

FEATURE

Scottish Teachers for a New Era: where should we start from, if not together?

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Scottish Teachers for a New Era: Where should we start from, if not together?

*Kay Livingston and Laura Colucci-Gray review developments
and comment on Tony Luby's paper*

Scottish Teacher for the New Era (STNE) is a partnership initiative involving the University of Aberdeen, Scottish Executive Education Department, the Hunter Foundation and six local authorities in the North-east of Scotland. The background to the STNE initiative was provided in Macaslan and Rea (*Education in the North*, 2005), and further information about STNE is available on the website (www.abdn.ac.uk/stne). In this article the authors describe the new way of working adopted by STNE. In the partnership initiative it is important to be aware of the people involved, we are many, we belong to different groupings, and we are exploring new ways of working together. The authors themselves in this article present ideas that have been developed by many people and are continuing to be developed. STNE provides the opportunity to pilot a new model of teacher education: the piloting process enables research, inquiry and experimentation that can bring peoples together in shared tasks.

Teachers for a new era

The world around us is characterised by perpetual change and we must all be equipped with the knowledge, skills and resources to respond to this in a confident and informed manner. In the fast-moving, technological and multicultural world continuous learning and collaboration between people are necessary. Knowledge is produced and re-produced by means of a multiplicity of methodologies and political agendas. There is a growing understanding of the inherent uncertainty and unpredictability of natural and social systems. Not only is research and knowledge incomplete, but the object of enquiry itself is a moving target because of constant changes all around us. Different views on a whole range of issues are apparent in everyday life at local, national and international levels. Consequently, existing knowledge needs to be questioned and new knowledge continuously sought. The notion of a teacher in a new era recognises that the complex challenges that affect our lives have implications for learning and teaching. A key question is, 'What do teachers need to know and be able to do in the 21st century in order to develop their own and others' learning?'

Tony Luby, in an article published in this issue,

identifies some of the critical issues in education: the complex, globalised world of the 21st century, the dimension of unpredictability, the clash of values. He makes a number of observations in relation to STNE, and in calls for wider engagement and participation of teachers in renewing their own profession. He emphasises the importance of

establishing links between student teachers and practitioners on a long-term basis...

and draws on the research of Ardichvili, Page and Wentling (2003) (see Luby's paper) to suggest:

providing spaces for joint generation of new knowledge, not just for exchanging the existing knowledge.

These points align closely with STNE's aims to create a continuum of teacher development and to enable the exchange and co-construction of knowledge.

A continuum of teacher development

STNE's vision is for a continuum of teacher development that spans initial teacher education and the induction year and links into career-long continuous professional development. It has begun to co-construct an initial teacher education programme that aims to provide a strong foundation for a beginning teacher to build on during the first year of practice and during a second year of mentored development. This continuum recognises that development as a teacher must take place in multiple sites (which include universities, local authorities, schools and local communities), and must be facilitated by a variety of people adopting a variety of approaches. These people will include university tutors, local authority personnel, headteachers, teachers and others in different ways at different times throughout a teacher's career. STNE's new way of working has been adopted in an effort to construct a seamless continuum of teacher development and to enable the collaborative engagement of a wide range of partners.

Communities for learning

The new way of working seeks to 'facilitate open and

honest learning conversations, promote active participation, build trust, support a culture of inquiry, and contribute to multiple communities for learning' (Graham, in 'Communities for Learning', a paper prepared for STNE drop-in session, 2006). The notion of communities for learning encapsulates STNE's aims and ethos. Communities for learning, as distinct from a community of practice, are inclusive of all people, in their variety and difference. Hence not only headteachers, teachers, researchers and lecturers but also parents, students and others are included in the community for learners. Such communities come together with a shared purpose but at the same time value the individual's way of seeing. In addition, communities for learning recognise that people belong to multiple communities and draw from and contribute to their existence. In adopting the philosophy of communities for learning STNE is creating spaces to encourage dialogue and co-participation in enquiry between people located in and out of the classroom and is developing ways to link different communities for learning.

The possibility to initiate and nurture this kind of collaboration and creative process has been a priority from the outset of STNE. Examples of this new way of working have been evident during programme development days held throughout year one of STNE. On these days headteachers, teachers, pupils, local authority personnel, members of the university research and development teams and others have come together to engage in communal work. Each day begins by agreeing a set of norms that help to build a shared understanding and confirms that all contributions are valued. All those involved in the development days have had opportunities to share their ideas, experiences and perceptions of learning and teaching from the many fields of activity in which they are involved, but they have also been able to collaborate to create something new and shared. This has resulted in the co-construction of the first year of a new B.Ed. programme.

Developing teacher education together

The initial developments, and the research associated with them, have provided some important opportunities to learn and some key messages for consideration during the next phase of the initiative. New developments were made possible because of the commitment, interest and enthusiasm of those involved. It is recognised that much has to be done to further promote dialogue and to extend the community for learning.

Luby poses a set of important questions at the end of his article published in this edition. He said:

While the STNE project is taking its first steps on the journey, I should like it to consider the following questions.

For example, the first question he asks is:

Are you truly providing a 'unique opportunity'... to renew the profession?

and he continues saying,

If so, are you prepared for the consequences that this will entail for the wider community of Scottish Education?

The questions are phrased in such a way that they suggest a you/I dichotomy. By asking what STNE is doing '*to prepare for consequences ...*', it suggests that STNE is working in separation from him and his fellow colleagues in the teaching profession. Whereas, the STNE initiative raises questions for educational stakeholders to consider jointly and seeks to create ways to find solutions and prepare for '*any consequences*' through working collaboratively. STNE addresses all educational stakeholders, 'What are **we** (collectively) doing as a profession to renew our profession?' Creating opportunities for dialogue and enabling connections between expert and novice, research and practice is what STNE is all about.

Luby highlights that developing professional knowledge – for student teachers, academics and experienced teachers – is a challenging enterprise. We agree – professional change is a challenging enterprise, particularly when it involves changing embedded practices and views, but we suggest that to meet the challenge, action is required in many places and by a variety of different actors. The experience of working with a wide range of actors in the first year of STNE has been challenging but it has also been rewarding and valuable. All those involved were aware of the potential that such collaborative encounters have for initiating change and for mutual and individual learning.

The title of our article, 'Scottish Teachers for a New Era: Where should we start from, if not together?' invites everyone with an interest in teaching and learning to consider how they might contribute to the development of the teaching profession in the 21st century. We welcome the questions raised by Tony Luby as they offer an opportunity for joint reflection. Anyone who wishes to participate in the shared discussions concerning the construction of a new model of teacher development can do so, by getting in touch by email stne@abdn.ac.uk or phoning 01224 274637.