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Helga Eng lecture 2015: What is a teacher in the 21st century and what does a 21st century teacher need to know?

Abstract

There is now almost universal recognition around the world that 'teaching matters' and that the quality of teaching is crucial in social and economic development. However, there has been remarkably little change in the ways in which teachers' work is constructed and the ways in which teachers are educated for a lifetime of preparing young people for their future worlds. In this paper¹ Ian Menter reflects on debates about the nature of teaching and teacher education in order to challenge much of the dominant thinking, suggesting that such thinking is often driven by ideology and prejudice rather than by careful deliberation or by the use of research evidence. His conclusion is that there are important underlying values that can be traced through the history of teaching which may now be more important than ever, but that the ways in which these values are embodied in the work of contemporary teachers are in need of major reconsideration.

Keywords: professional knowledge; social and technological change; globalisation; teacher education

Figure 1. Helga Eng

Introduction

There have been many great women who have played a part in the development of teacher education and Helga Eng was clearly one of them. Her approach started from children - she was deeply interested in how children learn and develop. Most famously she focused on how children's drawing demonstrated their growing understanding of the world around them (Eng, 1931). This was a key interest for many who believed that education should be 'child-centred', although of course that term, in some European countries at least, has become somewhat discredited, as such approaches have often been stereotyped as being romantic and sentimental (see Cox & Dyson, no date, for example). But education that focuses on the learner does not have to be either of these things - indeed it is difficult to see how any education that is humane and concerned with individual development can do anything other than start from the learner and his or her attributes, dispositions and needs. In other words it all depends what you mean by child- or learner-centred approaches (Entwistle, 1970).

Although it is not only women educators and teacher educators that have emphasised the need to focus on the learner, it is certainly the case that that has been a common characteristic of many of those great women who have made major contributions. I am thinking of Maria Montessori in Italy (Montessori, 1912), Susan Isaacs and both Rachel and Margaret McMillan in England (see Giardiello, 2013, for an account of all four), or more recently, Sylvia Ashton-Warner in New Zealand (Ashton-Warner, 1966) and Sybil Marshall (Marshall, 1963) in England. Also, in England, many of the principals of the colleges of education during the twentieth century were women, including Winifred Mercier at Whitelands College of Education² (Grier, 1937). And if we look to the USA, so influential in teacher education research at present, three of the most important contributors are women: Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Linda Darling-Hammond and Gloria Ladson-Billings (Cochran-Smith, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Helga Eng became known for her commitment to 'universal, realistic humanism', a wonderful term that I would argue could be applied to the educational thinking of all of the women whom I have mentioned. An important part of that commitment - implied by universal and realistic is a commitment to communication and to the wider community. In other words, this is not just education for the individual but education through the individual for the benefit of the wider society.

So I believe that the focus of my talk connects very closely to Professor Eng's interests - including her commitment to research grounded in the reality of children and young people's lives as well as to education for all.

In this paper I work through the following five themes –

1. The politicisation of teaching
2. The (changing) nature of teaching
3. The importance of research
4. Underlying values
5. Enduring themes in teacher education

My conclusion will therefore concern the nature of 21st century teaching and what we should be concerned with teachers in this century knowing.

The politicisation of teaching

However, before we examine the core questions of my talk - concerning the nature of teaching and of teachers' knowledge, let us acknowledge how the wider policy context affecting teachers and their work has changed in the late 20th century and into the 21st, in the days since Helga Eng lived and worked.

In essence it is now widely recognised that:

- i. education has become much more of a political issue than it was formerly;
- ii. teaching is at the heart of questions of education quality: the nature of teacher education is therefore very significant;
- iii. there are global influences on education and teaching throughout the world - both in what we call the developed world and in the developing world.

These universally acknowledged truths are respectively evidenced by:

- i. observing any general election;
- ii. the importance that politicians attach to transnational reports such as those produced by McKinsey (Barber & Mourshed, 2007); and
- iii. by the overwhelming influence of transnational comparisons such as those provided by the OECD's PISA (see: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>).

As calm and objective analysts of these matters, we may have some deep concerns about the ways in which political ideologies impinge on education, how major corporations may have motives that are not entirely altruistic (Ball, 2012) and how flawed some of the interpretations of PISA may be (e.g. Mortimore, 2009). But that is the real world we are living in and that is the world children are growing up in and the world in which new teachers are being prepared for their careers.

The Finnish educator Pasi Sahlberg has of course managed to capture a great deal of this in his term 'The GERM', the Global Education Reform Movement, which, in its epidemiological spread around the world, has at least the following five characteristics, all of which can be detected in some shape or form in most of the education systems around the world:

- Standardization
- Increased focus on core subjects
- Prescribed curriculum
- Transfer of models from the corporate world
- High-stakes accountability policies

(Sahlberg, 2011, pp. 99-106)

Sahlberg notes that these trends have been far less apparent in Finland itself, where of course there had been consistently successful outcomes in terms of PISA results. Furthermore, very recently we may see that the report of the Ludvigsen Committee into the future of education in Norway (Ludvigsen, 2015), may be seen as something of a challenge to this direction of travel, with its focus on 'deep learning' and interdisciplinarity.

The reason that education has become so important in global politics is because of the widely held view that economic progress and development are very dependent on educational progress. In the developing world this may still be manifest through the prioritisation of raising levels of basic literacy and numeracy. In the developed world however, this the focus may be much more on the so-called 'knowledge economy', where knowledge itself becomes a new form of capital (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). Education therefore is about developing the technical knowledge and intellectual skills that lead to success in economic competitions.

So, in short, neoliberalism - for that is the best label for these economic, political and social phenomena - has become the dominant ideology across the western world (Harvey, 2007). Even in the formerly communist countries we see evidence of marketisation being increasingly prevalent. Indeed, somewhat against this trend, it is in parts of Scandinavia where some of the last bastions of social democracy tenaciously linger. As the European historian, the late Tony Judt put it, as he was contrasting the trust and cooperation which is typical of social democracy, with the competition and division typical of more marketised societies:

...the fact remains that trust and cooperation were crucial building blocks for the modern state, and the more trust there was the more successful the state. (Judt, 2011, p. 70)

The kind of society where trust is widespread is likely to be fairly compact and homogenous. The most developed and successful welfare states of Europe are Finland, Sweden, Denmark³, the Netherlands and Austria, with Germany (formerly West Germany) an interesting outlier.... (Judt, 2011, p. 67)

But across the world, this neoliberal polity has been the underpinning to sustain a broadly capitalist economic system, driven by markets and by profit, an essential feature of which is differentiation within the population in terms of ownership and levels of income. Inequality is an inevitable dimension of neoliberalism and this inequality continues to be both *within* nation states (although greatly exaggerated in some states more than others) and *between* nation states and indeed between economic *blocs* around the world.

My own view therefore is that while the visible politics may have changed - and this includes putting education much more centrally into the mix - the underlying economic system pertains much as it did throughout the twentieth century. Significant social inequalities remain, regional conflicts continue, forced (and 'unforced') migrations ensue, poverty persists. And of course we do also have a new challenge in the form of climate change and the need for environmental sustainability.

The (changing) nature of teaching

Against this backdrop of shifting dominant political and educational values, but continuing economic and social challenges, how has the work of teachers changed? As politicians have become increasingly involved in educational policy we have seen accelerating rates of reform in curriculum, assessment and pedagogy (invoking Bernstein's three educational 'message systems', Bernstein, 1972).

In England there is currently great concern about retaining teachers in the profession. On the 23 October 2015 we saw two stories in the news⁴.

Over half of teachers consider quitting

A YouGov poll of more than 1,000 primary and secondary teachers in England, commissioned by think-tank LKMCO and Pearson UK, has found that three in five teachers have thought about quitting in the past six months, with science teachers being the most likely to want to leave. Three-quarters said the workload gave them doubts, while a quarter disliked the culture of schools. Three in 10 said they do not feel they get enough support and 27% said poor pupil behaviour was putting them off. Being unhappy with the quality of leadership and management and insufficient pay were also cited as reasons. The most common reason for choosing to train as a teacher was that people think they will be good at it. Teachers said their main reason for staying in teaching was feeling they were having an impact, with 92% saying the opportunity to make a difference was a major motivation.

The Independent, Page: 10 *Daily Express*, Page: 10 *Yorkshire Post*, Page: 1

On the same day

Stressed teachers being "reduced to tears"

Stressed teachers are being reduced to tears and not being helped with their workload, says Mary Bousted, general secretary of the ATL. Writing in the Times Educational Supplement, Dr Bousted said how she was "silenced" by a man who told her how worried he was about his primary school teacher partner and called on head teachers to back their staff while ministers have pledged to reduce unnecessary workloads. Brian Lightman, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, agreed there was no doubt the whole teaching profession, from the newly qualified teacher to the senior leader, was under considerable pressure. A DfE spokesman said teaching remained a hugely popular profession, with the highest numbers of people joining since 2008, but acknowledged that "it is vital schools have systems in place to help limit stress for staff, and provide appropriate support if needed".

BBC News

These stories emanate from England and it is becoming increasingly clear that England is something of a special case in these matters (see Teacher Education Group, 2016), even if workload issues are a concern among teachers in many parts of the world. As I have noted before elsewhere, the particular ways in which these political changes have impacted on teaching and teacher education does seem to vary significantly and relates to the relationships that exists within civil society between professionals and politicians - as well as with the wider community and the mass media (Menter, 2016). My usual exemplar of these differences is the comparison between England and Scotland, two parts of the so-called United Kingdom (Hulme & Menter, 2011). Just five years ago we saw very different approaches to the reform of teaching and teacher education in these two contiguous countries. In England the then Secretary of State, Michael Gove - a politician of course - set out a view of teaching as essentially a craft, to be learned in apprenticeship style, or as he put it, 'on the job', from existing teachers. In The White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010), he wrote:

Teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman. Watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best route to acquiring mastery in the classroom.

More or less at the same time in Scotland, the former Chief Inspector of Education, Graham Donaldson - a professional educationist of course, rather than a politician - set out a view of teaching as a complex intellectual activity to be learned through serious study of education and of the teaching of the subject as well as through practical experience in school settings (Donaldson, 2011). He wrote in his report of teachers as:

reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals who have the capacity to engage fully with the complexities of education and to be key actors in shaping and leading educational change. (p. 4)

How can it be that two such different views exist in these two 'advanced' nations that are part of the same wider political unit? Is it simply that one view was expressed by a politician and the other was expressed by a very experienced professional? We should remember that in the latter case it was a politician, the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Education, who had commissioned the professional concerned to undertake a review - in other words there was a political decision behind the report. I would argue that the differences in these publicly stated views of teaching and how they come to be 'acceptable' expressions in each country can only be understood through a wider analysis of the social and cultural positioning of public education and of the occupation of teaching in these two nations (Menter, 2014; Menter & Hulme, 2008). In England teachers had become increasingly the objects of a 'discourse of derision' (Ball, 1994) in the mass media and through a relentless series of pamphlets from rightwing thinktanks, at least since the 1970s (Whitty & Menter, 1989). This had created an extended 'moral panic' within an increasingly competitive world of education where parents are made to feel increasingly anxious about mainstream provision. Indeed a recent study suggests that 27% of children aged 10-18 have private tutors hired by their families with the aim of enhancing the children's examination results (Todd, 2015). In Scotland on the other hand, where public education had long been a significant pillar of Scottish distinctiveness (along with law and the church), education continued to be highly valued by the wider community as a social good, which was offered fairly to all and provided access to opportunity for improvement (Humes & Bryce, 2013). Thus both schools and universities are more highly regarded and indeed continue to be trusted in a way which has been eroded in England during the late twentieth century. It is only these kinds of differences that can explain such starkly differing public pronouncements on the nature of teaching and therefore such widely differing approaches to teacher education that ensue.

But if there are stark differences in approach between these two nations, there is one element that they have which is very much in common. That is in the view that a teacher has responsibility for conveying knowledge to children. Whilst many reviews of teacher education do refer to such elements as 'technological change', they do not challenge the continuing understanding that teachers work in schools, where children are brought together in large numbers and that most of the work of teaching is done in classrooms with teachers taking charge of learning for particular periods of time. That is to say, the fundamentals of the organisation of state education are not being challenged, at least in the context of national reports. And these fundamentals have pertained since the late nineteenth century.

More recently, in Wales, we have seen very concerted attempts to align curriculum/assessment reform (Donaldson, 2015) with teacher education reform (Furlong, 2015) through ensuring that those leading different aspects of reform are in regular discussion with each other and with the wider range of stakeholders. But even here, it is doubtful whether we see any genuinely radical reorganisation or reconstruction of the nature of teaching or of education systems.

Does this mean that current systems are indeed fit for purpose and that this late nineteenth century invention is indeed the most successful part of what the Anglo-Welsh cultural theorist Raymond Williams described as 'The Long Revolution' (Williams, 1961/2011)? If we turn to Williams' analysis of the development of state education in Britain (especially England), we can see the continuing influence of the three social forces that he detected influencing that development. These forces were in constant tension with each other and the evolving education system was a result of the continuously revised 'settlements' between them. The three influences were: first, the 'old humanist' forces which emphasised the passing on of a body of knowledge drawn from the culture - usually 'high' culture; second, the 'public educators', who emphasised the importance of education for citizenship, having a literate and numerate population so that all could contribute to social development; and third, the 'industrial trainers', who prioritised the economic importance of education in supplying an appropriately prepared workforce to sustain the economy into the future.

So, if these forces continue to operate today - although perhaps it is the industrial trainers who have been in the ascendancy over recent decades - how should we expect these 21st century challenges to be influencing policy and practice? The endurance of the basic organisational units of schooling is really quite extraordinary given the amount of technological and social change that we have seen. So perhaps the question we should ask is: How might we **expect** that the dramatic new challenges of the late 20th and early 21st centuries to impinge on the work of teachers?

If globalisation is a wider political and economic process that does more to shape the context for education, it is perhaps within these late 20th/early 21st century themes that we may see more direct impact. Should such topics as globalisation, multiculturalism, migration, technology (including the rapid expansion of social media), the environment, and inequality change the nature of teaching or indeed the ways in which state education is organised?

Five years ago, when a team of us at the University of Glasgow undertook a literature review for the Scottish Government as part of the wider review referred to above, we identified different conceptions - or paradigms - of teaching within the policy and research literature.

- i. The effective teacher – emphasising skills, content, performativity and measurement.
- ii. The reflective teacher – skills and content again, but with the addition of knowledge about learners, and consideration of the values underlying and the purposes of education.
- iii. The enquiring teacher – systematic enquiry into all of the above; deploying research and evaluation methods and techniques.
- iv. The transformative teacher – adopting a 'critical enquiry' approach, looking beyond the classroom, considering social context, moral and ethical issues, developing alliances ('stance').

Menter, Hulme, Elliot et al, (2010), see also Menter (2010).

The reflective teacher may well recognise the challenges posed by the contemporary issues mentioned above, the enquiring teacher may try to see how to improve their teaching in response to these challenges, but it is in the transformative teacher that we may expect to see active responses. For example, the role of teachers in ensuring the effective learning of migrant children arriving in their classrooms, to ensure that **all** children understand the causes of and motivations for migration (although this is clearly a curricular matter as well as a pedagogical one), ensuring that children recognise the way in which environmental matters relate to their own communities as well as to the wider world (car exhaust emissions is one recent example) and making productive use of new technologies, whilst developing critical awareness of their deployment at the same time - all of these would be a part of the approach to be taken by a transformative professional working in the 21st century.

The importance of research

Another major finding of our 2010 literature review was that there are some great weaknesses in the field of teacher education research. We have had very few longitudinal or large-scale studies of teacher education in most parts of the world, for what is - as argued earlier - widely seen as a critical aspect of education systems (Menter, Hulme, Murray et al, 2010).

Elsewhere I have argued for the importance of research being developed in three relationships with teacher education (Menter, 2011). There needs to be research **in**, **on** and **about** teaching and teacher education and this needs to be carried out in every context where teacher education takes place. In fact, Norway is one of the few countries where this seems to be actually recognised, with a number of very significant projects, not least ProTed, Centre for Excellence in Teacher Education, and in which there have been significant investments from government and other funders.

But we also need to consider the relationship between the work of teachers themselves and research. In 2012, the British Educational Research Association

(BERA), working with the Royal Society for the Arts (RSA) set up an inquiry into the relationship between research and teacher education. Admittedly this was in large part established as a response to what was then happening in England, although BERA as a UK wide organisation considered the situation across the four nations. Having gathered evidence across the UK and having commissioned a number of papers that reviewed evidence from around the world, our core finding was that teaching needs to be imbued with an awareness of research, indeed we called for all teachers to be 'research literate' (BERA-RSA 2014b; see also BERA-RSA 2014a). That does not mean that all teachers should be active researchers all of the time. Rather it means that they should be able to read, evaluate and use the research findings that are relevant to their work, in order to develop their practice. However we did also go so far as to suggest that teachers should have the capacity and skills to engage in research themselves if the context and conditions are appropriate.

Figure 2. Dimensions of teacher effectiveness and teachers' professional identity

As for what teachers should know and therefore the ideas that should shape the education of teachers, we suggested that there are three overlapping areas, as shown in Figure 1.

It is this understanding that leads us to draw attention to the concept of 'research-informed clinical practice' in initial teacher education, the topic of one of the papers the inquiry commissioned (Burn & Mutton, 2014) and an approach that can be found in the Oxford Internship scheme (Benton, 1980), the West of

Scotland clinical practice model (Conroy et al, 2013), a range of developments in Australia and the USA as well as within the ProTed initiative in Norway.

Encouragingly there is a movement under way in England and to some extent across the wider UK to bring research literacy into play. We have seen the emergence of an organisation called ResearchEd (see: <http://www.workingoutwhatworks.com/>), teachers themselves taking on research activity, we have seen research and development being established as one of the so-called 'big ideas' for Teaching Schools (tscouncil.org.uk) and we have seen the Education Endowment Foundation (see: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>) deploying very significant resources in school-based research, notable Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) designed to lead to improvements in outcomes for underachieving school students. There are also plans to establish a College of Teaching, to create a professional body for teachers (see: <http://www.claimyourcollege.org/>), given that there is no Teaching Council in England of the kind that exists in the other parts of the UK and in Ireland (TEG, 2016). So there are some very positive signs at present. However, we do have to be alert to the importance of research being rigorous and systematic as well as drawing on a full range of methodologies. In the initiatives I have just mentioned this is not always the case. It is not possible for example to find all the insights we need, through the application of RCTs alone, valuable though these can be.

Underlying values

The essence of the argument I have been developing is this. New challenges have been arising over recent decades. These are challenges for governments, for education systems, for schools and for teachers. The new challenges have not had - and seem unlikely to have - a major impact on the organisation of state schooling. Nevertheless the challenges do bring new responsibilities for teachers, new challenges and new opportunities. If we continue to see teaching as a profession of moral responsibility that seeks to ensure that every learner is educated in such a way as to make the most of opportunities that suit his or her dispositions, aspiration and needs, then we do need teachers who are increasingly capable of making difficult judgements in complex situations, based on a clear and conscious set of values. Although teachers are working in national systems, this does not translate into teachers promoting 'national values' (as some English politicians would have it), but rather, as Helga Eng would surely have put it, universal values, such as respect, justice and equity. And, in order to inform their judgements, as well as the traditional knowledge of the subject/s being taught and of professional content knowledge and of professional skills, teachers need access to the skills of systematic enquiry - that is research skills - as well as access to research published by members of the wider academy.

Enduring themes in teacher education

So as we move further into the 21st century there are resources such as the ProTed experience and the BERA-RSA Inquiry that we can bring to bear. But it is crucial that teaching and teacher education continue to be the focus of intensive systematic inquiry, both 'internally' through teacher research and practitioner research and 'externally' through larger scale research - large scale projects are extremely important (and the recent Ministerial Advisory Group Report in Australia appears to acknowledge that (TEMAG, 2015). But thirdly, we also need what we might best call 'partnership' research - that is enquiry that engages practitioners and academic researchers in collaborative communities of enquiry.

These three approaches - internal, external and partnership - can all be brought to bear on what I have suggested are some of the enduring themes of teacher education (Menter, 2015):

- The relationship between theory and practice
- The nature of professional knowledge
- The sites of professional learning
- The pedagogical contributions of the school and of the university
- Curriculum and assessment within teacher education
- The extended continuum of professional learning

These are themes that emerge both historically and contemporaneously in any serious consideration of teaching and teacher education (e.g. Alexander et al., 1984; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Cochran-Smith et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012; Dent, 1977).

Conclusion

So, inspired by Helga Eng and by colleagues here in Norway, in the UK and elsewhere, I wish to reassert:

- The importance of research
- The importance of children's experience and development
- The importance of teaching (and teachers)
- The importance of teacher education
- The importance of communication

To return to my initial questions - in the 21st century, what is a teacher? And, what does a 21st century teacher need to know? As I hope I have shown in the discussion above, the answers to these two questions are closely interconnected.

A teacher is a person who has made a decision to help to shape the citizens of the future. This is a decision that has a moral component as well as an occupational component. Teachers therefore need to have a clear understanding both individually and collectively of their own values, of the values which will help to sustain a peaceful, fair and just future for their students. They need the skills to assess the learning needs of the students for whom they are responsible in the context of a rapidly changing environment, but also to be continually assessing the impact of policy initiatives on their own practice and on the lives of learners. In order to be in a position to make such judgements they will need research skills of critical enquiry. If this is a teacher for the 21st century and if teachers can develop such knowledge as part of their professionalism then not only will they make a continuing crucial contribution to the future of society, they are also likely to be increasingly valued, trusted and respected by the wider community. And I submit finally, that all of this is entirely consistent with Helga Eng's vision of and commitment to a 'universal, realistic humanism'.

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¹ This paper is based on the Helga Eng lecture given at the University of Oslo on 6 November 2015.

² I gave a lecture in her honour in March 2016 at Leeds Beckett University, where Mercier was Vice-Principal of Leeds Training College.

³ There is no explanation of why he does not include Norway here!

⁴ These news stories were sourced from Head Lines, Monday 28 September, 2015: headlines@earlymorningmedia.co.uk