SCOTLAND

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SYNOPSIS
This article presents the conceptual analysis which forms the background to an
empirical comparative study which is currently in progress. The study compares
the initial preparation of secondary teachers offered in three postgraduate courses
in France, England and Scotland respectively. It aims to investigate and compare
the conceptual frameworks for initial teacher education (ITE) which underpin
these three training programmes. The conceptual framework for ITE corresponds
to underlying conceptions of the role of the teacher; of teaching as a professional
activity; of what constitutes good practice; of the process of learning to teach and
how best to support it.

“I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data.
Insensibly, one begins to twist facts to suit theories instead of theories to
suit facts.”
Sherlock Holmes

ENGLAND AND FRANCE AS IDEAL EXAMPLES OF DIFFERING WAYS OF CONCEPTUALISING
SECONDARY INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION
The way we conceptualise the role of the teacher in society and the nature of teaching
is going to affect the way we conceive of the professional preparation of teachers.
These conceptions are the product of the socio-cultural and historical backgrounds
of the country in which we live, they also reflect what Elisabeth Dunne (1993) calls
‘current wisdoms’ about what constitutes good practice at a given time and in a
given place.

Harry Judge reports striking evidence of what he calls the ‘different conceptual
Similarly, other researchers produced a certain number of comparative studies
of French and English teachers’ conceptions of their roles, responsibilities and
classroom practices, but also, importantly, of pupils’ experience of schooling and
academic achievements in England and France (Broadfoot, 1996, 1999; Broadfoot
OU, 2000; Panel, 1997). Similarly, Birgit Pepin (1999) efficiently documented
the influence of national traditions in education on teaching styles and pedagogy
in her comparative work on France, England and Germany. All these studies show
evidence that perceptions of the role of the teacher, and the nature of their work, are
very culture-specific. This in turn accounts for the extreme variety of ITE provisions
present across Europe since:

Teacher education is embedded in each nation within the cultures of teaching,
just as teaching is contained within schooling, while schooling is located as one
part (but by no means the only one) of education, which itself reflects, transmits,
and modifies the values of the whole society (Judge, 1988, p.156).

Programmes of initial teacher education are based on assumptions about what
constitutes good teaching at both expert and novice levels, and about the processes
involved in learning to teach. More often than not however these assumptions are influenced by national cultural traditions in education and prevailing political ideologies rather than by a clear understanding of the nature of teaching and the process of learning to teach.

The reform process of ITE, which took place in England and France in the 1990s, provides a clear illustration for this argument. France and England had announced identical objectives for the reform of their ITE arrangements: to train more, to train better and to promote professionalism in teaching. Yet, they adopted radically different methods in order to achieve these objectives. France opted for a two-year postgraduate institution-based training for all teachers with the creation of a higher education institute: the Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maitres (IUFM). England, on the other hand, moved towards a highly school-based ITE provision, especially so for the one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

In the two countries, the governments’ political agendas had a significant impact on the nature of the reforms implemented. The contrasting nature of France and England’s reforms also seems to have originated in differences in their conceptions of the role of the teacher. Bonnet (1996) argues that in the case of France, it looks as if the proper job of teachers is to hand down academic learning irrespective of circumstances, whereas in England, teachers seem to mostly cater for the social and personal needs of pupils. This difference in conceptions partly explains why academic achievement and the acquisition of de-contextualised education theory are still paramount to actual teaching practice and the development of professional skills in France. It could also account for the adoption in England of a more school-based, apprenticeship-like and therefore more individualised form of training. Townsend (1994) reported evidence gathered from HMI official inspection reports, that ITE providers in England have adapted very successfully to the new governmental requirements and that the reformed English ITE provision is consistent with the type of teachers the English education system needs.

Calderhead (1997) states that:

Teacher education in Europe offers a fascinating natural laboratory for educational researchers to explore different ideas and programmes, and the effects of different forms of training (p.2).

Undoubtedly, England and France offer ideal examples of different ways of conceptualising the preparation of secondary teachers. The very fact that their respective postgraduate arrangements for secondary ITE present many more contrasts than similarities was one reason why those two countries were originally selected as relevant subjects for this study. Other factors also motivated this choice. In their 1986 review of research on teacher education, Lasnier and Little reported striking findings about student-teachers’ evaluation of their professional preparation. The studies had been carried out in different institutions in the United States and at different periods, and yet the general trend showed that regardless of the course structure or content, student-teachers universally condemned the lack of connection between theory and practice in their course, and found it difficult to relate the theoretical components of the course to their practical needs and concerns. They usually greatly valued the school-based components of the course however and appeared to relate more easily to their school-based tutors than to their university ones. These same criticisms have since then been reported by Miller and Taylor (1993) in their study of teacher education curricula in Europe. Trainee-teachers around the world appeared to express similar complaints about their otherwise different preparations. It was as if this universal dissatisfaction were the expression of an anxiety inherent to the very nature of the process of learning to teach and symptomatic of the painful construction of trainees’ professional identity (Blanchard-Laville & Nadot, 2000).
Yet, recent comparative studies carried out in the contrasting ITE contexts of England and France provided evidence that various forms of training do in fact result in different levels of satisfaction among trainees. Asher and Malet (1999) reported that opinions about the French ITE course provided at the IUFM were mostly negative. Educational and professional studies modules were condemned by trainees for being removed from the realities of the classroom and miles away from the practical nature of their expectations and needs. English trainees on the other hand seemed generally satisfied with their PGCE course. A majority stressed the quality of the integration of the practical training in schools with the theoretical elements of the course provided at University. Foster’s (1999) findings on school-based ITE in France and England support those of Asher and Malet. He also found that although both French and English student-teachers highly valued the practical aspects of their course, here again, English trainees appeared to be more satisfied than the French. This is hardly surprising given the current emphasis placed on school practice in the English PGCE. The French envied the progressive induction into teaching which their English counterparts enjoyed, the quality of support they received as well as the variety of experiences in schools which they experienced. At the same time, French trainee-teachers still greatly rated the in-depth experience and professional status which their main school-placement (described below) offers. Clearly, if any genuine improvement in initial teacher education is to be achieved, there is a need for more comparative research into training models like those in France and England, especially the impact which various types of school-placements, status and support systems have on the process of learning to teach.

WIDENING THE COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: THE CHOICE OF SCOTLAND

The introduction of a third country, if carefully selected, could provide a relevant and meaningful additional perspective to the comparison and increase the chances of generating worthwhile data. To do so, this country had to present some relevant points of comparison with both the English and the French ITE provision as well as a number of particularities in the way the national preparation of secondary teachers is conceptualised.

Scotland was a scientifically justifiable candidate. Indeed, prior to the introduction of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the prevailing political and economic context in the UK resulted in a certain similarity between Scottish and the British educational policies. Yet as Raffe et al (1999) rightly point out: ‘Scottish education had […] begun to develop as a national system before the union with England in 1707’ which explains its very distinct nature, inclusive of its arrangements for teacher education (p10). Indeed, like in France, higher education in Scotland still plays a substantial part in initial teacher education. Graham (1996) argues that a course which is more university-based

accords a major role to professional studies and sees this component as providing understandings which are fundamental to the production of teachers who are reflective practitioners (cited in McPhee & Humes, 1998, p.167).

McPhee and Humes (1998) point out that there exists significant differences between the status and role which is attributed to educational and professional studies (EPS) in England and Scotland respectively; differences which are reflected in the structure and content adopted in their ITE courses (see below). Scotland has recently initiated a large-scale restructuring of its teaching profession which promotes a new, more holistic conception of the role of the teacher as an educator in the wider sense, and which aims to enhance teaching as a profession. Given the strategic role which ITE plays in the implementation of structural changes to the profession and to the conceptual framework for teaching and learning in Scotland, the first step towards
implementing the announced restructuring was a commitment to produce an ‘all-embracing review’ of the Scottish ITE provision (Deloitte & Touche, 2001, p.14). The first stage of the review was published in June 2001 (ibid.). It maps out the current ITE provision across the country and examines seven areas that most need to be addressed and improved. The integration of Scotland into a study which seeks to investigate different conceptualisations of initial teacher education appears relevant in view of the current Scottish educational context. Additionally, Raffe et al (1999) recently stressed that little educational research had been undertaken into what they call ‘home internationals’. The authors regret that Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland too often see their respective educational policies amalgamated with those of England only. This project offers an opportunity to bring out the specificity of the Scottish ITE provision through a careful study and comparison with its English counterpart.

Like England and France, Scotland has undergone a reform of its ITE provision in the 1990s. In the three countries it resulted in an increase, sometimes substantial, in the school-based component of their training programme. The structure and the content of the secondary ITE postgraduate course and the nature of the partnership between higher education and the schools had to be re-defined to meet the new requirements and ensure a more practical ITE course. These changes had significant consequences on the conceptualisation of the courses in the three countries. Initial teacher education in England has moved towards an apprenticeship model, in which in principle at least, the partnership is very much in favour of the schools. The responsibilities in the partnership which are still officially the remit of the Higher Education Institution are limited to meeting validation and accreditation requirements, ensuring students are assessed for the awards of qualifications and teaching subject studies (DfE, 1992:6).

In France, the structure and content of the training programme changed substantially after the reform, but the IUFM and its training staff enjoy a significant degree of autonomy in the way they interpret the official ‘mission’ of the secondary teacher and in the selection of a relevant knowledge-base for ITE and appropriate training actions (Brisard & Hall, 2001). Scotland however, like France, retained a form of partnership in which the responsibility for the design, delivery and assessment of the training programme still lies to a large extent with the higher education institution. Christie (1999) explains that in Scotland ‘any attempts to change the nature of Initial Teacher Education which are perceived as politically motivated have been resisted, particularly those which could be seen as directly or indirectly threatening to the professional status of teaching (p. 907). He attributes this ‘distinctively Scottish flavour’ to the existence and influence in Scotland of strong professional organisations such as the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC(S)) for instance (ibid.). The Council was created in 1965, and comprises a majority of teachers. It has a responsibility for regulating the entry and standards of the profession and has exerted a significant influence on the work of teacher education institutions in Scotland. Until recently, England did not have such a professional organisation to defend the professional standards of teaching and the professional education of teachers. The Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 introduced a long-awaited General Teaching Council for England (GTC(E)). The new Council will not enjoy the same powers as the GTC for Scotland in relation to Teacher Education however. The GTC(S) has authority to inspect programmes of initial teacher education and is responsible for the accreditation and regular review of courses. It also proposes the criteria for full-registration of teachers, to be approved by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED), and is ultimately responsible for the registration of all teachers in Scotland. In contrast, the GTC(E) has not been granted the right to accredit teacher education courses or to determine the criteria for registration of teachers, and ultimately has to comply with the Secretary of State’s recommendations regarding the registration of teachers (Kirk, 2000: 238-240).
A MEANINGFUL COMBINATION OF CONTRASTS AND SIMILARITIES ACROSS THE THREE PROVISIONS

Three institutions have been selected for this study, one in each country. This research project focuses exclusively on the consecutive model of training for secondary teachers offered in the three countries. At secondary level, England and Scotland provide both a concurrent and a consecutive model of training. In France however, all teachers are trained at postgraduate level and consequently only a consecutive model of training is offered, which lasts two years. The first year at the IUFM however is dedicated to the preparation of the open competition for the Certificat d’Aptitude au Professariat de l’Enseignement du Second degré or CAPES. Only those students who are successful can then proceed to the one-year professional training at the IUFM. This research project will therefore look at a one-year PGCE in England and in Scotland, and the second year of training at a selected IUFM in France.

Several aspects of the course provide evidence of the existence of significant differences in the three countries’ respective visions of the initial preparation of secondary teachers.

These training aspects are:

- The structure of the course
- The nature of the school-placements
- The type of training support available to trainees in the course
- The professional educational studies element of the course
- The activities designed to promote reflection on professional practice
- The assessment and qualification procedures.

Significant differences in the institutions’ respective conceptual frameworks for ITE are reflected in the course structure, principally in the weight given to theory and practice. In postgraduate ITE courses, the emphasis put on practical experience in schools varies from approximately 47 percent in France to 50 percent in Scotland and up to 66 percent in England.

Different conceptualisations of teaching and learning to teach are also evidenced in the nature and organisation of the school-placements. Throughout the entire second year of their ITE course, trainees in France alternate between four to six hours of teaching experience in school in full-responsibility and courses in method, curriculum and educational and professional studies at the IUFM the rest of the time.

In England and Scotland, despite variations in the actual time spent on placement mentioned before, students experience two to three main blocks of what will be referred to as supervised teaching practice in the context of this research, as opposed to teaching practice in full responsibility as experienced by French trainees.

Unlike their French counterparts, English and Scottish trainees do not have their own classes during their blocks of school-experience. Rather they observe and teach in their supervisors’ classes as well as those of other host teachers in the subject department.

French trainees also experience this particular form of placement but for 30 hours only as opposed to 216 hours delivered in full-responsibility in their main placement. They only get to see one school in supervised practice and generally only observe their supervisor’s classes. There also exist variations in the nature of the induction into teaching and of the school-based experience altogether between the three provisions.

The type of support provided to students during the various aspects of the course
also provides clues as to the various conceptual frameworks for ITE at work here. Two categories of teacher educator are common to all three institutions, the school-based subject supervisor and the institution-based subject tutor. Yet significant variations exist in their professional status and background, and in the nature of their work and responsibilities in the training programme.

Of particular interest to the comparison is the role of the regent in Scotland and of the link tutor and professional mentor in England, positions that do not exist in France, and yet are perceived as essential to a successful integration of theory and practice in the course. The professional mentor is school-based and is responsible for the overall organisation of all trainee teachers placed in the school. He or she also organises the delivery of the school-based part of the educational and professional studies modules. The university link tutor is a member of the university, responsible for a cluster of partner schools. He or she acts as the interface between the schools and the university. The role of the regent in Scotland is a combination of these two positions. The Regent however is school-based. Finally the role of peer support in the English course selected and in the short-term supervised teaching practice placement in France also offers an interesting aspect of study since student-teachers of the same discipline are placed in pairs in the placement-school.

As mentioned previously, McPhee & Humes (1998) reported evidence that the nature and importance of professional educational studies in ITE courses in Scotland differ significantly. In England, 25 per cent of the time spent at university is dedicated to Educational and Professional Studies (EPS), which is less than 10 percent of the overall training. Some of the whole-school issues though are delivered by the partner schools on placement. The limited time dedicated to EPS at university can be explained by the choices Higher Education Institutions have had to make in terms of content considering they now only see the students for 12 weeks. In the Scottish institution selected for this study, quite a significant part of the course is spent on various cross-curricular and whole-school issues. For a student being trained in a single subject for example, it would correspond to 33 percent of their course. According to McPhee and Humes (1998) this can be explained by the fact that the presence of educational and professional studies in Scottish Initial Teacher Education courses ‘is expected and commented upon by both the General Teaching Council (GTC) and the Scottish Office Education and Industry (SOEID) when course proposals undergo the respective processes of accreditation and approval without which they are not permitted to run’ (p169).

In France, where the training is the most institution-based (53 percent), approximately 18.5 percent of the overall course is spent on EPS. In the three countries, a wide variety of staff is involved in the delivery of cross-curricular and whole-school issues. Yet while in England and Scotland it is delivered both in schools by the professional mentor or the regent and at university by PGCE staff and lecturers in education, France calls upon a large variety of professionals from within and without the educational field (i.e. social-workers, nurses…) to come to the IUFM to deliver this aspect of the course. Christie (1999) notes that ‘the character of professional studies in ITE courses can be expected to reflect prevailing views about the nature of teaching as a professional activity,’ and consequently about the model of professional teacher the course aims to produce (p. 904). It is interesting to note that Scotland appears to present more similarities with France than with England in this respect. Bourdoncle (1994) argues that the difficulty with the concept of profession and professionalism is that it takes on a different meaning depending on the culture and language in which it is used. Clearly this was yet another factor at the origin of the contrasting nature of the reforms of ITE implemented in France and England in the 1990s which aimed to promote professionalism in teaching. The French ITT provision is based on a conception of the professional teacher characterised by the possession
of seven fundamental competences covering three specific areas labelled as subject matter, teaching and learning strategies and the educational system. The conception of teacher training underlying the Conservative reform and the introduction of the Standards in 1993 in England and Wales was based on a very narrow definition of the professional teacher in which the teacher maintains discipline, delivers the set curriculum and assesses pupils’ achievements against national standards. If the 1998 Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status (TTA, 1998) already did put forward a less restrictive vision of the professional teacher, the new version of the Standards recently published jointly by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is an attempt to put forward a more holistic vision of the professional teacher (TTA & DfES, 2002).

A variety of interpretations of the concept of the professional teacher can also be noted in the strategies adopted to promote the integration of theory and practice in the course such as the professional dissertation in France, the portfolio in the Scottish institution and the school-based collaborative research work in the English institution investigated. In the French conception of the professional teacher for instance, the development of pedagogical discernment and critical thinking through the professional dissertation is at the basis of a true professional identity (Robert & Terral, 2000, p.5).

Finally, the assessment and qualification procedures adopted in the three countries are also worthwhile investigating. Unlike in France, trainee teachers in England and Scotland have a period of probation after completing their one-year preparation in order to be awarded fully qualified teacher status. In England this period lasts one year against two in Scotland. Following the recommendations of the McCrone report however, it will be reduced to one year only in 2002 in an effort to promote quality over quantity. England and Scotland both adopted a competency-based model of training following the reform of their ITE provision in the early 1990s although here too there are important variations in the way they define and use the notion of competence in the course and in the assessment procedure. The French also use the concept of competence in official documentation to provide some common reference as to the role and nature of the work of the professional teacher they aim to train. Unlike the Scottish competences (SOED, 1998) and to some extent also the Standards in England and Wales (TTA, 1998), the French competences outlined in Circular 97-12323 (MEn, 1997) are not generic. The roles attributed to secondary and primary teachers respectively are perceived as very distinct. The French circular sets out three missions of the secondary teacher in schools and nine attendant competences characteristic of good practice to be promoted in ITE course against 117 Standards required for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status in England and Wales (Primary and Secondary). These competences reflect a model of initial teacher education which stems from the traditional French belief that teaching cannot be learned nor be broken down into technical competences (Leselbaum, 1987, p.78). This underlying assumption might also explain why a school-placement in full-responsibility for 4 to 6 hours a week and for the entire school-year has been adopted in France although its introduction in the mid 1980s had probably more to do with providing the education system with additional manpower at a time of teacher shortage. The French competences are not to be used straightforwardly for assessment purposes because they are not expected to be achieved fully by the end of the training programme. It is left to the IUFM and teacher educators to determine for each subject, what constitutes good practice at ITE level and how student-teachers’ professional development will be assessed at the end of their preparation. This varies considerably from the discrete Standards for the Award of QTS in England and Wales which ‘have been written to be specific, explicit and assessable’ to present a reliable basis for assessment (TTA, 1998, p.2). The Scottish Guidelines for ITE courses were
set out as a framework for the design and implementation of ITE courses by teacher education institutions and schools but also as a basis for the assessment of trainee teachers through the 40 generic competences it sets out. Unlike the TTA Standards however, it is left to the training institutions and the schools to work out how the competences will be assessed.

Several sources of data can help identify the nature of conceptual framework for ITE which underpins the training programme adopted in each of the three national institutions selected as well as the factors which influence its nature and implementation into training contents and actions.

Governmental conceptions of what constitutes good practice at novice or expert levels are published in official ITE policy documents which regulate all training courses. In France, a 1997 circular sets out the Mission and Competences expected from secondary teachers at the end of their initial preparation (MEn, 1997). French teachers are responsible for the instruction, education and social integration of their pupils. As civil servants, they are entrusted with the transmission of a nationally defined curriculum as well as values concerned with citizenship and with the ideals of the République. As professionals, they ought to possess a high level of subject knowledge, be self-reflective and committed to life long learning. In Scotland, the Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education were published by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department in 1993 and 1998 and present a conception of Scottish teachers as ‘knowledgeable, critical and positively committed to professional life, as well as being technically skilled practitioners’ (Kirk & Cameron-Jones, 1994, p.409). The Guidelines have been incorporated in a recent document which sets out the Benchmark Standards for Initial Teacher Education in Scotland (QAAHE, 2000). The most prescriptive document however states the Standards for the Award of Newly Qualified Teacher Status for England and Wales (TTA, 1998b). The Standards are part of the Requirements for Courses of Initial Teacher Education (TTA, 1998a) and were largely criticised for promoting a vision of teaching mostly reduced to ‘a technical activity focusing on a combination of specialised subject expertise and management skills’ (Judge et al, 1994, p.227). As mentioned earlier, in February 2002, the Teacher Training Agency and the DfES published a revised version of the Standards, to be implemented in September 2002 and which stem from a desire to put a greater emphasis on ‘professional values’ as well as to streamline the course requirements and provide guidance on the national curriculum for ITT and the Standards for QTS for ITE providers (TTA & DI, 2002). The progressive implementation, in England and Scotland, of the official conceptual frameworks for ITE posited in these policy documents has limited the scope of freedom available at institutional level when it comes to conceptualising and designing ITE courses. Yet, there is evidence that the introduction of highly demanding requirements for ITE courses in England does not necessarily prevent teacher educators and schools to design and implement their own intrinsic conceptual framework for ITE, which Lambert and Totterdell (1995, 1998) believe

... is an essential pre-requisite of the more effective advocacy of a broad-based teacher education as opposed to a narrower view of training in operational competence (Totterdell & Lambert, 1998, p.351).

Whether for the best or not, it appears therefore that individual conceptions on teaching and learning to teach held by the various teacher educators involved in ITE courses probably provides vital clues as to what the reality of ITE provision is.

The degree of autonomy which institutions have in the conceptualisation of ITE courses varies across the three countries. Institutional autonomy lies in the choice of what is conceived as an appropriate knowledge-base for learning to teach as well as suitable training actions to facilitate the acquisition of this professional
knowledge and to promote the development of adequate professional practice. The conceptual framework for ITE is also reflected in the balance between the theoretical and practical contents of the course and the extent to which they inform each other to support the process of learning to teach. As such, individual conceptions held on these key issues by the various teacher trainers involved in the course play a significant part in shaping the conceptual framework which underpins the whole training programme.

NOTES
1. The actual sources are not mentioned, but evidence for this argument can be found in HMI, 1991 and 1993 as well as OFSTED, 1993.
3. Now the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED).

REFERENCES


You can apply for Initial Teacher Training programmes to graduate with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Bachelor of Education (BEd) degrees are a popular route for prospective primary school teachers, but some universities do offer secondary-level BEd programmes for certain specialisms. Alternatively, you could study for a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BSc). Prospective secondary teachers would spend still more time on the subjects they were preparing to teach, with less than 10 percent of their time devoted to practice teaching and special methods. Such a subject emphasis for secondary teachers can be found in many countries. In countries where technical or vocational education forms an important part of secondary school provision, there have sometimes been specialist institutions for the training of teachers for this work. Nearly all the universities in England and Wales that now offer the bachelor of education degree for college of education students include technical subjects within their list of approved options.