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25. NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS IN HONG KONG: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OR MEETING ONE'S FATE?

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE

In recent years much attention has been paid to the start up period in teaching influenced at least in part by two main concerns. Firstly, global and local influences such as educational reforms, demographic changes, concern about standards and the professional ladder, teacher supply and retention and pressures for school effectiveness and improvement position 'new' teachers in the van of implementing or bearing the brunt of new educational policies. Secondly there is evidence of a growing understanding that professional formation and professional development are elements of a single continuous process and that this implies the significance of continuity between initial teacher education and subsequent experience in teaching work. Such continuity may be both contractual and professionally developmental: that is, it may relate to both the speed and ease of finding work and the perceived opportunities for development. The evidence suggests that the transition into working as a teacher has important implications for establishing professional standards, and justifying subsequent professional development along the professional ladder (Huberman, 1993, Gold 1996).

An understanding of the importance of the early period in post in any work has been informed by occupational research which highlights both the significance of early success in a post for subsequent commitment and the importance of focussing on staff as a key resource in an organisation (Schein, 1968). Studies of induction into new posts (Nicholson and West, 1988) have shown that good induction is enabling, while inadequate or inaccurate induction is disabling. Their model of induction suggests four stages: preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation. An important emphasis in their model and a period often overlooked in practice is the *preparation* stage prior to taking up a post, when there is the opportunity to familiarise new recruits with key information they will need to ready themselves for the work to be done and orient themselves to the new work setting. Applying the lessons learned from occupational research to teaching we can posit that good induction will include the provision of useful information to staff both before and when they arrive in post, the provision of support for survival in the early stages and feedback on their teaching. Schein's emphasis on early success has particular implications for the timetable and classes which new teachers are given and for the extent to which teachers are clear about what is expected of them and whether and how well they achieve it. Echoing Ball (1994) and Kuzmic (1994), Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) reinforce the importance of the induction period in acquainting new teachers with the micropolitics of the school as an aid to their survival and progress.

Educational research suggests that starting work as a teacher is a potentially over-whelming experience for new teachers report becoming more aware of the heavy responsibility they carry for learner's education and future opportunities than had been apparent to them as students on placement in other teachers' classes (in the U.K. see Draper *et al.*, 1991: in H.K see Griffin, 1982, 1983 and Griffins and 1984). Their evidence suggests that professional placement experiences – such as school experi-ence/teaching practice – while offering opportunities to practise the technical skills of teaching are unable to fully familiarise the student teacher with all the demands of the teacher's role. Such 'praxis shock' has been noted by many researchers in spite of considerable efforts to develop appropriate support systems (Rust, 1994, Gold, 1996, Wideen *et al.*, 1998). Bullough *et al.*, (1989) describe new teachers facing the need to build a professional identity and self esteem as they move into work. The notion of a smooth transition into work seems optimistic in the face of all these findings but also suggests that induction is important to ease the passage where possible. Where new teachers are additionally faced with job-insecurity such as is posed by fixed-term contracts, there is additional evidence (Draper *et al.*, 1998) that teachers invest their time in seeking future work rather than on their professional development. In addition, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) found that those who did not find work in teaching quickly experienced increased doubt about their professional competence and their self esteem was threatened.

Drawing on evidence of the complexity and difficulty of starting to teach, some systems have developed elaborate mechanisms to support induction – for example in Scotland and England – often with some element of working time free of teaching commitments and an entitlement to support. In such systems the induction period leads to an assessment hurdle which represents a test for full entry to the teaching profession. A controversial dimension of these developments is their assumption that stakeholders are in agreement about teaching-fundamentals (Britzman, 2000).

Currently the debate about what constitutes teaching-fundamentals has raised con-cerns over the reduction of teacher training to a set of technical skills and mechanistic activities. Attempts to relegate teaching to a set of easily measurable behaviours and outcomes, while typically characteristic of the new managerialist approach to public sector management, are thought to diminish the true nature of both the impact and content of teaching. The extensive literature on teaching as a profession (including that by Eraut, 1994, Kirk *et al.*, 2000, Day, 1999) highlights a number of features which are understood to be characteristic of professional work including autonomy, a commitment to service and a commitment to improvement which go well beyond a technicist conception of teachers' work. The advent of the Lifelong learning approach reinforces the importance of developing positive attitudes to continuing professional development (Day, 1999), through professional commitment.

Other systems not characterised by an extended certification stage assume new teachers are full members of the profession from the point of qualifying. These systems prompt their own particular debate. Characterised by perceptions of being required to train too-much within too little time, teacher-trainers' debate prioritise their focus on either extending trainees existing beliefs (Calderhead and Robson,

1991), encourage trainees to go beyond best current practice (Bramald *et al.*, 1995, Wideen *et al.*, 1998) or recognise the need to change trainees' perspectives (Lieberman, 2000). Choosing between such priorities has been argued to be solely the responsibility of teacher educators (Hargreaves, 1994; Dill, 1998; Wilson, 2000) while others see in such a demarcation a breeding-ground for conformity and compliance (Elby, 1997; Britzman, 2000). Such debate again points to continuing uncertainty about teaching-fundamentals although one dimension of teachers' work which has been generally agreed as key to the success of new teachers is successful class management and control (Veenman, 1984).

In Hong Kong those entering teaching experience a system that equates salary to qualifications. Three different routes are possible and equate to different salary expectations, the highest being a full-time pre-service teacher education, followed by part-time in-service teacher education while teaching as an unqualified teacher and the lowest, teaching without a professional qualification. New teachers seek posts in competition with other teachers and once in post have full teaching commitments. The challenge for teacher-trainers of full-time pre-service teachers under this Hong Kong system is to help these new teachers to cope as full members of the profession from the point of qualifying.

Common to both approaches to the professional formation of teachers has been concern with providing scope for reflection on early professional experience (Schon, 1991; Elby, 1997). Continuing to reflect upon practice is recognised both as an important dimension for professional development and very difficult for those who carry a full timetable from day one. Opportunities to reflect upon what is working and what isn't are limited when work demands are perceived to be very high. The availability of colleagues as mentors to facilitate that reflection is similarly important. If this perception of high workload is shared by both new-teachers and by experienced teachers, it may threaten the provision of effective school-based mentoring (Pang, 2001; Cheng *et al.*, 2002).

Using these ideas of professionalism and induction into post as a framework for the evaluation of teachers work, this chapter will explore the experiences of newly qualified teachers in Hong Kong. It will also seek to evaluate to what extent and in what ways new teachers in Hong Kong have a good professional start to their careers and what predictions might be made about their continuing professional development in teaching.

RESEARCH METHOD

To investigate beginning teachers' experiences of their first year of teaching a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach was adopted. Graduates (n = 72:12% of Hong Kong's annual supply of new graduate teachers) from one full-time Post Graduate in Education Programme (PGDE) (offered by the Department of Education Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University PGDE in AY 2001–02) were monitored during one Secondary school year (September to June 2002–03). Two parallel questionnaires were issued to these graduates – the first in September 2002, the second in June

2003. To add qualitative insights to this quantitative data, randomly selected volunteers (n = 12:17%) were interviewed at four times throughout the teaching year (September, December, April and June).

The two parallel questionnaires were derived from an established study of teachers conducted in Scotland and adapted to the Hong Kong context. Comprising twenty-three open-ended questions, the two parallel questionnaires explored respondents' teaching duties, experience of applying for a teaching post; formal induction into teaching; informal induction into teaching; self-perceptions of themselves as teachers; current experiences of being a teacher, reflections on their PGDE programme and personal details (excluding personal identifiers).

The timing of the two parallel questionnaires sought to capture pre and post experiential views of respondents' first year as a full time Secondary school teacher. The first questionnaire was completed within the first month of full-time teaching (September 2002); the second questionnaire was administered within the last month of full-time teaching (June 2003). The return rates for each questionnaire were low (respectively 43% and 28%) and attributed to an overlap with other questionnaires at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year and a combination of unforeseen factors including employment-uncertainty and the pressures of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). As the questionnaires were anonymous, cross comparison of individual responses was not possible. Although the results of each questionnaire cannot be claimed to be representative they do reveal a number of issues which must be of concern.

Four sets of standardised interviews were made by one interviewer employing a standardised interview protocol comprising prompts and probes that sought to explore respondents' teaching context; views on what is 'good' about teaching; views about what is 'challenging' about teaching; what support they have received, what support they would like to receive and their reflections on the PGDE training programme.

The interview schedule comprised four interviews – the first as the school started (September) followed by interviews that trisected the teaching year (December; April; June). The closure of schools due to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in March & April enforced two methodological adjustments. First, the April interviews were completed by telephone: second, the April interview questioned respondents' views *prior* to SARS then duplicated the same questions but with reference to respondents' views *during* SARS.

All interviewees (n = 12:17%) comprised randomly selected volunteers. Where interviews were conducted in Cantonese, verified translations made these responses available in English. Coding and tabulation of recorded responses was verified through standard protocols involving independent parallel analysis. To protect respondents' identities, all quotations are cited free of personal identifiers.

In summation, both the questionnaire and interview data provides evidence of respondents' teaching context, support received, experiences of being a teacher and reflections on the PGDE programme. Drawing on this evidence now provides insights to these newly qualified teachers' experiences and their responses to their first teaching year.

FINDINGS

Two clusters are reported: first, their experiences of finding work, induction and preparation and their responses to teaching, establishing competence and their future professional development.

Finding work

For our sample, finding work had not been easy. They reported making numerous applications (minimum 40, maximum 250, with a mean of 70), resulting in a small number of subsequent interviews. Over half had been offered only one post but 40% had had a choice. For those who were able to choose a post, the nature of the contract (permanent or renewable) had been the most important criterion, followed by location. A third of the respondents held full time permanent contracts. In summary, respondents reported a highly competitive job-market where the majority (66%) of those who found teaching posts were on fixed-term contracts.

The posts which the new teachers held were distributed across the ability bands of Hong Kong pupils. Half taught at least two forms and three quarters taught up to three different forms, and half taught one or two remedial forms. While 12 taught one subject, 9 taught 2 subjects and 7 taught three. The new teachers mostly taught a range of forms at different stages with a spread of ages of at least 3 years. The range of students and subjects was thus substantial. Three quarters (22) reported their teaching load as average, while 5 teachers said their load was heavy. By the second data collection point under a third (6) said their load was average and over half (11) perceived it as heavy. The teachers do not report significant changes in the number of forms or hours they teach and thus it is assumed that this difference of perception has come about because they are now more familiar with their colleagues' workload than they were at the earlier stage. In summary, these new teachers were required to teach across ability bands, across school forms and across subjects – in effect new teachers were not 'eased' into the teaching profession.

Induction and preparation

In our sample of Hong Kong teachers nearly all (93%) knew they had a job at least 2–3 weeks before it began. Information on their teaching timetable took a little longer however with 80% knowing their timetable a week in advance, 10% finding out their timetable the week they began teaching and 10% still unsure at the time of the questionnaire. School policies took a little longer again with three quarters (73%) knowing about them a week before they began work and 20% finding out in week one. Learning about school practices was a mystery to nearly half of the sample until the week they actually began teaching, and 17% remained unsure at the time of the first questionnaire. Finally knowing who to ask for reliable help was unclear to one third during the first week of teaching and this had significant consequences:

> Because I didn't know (who to ask) I was crying at home when facing some problems.

In the initial stages of teaching only one third had been allocated a formal mentor and even when there was an identified supporter, support was not guaranteed. While some saw their mentor regularly, for example, every 2 days, about twice a month etc. and some frequently, others had no set pattern of meetings and some had no meetings at all. Some had no fixed time but the mentor was approachable when there was a problem which while offering support placed the beginning teacher into deficit rather than more positive mode. Asked about advice offered by the mentor there were only a few mentions of advice for professional practice, for example on dealing with classroom discipline or preparation of work and no mentions of help in understanding what Ball (1994) terms 'the micropolitics of the school'. For a fortunate minority advice was available elsewhere:

> *It is good that there are three new teachers (including me) ... we get great support from each other. I also have friends who entered the profession this year ... we often talk on the phone. I'm also extremely lucky that I also get support from my family ... both my parents are teachers.*

Taken together the above findings suggest that a significant proportion of new teachers lacked the basic guidance and information they needed in order to perform effectively in the teaching role.

Given these experiences, how did these new recruits respond? The following now reports their initial responses to teaching, establishing competence and their future professional development.

INITIAL RESPONSES TO TEACHING

Levels of commitment – see Table 25.1 – are similar at the two stages and suggest that experience had not blunted their enthusiasm for teaching. These findings are encouraging as positive indicators of their professional commitment and perhaps of their effective pre-employment training.

Most (70%) saw themselves as still developing their teaching style. Informed by feedback mainly from pupils only a few felt they were performing poorly as teachers though only a quarter said they were doing well.

There was more satisfaction with salary in the earlier but not the later stage perhaps linked to a growing perception of a heavy work-load which, as in many other studies, was a major and continuing issue of concern – Table 25.2. Friendliness of colleagues was valued "*Someone to talk to ... to cope with the stress*" but more so than their professional

TABLE 25.1   Commitment to the job

		Early	Later
1	Very little	0	0
2		16.7	10.5
3		70	73.7
4	Complete	13.3	15.8

TABLE 25.2 Mean satisfaction with aspects of teaching (4 point scale,
1 = very satisfied, 4 = very dissatisfied)

	Early	Later
Increased satisfaction		
Balance between work and personal life	2.73	2.63
Friendliness of colleagues	1.83	1.78
Decreased satisfaction		
Salary	1.77	2.11
Workload	2.53	2.57
Colleagues' views of teaching	1.97	2.37
Society's view of teaching	2.03	2.47
Availability of resources	2.47	2.57

views. Moral support from society and teaching resources were increasingly perceived as unsatisfactory. These cumulative pressures on new teachers are perhaps reflected in concerns over the balance between work and personal life, especially in the earlier stage.

Overall Table 25.2 demonstrates that satisfaction decreased slightly over the period – a summation ironically summarised by one interviewee as: *To survive you have to be 'superwoman'.*

Establishing competence

When do new teachers find out what is important to do well? At the outset 11% remained in the dark and nearly half (48%) reported they did not know if their performance was 'ok'. Of those who claimed they did know over half (53%) reported they had found out for themselves. Only a third reported they had been told either by their Panel Chairs, or by administrative staff. Notably, the main source of information on school policies and practices was the administrative staff.

The dissemination of professional knowledge by non-professional sources is also apparent when new teachers reported how they knew that their performance was 'ok'. Minor sources of this knowledge comprised experienced teachers (10%) or Panel Chairs (3%); major sources were self discovery (21%), pupils (10%) or administrative staff (7%). Such dependency on professional knowledge from non-professional sources does not bode well for this profession.

Their future professional development

Most were intending to stay in teaching (84%) with nearly 70% considering further training, mostly at masters' level. For the minority in stable employment, future concerns focused on their perceived heavy workload. Asked what professional development would assist them, the majority raised pragmatic issues related to alleviating workload stress:

Less work! ... smaller class size ... someone to talk to ...

For the majority – those on fixed-term contracts – their key challenge was that of securing a new post or contract renewal.

DISCUSSION

Several factors have been identified as contributing to the effective induction, professional development and commitment of new teachers – good preparation, support, feedback on teaching, early success – and it seems that against this standard the experiences of at least some new teachers in Hong Kong are less supportive than they might be. While some new entrants are fortunate, and find themselves in supportive school environments others lack basic information about the context in which they are working, what is expected of them and feedback on how well they are doing. In the absence of key information and feedback many fall back on their own self evaluations, uninformed by other professional advice. It is interesting, though not unusual, that a professional group committed to the learning of others does not consistently and consciously apply that understanding of learning to its own members. Yet it is not only the new teachers themselves but the schools in which they work and most importantly their pupils who pay the price of inadequate support. In these circumstances it is difficult to see how their professional development can be progressed as well as it might be. The aim in seeking continuity with initial training is not only to ease the passage into teaching but also simultaneously to locate new teachers on a path of continuing professional development.

The achievement of early success has been identified as particularly important for the consolidation and development of teacher commitment. The evidence offered here suggests that several factors reduce the chance of early success for these new teachers. Fostering commitment to teaching is not only important for those concerned about supply and retention. It has significance for attitudes and motivation to professional development. While some new teachers are clearly offered experiences which support the development of commitment, others' experiences fall far short of this. A key dimension of professional behaviour is commitment to continuing improvement. In the absence of support and feedback one danger is that staff will settle for 'good enough' teaching: getting by rather than getting on, and that in time their approach to their work will be characterised by a restricted professional strategy.

A further dimension highlighted in these findings is the impact of fixed-term contracts. That a considerable proportion are concerned about the possibility of finding a secure post does not bode well for commitment nor professional development. It is expensive to train teachers and, in a fast changing environment characterised in Hong Kong by rapid changes in educational priorities, it is important that they further develop their competence once in post. Both initial training and subsequent professional development are investments in education. Establishing formal support structures or at least ensuring that the experiences of new teachers are monitored for their induction and developmental value would be steps toward protecting these investments and enhancing the education of the pupils these new teachers teach.

Since many of the teachers had little or no choice about the school in which they taught and schools offered very different opportunities to new teachers, it appears that becoming a new teacher in Hong Kong is less a matter of professional development and more a case of meeting one's fate.

CONCLUSION

The evidence indicates that Hong Kong Secondary schools fail to provide adequate – or indeed any – mentoring support to these new teachers. However within the current Hong Kong professional teacher training system there is as yet little support provided to compensate schools that wish to devote valuable staff-time to mentoring.

If, as the evidence suggests, new teachers are left largely unsupported at the beginning of their teaching careers, the question arises about what support can established teachers expect? Where new teachers and experienced teachers are both being tasked by new education reforms and changing educational priorities, adequate provision for school-based staff-support systems may seem an essential investment.

Where schools cannot offer support, the possibility arises of enhancing the role of teacher-training providers. The current teacher-training learning-scaffold may be further developed to address the issues and concerns raised by these findings. Where new teachers' perceptions of their initial year career can more closely conform to its realities, then their transition into professional teaching may be less a matter of meeting one's Fate and more closely conform to a professional development.

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