

# Transition and Translation: Increasing Teacher mobility and extending the European Dimension in Education

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## Abstract

This paper draws together the experience of tutors and students who took part in an inter-institutional pilot project between the secondary initial teacher education (ITE) course at the Institute of Education (IoE), University of London, England and the Faculty of Education, University of Turku, Finland. The project set out to examine critically the pedagogic approaches of the two institutions, share reflections and identify possible implications for future practice. Finland was selected because of its excellent educational achievement in comparison with other European countries; namely, the fact that it continues to excel in the PISA ratings (OECD, 2001; OECD, 2004; OECD, 2007). IoE participants were keen to identify both the pedagogic and cultural reasons for this success and consider how this could both challenge and inform Beginning Teachers<sup>i</sup> (BTs) developing pedagogic practice.

Turku has a higher proportion of ethnic minority pupils in its school population than any other city in Finland and this number is set to increase. Therefore ITE tutors (IT) at Turku University are keen to understand how they can enable student teachers to develop their pedagogic practice in response to this changing cultural context. They believe that what happens in Turku will inform future policies and practices in other parts of the country where immigration continues to increase but at a slower pace. It is their perception that IoE student teachers working in London's multi-ethnic schools are developing a more secure not sure about secure as it suggests a rigid notion of understanding (how about indepth?) understanding of interculturalism and could help their Finnish counterparts identify relevant pedagogic strategies in response to their changing school population - a *transition* in their practice.

This paper reflects critically on the first part of this pilot project namely the observations of learning and teaching in Turku 'Normal' School by IoE students and tutors. These initial observations are informed by a comparative study carried out by IoE students highlighting their developing understanding of the relationship between pedagogy and political/social/economic 'drivers' in the development of educational policies and practices - a *translation* of different experiences.

**Key words:** Initial Teacher Education, pedagogic practice, student mobility, Europe and cultural context

## Difficult Discourses: Urban Pedagogy - Teaching in London Schools.

As with football, we in the UK find it hard to accept we might be middling in international education comparisons. But now that the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa) survey shows that this is the case - in maths and science as well as reading - it is time to start taking a measured interest in what we could learn from other countries. (Hirst, 2007)

When we started writing this paper in December 2007 we had just received the news that the UK's rating in the 2006 OECD Pisa survey of 15 year olds in 57 countries had dropped significantly from 7th to 17th in reading, 8th to 24th in mathematics and from 4th to 14th in science. As a result we were presented with these dispiriting newspaper headlines:

OECD gives UK teenagers only 'average' marks.

(Turner, 2007)

Britain slumps in world league table for maths and reading.

(Woodward, 2007)

UK plummets in world rankings for maths and reading.

(Lipsett, 2007)

Reading and maths standards falling in Britain, says OECD.

(McSmith, 2007)

UK children plummet down science league table.

(Taylor, 2007)

A few weeks later as we agreed the final draft we were confronted with this image and headline emblazoned across the front page of another national newspaper - painting an even grimmer picture of our urban schools.

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

Plate 1 The Observer newspaper

### **Knife scanners at school gates to curb attacks**

Airport-style metal detectors will be installed at hundreds of school gates under sweeping measures to confront the growing problem of teenage knife crime. (Townsend, 2008)

### **Middling, mediocre and menacing**

It seems that state education in the UK is not only middling and mediocre but also menacing! Inner-city comprehensive schools rarely get a good press indeed urban schools<sup>ii</sup> are often vilified by the Media. Clearly some of this can be dismissed as 'media hype' even 'moral panic', nevertheless such constant criticism can be both demoralizing and de-motivating for teachers - especially beginning teachers (BTs)<sup>iii</sup>. The view that journalists present is typically sensational and often superficial. However, it is also insidiously powerful in the way that it influences the attitudes and values of the general public<sup>iv</sup>. It is hardly surprising that UK teachers are rarely afforded the respect and trust enjoyed by some of their counterparts in other European countries.

This pilot project afforded the opportunity for IoE Tutors and BTs to experience first-hand learning and teaching in Finland - the country our Media defines as 'top of the Global Class... among the super powers of education'. (BBC, 2007)

### **And muddled and misguided**

Peter Mortimore (2007) claims that there is no coherent philosophy among policymakers in the UK suggesting that they remain unsure whether they want to promote an education system that continues to focus on young people who are 'socially, economically and culturally advantaged and find learning easy', or whether they want to enable as many young people as possible to succeed. He points out how:

Discussions of this issue often reveal a deep division between those who passionately believe that more must mean worse - whether in relation to the proportions passing exams or gaining university places - and those who believe that many more could succeed and that equity is as important a goal as high academic standards. (Mortimer, 2007)

Mortimore suggests that educators should examine the system in Finland where no such divisions exist. He claims that it is the Finnish system's twin objectives of *securing adequate equity in education* and the *promotion of high standards* as the reasons why it achieves such high PISA ratings; objectives that ensure that its average and below-average pupils achieve results gained by the most able in other countries (ibid).

There is evidence to suggest that UK policymakers recognise the value of

'twinning' these objectives. For example, the *2020 Vision the Report of the Teaching and Learning* (Gilbert, 2006) insists that in the UK, schools, local and national government need to work together towards a society in which:

- a child's chances of success are not related to his or her socio-economic background, gender or ethnicity
- education services are designed around the needs of each child, with the expectation that all learners achieve high standards.

Numerous interventions have been introduced: Sure Start, London Challenge, Extended Schools, Excellence in the Cities, Personalised Learning (Miliband, 2004) and Every Child Matters (DFES, 2003) Youth Matters (DFES, 2005) Community Cohesion (2007)- all reference the importance of raising the achievement of young people from less privileged socio-economic groups.

However, despite these initiatives, segregation and class division have historically been, and still remain, endemic (and well rehearsed) (Ball, 2003b; Apple, 2004; Reay, 2005). We suggest that this is not really a muddle, a lack of clarity from the government, but a deliberate attempt to 'reshape' education to support the now dominant neo-liberal economic policies. Stephen Ball (2007) draws attention to the impact of (post)-neoliberalism on UK state education; he defines this as the shift away from state control to a 'deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation' (Ball, 2007). He explains how private sector intervention into state education championed by consecutive Conservative Governments in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in Local Management for Schools (LMS), Compulsory Competitive Tendering, City Technology Colleges (CTC) and regulated by a restrictive and often punitive inspection regime - all promoting an education system predicated on a market led culture. In the wake of this, during the 1990s the 'New' Labour Government introduced their 'Third Way', an approach that is:

much more interventionist and considerably more managerialist. Outcomes remain the focus but they are now constituted as targets and benchmarks. (Ball, 2007)

Ball cites Giroux (1992) who describes this same approach in the USA as 'steering at a distance':

It allows the state to insert itself deeply into the culture, practices and subjectivities of public sector organisations and their workers, without appearing to do so. It changes meaning; its delivers re-design and ensures

'alignment'. It objectifies and commodifies public sector work: the knowledge work of educational institutions is rendered into 'outputs', 'levels of performance' and 'forms of quality', that is this process of objectification contributes more generally to the possibility of thinking about social services like education as *forms of production*, as 'just like' services of other kind and other kinds of production. The 'soft' services like teaching which require 'human interaction' are re-made to be just like the 'hard' services (book supply, transport, catering, instructional media). They are standardised, calculated, qualified and compared. More generally performativity works to edge public sector organisations into a convergence with the private sector. (Ball, 2007)

This 'Third Way' advocates 'flexibility', 'growth', 'creativity' and 'enterprises' that work in 'partnership'. Much is made of consumer 'choice' but this choice has produced consequences that have impacted on those who have *less* opportunity to choose. One consequence of the neo-liberal agenda in the UK is the highly politicised and publicised effect of 'parent choice'.

### Privilege and Parental Choice



Plate 2 London Metro Newspaper 13 Feb 2008

[I]nternational comparison has shown, English schools are more socially differentiated than any in Europe. Some hardly warrant the description of 'comprehensive' at all, thanks to the parental choice policies pursued by successive governments. They may even be more socially stratified than the old grammar schools and secondary moderns they replaced. (TES, 2002)

Within the UK the number of different types of schools is complex and confusing: public, private, independent, grammar, comprehensive, grant maintained. Within state 'comprehensive' secondary education there exist: Academies and City Technology Colleges (independently funded state secondary schools), Specialist Schools (85% of all schools have a specialist status), Faith Schools, Foundation Schools, Community Schools, Grammar Schools, Fresh Start, Beacon and Leading Edge Schools - the list goes on. While some parents seek out single sex schools or single denominational (Faith)

schools, others move location to secure a place for their child at a state comprehensive school that ranks high in National League Tables, still others (7%) are prepared to pay high fees to send their children to independent schools outside the state maintained sector.

Gorard and Fitz (Gorard and Fitz, 2006) caution against uncritical assertions that *parental choice* automatically leads to 'the polarization of schools, with those in more working class areas sucked in to a spiral of decline' (MacLeod, 2001). However, in line with others (Ball, 2003a; Power, 2004; Reay, 2005) we believe 'parental choice', largely remains the privilege of those who have the cultural capital to work their way through this complexity or the economic capital to buy their way out of it. Such choices are too often based on self-interest rather than altruism. This can be seen to reinforce inequality and class social divisions, equity remains undervalued and there is still a stark gap between the achievement of pupils in affluent and deprived communities. Add to this league tables, Ofsted Inspections, and the constant assessment of young people against externally set national standards (starting at the seven years of age) and the result is a system where:

...school performance is more important than student involvement in that it doesn't matter how students "feel" about their education as long as they end up with the necessary qualifications. (Power et al., 2004)

All this makes it difficult to see how Gilbert's Vision for 2020 or other recent Government drives such as *Community Cohesion* (DFES, 2007) can be made to fit into a system predicated on a divided and divisive top-down approach to education. Given this somewhat 'dystopic' view of the situation in the UK, the opportunity afforded by this project to visit Finland and witness first hand how they maintained the balance between equity and achievement was received with enthusiasm.

### **Pilot project aims**

The overall aim was, in line with the Bologna Declaration 1999, to promote a 'European dimension ...in HE through curricula, inter-institutional co-operation and mobility schemes for both students and teachers' (EHEA, 1999). The

project set out to provide new stimulus for the PGCE course (for both BTs and ITs) and to develop:

- tutor skills in another socio-cultural context
- knowledge and understanding of teacher training in another European country building on links already established with the IoE
- a European experience to inform pedagogy and practice on the PGCE course
- research collaborations between the two Universities; and enable Further Professional Development for the IoE tutors in an innovative way
- the role of the PGCE in the IoE's International Strategy - marketing and recruitment
- two actions of the Bologna declaration: the second cycle (Master) and the system of accumulation and transfer of credits which could contribute to the current re-modelling agenda

One of the main vehicles for achieving the pilot's aims and objectives was to send IoE ITs and BTs on a weeklong visit to Turku University. The focus of the visit for both ITs and BTs was to be comparative. The visit took place in January 2007 and was intended to generate a number of opportunities for all parties based around a simple pattern of:

- visiting training in Turku University
- visiting trainees in Turun normaalikoulu Turku University's training school
- meetings BTs, ITs and school staff to discuss and share experiences and insights.

The early discussions at Turku University enabled us to identify similarities and differences between the two countries' teacher training systems, below is a summary (Table 1).

| <b>Contrasting Structure of Initial Teacher Education</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>London</b>   | <b>Turku</b>  |
| Postgraduate course (90 credits towards a 180 credit MA)  | Integrated with Degree<br>Master qualification a pre-requisite for teaching   |
| Intensive 1 year course (36 weeks) addressing clearly defined Standards   | Less intensive  |
| Two placements in contrasting 'partnership' schools<br>Total of 24 weeks in school, 9-11hrs teaching per week.  | Single placement in a 'Normal' (university training) school<br>Teaching organised more flexibly to meet individual needs                              |
| Successful completion of an Induction year is required before full QTS is conferred   | No induction year but an emphasis on continuing professional development (CPD)  |
| Focus on subject studies, pedagogy & wider professional issues<br>(Inclusion, equal opportunities, school and the community, learning beyond the classroom, citizenship)                | Focus on subject studies and pedagogy   |
| Gap between sociology of education/research in education and Initial Teacher Education. The former influencing policy the latter mainly limited to small scale action research projects | Gap between education and teacher training within the university - different faculties with former much more likely to be involved in funded research |

Table 1. Contrast in Teacher Education

## **IoE Student Teachers**

Interested BTs were asked to write a short statement saying why they wanted to be involved in the project and how they thought they would develop personally and professionally from this engagement. Predictably, most claimed that they were interested to find out why Finland achieves such 'high ranking OECD PISA ratings' and to 'identify the pedagogic and cultural differences that made such high standards possible', others said they were keen to 'observe teaching in another EU education system' and 'to have the opportunity to compare and contrast English and Finnish ITE programmes'. They thought it would 'provide insights,' 'prompt questions' and 'unsettle assumptions' and 'help encourage them to critically reflect on their own developing pedagogic practice by testing it out in a system that was unfamiliar to them'. Other reasons they identified were 'to experience its extreme climate', 'identify the extent to which Finnish design had an impact on individuals and environments', 'visit the home of Nokia and the Moomins' and 'have a *real* sauna (complete with outdoor ice plunge-pool!) and go to a *proper* ice hockey match'.

A total of 9 students were selected, 3 from each of the following subjects: Art & Design, Business & Economics and Mathematics. The intention of the pilot project was to encourage students to respond critically to their (5 days) experience in a Finnish University Partnership Training School ('Normal School'). Tutors worked alongside students, observing learning and teaching and participating in discussions, they were keen not to establish a hierarchy and kept interventions to a minimal; aware of the power relations implicit in any student-tutor relationship they acted as 'critical friends' questioning BTs' initial perceptions and encouraging further critical analysis. All the students were encouraged to keep reflective diaries, share perceptions with each other and to discuss their developing understanding with host students. On the final day they presented their reflections/findings to the host students and tutors. These are summarised in the following chart (Table 2):

## London BTs' Findings and Observations

| Themes   | Turku   | London   |
|--|---|--|
| Structure<br>School<br>Lesson  | Pupils remain together in the same comprehensive schools from the age of 7–16 (with Class teachers till 11; subject teacher 13-16)<br>Emphasis on 'didactics' at beginning of lessons<br>Freedom and flexibility<br>Relaxed pace<br>Responsive to local needs   | School starts at age 5/Nursey from 3/ Sure Start<br>Four key stages between 5-16<br>Pupils move to secondary schools at age 11<br>Formulaic approach e.g. increasing emphasis on a three-part lesson structure<br>Informed by National Strategies  |
| Differentiation  | Setting by interest<br><br>Personalised learning embedded<br>SEN – focuses on re-integration<br><br>No scheme for G&T   | Setting by ability<br>Prescribed, imposed by central government e.g. Gifted and Talented (G&T)<br>Individual Learning Plans (IEP)<br>Monitoring and tracking<br>Personalised Learning<br>Streaming   |
| Cultural diversity   | Displays reference local, national and European concerns<br>No evidence that content of teaching takes into account cultural diversity except 2 <sup>nd</sup> language teaching<br>Evidence of diverse pupil intake   | Multicultural displays<br>Cultural diversity informs teaching<br>Ethnically diverse intake wide range of cultural and religious backgrounds<br>1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation immigrants   |
| Environment  | Open, 'soft' community spaces within the school<br>ICT used more judiciously and usually in computer labs   | Victorian moving towards 'Schools of the Future'<br>Rush towards new technology – but still grappling with relevant pedagogy   |
| Assessment and accountability  | Test free zone!!<br>Focus on Formative, Self-evaluation & Ipsative<br>Negotiated between teacher and pupil<br>Relaxed, less stressful<br>Accountable to parents<br>No numerical grades - in fact prohibited by law until Matriculation!   | Highly structured and regulated<br>Assessment at ages 5, 7, 11,14,16,18<br>results inform league tables published in national and local press<br>Paperwork burdensome<br>Tensions, pressure to achieve for both teachers and pupils  |
| School ethos/atmosphere  | No uniform<br>Self motivated<br>Pupils keen to learn - empowered<br>Communities<br>Relaxed<br>Negotiation<br>Confident  | Range from highly competitive to more community focused but always with a focus on results – testing & accountability<br>Some schools segregated on grounds of religion, sex and class. Increasing emphasis on uniformity – dress code, keep left, keep off the grass, don't touch, be on time<br>Under surveillance – police/camera   |
| Relationships<br>Teachers and Parents,<br>Teachers and Government,<br>Teachers and Pupils,<br>Teachers and wider Society | Teachers are trusted to be professionals. Allowed the freedom to develop curricula in response to perceived local needs.<br>Teachers self regulating<br><br>National curriculum forms the basis but is open to wide interpretation<br>Parents respect teachers<br>No threat of Inspections<br><br>Valuing of the teaching qualification as something transferable – relevant to other professional occupations<br>Good pupil attendance | Assessment has a high profile<br>Accountability<br>Clearly defined National Curriculum<br>Programmes of study<br>Continuous monitoring<br>Swamped with paperwork<br>Evidence based - criterion referencing<br>Teachers under enormous pressure<br>OFSTED: inspections HMI by senior management, LEAs, student self-evaluations<br>Peer reviews<br>Teacher undervalued – low status<br>Pupil truancy high in some areas |

Table 2 BT observations

It is important to point out that we did not go to Finland with a finely honed research question, rather we saw the visit as a pilot that would enable us to identify how we might engage in collaborative research in the future. Emphasis was placed on the experiential and the dialogic with observation, reflection and discussion informing BTs' initial findings. This 'grounded' approach (Charmaz, 2003) helped to develop an understanding of the *holistic* overview or *big picture*, whilst the reflection in and on action (Schon, 1983) pointed towards a need for a more detailed, 'fine-grained analysis', informed by contextual information.

It is anticipated that each cycle of this project (this is only the pilot stage) will elicit various kinds of data which will help to build a 'richer' understanding. As Ryan and Bernard (2003) point out the power of this type of ethnography lies in its embrace of context, complexity, meaning, and emphasis on the everyday lives of individuals (and in this case the IoE/Turku teachers/tutors). What is more, there is a looseness to this approach, which begins with a broad-brush approach and gradually produces more focused questions based on insights which arise within the particular research context. It is:

... an iterative process by which the analyst becomes more and more "grounded" in the data and develops increasingly richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works. (Ryan and Bernard, 2003)

### **Educational Pilgrims?**

We were aware that our visit to Finland could be seen as just part of a steady stream of '*educational pilgrims*' keen to get a first hand look at how Finland has 'created a well-performing education system and sustained the main features of a welfare state' (Sahlberg, 2007). Sahlberg is critical of those who simply make comparisons by examining the PISA rankings of different countries, rather than trying to learn about national underlying characteristics that might explain performance (ibid: 163). In the table below (Table 3), she highlights significant differences between the Finnish system and the way in which other countries, (including the UK), have developed since the 1980s under the influence of market-orientated neo-liberalism. The table she produced, although couched in more considered language, accords with many of the observations made by the BTs.

| Global Education   | Finland  |
|--|--|
| <b>Standardization</b><br>Setting clear, high and centrally prescribed performance standards for schools, teachers and students to improve the quality of outcomes.  | <b>Flexibility and loose standards</b><br>Building on existing good practices and innovations in school-based curriculum development, setting of learning targets and networking through steering by information and support.  |
| <b>Focus on numeracy and literacy</b><br>Basic knowledge and skills in reading, writing, mathematics and natural sciences as prime targets of education reform.  | <b>Broad learning combined with creativity</b><br>Learning and Teaching focus on deep and broad learning giving equal value to all aspects of an individual's growth of personality, moral, creativity, knowledge and skills.  |
| <b>Consequential accountability</b><br>School performance and raising student achievement are closely tied to the processes of promotion, inspection and ultimately rewarding or punishing schools and teachers based on accountability measures, especially standardised testing as the main criteria of success. | <b>Intelligent accountability with trust- based professionalism</b><br>Adoption of intelligent accountability policies and gradual building of a culture of trust within the education system that values teachers' and headmasters' professionalism in judging what is best for students and in reporting their learning progress |

Table 3. Some aspects of global education reform trends and education policy principles in Finland since the 1980s (adapted from Sahlberg 2007)

### Raw data: (The danger of) Jumping to conclusions!

On closer analysis, UK BTs' observations appeared to confirm their preconceptions; they tended to seek out evidence to support rather than 'unsettle assumptions'. For example, lessons in Turku were identified as 'flexible' and 'relaxed' whilst in London they were 'formulaic' and 'highly structured'; teachers in Finland are 'trusted', 'respected' and 'allowed freedom' whilst in London they are 'undervalued', of 'low status' and 'under surveillance'. Clearly this fails to do justice to the complexity of the two systems. More worrying is the fact that UK BTs failed to recognize their role in this discourse, and do not identify themselves as being in a position (as new entrants into the profession) to affect change or challenge the situation. Rather than seeing their roles as *agents of change* they appear as victims of the system – a worrying negativity comes through. There is a sense that they are powerless against their inevitable control by central government policy, dominated by managerialism and anti-intellectualism. This supports Ball's claim that the UK government has effectively reduced the role of teachers to that of *classroom technician*. He insists that 'the politics of education since the 1980s can be interpreted as centering upon a primary concern – taming the teacher' (Ball, 2003b). He suggests the teacher is being both silenced and de-centred:

What is being achieved is the redistribution of significant voices. As always it is not just a matter of what is said but who is entitled to speak. The teacher is increasingly the absent presence in the discourses of education policy, an object rather than a subject of discourse (Ball, 2003b)

What also became clear is the extent to which BTs' observations of the Finnish system and their reporting on their own was limited to current policies and practices – a postmodern reading off the surface – and very matter-of-fact. There was limited critical reflection and little evidence of *epistemological curiosity*<sup>v</sup>. They appear to be in the grip of the government rhetoric reinforced by negative media hype; the hype and rhetoric that we introduced you to in this paper. As tutors we are particularly anxious to ensure BTs resist any suggestion that teaching *can* be reified in this way. It encourages a reductive, mechanistic approach to education and ignores the idiosyncratic, contingent aspects of learning and teaching (aspects such as pupil intake, teachers' preferences, and prevalent socio-economic relations). The shift towards M level (King, 2008) for ITE courses in the UK will encourage further critical engagement including the epistemological curiosity that Friere (1999) recognizes as essential.

## Changing Contexts

In our attempts to understand education policies comparatively... the complex relationships of ideas and the dissemination of ideas and the recontextualisation of ideas remains the central task. (Ball, 1998)

Sahlberg 2007 points out that although education policy discourse in Finland has been subject to ongoing changes since the 1980s, Finland has been slow to instigate the market-oriented (neo-liberal) education reforms that have dominated policies elsewhere in Europe. Instead a:

...steady improvement in student learning has been attained through Finnish education policies based on traditional values of equity, flexibility, creativity, teacher professionalism and trust. (Sahlberg, 2007)

She quotes from Lewis (2005), who agrees that traditional values have endured including 'cultural hallmarks as a law abiding citizenry, trust in authority, commitment to one's social group, awareness of one's social status, position, and a patriotic spirit'. A view that seems to validate the claim about the Finnish system made by Mortimore (2007) earlier.

However, we note with interest that Sirkka Ahonen (2006) paints a different picture of Finnish society. In contrast to the impression given so far, she suggests 'a crisis is looming' (Ahonen, 2006) and that Finns would be wrong to be too complacent. She points out that the number of young people bothering to vote is declining, as is the number engaging in volunteer work. She suggests that this can be seen as the result of a gap in their education which she defines as a lack of 'active citizenship'. Although the culture of the classroom can be recognised as 'democratic', young people in Finland, like their teachers, don't have a 'voice' more widely; for example, their representation on school councils is not the norm but is looked upon with suspicion<sup>vi</sup>. Sirkka suggests that schools have become 'more and more skills dispensaries than cradles of homogenous citizenship' (Ahonen, 2006) with very little emphasis on society per se. Simola (1995 in Ahonen 2006) claims that Finnish teachers... 'appear to be pedagogically conservative and somewhat reserved in their relations with pupils and their families' .

Ahonen contends that teacher education in Finland focuses too exclusively on developmental and social psychology and subject specific knowledge as the basis of teacher expertise without recourse to the changing nature of society. She claims that the culture of teacher education is one that promotes the notion of the teacher as 'a tool of the state to maintain necessary political conformity and harmony in the country' (in Simola 1995). Not that dissimilar to the description Ball gives of the UK government's policy of 'taming... the teacher' (Ball, 2003b).

Our reading of recent texts by Finnish academics (Jakku-Sihvonen and Niemi, 2006; Kallo and Risto, 2006) suggest that education in Finland has not been isolated or protected from the neo-liberal views of society. Like their European counterparts, they are being affected by demands of cost effectiveness, the growth of parent choice encouraging competition between schools; albeit at a slower pace. Equality of opportunity is starting to change and educational achievement is becoming more differentiated. Giroux's description of how 'performativity works to edge public sector organisations into convergence with the private sector' (op cit) applies in Finland too. The 'soft' services of teaching

being turned into the 'hard' services to be standardised, qualified and compared. However, Ahonen insists;

On the basis of their education, teachers are not too well prepared to elaborate the new corporate ways of running schools not to speak of questioning them... Neither are they enlightened to see the broad spectrum of social changes in society... the minimal share of studies towards social awareness in teacher education must be deplored. How can a teacher relate his or her work to the social situation of the country, if he or she has not reflected on what is happening in society? (Ahonen, 2006)

It appears that Finnish student teachers are not well prepared to deal with changes in society, they are not encouraged to reflect and discuss social and political affairs as part of their training, in turn their teaching can be seen to elide references to these issues. As Ahonen points out Finnish students 'live amidst a flood of information from the ubiquitous media while perhaps missing the capacity for multiperspectival views of her or his time and world' (Ahonen, 2006)

Perhaps Finnish student teachers' conservatism, and their lack of critical engagement with changing social issues goes some way towards explaining why UK BTs found little evidence of curriculum materials or teaching methods developed to meet the needs of a growing immigrant population (beyond Finnish as an additional language). Unlike the UK, Finland is not steeped in post-colonial histories nor does it have the same immigration patterns that make UK the rich pluralist society it is today. It is worthy of note that '*more than 30% of pupils in the teacher training school in Turku (Turun Normaalikoulu) speak another language than Finnish as their home language, pupils speak 29 different languages. The largest language groups are Russians, Albanians, Arabs, Kurds and Vietnamese, pupils.*' (Vesa Valkila, Principal). University Tutor Heine-Marja Jarvinen recognises the need to address the paucity in provision for these young people:

Finland is such a young country [in terms] of immigration and we have not received immigrants for long we don't have any rules, curricula or syllabi in that field. This is something we should do more of. It is actually Turku that has exception in that it has so many immigrants here. Some parts of Finland have none at all. We should actually initiate the development, originate these materials as leaders of educational research we have a responsibility to do more. We have been focusing on Finnish as a second language and moving education towards internationalisation which is linked to Finish as a Second language. We need to think about how we

can explore culture, what culture conveys and how they can enrich what we already have.

As already noted it is important to recognize that the formation of attitudes and values towards cultural diversity is not restricted to schooling, the 'ubiquitous media' in its various manifestations is helping to (re)form the attitudes and values of young people. For example, a research project carried out on the way cultural diversity is represented on the websites of large Finnish companies found that they were the least likely of eight European countries to present diversity statements (Bairoh, 2005). She points out that her findings coincide with those of Trux (2002) and Forsander et al. (2004) who claim that diversity and/or diversity management has not (yet?) entered the discourses of Finnish companies.

However, it was not part of our remit to explore cultural diversity (immigration/interculturalism) and its implications for pedagogy. Just as we have tried to unpick the reasons why Finland remains 'top of the global class' the Finnish visit to the UK will give them the opportunity to identify the different strategies for inclusion being employed in London schools and consider the relevance for their own practice.

### **Conclusion: bemused and bewildered**

The opportunity afforded by this project to experience learning and teaching in Finland has resulted in more questions than answers, and perhaps it is not surprising that we find ourselves entering the next phase of the collaboration more than a little *bemused*. It is important to reiterate that this is a pilot project and was only set up to establish links and identify areas for future development. The BTs' responses were not pre-determined by a clearly defined research agenda, as such they should be recognised as experiential in nature - first impressions and a springboard to the next cycle. It would be reasonable to say that we find ourselves slightly *bewildered* by the conflicting and contradictory views on the Finnish success story and draw comfort from Zagar who advocates that we continue with the dialogue:

Not surprisingly – as it is with weather or football – everybody has an opinion... Often these views differ; they can be conflicting and, sometimes, exclusive. In a way, these discussions and different, sometimes, dissenting

views reflect the complexity of the phenomenon itself. (Zagar, 2008)

We started with a newspaper headline and would like to end with an equally thought provoking recent image to put the UK position into more of a context. Our press invest a lot of time nationally discussing the weather and football and more recently, like Finland, have been debating the effect immigration will have upon the country and its education system. We certainly have not found the solutions and with regards to teacher training we need to recognise and then resist the rhetoric, move away from the simplistic comparisons by layering findings with epistemological curiosity and a critical engagement with recent literature – identifying not only how another country is seen but also how it sees itself – changing.



Plate 3. The Daily Express 28th January 2008

We look forward to the next stage when Finnish students and tutors visit London to make their observations in our institution and partnership training schools and identify for themselves how, why and to what extent *interculturalism* is working.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> At the IoE student teachers are referred to as 'beginning teachers' (BTs). This is indicative of their status as new entrants to the profession and also references the fact that initial teacher education (ITE) is just the first step in their continuing professional development (CPD).

<sup>ii</sup> The educational literature relating to the theme of urban education is predominantly North American in origin and largely specific to a US context. In common with much UK literature on urban education there is a lack of clarity as to what exactly the term urban refers to and it is commonly used as an assumed term rather than one that is explicitly stated and defined. US literature on the preparation of teachers for teaching in city schools offers a number of insights that may be helpful in illuminating the UK context. Much of the literature takes as its central concern disparities between school populations in US cities and the teachers preparing to teach in them. US urban schools are increasingly being populated by black and Hispanic students, yet the teachers being prepared to teach in those schools tend to be white and suburban; a situation exacerbated by increasing social and housing segregation so that many training teachers' first meaningful experiences of contact with black and Hispanic young people is on their teacher education programmes (see Olmedo, I. M. (1997), 'Challenging old assumptions: Preparing teachers for inner city schools'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 13. Research conducted on the preferences of pre-service teachers suggests that few wish to teach in settings different from those with which they are familiar (see Gilbert, S. (1995), 'Perspectives of rural prospective teachers towards teaching in urban schools'. *Urban Education*, 30.). The scale of the problem can be inferred from literature aimed at white, suburban teachers preparing to teach in urban areas (see, for example, Weiner, L. (1999), *Urban Teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.).

Two distinct themes emerge from this body of US literature: First, the cultural, social and spatial distance between the pre-service teachers being trained to work in urban contexts and the young people and communities they will be working with. Second, the need to develop further aspects of pre-service teacher programmes to help prepare teachers training to work in such contexts.

<sup>iii</sup> The UK based literature specifically addressing the preparation of teaching for working in urban schools is significantly sparser although there are distinct parallels to themes addressed by the US literature. Such parallels are especially evident in the nineteenth century literature on the training of teachers to work with the urban poor (see, for example, Kay-Shuttleworth writing in 1862 and quoted in Cook, C. (1984), 'Teachers for the inner city: change and continuity'. In G. Grace (ed.), *Education and the city - theory, history and contemporary practice*. London: Routledge.) and described subsequently by Grace (1978) as: 'Social and cultural missionaries – a kind of secular priesthood dedicated to the work of civilization' (Grace, G. (1978), *Teachers, Ideology and Control*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul., p11).

<sup>iv</sup> It is not surprising that we have raised the question before 'who will want to teach in them?' Ash, A. and Hall, D. (2006), *Urban ITT: Working with Urban Schools in Challenging Contexts*. London: University of London.

<sup>v</sup> Epistemological curiosity – a curiosity that investigates the nature of knowledge, its foundation, scope and vitality: one that is not always present in dialogue Freire, P. and Macedo, D. P. (1999), 'Pedagogy, Culture and Race'. In J. Leach and B. Moon (eds), *Learners and Pedagogy*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

<sup>vi</sup> Since a radical experiment to introduce student democracy in this way in 1970s was abandoned when it became an acrimonious struggle between the political left and right.