Marta Kowalczuk-Walędziak
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Rethinking Teacher Education for the 21st Century

Trends, Challenges and New Directions

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Chapter 8

Initial Teacher Education Policies: A Comparison between Italy and the UK. Recent Trends and Future Prospects

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ABSTRACT: European education systems are facing tricky challenges; both the aims and the structures of them must be rethought from the roots. The European education systems (and, above all, the Italian one) leave many students behind intellectually, civically and morally. Educational leaders disagree about *why* this is so. Teacher education policies could have a great impact in facing these educational challenges. The topic is debated in many EU countries where education policy makers are wondering even more frequently about the best ways to attract young, prepared, and motivated graduates to the teaching profession. Through an analysis of the Italian and English legislation and policy documents, this paper will draw a comparison between the two countries, highlighting some of the main recent reforms and future prospects concerning teacher education policies, in order to think out of the box and learn from each other about what matters and what works in different contexts, and imagine new paths and future prospects for a better initial teacher education system.
KEYWORDS: initial teacher education, education policies, comparative education, work-related learning, Law no. 107/2015

Introduction

In our complex and global societies, European education systems are facing tricky challenges. In the face of profound and epochal changes, both the aims and the structures of European education systems must be rethought from the roots. European education systems (and, above all, the Italian

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one) leave many students behind intellectually, civically and morally. Educational leaders disagree about *why* this is so. Concerning this key issue, teacher education policies could have a great impact in facing these educational challenges (Ellis and Orchard, 2014; Evans, 2013; Furlong, Cochran-Smith, and Brennan, 2009). Over the last years, attention to the teaching profession, teachers and teacher education has increased, also becoming an important matter debated at European level (European Commission, 2013). With the teaching profession currently evolving and facing "a number of challenges, including an ageing population, variable working conditions and negative views of the profession" (OECD, 2015b, p. 88), in many European Countries policy makers are wondering about the best ways to attract young, prepared and motivated graduate students to the teaching profession. But this is the broad European context. Within this general framework, there are profound differences among the initial teacher education systems of the individual States, from the historical, pedagogical, institutional and political point of view. This is the case in Italy and England, and this paper will focus on a comparison between these two countries which have a very different initial teacher education system, and are both currently involved in some recent attempts at reform.

In England, for example, in the next few years there will be a real shortage of teachers in some geographical areas and disciplinary sectors (House of Commons, 2017) and the current challenge is how to attract a greater number of motivated and talented young people to the teaching profession (European Commission, 2014).

On the contrary, in Italy, the situation appears instead diametrically opposite. Due to teacher education and recruitment policies occurring over a period of time, "in a chaotic way often under the pressure of needs and demands unrelated to the enhancement and improvement of the quality of the school system" (Saltari, 2014), Italy has to deal with the legacy of the past decades – a legacy that today means a long waiting list of temporary teachers waiting for permanent employment. In the last few years, a massive operation has been launched for the recruitment of teachers in Italy. Thanks to the extraordinary occupational plan required by Law no. 107/2015, almost 100,000 temporary teachers were hired during the autumn of 2015, over 63,000 in 2016, and over 51,000 in 2017. The overcoming of some heavy legacies of the past (Bertagna, 2017), combined with the fall of decades of "ideological barriers" (Bertagna, 2015), seemed, until a few years ago, to suggest the unfolding of a favourable space for the discussion

of genuinely reforming perspectives of the Italian system of initial teacher education. Instead, despite a huge effort of economic resources, what has been defined as an "institutionalized precariousness" (Gremigni, 2013) remains prevailing.

Someone might wonder, why make a comparison between two such different systems? Why not compare two more similar systems (such as, for example, the French and the Italian ones)? The answer is simple: because, in order to think about other paradigms and experiences it is useful, from a comparative education perspective (Argentin and Giancola, 2013; Cowen-Kazamias, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Larsen, 2010; Manzon, 2011, 2018; Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal, 2003; Sayer, 2006), to look at the English case, which is very different from the Italian one and for this reason particularly interesting for an Italian observer (Magni, 2018). In this way, it will be possible overcome some historical paradigms that seem indisputable and unreformable, to think out of the box and imagine new paths and future prospects for a better initial teacher education system in Italy. In fact, as has been emphasized at the international level, "the teaching challenges posed by higher expectations for learning and greater diversity of learners around the globe will likely be better met if nations can learn from each other about what matters and what works in different contexts" (Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 307).

The way in which teacher training is structured in England, its historical evolution and the pedagogical paradigms attached to its different training paths, and the role that, in this context, it plays in the constant relationship between theory and practice or between schools and universities has much to teach the Italian case and the regulations resulting from Law no. 107/2015.

The recent reforms in Italy

In the last few years the Italian government – through Law No. 107/2015 and Legislative Decree No. 59/2017 – tried to change the system of initial teacher education for secondary teachers (Magni, 2017). There have been no changes for the initial teacher education for primary school teachers; the current model requires that after the five-year Master's degree in primary education, during which there are also periods of traineeship, and the achievement of qualified teacher status, it is possible to take part in national competitions, in order to obtain a public employment in a school as a teacher.

Otherwise, for the initial teacher education of secondary school teachers, the new (consecutive) scheme provides that, after a Master's degree (3+2 years) and the overcoming of additional university exams (for a total of 24 credits in disciplinary fields such as pedagogy, anthropology, psychology, didactics, or special education), candidates sit a national examination. After that, if the examination has been passed, the aspiring teacher is hired with a three-year fixed-term contract at a school and, at the same time, enrolled in a three-year teacher education course which is university-based. During these three years, the teacher-trainee has to attend university courses (60 CFU, university credits), carry out an internship (10 CFU) and gain the teacher qualification (1 year). Then, during the second and third years, the student/trainee has to carry out a research project (Action Research), attend university lessons in innovation and educational experimentation (15 CFU) and some workshops (9 CFU). During the second year the student/trainee can teach as a substitute for a maximum of fifteen days. During the third year he/she can teach in school as a substitute teacher. Finally, at the end of the third year, the student/trainee is employed as a full-time permanent teacher.

The Italian way to become a secondary teacher is very long (thirteen years of primary and secondary education + five years of university courses for a master's degree + 24 CFU university exams + the national examination + three years of initial teacher training). For young Italians it is impossible to begin to teach before the age of 28. Furthermore, there is only one way to become a teacher and it is very uncertain because candidates have to wait for the results of the national public examination. Moreover, Italian teachers are the oldest in the European Union: in 2015, more than 57% of teachers in Italy were aged over 50 (UE 36%) and more than 18% were aged 50–60 (UE 9%) (Eurostat, 2017).

All of this is not only about the teacher education system, but reveals the underlying values and priorities of a given socio-political context. In fact,

> an analysis of the teacher education policy in any state system is deeply revealing of the currently dominant values within that society. Through defining how and where teachers should be prepared for their work and sometimes through prescribing exactly what they should know and be able to do, we see how those in power in society are seeking to shape the world for future citizens (Menter, 2016, p. 3).

Recent trends in teacher education in England: theory *vs.* practice?

The English case is very interesting from an Italian perspective. First of all because there are multiple and diversified roads into teaching. Secondly, there is a constant relationship between theory and practice. Then, there are the partnerships existing between schools and universities. Moreover, compared to the Italian case, it is a shorter, less uncertain path into teaching, with a greater choice of different options.

Starting from the relationship between theory and practice, in her foreword to a recent book about teacher education, Cochran-Smith (2016) identifies in "the practice turn", one of the five trends in current educational policies for teacher training in England. She writes:

> the practice turn has emerged internationally in the face of mounting claims that college and university preparation programmes have failed to produce effective teachers in part because of the long-perceived 'gap' between theory and practice. The notion of a 'theory-practice gap' is based on the perceived failure of the university model of teacher education, which presumably emphasizes theory, values and belief at the expense of actual teaching practice, thus leaving new teachers on their own to implement or translate theory into practice (Cochran-Smith, 2016, p. xiii).

Similarly, other authors (Mattsson, Eilertsen, and Rorrison, 2011; Reid, 2011) recognize that teacher education reforms are internationally placing much greater emphasis on learning to teach in extended practice periods in schools.

Firstly, we must remember that in England, as early as the 19th Century,

> a classroom-based apprenticeship model of teacher preparation was favoured. […] Recent governments of all political persuasions have […] once again pursued a more extensively work-place model of teacher pre-service and continuing professional learning (McNamara, Murray, and Jones, 2014, p. 1).

Although the English teacher education system has a long-standing model based on pupil-teacher apprenticeship, between the 1970s and 1990s, "teacher education became increasingly academic and its relationship with practical teaching skills became extremely tenuous" (ibid., p. 185).

The last thirty years have been a period of unremitting change for pre-service teacher education in England. This period has been seen as a "pendulum swing" (Murray et al., 2016), "away from the dominance

of higher education institutions (HEIs) towards a greater role for schools and teachers in the formation of beginning teachers" (Mutton, Burn, and Menter, 2017, p. 14). And the path chosen by recent English governments, of all political persuasions, has increasingly moved up towards a workplace model of initial teacher education.

Until the mid-eighties,

> initial teacher education in England was the exclusive province of higher education; government automatically recognized university-validated qualifications for the formal award of 'Qualified Teacher Status'. […] The following ten years were a period of intense struggle and confrontation between government and higher education, a struggle which higher education eventually lost (Furlong et al., 2009, p. 46).

Firstly, in 1984, the establishment of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, the prescription of minimum periods of school-based training (DES, 1984; DES, 1989) to widen "practical preparation of teachers, involving more classroom experience" (Craft, 1984, p. 338), and the introduction of the notion of 'accreditation' was the first major state intervention into pre-service teacher training. Particularly, the latter has been used to diversify training provision in order to include school-based routes and later for the introduction of School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) in 1993. The new routes were also intended to widen and diversify the pool of applicants to teaching.

But for a first period that lasted several years, these new routes into teaching had very limited impact and traditional routes offered through universities and colleges of education were the vast majority. Furthermore, after a long history of attempts (DES, 1983; McNair, 1944), partnerships between schools and universities in teacher education began to develop as voluntary relationships with formal agreements (for example in 1987 the *Oxford Internship Scheme* was launched (Benton, 1990)). Then, the circulars 9/1992 (DfE, 1992) and 14/1993 (DfE, 1993) mandated a statutory requirement for higher education institutions to build up partnerships with schools, with the expectation that they would "exercise a joint responsibility for the planning and management of courses and the selection, training and assessment of students" (DfE, 1992, paragraph 14, see also Mutton et al., 2008). Nonetheless, as claimed by some authors, the model has probably shifted from entirely university-led to entirely school-led (Furlong et. al., 2000).

Meanwhile, in 1994 the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education was replaced with the Teacher Training Agency (it is to be noted

the shift from the term 'education' to 'training'). The Agency re-launched work-based routes (called 'Employment Based Initial Teacher Training'), which reached around 20% in the late 2000s.

During the following years, there was a general deregulation of the English education system and "a shift in location of initial and continuing professional learning from university to school, with increasing interest in learning that occurs outside structured, pre-determined curricula and [teachers undertaking] ever more varied roles" (McNamara, Murray, and Jones, 2014, p. 193).

In June 2010, the Secretary of State for Education in England, Michael Gove, announced his intention to "reform teacher training to shift trainee teachers out of college and into the classroom" (DfE, 2010), because of his belief that "teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice, observing a master craftsman or woman" (Gove, 2010). Just two weeks earlier, Gove had announced the abolition of the General Teaching Council of England, a little over ten years after it had been created.

Despite other documents (DfE, 2011a; DfE, 2011b; DfE, 2012; House of Commons, 2012) and reassuring noises about the continuing role of universities in the teacher education process from the document *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010), the English government promoted more school-based initial teacher training pathways.

This happened despite the fact that not only were there criticisms and misgivings by some commentators who noted that "postgraduate pre-service teachers already spend two-thirds of their training in the workplace on professional placement" (McNamara, Murray, and Jones, 2014, p. 183), but also Ofsted itself, the government's own inspectorate of pre-service teacher education, in its 2010 annual report had estimated that "there was more outstanding initial teacher education delivered by higher education-led partnerships than by school-centred initial teacher training partnerships and employment-based routes" (Ofsted, 2010, p. 59). These inspections found that 46.8% of the 64 higher education institutions inspected were deemed outstanding, compared to 39.0% of employment-based routes and 22.7% of school-centred routes. Even if it is true that there was "any evidence that a further increase in the proportion of practice-based training (over and above the two-thirds currently mandated) will automatically and inevitably lead to better quality learning for pre-service teachers" (McNamara, Murray, and Jones, 2014, p. 184), this was the path undertaken by the recent English governments. Questions such as: 'What do teachers learn on-the-job?' and

'How, if at all, do they learn from experience?' are still "the central problem in policy-making and professional practice" (Ellis and Orchard, 2014, p. 1).

Training teachers who are able to think then act, and *vice versa*, and are able to judge and redesign their own acts, is increasingly crucial in face of the new challenges in the global context (Bertagna, 2016; Magni, 2016). But if there is, on the one hand, a wide agreement internationally about the importance of a good and effective initial teacher education, there is, on the other, "a wide range of views about how to develop it" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012, p. 151), even if it is possible to recognize the most recent trends of evolution in initial teacher education around the world. And this may explain the great variety of different attempts at teacher training in the English system.

Multiple roads into teaching

To understand the great success that work-based learning has in England and the preference for a differentiated system, it is perhaps useful to refer to the figure of Ellen Wilkinson, Minister of Education from 1945 to 1947. One of her last acts before her death in 1947 was to compose a foreword to a Ministry pamphlet entitled *The New Secondary Education*, in which she defended "the uniqueness of the individual child, and the necessity of developing forms of education that could relate to individual needs and interests" (Jones, 2016, p. 22). Commenting on her proposals for reform, she wrote: "these plans put the child first. […] Their variety is designed to suit different children, not different income groups […] No child must be forced into an academic education which bores it to rebellion, merely because that type of grammar school education is considered more socially desirable by parents" (Wilkinson, 1947, pp. 3–4); "some are attracted by the abstract approach to learning", while others, the majority, "learn most easily by dealing with concrete things" (ibid., p. 23). This is reflected in the second characteristic of the English system, very different from the Italian one: the multiple, differentiated roads into teaching.

In England, the percentage of teachers trained through 'alternative routes' compared to the academic one has increased from about 2% in 1997 to 20% in 2009 and continues to grow to over 50% in recent years (Whitty, 2014). This is a diversification, however, which not only concerns the initial phase but which continues during the professional development of the teacher: "we see an increasingly differentiated teaching workforce both

by route of entry and by nature of the responsibility" (Childs and Mender, 2013, p. 102).

To name a few routes to teaching, in addition to the undergraduate route (provided by Higher Education institutions), England has *School-centred Initial Teacher Training* (SCITT), *School Direct*, *Teach First*, *Troops to Teachers*, *Researchers in Schools* (RiS), *Future Teaching Scholars*, *Now Teach*, *Premier Pathways and the new Postgraduate teaching apprenticeship*, starting from September 2018 (Magni, 2018).

Among the new different routes to become teachers recently introduced in the English education system, one of them is called *School Direct*. What is new about this teacher education programme is the fact that it gives to individual schools, rather than universities, the possibility to choose – with a broad discretion – their candidates for certification, and then the possibility to train their teachers *directly* in the schools.

School Direct is an innovative route into teaching, introduced in 2012/2013 and designed to enable schools to take a leading role in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), whilst still working in close partnership with an accredited ITE provider, like universities. After one-year of full-time training, the 'apprentice-teacher' gains Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). On successful completion of the *School Direct* program there is an expectation that trainees will be offered employment, either by the school in which they trained or elsewhere within the group of schools involved in the *School Direct* provision. However, this employment is not guaranteed. *School Direct* provides a real period of practical training to be carried out directly in schools after graduation, starting with what has been called a 'deep dive approach' to school life. In this way it would be possible to pursue two main goals: on the one hand to carry out a model of dual education in teacher education, which links simultaneously theory and practice; on the other, to promote and support the greater autonomy of schools. Despite some concerns (Wilson, 2013), *School Direct* has been a great success, growing from 722 apprentices-teachers in 2012/2013 up to 17,609 in 2015/2016.

Future prospects

The English case can be a touchstone for those educational systems – like the Italian one – still too uniform, rigid and centralized. In fact, in the face of a global perspective and current 'liquid' and complex societies (Bauman, 2001), in order to sustain wide improvement in education systems "societies

are increasingly demanding strategies characterized by diversity, flexibility and choice" (Hopkins, 2013, p. 64). As it has been noted,

> future-oriented pedagogies involve large measures of collaborative and creative problem-focused learning to release wide-ranging talents for innovation and to liberate teachers and learners from bureaucratic constraints. […] Indeed, a broader and less constricted curriculum and system of assessment are needed to facilitate reformed methods of teaching. […] Smarter pedagogies and a more adequate organization of schools and teaching will bring significant improvements to knowledge, skills and competences that are needed for raising national economic competitiveness and increasing ecological sustainability. Specifically, well-developed teaching methods include cooperative learning, problem-based learning and creative problem-solving (Sahlberg and Oldroyd, 2010, p. 296).

Therefore, the English teacher education system appears profoundly distant to, and full of suggestions and ideas from, the system currently in force in Italy (as well as from the one being implemented after the recent legislation). It is still too centralized, uniform; initial training paths for secondary teachers are too long, expensive and uncertain, not only in their final outcome, but also in the timing of their beginnings. Moreover, a system such as the Italian one, where theory and practice remain separated, where school and university are distant and mutually suspicious, where the prospect of work-based learning is still a mirage, generates an absurd fragmentation (Hudson, 2017), worthy only of nineteenth or twentieth century logic.

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