Teach First: From McKinsey to the classroom

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Abstract

In June 2003 one hundred and eighty-six graduates from the United Kingdom (UK) Russell Group universities joined the Teach First (TF) programme which was to have a significant impact on Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in England, Europe and across the globe. This article describes the origins of the programme, provides a summary of evaluations and inspection reports, and concludes with a brief commentary on the next steps for TF.

Two key questions are addressed:

- Can teachers become effective practitioners without the theoretical underpinning provided by more conventional full-time programmes?
- Can partnerships with global businesses and management consultants enhance ITE?

Keywords: Teach First; educational disadvantage; evidence; teacher education; mobility; lifelong learning; partnership

Introduction

In June 2003 one hundred and eighty-six graduates from the United Kingdom (UK) Russell Group universities joined a programme which was to have a significant impact on ITE in England, Europe and across the globe. This article will describe the origins of TF, draws together an initial evaluation framed by the European Commission Common Principles for ITE, and concludes with a brief commentary on the next steps in the TF journey. All comments are attributable to the author and not to TF or any other partnering agency.

Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED, 2008) provide a succinct description of TF:

TF is a distinctly different employment-based route for training teachers. The programme aims 'to address educational disadvantage by transforming exceptional graduates into effective, inspirational teachers and leaders in all fields'. To achieve this, Teach First places high-quality graduates into challenging secondary schools for two years. In the first year, the graduates are trained to meet the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) while employed as unqualified teachers.

In practice TF combines the expertise of global corporations, community groups, schools, education agencies and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to educate and develop teachers for challenging urban schools and through this process also develops leaders for the education, not for profit and commercial sectors. This article argues that corporate involvement in ITE and continuing professional development in schools will provide new opportunities for academics and practitioners engaged in school practice.

Having secured agreement in principle from the Prime Minister's Office the newly formed TF charity gained support from a number of global companies and associated foundations through the London First and Canary Wharf Group who offered donations and practical support including office accommodation, travel, internships and coaching and mentoring for participants. For an HEI to consider involvement, TF would need to provide an opportunity for innovation and impact which would enhance their standing in the classroom and in the broader educational community. Schools would also need to be convinced that young highly qualified graduates could be trained to have an impact as teachers. In short would they be an asset or a burden to their already overstretched teaching resources?

These were the practical considerations. The ideological issues would prove to be far greater challenges to those involved:

- Can teachers become effective practitioners without the theoretical underpinning provided by more conventional full-time programmes?
- Can partnerships with global businesses and management consultants enhance ITE?

From ideology to practice

Since Callaghan's 1976 Ruskin College speech there has been pressure on those engaged in education to relate teaching and learning to the development of skills needed for business, industry and commerce. The involvement of business in education is not new; many schools were built through the patronage of the great industrialists of the Victorian era. The School Curriculum Industry Project of the 1970s linked with corporations. Business in the Community has a 25-year history of working in partnership with schools and of contributing to the training of school leaders. Since the 1980s school governors have been recruited to inner city schools which began with the Governor One Stop Shop initiative led by a retired United Biscuits executive. In 1988 Earley and Weindling reported on the management exchange initiative, Management South. The list goes on. Critically it has taken 30 years since the Callaghan speech for the business and educational worlds to recognize the importance and value of teaching developing future leaders while combating educational disadvantage. TF is the manifestation of a collaboration which has brought together government agencies, HEIs, a government lobbying group (London First) and a team of recruitment experts to recruit and train some of the best of UK's graduates to teach.

The TF initiative was set within a context of what might be seen as an ideological revolution, when universities across the globe are facing a time of unprecedented change. Challenges of scale, access, funding, demographics, internationalisation and new technologies have created both competitive threats and new opportunities. The issues are complex, often contested, but they are unquestionably transforming higher education. As identified in the Government White Paper (DFES, 2003) and the more recent Lietch Report (2006) new models and new suppliers are emerging, creating a need for HEIs to consider new ways of educating and training the public and private sector workforce. From this perspective TF represents a new ideological framework which combines the best of commercial leadership development with the highest standards of ITE as articulated in the TF Mission:

To address educational disadvantage by transforming exceptional graduates into effective, inspirational teachers and leaders in all fields.

The American model: Teach for America

TF is based on a movement which began in America in 1989. As founder and Chief Executive, Wendy Kopp began her journey when writing her University of Princeton final year dissertation. This is described in her book, One Day All Children: the unlikely triumph of Teach for America and what I learnt along the way. Kopp had felt that as a Princeton Senior she was part of the 'me' generation and most of the people she knew were heading for two-year programmes similar to internships in the business community. Kopp sensed that she was not alone in wondering if this was the right path for her and that there were thousands of other seniors like her who were searching for jobs that would offer them significance and meaning. She suddenly hit on an idea (2001, 3): "Why didn't this country (USA) have a national teaching corps of recent college graduates who would commit two years to teaching in urban and rural public schools?". Kopp believed that the teacher corps would provide seniors with an alternative to the two-year corporate training programmes and graduate schools. Significantly the teaching corps would also make teaching an attractive choice for top graduates, not least, by surrounding it with an aura of status and selectivity, streamlining the process of applying for teaching positions and assuring recent graduates a job and a steady income despite districts' inability to hire them until Labour Day.

On April 12 1989 Kopp went to Princeton's library to look for the names and addresses of chief executive officers of major American corporations. She picked companies she recognised and those that surfaced in her thesis research as being committed to educational reform. Within a week she had written to the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of thirty companies including Mobil Oil, Delta Airlines and Coca-Cola. Inevitably, Kopp did not get directly through to the CEOs but the letter did make its way down various corporate ladders and she had meetings with six or seven executives. She eventually met with executives of Xerox, IBM, AT and T, Metropolitan Life and New Jersey's Dodge Foundation. Kopp also met with an official in the Department of Education, the Dean of Harvard's undergraduate teacher education programme, the Head of Education of the States which advises States in their efforts to improve education and Stanley Caplin, the founder of the Test Preparation Company and a man deeply committed to education reform (Kopp, 2001, 34).

Exactly one year and ten days after Kopp had graduated from college she met with her 500 teaching corps members gathered in the University of Southern California's auditorium for the opening ceremony of Teach for America's first summer training institute. They were some of the country's most sought after recent college graduates; they came from 100 colleges including Ivy League schools and historically black colleges, state schools and private universities. Teach for America alumni now have major roles in government and state departments. There are also a significant number (approximately 60% each year) who remain in schools achieving high status in their communities. Although Teach For America has not gone unchallenged by academics who find its relationship with businesses unpalatable, it has had nearly twenty years of social, political, educational and economic success. Recruitment is set for 3 000 graduates in 2008.

Creating a start-up charity in the United Kingdom

In 2001 a team of management consultants from McKinsey relayed to the government via the lobbying group, London First a report which identified a key factor needed to address educational disadvantage in London. If the quality of teaching was to improve those recruited to the profession

would need to be of the highest quality. More generally the McKinsey report had also focused on the usual indicators of success in schools: attendance, exclusions, examination grades and the recruitment and retention of teachers. Hutchings *et al.* (2005) describe the origins of TF:

It came into being after two business membership organisations, London First and Business in the Community, engaged management consultants McKinsey and Company on a pro bono basis to investigate how businesses could help improve pupil performance in London. The McKinsey team reported that the number of excellent teachers was one of the strongest predictors of improved pupil performance, especially in challenging schools. They proposed the creation of a programme targeted at top graduates, using the support of business and education leaders, 'to bring additional excellent teachers into challenging schools for two years' (TF website). This idea was inspired by the success of Teach for America, a programme set up in 1990 through which talented graduates are recruited to teach in the neediest urban and rural public schools in the USA (Kopp, 2001). From February 2002, a team including London First, Business in the Community, and Brett Wigdortz from the McKinsey team, worked on the development of TF, enlisting support from the business community, the government and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA).

As stated, following the publication of the report the team of consultants led by Brett Wigdortz was invited by the Prime Minister's office to develop a scheme for recruiting young graduates from leading UK universities to be trained as teachers ready to address educational disadvantage in urban contexts.

Funded by the Department for Education and Skills (initially £500K, though this has not been sustained) Wigdortz and his team of McKinsey consultants registered TF as a not-for-profit company, with the aim of engaging a number of global companies and the TTA to generate further funding and to create an innovative programme which would combine the best of leadership training with the best of ITE. Inevitably success with engaging companies was linked to the consultants' access to executives through McKinsey and London First. As reported by McKinsey (Headline 2, 2003), 'McKinsey's involvement has extended ... since 2002 ... 50 Firm and support staff worked periodically with Teach First.'

The TTA worked in partnership with TF to appoint the HEI which would plan, develop and deliver the initial and ongoing school-based training programme. Early in November 2002 the TTA invited accredited ITE providers working in partnership with London secondary schools to apply for the Provision of Employment Based ITE for TF through a competitive tendering process. The successful tender was delivered by Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), a leading provider of ITE which had previously been in involved in the creation of foundation degrees and other work-based education and training programmes. In direct contrast with Teach for America this initiative was to have award-bearing status. Hutchings *et al.* (2005, 12) described the process:

Teach First came into being in 2003. It is a training programme for able graduates who commit themselves to teaching for two years in challenging London secondary schools. They undergo both teacher training (in the first year) and a programme of leadership training (starting in the summer term of the first year and extending into the second year).

Teach First adds to the wide range of routes into teaching in England. To become a teacher a person must be awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), by demonstrating that they have met the Standards for QTS (TTA, 2003): these are outcome statements that set out what a person must know, understand and be able to do in order to be awarded QTS. Traditionally teachers were trained either on undergraduate (BEd or BA QTS) or postgraduate (PGCE) courses run by higher education institutions. From 1994 School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) was introduced; this is a full-time

postgraduate training based in a school or group of schools. Other postgraduate provision includes flexible routes designed for graduates with some teaching experience, and the Fast Track programme, offering augmented postgraduate training for those with the potential to become future leaders of schools (Ross & Hutchings, 2003).

Employment-based routes into teaching were first introduced in 1990. These were designed for well-qualified mature (over 24 years)¹ people who need to earn a living while they train, and who can take on responsibility quickly. They include the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP), the Registered Teacher Programme (RTP) and the Overseas Trained Teacher Programme (Ross & Hutchings, 2003). Numbers on employment-based routes have expanded rapidly since the GTP was introduced in 1998-9. In that year fewer than 100 trainees were enrolled on employment-based routes, compared with 6 820 in 2003-4 (the last year for which complete data are available (DfES, 2005). This represents 17% of those training to teach.

Teach First is an employment-based route, but differs from those already in existence in key ways: it is designed for new graduates rather than mature people. It involves a two-year commitment, and participants teach in challenging schools. It is specifically designed to attract people who would not otherwise have become teachers, and it is anticipated and accepted that many of them will go on to careers in other sectors (hence the name, Teach First). There is a strong focus on recruiting teachers in shortage subjects.

Clearly there were some questions which could not be answered at the initial stage but these would help set the framework for the programme. Critically, what would the benefits be to those involved? For the participants, graduating from Oxbridge and other Russell Group institutions would almost guarantee them a head start in their chosen career. TF would have to offer similar or better prospects.

The selection process had already begun in October 2002; Russell Group graduates able to demonstrate a commitment to TF values would be trained to gain QTS in year one and TF Ambassadorial status in year two while working for at least those initial two years in challenging London schools and simultaneously undergoing an intensive programme of education and management training.

For schools, how could the programme provide teachers who could meet the classroom challenges considered to be amongst the most difficult in the country? London Challenge had been created to address this very issue. Led by Professor Tim Brighouse the headteachers and advisory staff were very supportive of TF participants.

The Canterbury Christ Church Teach First Training Programme

To introduce a scheme into United Kingdom teacher education which was driven by an American model supported by a government lacking in popularity in a city that reflected the best and worst in educational practice was a tantalising challenge.

A three-way partnership involving TF, CCCU and London schools was created to develop the inaugural programme. The key elements of this programme are a six-week Summer Institute, three weeks in London focusing on observation, planning and practice in schools where the participants will be employed. A further three weeks in Canterbury follow which focus on the integration of theory and practice through lectures, seminars and workshops involving HE

While the age limit was subsequently removed, the TDA website still recommends this as 'a particularly good choice for mature people'.

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tutors, Teach for America alumni, government ministers and officials, local authority advisory staff, community leaders, head teachers and practitioners.

Following the Summer Institute participants begin teaching in challenging urban secondary schools for up to 80% of the timetable in two subjects supported by school-based mentors and professional tutors and their CCCU tutor who observes then teach every two weeks. Participants also attend subject and professional study days held in a London location delivered by the HEI. During the first year four written assignments are submitted, assessed and moderated. The programme concludes with a return to the Summer Institute where the final presentations, portfolios and written assignments are assessed and moderated. In addition to the taught and assessed elements (QTS) participants are also expected to gain further teaching experience through a five-day placement in a second school setting by the end of their first year and to complete the Training and Development Agency (TDA) numeracy, literacy and ICT on-line assessments.

From May of the first year participants join the TF Leadership Development programme from the start of the summer term and engage in a school-based project aimed at sustainable development for learners and/or the community. The Leadership Development programme is TF credit-based; participants require 190 from a possible 240 credits in order to gain TF Ambassador status at the end of year two.

Research and evaluation

Researching innovative teacher education practices in the 21st century

The TF programme is an innovative evidence-based programme which has been subject to significant internal and external evaluation and scrutiny since its inception. The European Commission common principles for teacher education provide the framework for the synthesis of the findings:

An evidenc-based profession

Professor Niemi Hannelle commented (European Commission Notes, 2008):

Teachers play a crucial role in supporting the learning experience of young people and adult learners High quality teacher education needs to be supported by coherent national or regional policy.

If research is to inform ITE in terms of curriculum it should also inform teacher training in terms of delivery. TF created its own evaluations from surveys taken during Summer Institutes and by tutors at the end of sessions. This cycle of feedback has been utilized in the enhancement and management of the programme. However the most significant evidence-based research to date was published by OfSTED in January 2008.

The inspection, which took place between July 2006 and July 2007, judged the quality of the London-based programme involving 210 trainees and 70 schools. The inspection also explored the difference that trainees made to the schools in which they were based. In the autumn, inspectors met 67 trainees in 15 schools. They visited a further 13 trainees in 13 different schools in the summer to judge their achievement of the Standards for QTS. They also attended 26 training sessions organised by schools and Canterbury Christ Church University and interviewed school-based and university trainers and staff working for Teach First.

The findings were almost wholly positive; the inspectors were extremely supportive of the TF model commenting (2008, 3):

- The teacher training component of the London-based Teach First programme is effective because it builds upon CCCU's experience and success in ITE and upon the expertise and commitment of staff within the Teach First office. The close and dynamic collaboration of the two organisations resulted in the very good central management of the programme. Their commitment to improving the programme and building on its success was impressive.
- The introductory six-week training enabled trainees to cope successfully with wholeclass teaching at a surprisingly early stage in their teaching career. Nonetheless, despite their very strong personal and academic qualities and the benefit of the course, trainees found their immersion into teaching exceptionally challenging.

The evidence is informative, supportive and revealing; clearly more needs to be done by TF and CCCU at the induction (Summer Institute) phase of the programme to create a more realistic approach to addressing educational disadvantage in schools with a particular emphasis on behaviour for learning.

A mobile profession

UK ITE programmes are now located with an extensive European framework. European and international mobility is extremely important to the Bologna Agreement (European Commission, 1999). Professional mobility however has several different meanings: transfer from country to country; transfer from phase to phase (e.g. primary to secondary); and transfer from profession to profession. It is the latter which is relevant to the TF programme. Ralph Tabberer then Chief Executive of the TTA stated in 1999 that teaching is not a profession that should necessarily be a lifelong commitment. This is a central tenet of TF, which by its very title implies that those recruited first enter teaching then move on to another profession taking the transferable skills with them.

TF aims to recruit the highest qualified graduates in order to raise the quality of provision in the most challenging schools. Haines and Hallgarten (2002) showed that graduates from the Russell Group universities (which claim to represent research institutions of the highest quality in the country) are very much less likely to enter teaching than those in other universities.

Overall, 3.7% of graduates enter teaching; the average for Russell Group universities was 2.7%, and for Cambridge, Bristol, Imperial College, UCL and LSE was less than 2%, with Oxford only just over 2%. Haines and Hallgarten concluded that teaching has a 'low appeal in the elite universities, stemming from the poor perception of the profession by the graduates themselves' (2002, 157). TF has successfully targeted these elite universities; the majority of participants (83% in 2003; 74% in 2004) have degrees from Russell Group universities, with particularly large groups from Oxford and Cambridge, which together make up a third of Cohort 1 and a quarter of Cohort 2.

Participants are encouraged to see themselves as an elite group: the TF website states: 'By joining Teach First ... you will mark yourself out as a cut above the rest'. Teaching in challenging London schools is used as an attraction, and a sense of mission is required: people who are 'dedicated to addressing the imbalances and injustices that cause poverty'. But participants are also promised a glowing personal future following their participation in the programme and the training it offers, not only in teaching but also in leadership and business skills: 'Teach First unashamedly expects many of its participants to become future Ministers, CEOs, and serial entrepreneurs of our times.' Thus the programme appeals both to altruism and to ambition.

There is no doubt that this combination has proved extremely successful. In the first year (2003) 1 300 people applied for the 250 places available. In 2007 TF reached 14th position on the Times list of the top 100 graduate employers. This list of leading employers is compiled by

asking more than 15 000 final year university students which organisations they think offer the best prospects for graduates based on the training and development on offer, the quality of the employer's recruitment promotions, and its overall reputation. This rapid rise indicates very clearly the impact that TF has succeeded in making among undergraduates.

A profession which works in partnership

In HE our partnerships are not mutually exclusive. The interface between partners providing education research, knowledge exchange and practice is now one which demonstrates mutuality. Organisations which network and work collaboratively will build the practical skills and academic knowledge required for social and educational growth.

A central factor in this initiative is the role that businesses play in the scheme. By building a link with TF, leading figures within business recognise the range of skills acquired by graduates through this prestigious scheme, potentially leading to careers outside teaching in the longer term. This has been acknowledged in articles in the *Times* (2003), *Telegraph* (2003) and *Guardian* (2003). The Secretary of State for Education and Chief Executive of HSBC also commented on the value of the programme beyond education at TF's one year birthday celebration on 15 July 2003.

The promise of a short internship with leading UK and Global companies as experienced by the majority of the Teach First team is also a huge incentive to Teach First participants. Major corporations are to provide additional management training for the participants, including the possibility of undertaking a mini-MBA during their second year of teaching delivered in partnership by the Tanaka School of Business, Imperial College and the Institute of Education, University of London. Through this programme participants are therefore presented with career choices that extend beyond a two-year teaching commitment. The TF team (Headline 2, 2003) also anticipate that alumni will assume leadership roles, both inside and outside the field of education.

TF's business connections also help to demonstrate to potential applicants that the skills they gain whilst teaching provide them with rapid progression within their chosen career once they have finished the two-year programme. Additionally, the participants' business contacts may be used to link these companies to the London schools involved in the programme, thereby bringing the potential for additional resources to those schools and their students.

As an ITE provider with inclusive values, CCCU was well placed to work with London Schools and members of the business community. The business community, including McKinsey the founding company, has yet to comment on the value that the partnership brings to their practice. Much has to be learnt as high standards of educational practice focussing on children link with the urge to profile TF within the business context through media coverage and consultancy networks. As the 2008 OFSTED report commented:

- Trainees were highly committed to Teach First's aim of countering educational disadvantage and had a markedly beneficial impact on the schools involved. Their placement as groups of trainees enhanced this impact.
- In selecting schools which are suitably challenging, Teach First accepts the risk that some are vulnerable to changes in staffing which affect the training they offer. The level of funding available allows for concentrated support for schools. Regular visits to the trainees by university tutors were central to the success of the training and helped to compensate for any deficiencies in school-based provision.
- The networking amongst the trainees contributed significantly to their progress during the year and their success in meeting the Standards for QTS.

A profession which demonstrates lifelong learning

The 21st century knowledge-based society has presented ITE with significant challenges. As Professor Bernard Cornu (TEPE Conference, 2008) commented during a recent presentation, we live in a society in which information plays a central role for buying, selling, travelling and so on. However information is not knowledge; a knowledge society is a networked society; a society of collective intelligence and a society of lifelong learning. Teachers in a knowledge society have a new role and mission and must themselves be lifelong learners.

In the TF context all participants are expected to develop beyond the minimum requirements of the Standards for QTS (TDA, 2007) and to strive for and achieve excellence. The introduction of the TF credit system leading to Ambassador status is a further example of 'raising the bar' for TF participants. From the point of entry a TF participant is part of a network, a movement which 'addresses educational disadvantage' through teaching and through leadership in other professions. There is a sense of the collective intelligence shared by TF as evidenced by the impact of the recent Policy First (Teach First, 2007) publication produced by Ambassadors in response to their experiences in London schools. Where TF participants will be in the future is a matter of speculation. The evidence thus far is that they are lifelong learners who continually recycle their learning for the benefit of other learners.

Conclusions

This article commenced with two questions concerning TF initiative:

- Can teachers become effective practitioners without the theoretical underpinning provided by more conventional full-time programmes?
- Can partnerships with global businesses and management consultants enhance initial teacher education?

Those engaged in the TF movement believe that highly motivated, focused individuals can make a significant impact on pupils' academic achievements. TF participants have succeeded in raising the aspirations and levels of educational achievement for London's secondary school pupils, working with children from challenging backgrounds to inspire them to excel above and beyond their own expectations (London Challenge Conference, 2008).

Pupils in London secondary schools benefit from the scheme through the generation of new energy in the classroom, and the creation of a dynamic and imaginative approach to classroom practice. Participating trainees gain the opportunity to develop transferable skills which are considered valuable within business, specifically communicating, planning, motivating, negotiating and presenting. Throughout the process participants are engaging with the application of theory to practice, which encompasses both educational and business theory.

The partnership with global businesses and management consultants has enhanced ITE through the calibre and commitment of its recruits. The cohorts selected by the dedicated team of TF recruiters have impressed schools and HEI tutors, OFSTED and the Government. There is much to be learned from corporate involvement in ITE and Continuing Professional Development in schools as developed by TF. The early evaluations are strong; the programme appears sustainable. In addressing educational disadvantage TF is also meeting the challenges set by the Mckinsey Educational Expert, Sir Michael Barber (London Challenge, 2008):

- The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of teachers.
- The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction.
- High performance requires every child to succeed.
- Great Leadership at school level is a key enabling factor.

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As James Learmonth (2003) stated: 'If the impact moves beyond the immediate and into the community it will have been a success.'

In 2006 TF began its expansion across England, to the NorthWest (Manchester and Liverpool), followed in 2007 in the Midlands (Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Nottingham) and in 2009 Yorkshire (Leeds and Bradford). The TF movement has also moved into Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Germany and is working in partnership with Teach for America in creating a global Teach for All movement beginning in Israel in 2008.

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