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In this month's edition our guest writer is **Professor Gary McCulloch**. Gary is the inaugural Brian Simon Professor of History of Education, and founding director of the International Centre for Historical Research in Education (ICHRE), at UCL Institute of Education London. He is currently president of the British Educational Research Association (2017-2019) and editor of the *British Journal of Educational Studies*. His recent publications include *Educational Reform Legislation in the 20th Century* (ed., 2018), and ***A Social History of Educational Studies and Research*** (with Steven Cowan, 2018).

Past, present and future in teacher education

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One of my favourite studies in the history of education is Emile Durkheim's work on the history of secondary education in France (Durkheim 1977). Not only is this a magisterial account of educational change over many centuries, it also provides one of the best statements that there is on why history should be included in educational studies in general and the training of teachers in particular. Durkheim argued that there was a fundamental connection between past, present and future in teacher education that could only be understood through historical study: 'it is only by carefully studying the past that we can come to anticipate the future and to understand the present' (Durkheim 1977: 9). Indeed, according to Durkheim, history was an indispensable asset in its own right, as a means of illuminating organisations with all their ideals and aims over the course of time, and to comprehend what he called 'man in his totality throughout time'. The present was itself merely 'an extrapolation of the past, from which it cannot be severed without losing the greater part of its significance' (Durkheim 1977: 12, 15) – its significance, he might well have added, for the future.

Durkheim was writing and lecturing over 100 years ago, as a professor of pedagogy, at the University of Paris. The range of his ideas over past, present and future may well be unmatched in the field of teacher education. I should like to argue that, in a very generalised sense, towards the end of the 20th Century, an idealised vision of teacher education for the 21st Century came to displace earlier concerns to build on the foundations of the past; that is, that a notion of the future became systematically divorced from that of the past.

The first stage in this process occurred in a number of works produced in the post-war period, between the 1950s and the 1970s, that reflected on the future of teacher education. These tended to provide a classical liberal perspective in which the gradual progress of past developments would be continued ad infinitum into the future. They matched the then dominant paradigm of the history of education which emphasised how educational progress was based on consensus in the interests of society as a whole (McCulloch 2011: ch. 2)

One such, published in 1955 as part of an edited collection entitled Looking forward in education, was published by G. B. Jeffery, then the director of the Institute of Education, London, on 'Universities and the teaching profession'. In this, Jeffery discussed the origins of the university tradition in Europe 800 years before, and the responses that had been developed in England in the 19th Century, before going on to explore developments that had taken place in the first half of the 20th Century. Finally, he asked whether the Ministry of Education would be prepared to take full advantage of the McNair Report of 1944 (Board of Education 1944) as a basis for further progress in the future (Jeffery 1955). Reassuringly, its image of the future, while only sketchy, matched its positive view of the foundations laid in the past.

Another example is the collection The future of teacher education, edited by J. W. Tibble of the University of Leicester (Tibble 1971a). This also dwelled on the origins of the study of education in England in the 19th Century and the historical development of the system of teacher education during the 20th Century. It took these as the starting point for a discussion of current proposals for further reform, including the potential for a unified system and possibilities for the colleges of education (Tibble 1971b). Several very interesting contributions looked at particular aspects. One, by Professor Maurice Craft of the University of

Exeter, opined that 'Of one thing we may be reasonably sure, there is unlikely to be any grand plan. If change comes about it will be more likely to emerge from local, pragmatic advance on the basis of favourable local conditions.' (Craft 1971: 34). This speculation proved unfounded – and very few were willing to make any such specific predictions.

We may compare these post-war reflections with the discussions published in the period from the 1970s into the new century. These generally ignored the history but substituted for this an idealised view of the 21st Century. Idealised images of the future, and especially of the 21st Century, have clearly had a continuing influence over the school reforms of the past three decades. Education holds a unique power, in our imaginations, to engineer our future in the changed world of the new millennium. The promise of the future also tends to eclipse the past in order to create high expectations for radical and fundamental change. This kind of factor helps to encourage architects of 'modernisation' (McCulloch 1998).

At the same time, history impinges on even the most historically unaware of education policies, with national social and cultural traditions remaining active and potent, renegotiated in the midst of reform. In spite of the surface pace of policy change, the practices of schools often accommodate themselves and are highly resilient. As Tyack and Cuban have pointed out in the United States, the 'basic grammar of schooling, like the shape of classrooms, has remained remarkably stable over the decades' (Tyack & Cuban 1995).

It is not difficult to find examples of these tendencies in the policy reports of the past three decades.

The White Paper of 1992, Choice and Diversity, did not look back beyond the 1980s, but looked forward eagerly towards 'a new century of excellence':

> ***By the next century, we will have achieved a system characterised not by uniformity but by choice .... There will be a rich array of schools and colleges, all teaching the National Curriculum and playing to their strengths, allowing parents to choose the schools best suited to their children's needs, and all enjoying parity of esteem. Our aim is a single tier of excellence ... The education system of the 21st century will be neither divisive nor based on some lowest common denominator. Diversity, choice and excellence will be its hallmarks, with each child having an opportunity to realise his or her full potential, liberating and developing his or her talents. (DfE 1992)***

The New Labour manifesto for the new teacher professionalism, David Blunkett's 1998 Green Paper T*eachers: meeting the challenge of change*, claimed that it had a 'new vision of education in the 21st century' in which, as it famously put it, 'The shabby staffroom and the battered electric kettle – which endured for so long because teachers always choose to put their pupils first – can become things of the past' (DfE 1998).

No less notably, picking these out at random, critics of government policy also stressed the future rather than the past. One fairly weighty critique, ***Learning to Succeed,*** the report of the Paul Hamlyn Commission on Education in 1993, said very little about the historical context, but set out a lengthy vision for the future in the form of '21st century teachers':

> *In our vision, a teacher in the twenty-first century will be an authority and enthusiast in the knowledge, ideas, skills, understanding and values to be presented to pupils. The teacher will be an expert on effective learning, with knowledge of a range of classroom methods that can be intelligently applied and an understanding of appropriate organisational and management styles, conditions and resources … (Paul Hamlyn Commission 1993)*

In 2005, a special issue of the *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 'Looking to the future', took this very literally, with no sense of past developments going back beyond 1988 (JET 2005). These tendencies remained during the Coalition years of 2010–15, when Michael Gove was an especially keen advocate of education for the 21st Century, and under the Conservative governments of David Cameron and Theresa May since 2015. Even in a critical international collection on teacher education in times of change (Teacher Education Group 2016), there is relatively little detailed attention given to historical perspectives.

What general lessons may be learned? Taking our cue from the ideas of Emile Durkheim, we might try to find a better balance between the past, the present and the future. If in the post-war years, history was emphasised as a liberal and idealised model of progress stretching into the future, since the 1970s teacher education reforms, like other educational changes, have been based on a minimally vague notion of the past that gives priority to an idealised vision of a 21st-Century future.

Might we be able to find a way to restore a balance? This might involve developing a fuller notion of a past that has been contested between different interests and ideals, that raises and gives meaning to unresolved questions about the future. As we peer out from a troubled present into an uncertain future we must hope that the past can give us greater guidance.

There is indeed a new literature in the history of teacher education that seeks to give a greater purchase on the present and the future. David Crook's review of the historiography of teacher education rightly raised a concern that the history of teacher education had been under-represented in the specialist literature (Crook 2011).

At the same time, recent research in this area has moved on from the historical accounts that were familiar until the 1970s.

New work on teachers and teacher education in the UK context has begun, for example, to document the history of teacher professionalism and professional lives, engaging with the insights of researchers such as Andy Hargreaves, Ivor Goodson, Christopher Day and Pat Sikes (see eg Day et al. 2000).

Wendy Robinson's historical study of teachers' attempts to learn through practice deals with similar issues (Robinson 2004).These concerns were also represented in a detailed analysis by Cunningham & Gardner (2004) on the historical development of the student teacher in the early years of the 20th Century. Cunningham & Gardner in their writings made use of contemporary written materials of different kinds, and also drew on the experiences of retired former student teachers to understand the experiences of student teachers from their own perspectives (see also Gardner & Cunningham 1998).

The contributions of individual teacher educators over their lives and careers is another area that has begun to be studied in depth, informed by feminist theory and life history. Thus far, we have only scattered published examples of the roles played by teacher educators over a long period of time, and even fewer that illuminate their everyday experiences and professional lives. However, these should help to provide a base for further, more intensive research (Crook & McCulloch 2013). The same is true of more critical discussions of the history of teacher education policy and comparative approaches to research that have also begun to emerge (eg O'Donoghue et al 2017; McCulloch 2018).

It may be that we can never recapture the unsurpassed scope of Emile Durkheim's mastery of the past, present and future in teacher education. The historic rupture between teacher education and the history of education that has taken place in the past generation is a continuing obstacle, but strong efforts are being made to surmount this and with some success. In the future we may even begin to recall the importance of making this connection through Durkheim's stirring words: 'It is only by carefully studying the past that we come to anticipate the future and to understand the present.' ■

May 2021 Postscript

Historical agendas for teacher education were being argued for even before the global Covid-19 pandemic (see also e.g. Beckett and Nuttall 2017), which has underlined the importance of anticipating the future and understanding the present. It remains true that we can do both by carefully studying the past. After months of lockdown, it is indeed a 'liberating experience', as Brian Simon put it, to remind ourselves that 'things have not always been as they are and need not to remain so' (Simon 1966, p. 92). We may be especially receptive in our present circumstances to the view of the American historian Michael Katz, who tried to demonstrate 'how the reconstruction of America's educational past can be used as a framework for thinking about the present'. Katz proposed that that 'historical products 'that were created over time were generally contested between different groups during their formation, among a number of discrete alternatives. Indeed, he added, these products of history were 'neither inevitable nor immutable', and 'may no longer even be appropriate' (Katz 1987, p. 1).

Reestablishing the dynamic connections between past, present and future, as becomes possible and indeed necessary in a time of crisis, should also inform our understanding of teacher education. The lessons of the past can be interpreted to inform our approach to a post-Covid system of teacher education with a rebalanced curriculum. An increasingly cloudy future may come to remind us of the centrality of the past in constructing the present, and an awareness of the rear-view mirror in staying the course. ■

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