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Teacher education and the GERM: policy entrepreneurship, disruptive innovation and the rhetorics of reform

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the question: how do a new cadre of teacher education providers in England, imbued in the discourses of the Global Education Reform Movement, construct the problem of a supposedly “failing” existing teacher education system associated with universities; what solutions to this problem do they propose and on what grounds; and how sound are their arguments? We make a rhetorical analysis of publicly available discourse from a “new rhetorical” perspective. We focus on one case in England: the Institute for Teaching (IFT), an organisation that has grown out an influential Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) and that models itself on independent Graduate Schools of Education in the USA, such as Relay. We examine the emergence of the IFT as a case of policy entrepreneurship, capitalising on a travelling policy idea to create a market for its provision of “practice”-based teacher education programmes. We show how the IFT has rhetorically constructed its policy window using typical neo-liberal, reformist explanatory frames, allowing them to present themselves as disruptive innovators capable of solving societal challenges. Although apparently sophisticated in presentation and rhetorically adept, we argue that, ultimately, the IFT’s rhetoric is instead sophistic, presenting fallacious arguments in plausible ways about complex educational and social problems.

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Teacher education has long been a site of struggle internationally (Ellis et al., 2015; Furlong, Cochran-Smith, & Brennan, 2009; Trippestad, Swennen, & Werler, 2017). As Popkewitz (1985) noted, studying teacher education “provides ways of considering deeper tensions in society”, its relation both to schooling and to professionalism, compelling us to examine it as a practice “in which larger issues of social interest and power are contested” (p. 102). In this article, we address three questions: first, how do a new cadre of teacher education providers in England, imbued in the discourses of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (Ball, 2012; Sahlberg, 2011), construct the problem of a supposedly “failing” existing teacher education system associated with universities? Second, what solutions do they propose and on what grounds? And third, how sound are their arguments?

We undertake a rhetorical analysis of publicly available discourse from a “new rhetorical” perspective (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). We focus on the Institute for Teaching (IFT), an organisation that has grown out of an influential Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) in England and models itself on the Independent Graduate Schools of Education (IGSE) in the USA. We examine the emergence of the IFT as a case of policy entrepreneurship, capitalising on a “travelling” policy idea (the IGSE), to create a market for its provision of practice-based teacher education programmes. We show how the IFT has rhetorically constructed its policy window using neo-liberal, reformist explanatory frames, to present itself as a disruptive innovator ultimately capable of solving societal problems. Although apparently sophisticated in presentation and rhetorically adept, we argue that, ultimately, the IFT’s rhetoric is sophistic, presenting fallacious arguments about complex educational and social challenges in superficially plausible ways that nevertheless have consequences. We begin by examining the international policy context within which this new (for England) phenomenon of a would-be “Independent Graduate School of Education” has emerged.

International policy context

Teacher education and the GERM

Musset (2010), writing for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), identified the challenge of designing teacher education policies “capable of helping students to acquire the competencies needed to evolve in today’s societies and labour markets” (p. 3). Previously, the OECD highlighted the quality of teaching as the single most important in-school variable for both educational and economic success, connecting the need for improved quality to more efficient systems of teacher preparation (OECD, 2005). Efficiency was defined as improvement in students’ performance on international benchmark measures such as the OECD’s own Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). These pronouncements reflect earlier interest by policymakers around the world in constructing teacher education as a “policy problem”, whereby “teaching and teacher education are tightly linked to the nation’s aspirations for global competitiveness” (Furlong et al., 2009, p. 3).

Sahlberg (2011) described the worldwide coalition of interests that promote strategies that perpetuate the education–economics elision as the “GERM”: the Global Education Reform Movement. As Ellis & McNicholl (2015) noted, the GERM is a social movement with a distinctive discourse through which “education systems are increasingly defined in terms of being able to ‘respond to the twin revolutions of globalisation and the knowledge economy’ (Giddens, 2000, p. 162) by producing a suitably qualified and skilled workforce for the 21st century” (p. 14). Sahlberg and others (e.g. Ball, 2012, 2013) have shown how the GERM reproduces itself through complex networks of “international development agencies, bilateral donors, and private consultants” (Sahlberg, 2011, p. 99) with the strategic interventions of venture philanthropists becoming increasingly significant (Reich, Cordelli, & Bernholz, 2016; Saltman, 2010). One of five key dimensions of the GERM’s operation is the “borrowing” of “market-oriented reform ideas” from the private sector and “aligning education systems to the operational logic” of private capital (Sahlberg, 2011, p. 103; see also Ball, 2012, 2013).

Verger, Fontdevila, and Zancajo (2016) distinguished between different approaches to the privatisation of public education systems globally. England is characteristic of what they describe as “privatization as state reform”, noting that “social democratic (or centre-left) governments” that followed Conservative (right of centre) governments “in the 1990s, did not challenge the privatization trend, but rather consolidated and even deepened it” (p. 179). Successive governments have used particular “explanatory frames” as “drivers to legitimate the reforms” such as “public education in crisis” and “public sector monopoly” (p. 179). The “crisis frame” is, in part, centred on a crisis of “equity” and “social justice” so that “equity frames” are “used to legitimate private-sector involvement” (p. 179).

The equity frame appropriated by such neo-liberal policy assemblages proposes that educational interventions alone can eliminate inequitable educational “outcomes” for students (with outcomes defined narrowly as test or examination results) despite the cumulative evidence that out-of-school factors account for most of the variation (e.g. Berliner, 2014; Duncan & Murnane, 2012; Rothstein, 2004). Both the rhetorical production of this equity frame and the associated policy tools move around the world as “travelling ideas” put forward for “borrowing” within nations and their education systems (Seddon, Ozga, & Levin, 2013, p.4). Ellis et al. (2015) studied Teach for All as a travelling idea in teacher education that saw the original American model (Teach for America) travel to over 30 different countries around the world resulting in some inevitably unpredictable local instantiations (see also Friedrich, 2014; Labaree, 2010).

Ball (2012) suggests that the policy entrepreneur plays an important role in globalising networks of reform:

They identify needs and offer innovative means to satisfy them; they bear financial and emotional risks in pursuing change where consequences are uncertain; and they assemble and coordinate networks of individuals and organisations with the talents and resources needed to achieve change. (pp. 13–14)

Ball notes that these individuals are extremely adept at “constructing or opening and taking advantage of ‘policy windows’” (p. 14) that are “in part at least, constructed discursively” (pp. 13–14). Citing Kingdon (1995, p. 182) he shows how the policy entrepreneur is able to “hook solutions to problems, proposals to political momentum and political events to policy problems” (p. 14).

We now examine how the “privatising as state reform” mode of policymaking has worked on teacher education in England since 2010 and how policy entrepreneurs have come to meet this policy need.

Extending market principles in teacher education

At the time of the UK general election in 2010, there were three main routes into school teaching in England: partnerships led by higher education institutions; school-centred initial teacher training schemes (SCITTs); and employment-based routes (Whitty, 2017). Each route led to the award of qualified teacher status (QTS), which at the time was a requirement for teaching in the majority of state-funded schools. The establishment of SCITTs (DfE, 1993) led to a small number of consortia of schools offering training, although any academic award (predominantly, the one-year Postgraduate Certificate

of Education [PGCE]) continued to require university validation. Employment-based routes, including the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) and the route offered by the charity Teach First, represented “on the job” (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Grossman, 1990) approaches to the development of teachers.

With the election of the Conservative-led Coalition government in 2010 came an increasingly powerful rhetorical emphasis in policy on “practice” and the application of teaching “skills”. The then Education Secretary Michael Gove asserted that “teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice” (Gove, 2010, n.p.). At the same time, initial teacher education (ITE) policy sought to extend the operation of market logic – particularly in terms of choice – across the sector. The publication of the white paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) saw the launch of the School Direct programme, a route that gave responsibility for the selection and recruitment of student teachers to schools, with those schools “in the lead” with a supposedly stronger emphasis on teaching. The balance of power and relationships between the universities and schools was shifting (Brown, Rowley, & Smith, 2016), with the privileging of school-based routes in the national funding system and the erasure of universities from the policy discourse (McIntyre, Youens, & Stevenson, 2017). However, the rapid introduction of School Direct led to fragmentation of the sector as the choice of ITE programmes grew exponentially. Prior to 2010, for example, a graduate seeking to become a secondary mathematics teacher would have had a choice of approximately 90 programmes.¹ At the time of writing, the number of choices available is now 977, of which 91 are “led” by universities (search.gtr.ac.uk). The government’s own National Audit Office (NAO) concluded that the market was not providing “good enough information to make informed choices about where to train and the plethora of routes has been widely described to us as confusing” (NAO, 2016).

Despite the proliferation of choice and the compliance of the majority of universities in the implementation of the School Direct initiative, applications to teacher education programmes declined overall (DfE, 2016b) but universities proved resilient enough in the market for the majority of their programmes to be viable. For whatever reason – recognisable brand, the allure of an academic award, careful market research, inside knowledge – when given a choice, enough applicants chose university-led programmes for them to become more important in mitigating the effects of an overall decline in applications to ITE courses (Howson, 2017).

Opening up the higher education market to private providers

In April 2017, the Higher Education and Research Act was passed, marking the first major regulatory reform to the UK higher education sector in 25 years. The 2017 Act makes the establishment of private providers with the title of university and degree-awarding powers much easier; it therefore created potential new opportunities for private teacher education providers. Until 2016, the only private teacher education provider was a subsidiary of Hibernia College, a private, for-profit, mainly distance learning college based in Ireland. It was subsequently bought by the owners of the *Times Educational Supplement* (a popular news magazine for teachers) and rebranded as the TES Institute, with Lord Jim Knight (a former New Labour schools minister) as chief education advisor to the parent company. However, in the run-up to the

passing of the 2017 Act, a number of new private providers of ITE and continuing teacher education began to emerge that, unlike the TES Institute, sought to offer their own academic awards.

In September 2017, the private Brierley Price Prior (BPP) University (granted degree-awarding powers in 2007, specialising in business and law) announced it would offer a “knowledge-based PGCE” in distinction to existing university PGCEs, which it considered “progressive” (Hazell, 2017). At the Conservative Party conference in October 2017, a joint venture between Oceanova (a teacher recruitment and training agency), the (private) University of Buckingham, a Multi-Academy Trust, and various other smaller organisations and consultancies was launched at an event sponsored by the Conservative think tank Policy Exchange. Subsequently renamed the National College of Education, it offered both initial and post-qualification programmes (NIE, 2017) with a niche offer tailored to schools that could take advantage of a new funding stream arising from the government’s apprenticeship levy (DfE, 2018).

Another new provider seemed more ready for the opportunities created by the 2017 Act, both in its awareness of the coming legislation and in its knowledge of the American IGSE model that it wanted to emulate. This organisation was the Institute for Teaching – a self-consciously “disruptive innovation” in the sector.

Innovation and change: disruption and/or destruction

Disruptive innovation was first conceptualised by technology entrepreneur and academic Clayton M. Christensen (1997). Although Christensen was originally referring to the commercial applications of technology, disruptive innovation as a theory of change has become popular at the reformist end of the education policy spectrum where there is a neo-liberal commitment to marketisation and to the encouragement of “start-ups” in the market. The theory

explains the phenomenon by which an innovation transforms an existing market or sector by introducing simplicity, convenience, accessibility, and affordability where complication and high cost are the *status quo*. Initially, a disruptive innovation is formed in a niche market that may appear unattractive or inconsequential to industry incumbents, but eventually the new product or idea completely redefines the industry. (Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation, n.d.)

Education Secretary Gove endorsed “learning from other nations like Sweden which have pioneered disruptive innovation” (Gove, 2012). Disruptive innovation represented a paradigm of public sector reform that Gove and his New Labour predecessors (Gove was speaking, approvingly, about Tony Blair) had invoked to explain increasingly privatising and market-based “solutions” to what they perceived as the entrenched vested interests of the public sector, professionals and other experts. However, the introduction of policies such as School Direct during Gove’s tenure as Education Secretary have certainly not introduced “simplicity, convenience, accessibility [or] affordability”, as we have shown. Indeed, teacher education policy during this period has seen increasing complexity across the sector and – with the rise in tuition fees – increasing cost and debt for students. To this extent, such policy might be more provocatively described using the related concept of “creative destruction”, developed originally by Marx (1863/1969) and

then picked up by economist Joseph Schumpeter (1942/2014). Rather than simply improving consumers' economic lives, creative destruction involves a continual revolution in structural values and, therefore, a fundamental challenge to the efficient operation of any market (cf. Harvey, 1991).

We now outline our methodological approach in building our argument about a GERM-influenced, "privatising as state reform" disruption of teacher education in England.

Methodology: rhetorical analysis

Our primary data consists of freely available public discourse. We use the tools of rhetorical analysis, as in the work of Edwards (2004), particularly the "new rhetoric" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969), with an emphasis on argumentation and the creation of the "rhetorical situation" (Bitzer, 1968). Rhetorical analysis seeks to understand how social actors use established patterns of argumentation and frames of reference to act in the world through the appropriation of particular persuasive structures for social and political ends. Although the focus of such an approach is the speaker or writer's argumentation, it also recognises that the effectiveness of argumentation is bound up with other rhetorical modes of persuasion such as *ethos*, the moral basis of the speaker/writer's appeal and authority to speak; and also *pathos*, the playing on of the audience's emotions (Lanham, 1991). We also understand a rhetorical message to be a strategic public statement directed at gaining attention and stimulating action in a target audience (Silverstone, 1993) through the active construction of a rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1968) that requires a response.

Additionally, a critical approach to rhetorical analysis (Edwards et al., 2004; Trippestad, 2009) aims to hold the *rhetor* (speaker, writer) publicly responsible for the message by undertaking an ethical consideration of such elements as the aims and purposes of the message, the relation between form and content, and its timing and situation. In classical rhetoric, a vital part of the rhetorical work is calculating the public, the place of persuasion and the timing of the message (Andersen, 1997). Classically, these elements are analysed as aspects of *kairos*. Bitzer (1968) defined *kairos* as a situation where it may be possible to change the world through a communicative action. Its key premises are that, first, there is an intrusive problem that demands communicative action. Second, the audience and the speaker/writer are in a position where they can recognise and do something with the problem. And third, circumstances (in the widest sense – social, technical, economic and cultural) allow for a solution of the problem and make it possible to communicate it.

The strategic and political work of the *rhetor* is to introduce a critical situation that needs to be addressed. The conservative Swedish philosopher Lars Gustafsson (1989) argued that "reform" problems are inevitably formulated and defined from the perspective of particular interests and not merely focused on the apparent object of the reform. If the reformers' understanding of the problem is accepted by the intended audience, the solution will primarily be given to the advantage of the political interest defining or constructing the problem. In our rhetorical analysis of the IFT's public discourse, our principal aims are to:

- (1) identify how the IFT claims Gustaffson's "problem formulation privilege" or, to use Ball's (2012) conceptualisation, how the IFT, as an example of policy entrepreneurship, managed to co-create, open and step through the "policy window";
- (2) examine critically the discursive construction of the policy window as an aspect of the IFT's "formulation of the problem" and in doing so to hold the policy entrepreneur publicly accountable, ethically, for their rhetorical agency and, crucially, the soundness of key premises.

Data and methods

The data analysed comprised all of the public discourse of the IFT available at the time (March 2018), represented in:

- writing – the *Beyond the Plateau* report (Hood, 2016a); the IFT website (www.ift.education); Job packs: Posts of Associate Dean (IFT, 2016);
- speech – a short radio programme in the *Four Thought* series first broadcast by BBC Radio 4 in December 2016 (Cook, 2016) available to download from the BBC website; contributions made by Matthew Hood, the IFT Chief Executive, to a public meeting at the Royal Society of Arts on 23 October 2016 (Hood, 2016b); and the audio recording of webinars aimed at prospective students of IFT programmes freely available on the IFT website (IFT, 2018a, 2018b);
- video – three short promotional videos available on the IFT website and also on Vimeo (IFT, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e).

We do not analyse the Twitter feeds of the IFT or associated individuals in this paper. As noted, all of the data we did analyse – texts, audio and video recordings – were freely available on public websites at the time of analysis. In addition, we refer to news stories and statements made by the IFT in response to questions by the journalist Warwick Mansell and reported on his news site *Education Uncovered* (Mansell, 2017a, 2017b).

We began our analysis with *Beyond the Plateau*, where the IFT's key ideas and arguments are most comprehensively expressed. We identified statements expressing "disruptive" or "problem-formulation" strategies that challenged the existing order in teacher education, their interconnectivity with dominant political ideologies such as neo-liberalism and focused, in particular, on the parts of the text where IFT's rhetorical production of both "problem" and "solution" was most apparent. We then followed this textual analysis with analysis of other media, including the three videos, drawing on the same concepts and our analysis of the earlier written texts. The speech of all audio and video recordings was transcribed and the transcripts of the videos were annotated with descriptions of what was on screen. Analysis of the videos involved both the visuals and the audio transcript.

The IFT and the rhetoric of policy entrepreneurship

How policy entrepreneurship opened the "policy window"

The IFT first came to public attention in 2016 with a report – *Beyond the Plateau: The Case for an Institute of Advanced Teaching* – by Matthew Hood and published by the

Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). In 2015, Hood was awarded a Winston Churchill Travel Fellowship to study “Graduate Schools of Education in the US”. The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust is a UK charity that funds travel intended to bring “innovative ideas” from other countries to the UK. One of the key reference points in *Beyond the Plateau* is the IGSEs, established in the USA in 2011 as university-like alternatives to universities (see Cochran-Smith et al., 2018; Zeichner, 2016).

At the time of Hood’s report, the future organisation was to be known as the Institute for Advanced Teaching and the author made the case that, “inspired by a US model” (Hood, 2016a, p. 6), it was intended to be “free from discredited educational ideas (such as learning styles)” (p. 16) and framed in distinction to traditional universities’ Master’s degrees that offer “little in terms of follow-through to improved outcomes for pupils” (p. 20). Hood identifies the American IGSEs as one of few “global ‘bright spots’ ” in the field of teacher education as they are “teacher-led (as opposed to academic-led) institutions” that are also “practice-orientated” (p. 21). There are connections to Coalition and Conservative Party education policy, with the titles of two white papers – *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) and *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (DfE, 2016a) – used as chapter headings, in-text references or allusions (e.g. p. 3). Additionally, in a reference to a speech by the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer (p. 28), Hood also aligns with the policy trajectory that culminated in the 2017 Higher Education and Research Act.

The structure, style and, indeed, allure of a university has been very important to the IFT despite its characterisation – explicitly and implicitly – of traditional universities as failing to improve educational outcomes through their work with teachers. Hood identified the “creation of a prestigious institution” with a “prestigious faculty of experts” (2016a, p. 5) as critical to its success and, in its advertisements for these posts, “Global expert[ise] in teacher education pedagogy” (IFT, 2016b, p. 4) was the second bullet point in an ambitious person specification. During 2016, Hood took on the role of “Chief Executive and Founder” of the IFT with the former head of the ARK [Absolute Return for Kids] Multi-Academy Trust’s in-house teacher education scheme, appointed as “Dean and Founder” with three “Associate Deans” also appointed. Four of the five people appointed to these senior roles had worked for Teach First in various capacities and they were joined by a “Talent and Partnerships Director” who had also worked for Teach for All. In addition to “Deans” and “Associate Deans”, the IFT borrowed further from traditional academic vocabulary in naming school-based teacher educators joining its programme as “Fellows”.

At the point of our analysis, however, the IFT did not exist as its own entity and it had not been granted degree-awarding powers. Indeed, the IFT’s financial status was interesting in that it seemed to be able to support the salaries of up to eight posts even though, at the time of writing, it had no enrolled students. In response to requests from Warwick Mansell, the IFT confirmed that it was being “incubated” within the ARK Multi-Academy Trust (equivalent to a charter management organisation in the USA) but would not clarify what “incubated” meant nor confirm how much start-up funding ARK had provided (Mansell, 2017a). ARK is a registered charity in the UK that operates a chain of over 30 academy schools. ARK is partly funded by hedge-fund managers and, as one funder acknowledged, “modelled on” the KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program), the US charter school chain (Evening Standard, 2011). It is an example of venture philanthropy’s use of private capital to influence public policy in England (see Junemann & Ball, 2013).

A story in the *Sunday Times* newspaper published in October 2017, quoting Matthew Hood, also reports that Sam and Holly Branson, the children of the founder of the Virgin Group, had provided funding through their philanthropic foundation (Griffiths, 2017), although the amount seems to be quite modest and related to a small, teacher well-being programme (Big Change Charitable Trust, 2017).

More significantly, in addition to potential philanthropic funding via the ARK charity, in 2017 the IFT was one of eight organisations which shared an initial £17 million tranche of funding from the government's Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund (DfE, 2017a). When Mansell asked further questions about their funding, the IFT replied that "at the wishes of the DfE [the government] we are unable to disclose the exact sum" (Mansell, 2017b). Commenting on this response, Mansell noted that "with government cash seeming to flow on occasion to projects and individuals of which it seems to approve, the need for as much transparency as possible seems greater than ever" (Mansell, 2017a). In further correspondence with the journalist, the IFT confirmed that the DfE had "formally supported our application to Companies House" to use the word "institute" in its title. "Institute" is a legally sensitive word in company registration regulations in England and the support of the DfE for its use by the IFT is significant. Approval of the title "Institute" is by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to established organisations that are already functioning as an institute but operating under a different name. Moreover, institutes typically undertake high-level research or are prestigious professional bodies (Companies House, 2018, para. 65).

Given that, at the time of our analysis, the IFT was neither fully established nor functioning, did not seek to undertake research and had no track record to evidence its high standing, the approval of its title by the Department of BEIS with the support of the DfE suggested high-level political support. The IFT was also officially launched in November 2017 with a speech by the then Secretary of State for Education in which, on the basis of no evidence, she "urg[ed] the profession to embrace the high-quality training it will provide" (DfE, 2017b). At the time, the IFT was recruiting to two training programmes for post-qualification teachers – the "Masters in Expert Teaching" and the "Fellowship in Teacher Education" – as well as the whole-school teaching development programme funded through the government's Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund. In this paper, we focus on the IFT's "Masters" and "Fellowship" programmes.

Both of these programmes were interesting because, at the time of their first marketing and our analysis, remarkably little had been decided in terms of content and mode of assessment. In the webinar for the "Masters", the IFT stated:

Has every session for all of the courses been written or stress-tested? Definitely the answer ... I think you'd agree, is no. In fact, there's still decisions being made about some of the content pathways that we might take in some of those courses. So we're definitely not a known quantity. (IFT, 2018a)

And, in response to a question from a potential applicant:

So how is the course assessed? Ok, ... so that's kind of still to a certain extent a bit of work in progress ... So we're starting with a blank sheet and if we get to that point where we feel that essays and a big dissertation at the end are the best way of helping us to identify and

assess those 3 perspectives on expertise, we'll go down that route. But I think at the minute, I think essays would be a very small part of the puzzle. (IFT, 2018a)

The fact that, at the point of marketing these programmes and accepting applications from potential students, the course content and mode of assessment could not be specified is interesting because it suggested a degree of confusion about how the IFT's rhetoric could be codified into a higher education programme. Moreover, the lack of confirmed detail appeared, on the face of it, to contravene the UK Competition and Markets Authority regulations (CMA, 2015). According to CMA guidance for higher education providers, details of programme content and assessment must be given to potential students in advance so that they can make a clear choice about which provider and programme they choose; these details are regarded as "pre-contract information". Failure to provide this information – or to provide incomplete information – is regarded as a "misleading omission".

Furthermore, in the publicity for the programme, the "Masters in Expert Teaching" carried an asterisk after the word "Masters" linked to the following statement:

*We are in the process of securing accreditation for the Masters in Expert Teaching from a university partner. Until this process is complete the Masters in Expert Teaching is not currently a Masters or other accredited qualification nor does it provide any credits which can be transferred to another accredited provider. (<https://ift.education/courses/>)

In other words, at the time of going to the market, the "Masters in Expert Teaching" was not a "Master's" in any conventional sense at all. Nonetheless, legally and financially, the IFT had opened a policy window and established its institutional footing to answer the problem that it had constructed discursively.

Claiming the problem-formulation privilege

In its public discourse, the IFT seeks to address *stasis* and conservatism in teacher education, to construct this situation as a crisis, and associate existing arrangements as insufficient to address the crisis. As such, the IFT claims the privilege of formulating the problem. Their strategy is twofold. First, they promote overarching and dominant problem formulas with high legitimacy in the current neo-liberal policy climate that are recognisable by the intended audience (policymakers and teachers, as well as the wider publics). Second, they construct a particular problem window to open up a new market in which their "solution" can be capitalised.

The crisis the IFT constructs is both a moral and economic crisis typical of neo-liberal discourses of education:

Every education system around the world faces two major challenges: closing the stubborn achievement gaps between disadvantaged children and their wealthier peers and ensuring that young people leave compulsory education with the knowledge, skills and characteristics they need in order to thrive in the modern world. Failure to address these challenges is morally indefensible and economically unsustainable. (Hood, 2016a, p. 3)

These twin crises are further detailed, portraying England's school system as particularly underperforming on PISA measures in terms of social mobility. The IFT initiative promises to address these complex problems by spreading opportunity more effectively

through the nation, closing the attainment gap and making better use of the nation's talent for future national competitiveness and individual benefit.

The function of simplifying a complex world to apparent matters of cause and effect is to propose a rhetorical situation that can be controlled. In *Beyond the Plateau*, such arguments rely mainly on an economic rationality that seeks to make all other rationalities appear absurd or unreasonable. This strategy is seen in the IFT's potent cause-and-effect argumentation, the argument snowballing from the destiny of the three-year-old child to the misery of the individual adult to greater, national economic impact:

the difference in 'school readiness' between three-year olds in the most and least disadvantaged families is the equivalent of one full year of development ... In turn, this iniquity [sic] is perpetuated in the jobs market, with the top professions such as law and finance dominated by those who went to private schools and selective universities. ... Educated populations also drive economic growth and international competitiveness. (Hood, 2016a, pp. 7–8)

With some brief references to life expectancy, public health and criminality, *Beyond the Plateau* essentially performs a reduction of what a society is, into a set of economic transitions. Its main rhetorical strategy is to promote a causal relationship between these economic and moral crises and the quality of teachers and classroom teaching. Improving teachers according to the IFT's plan then becomes the privileged solution. The text even insists on excluding wider solutions to inequitable outcomes:

the key to success lies in improving the quality of classroom teaching that disadvantaged pupils receive. While policymakers are often tempted to tinker with funding systems and school structures, it is what goes on inside the classroom that really drives up standards. (Hood, 2016a, p. 8)

Beyond the Plateau, then, seeks to reduce the complexity of success and competitiveness – and other societal issues such as public health – to be only a question of education. And, again, it reduces complex questions of education to be mainly questions of teachers, teaching “quality” and performance in the classroom.

According to *Beyond the Plateau*, a teacher's performance develops swiftly from year 1 to year 5 but “plateaus” at a certain level and does not develop further. Through charts, figures and references to a limited selection of research, Hood (2016a) demonstrates this metaphor (e.g. p. 13). Whilst much educational research has indeed suggested that teachers' effectiveness can be sustained at the same level for substantial periods (e.g. Rivin, Hanushek, & Cain, 2005), recent longitudinal research drawing on data from large urban school districts in the USA have challenged this assumption (Kraft & Papay, 2014; Papay & Kraft, 2015). Rhetorically, however, for the IFT the plateau represents the essence of their problem-formulation because creating social mobility and growing the skills of the individual for a competitive economy requires expert teachers. It argues that the existing teaching workforce does not yet have this crucial potential and is therefore in need of further training, implicitly to save the disadvantaged child and – ultimately – the nation's competitiveness. The IFT positions itself as a solution to this dramatic problem with the experienced but “plateau-ing” teacher rhetorically constructed as a barrier to improvement.

Chapter 2 analyses the resources spent in England and the USA on the continuing professional development of teachers compared to other professions and again asserts that there is sufficient spending but that the resources are misdirected. Specifically,

resources need to focus on providing ongoing development throughout a teacher's career "until they have mastered a core set of instructional techniques" (Hood, 2016a, p. 14). By this point in the text, the IFT has sought to create its future niche in the teacher education market, even during times of continuing economic austerity and cuts to school budgets in England.

Disruptive innovators producing ethos to create a market

According to Aristoteles and Eide (2006) a vital part of the persuasion process is dependent on the audience's perception of the *rhetor* through three modes of persuasion – *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. Their use and balance must appear proper to the audience, purpose and situation (cf. Lanham, 1991). Johannesen (1987, p. 65) claims that a rhetorical interaction between a speaker and audience is ethical if the balance between these modes and, indeed, the intent and character of the case are in the interests of *both* the speaker and the audience. Otherwise, the rhetorical interaction risks being coercive and manipulative of the audience, potentially fallacious in argumentation and *sophistic* in effect. We closely examine two of the promotional videos produced by the IFT to show how they contribute to the *ethos* of the IFT's arguments. We focus on these videos as, of the three available at the time of our analysis, they address the two education programmes the IFT offers that we have been discussing.

The ethos of knowledge and authority: "dean" by association

In the video *Institute for Teaching – Fellowship in Teacher Education* (<https://vimeo.com/240819762>), an *ethos* based on traditional university authority is produced by association and through the use of emotional spaces and symbols. In this context, we are introduced to the "Associate Dean of the Fellowship Programme". The title of dean is normally associated with universities but the IFT is not currently any kind of higher education institution. Therefore, not actually having conventional substantiation for the use of this title, the *ethos* strategy of the video is to make the named individual it presents a dean – by association.

We first meet this associate dean walking through an old library with a book in his hand. The walk claims an association with university authority and tradition although the IFT itself does not possess such a library. The video then uses other spaces and symbols of travel and movement as metaphors and subconscious arguments, suggesting change and momentum. Cycling, train tracks, harbours, rivers – the images of travel are cross-cut in the film with spaces and symbols representing knowledge, research and epistemological authority. The associate dean is presented by a river reading a book, occasionally glimpsing modern architecture at the other end of the river. In slow motion, we see him walking in a park with a colleague, suggesting a place of reflection and deliberation, perhaps intended to echo the parkland or green quadrangles found in elite universities. We also see this associate dean linked with height throughout the video – near a harbour crane, walking up a flight of stairs, standing in a tower, and sitting on a bench with a view over the landscape below. In the aesthetics of power, height is used to suggest superiority (Hernes, 1990) such as having more strength or a better perspective.

The argument developed in the visuals and voice-over in this video is that to be a successful teacher is not enough to become an expert teacher educator. It is only a start. Rhetorically, however, we see the fundamental purpose as presenting the claim of expertise in teaching and in teacher education in relation to traditional university structures and values; to establish a dean *by association* with conventional images of academic knowledge and authority.

The ethos of passion and inspiration: teaching as a family of athletes

In the video *Institute for Teaching – The Masters in Expert Teaching* (<https://vimeo.com/240810549>), *ethos* is visualised in the presentation of the “Associate Dean for the Masters in Expert Teaching”. In this video, love for fellow teachers and passion for teaching is strongly expressed through the use of family as a metaphor. We see a dinner table with this associate dean and (we assume) his family; the *ethos* of this associate dean as a passionate, experienced teacher is strengthened in the voiceover:

I was a teacher for a long time. My wife is a teacher. My sister is a teacher. My mum is a teacher. And my granddad opened the school that we all went to. Teaching really does run in my blood. The most important thing about this programme is that it's not necessarily about helping you to become a better researcher. It's focused squarely on helping you become a better practitioner. (<https://vimeo.com/240,810,549>)

This approach, he claims, draws on both the best research evidence and consultation with the best teacher educators (unnamed) around the world. The double message of both being a practitioner and drawing on the best research is emphasised by the associate dean, writing the words “expert teaching” on a blackboard.

The associate dean then more explicitly attempts to inspire potential students to apply to the IFT’s programme, stating that this is the “best time to be a teacher” and that he is “so excited” about “helping teachers to move from where they are at”. The ethos of having teaching “running in his blood”, his own (family) inspiration and his call to teachers to move and become “the best they can possibly be”, is strengthened by images of the associate dean putting on running shoes or taking off his shirt. The end of the video connects back to the beginning, where he was initially staged as an athlete seeking to improve his performance through deliberate practice. The improvement of athletic performance is posed as the key analogy for becoming an expert teacher:

When you talk to endurance athletes essentially what you learn over time is that they all have a similar mindset. You have to try and push yourself further. There is that battle with yourself. (<https://vimeo.com/240810549>)

The analogy between improving athletic performance and improving teaching is most thoroughly elaborated by Matthew Hood in a short BBC radio programme first broadcast in December 2016 (Cook, 2016). Teaching, says Hood, is “like athletics, or acting, is a performance profession” and the problem (and, implicitly, the policy window) is that currently “we don’t teach it like one” (Cook, 2016). The key message about developing teaching expertise in both Hood’s radio talk and the video about the “Masters in Expert Teaching” is that becoming an expert teacher requires hours of deliberate practice,

breaking down skills into their smallest parts and rehearsing them outside the context of “the race” or athletic competition.

The soundness of key premises

Thus far, we have shown how the IFT, as a self-conscious example of disruptive policy entrepreneurship in the field of teacher education, claimed the problem-formulation privilege (Gustaffson, 1989) through the discursive construction of a policy window (Ball, 2012) and the use of the American IGSE model to meet a need within the policy sphere in England. While our reading of *Beyond the Plateau* showed a rhetorical strategy of connecting dominant, neo-liberal political ideas with more or less research-based argumentation for an audience of, mainly, policy actors, our analysis showed that the use of radio and video productions based their rhetorical strategy on using the dramatised personas of real IFT employees as persuasive tools for different audiences (both professionals and the wider publics). We then illustrated how, in the programme recruitment videos, the personal *ethos* of the associate deans was exploited to build the IFT’s claims both to authority and to reputation. Through this analysis, we identified a rhetorical strategy of using emotional geographies, placing characters in spaces and places that evoke affective associations with knowledge and authority, passion and inspiration, in order to create the rhetorical situation.

As Bitzer (1968) points out, rhetoric is a “mode of altering reality ... by the creation of a discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action” (p. 4). The potential for change exists within the rhetorical situation that has been created for the audiences who may be “capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (p. 8). According to Bitzer, rhetorical situations may be “real” or “*sophistic*”, a distinction that raises the critically important question of the soundness of the key premises of the arguments. A *sophistic* rhetorical situation is one in which, although the communication is apparently plausible and rhetorically adept, the arguments are specious, based on spurious premises and the construction of a false exigence or problem-formulation (p. 11). We conclude by focusing on the soundness of the premises in the IFT’s arguments and the nature of the rhetorical situation constructed.

“Apocryphal claims, illusory evidence”: the IGSE as a “solution”

The IFT poses the IGSE and the kinds of teacher education programmes they offer in the USA as the answer to plateauing teacher effectiveness and to wider issues of structural inequity and social immobility in England. From their initial statements in *Beyond the Plateau* onwards, the IGSEs such as Relay (and their degree-awarding powers) are promoted by the IFT as a vital part of their entrepreneurial activity. However, the only rigorous, evidence-based analysis of IGSE performance in the USA to date presents little by way of substantiation for these claims. Zeichner’s (2016) critical synthesis considered all the available peer-reviewed research as well as other evidence, including internal evaluations of impact by five IGSEs. Zeichner’s review, commissioned by the National Education Policy Center, concluded that while advocates and entrepreneurs of the IGSEs make bold claims about innovation and success, they are “not substantiated by independent, vetted research and program evaluations” (Zeichner, 2016, p. 2). Zeichner

shows how the IGSEs make “apocryphal claims” based on “illusory evidence”. Although some students at some of the schools associated with these IGSEs perform well on standardised tests in maths and English, questions continue to be raised about the selectivity of those schools (such as KIPP schools) and the attrition rates of certain categories of students from them, a phenomenon we are now seeing in some MATs in England (Staufenberg, 2018).

Additionally, the IGSE as a model has itself become somewhat problematic in the USA. The Relay GSE, for example, an organisation on which the IFT relies for considerable authority, has been described in the US press as a “controversial degree vendor” (Stern, 2017) and has met opposition over its approach to the recruitment and training of “minority teachers” (Thomas, 2016). At the regulatory and quality assurance level, although now operating in the state of Pennsylvania, Relay was initially denied a licence to operate in the state by its Department of Education as, amongst other reasons, the specification of its Master’s degree was regarded as deficient (PDE, 2016) because the programme had an insufficient research element and the faculty’s qualifications were deemed not appropriate for teaching at Master’s level.

Given the IFT’s criticisms of existing teacher education in universities, in particular, it is somewhat paradoxical that, like Relay, they seek to emulate a traditional academic institution with deans, fellows and degrees. We believe it is also somewhat misleading, within the increasingly marketised higher education sector in England, that an organisation that appears not to meet the criteria for registration at Companies House as an “institute” is nonetheless allowed to style itself as one and also to advertise a “Masters” degree that was not, at the time of its first marketing, a Master’s degree in any conventional sense, in spite of Competition and Markets Authority regulations. Whatever the substance and quality of provision the IFT may offer in the future, its appearance currently seems illusory in terms of being an independent higher education institution.

“Deliberate practice”: necessary but not sufficient

The key pedagogical premise of the IFT’s arguments is that teaching is like athletics. Improving teaching, therefore, is likened to improving individual athletic performance. The role of the teacher educator is to provide opportunities for teachers to develop “mastery” of “a core set of instructional techniques” (Hood, 2016a, p. 14). This argument plays into a common-sense understanding of how to learn to teach and become more proficient – which is that “the more one teaches, the more proficient one becomes” (Lampert, 2010, p. 27). The argument also plays into the theory of expertise associated with the psychologist Anders Ericsson who proposed that “high levels of deliberate practice are necessary to attain expert level performance” (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993, p. 392). The concept of “deliberate practice” and its supposedly causal relationship with teaching expertise figured large throughout the IFT public discourse we analysed and has continued to do so in subsequent publications (e.g. Bates, 2018; McCrea, 2018), sometimes referenced to US publications by Deans for Impact (e.g. 2015). Deliberate practice has also attained some popularity within both popular and academic social movements interested in the identification of the aforementioned “core instructional techniques” and the “core practices” approach to teacher education (cf. corepracticeconsortium.com).

Hambrick et al. (2014) speculate that Ericsson's research has "captured the popular imagination" because of its "meritocratic appeal – the implication that nearly anyone can become an expert with enough hard work" (p. 35). It is certainly true that the deliberate practice theory of general expertise, like the IFT's argument about developing teaching expertise, is fundamentally optimistic. However, more recent, laboratory-based and naturalistic studies of expertise have called into question simplistic causal relationships between deliberate practice or rehearsal and the attainment of expert performance. Empirical studies have concluded that deliberate practice is "necessary but not sufficient" for reaching high levels of expertise in, for example, chess (Campitelli & Gobet, 2011) and music (Meinz & Hambrick, 2010). Crucially, Hambrick, MacNamara, et al. (2016) also found that developing expertise in individual performance where environmental factors can be controlled and the measures of effectiveness are simple (e.g. running and jumping) is a very different prospect to developing expertise in an activity where both environmental factors and measures are multiple, unstable and sometimes competing. More recent psychological science, therefore, suggests that developing expertise in teaching is significantly more complex than it is in athletics. The IFT's predominant pedagogical premise in its argumentation is therefore, in our view, spurious. It is characteristic of the oversimplifications in its rhetoric throughout the data we have analysed and the reductions in complexity that consistently marked out their discursive construction of a policy window. Moreover, as current research from the USA is now beginning to articulate, an over-reliance on a single approach to teacher development – such as the rehearsal of particular classroom routines uncritically accepted as "core" – "contribute[s] to the obscuring of deeper, systemic, structural injustices in education and in society" (Philip et al., 2018).

Policy entrepreneurship as state-sponsored disruptive innovation

In this paper, we have analysed the public discourse of a self-styled "disruptive" provider of teacher education in the context of a "privatising as state reform" (Vergier et al., 2016, p. 7) policy trajectory in England. Responding to Ball's (2012) injunction to pay greater attention to the "role of the individual policy entrepreneur" (p. 33), we focus on the ways in which the IFT discursively constructed the policy window through which their appropriation of the travelling idea of the IGSE might be capitalised. We show how the IFT rhetorically produced the problem of a supposedly "failing" existing teacher education system associated with universities as a policy window; the solutions they proposed and on what grounds; and the soundness of their arguments. Ultimately, we conclude that no matter how successful their entrepreneurial activity in meeting the need of a state frustrated with the challenge of reforming teacher education *and* universities in England, and also noting their rhetorical fluency and skill, the rhetorical situation the IFT has created is *sophistic* as the key premises of their arguments are unsound.

Our approach to the analysis of their public discourse has also attempted to hold the IFT ethically accountable for their rhetoric and to promote rhetorical accountability more generally as a responsibility in public sector reform. Problem-formulation of the kind that we have demonstrated in the rhetoric of the IFT is destructive as well as creative. For every instance of privilege accorded to the IFT (and similar individuals and organisations) as a

result of their entrepreneurship – and for every pound from general taxation they receive (but have apparently not been allowed to discuss) – other activities and opportunities for the transformation of schooling and the development of teachers are excluded. This extraordinary encounter between a policy entrepreneur’s appropriation of a travelling idea to meet a need within a long-developing policy trajectory around higher education’s role in teacher education in England is, at one level, highly creative. At another, it both adds to the consequential fragmentation and instability within a critical part of the national education infrastructure and helps to remove responsibility from both policymakers and the wider publics for structural inequities by reducing the complexity of the underlying situation and the potential educational responses. Furthermore, unlike policy entrepreneurial activity in more fully marketised systems such as in the USA, the levels of risk to these policy entrepreneurs are mitigated by a combination of apparently strategic, high-level political support and government funding. On that basis, we consider the IFT to be a very British example of state-sponsored disruptive innovation in teacher education.

Afterword

In spring 2018, the IFT entered into a formal partnership with Plymouth MarJon University, a small, post-1992 university, initially to accredit some aspects of the “Masters in Expert Teaching” programme. Subsequently, in July 2018, the IFT announced its intention to merge with Ambition School Leadership, a charity also initially set up in part by ARK and modelled on the US organisation New Leaders. Whether the IFT achieves its original goal of establishing itself as an IGSE – or indeed solving entrenched problems of educational and social injustice – remains to be seen. Whatever the eventual outcome, it has nonetheless leveraged considerable funding and support from the state. To that extent, at least, its entrepreneurial construction of a policy window has been successful.

Note

1. This estimate is based on the number of universities with education departments and the relatively small number of SCITTS operating at the time.

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