

**'Why am I having to do this?': The nature and
purpose of concurrent courses in Scottish
primary teacher education**

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Stuart Hanscomb and Carlo Rinaldi
School of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Glasgow

Abstract

In his *Report of a Review of Teacher Education in Scotland* (2010), Donaldson presents the idea of the 'twenty-first century teacher'. Central to this is the requirement for an 'extended professionalism' in which emphasis is placed on the development of the student teacher's academic and intellectual qualities. This article aims to analyse the role of concurrent courses (i.e. university courses taken by education students outside of core education subjects) in the development of this extended professionalism. It does so by comparing it with the 'graduate attributes' agenda adopted by many universities, and by outlining two dimensions and three possible models of the relationship between concurrent courses and the purposes of teacher education. It is argued that one of these models best fits the word and spirit of the Donaldson Report, but that further research is required to establish how different models of concurrency have been, or might be, received by students and staff on Scottish primary education degrees.

Key words

Concurrent teaching; curriculum; Donaldson Report; extended professionalism; graduate attributes.

Introduction

A characteristic of the twenty-first century teacher, as envisioned by Donaldson's (2010) *Report of a Review of Teacher Education in Scotland* (the 'Donaldson Report'), is an 'extended professionalism' that emphasises certain academic or intellectual qualities. Towards achieving this, it is recommended that primary education students are more closely integrated with the 'wider academic community' by being required to take courses outside of education. Recommendation 11 of the Report reads:

In line with emerging developments across Scotland's universities, the traditional BEd degree should be phased out and replaced with degrees which combine in-depth academic study in areas beyond education with professional studies and development. These new degrees should involve staff and departments beyond those in schools of education (40, 88).

Beyond this basic template however, details concerning the nature and purpose of concurrent teaching remain relatively unspecified. In one of the few publications to discuss this aspect of the Report, Smith (2011) is critical of Donaldson's vagueness and raises questions that we intend to investigate in this article. He questions, for example, whether Donaldson thinks 'any other discipline is appropriate' or whether concurrent courses should be in some way related to education (2011: 24). If they should be related to education, he then asks whether students should be exposed to these subjects 'with no necessary attempt to connect [them] with primary school curriculum applications' (2011:28) or whether they should be structured such that their educational relevance is made explicit.

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From our point of view – as lecturing staff involved with core and concurrent teaching on a primary education degree in Scotland that embodies this aspect of the Donaldson Report – the need to find and refine answers to a range of questions concerning concurrency has been apparent for a number of years. In many respects these are expressed by the student who, quite reasonably, asks “Why am I having to do this?” With this in mind, this article considered ways in which concurrent teaching might be understood as forming part of primary teacher education, with particular emphasis on whether and how it is integrated with core learning. More precisely, we engage with Smith’s questions concerning whether there are kinds of concurrent courses that should be recommended by schools of education, and whether changes should be made in the way such courses are taught in order to accommodate primary education students. To these we add a third line of enquiry: how should students be prepared or oriented by their education degree leaders in order to appropriately engage with concurrent courses?

DONALDSON’S TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY TEACHER

Recommendation 2 of the Donaldson Report, concerning teacher attributes, reads:

Education policy should support the creation of a reinvigorated approach to 21st century teacher professionalism. Teacher education should, as an integral part of that endeavour, address the need to build the capacity of teachers, irrespective of career stage, to have high levels of pedagogical expertise, including deep knowledge of what they are teaching; to be self-evaluative; to be able to work in partnership with other professionals; and to engage directly with well-researched innovation. (2010: 84)

The ‘twenty-first century teacher’ embodies an ‘extended’ (as opposed to a ‘restricted’) professionalism’. She is the kind of professional who is highly proficient in the classroom and who is also reflective and enquiring not only about teaching and learning, but also about those wider issues which set the context for what should be taught and why. (15)

Donaldson’s emphasis on professional identity applied to teaching indicates that the teacher should be seen as a member of a profession that is ‘recognised as both complex and demanding’ (2010: 14). The term ‘profession’ denotes ‘advanced learning’, and is often seen as synonymous with ‘vocation’. As well as possession of a sound theoretical grounding in pedagogy, this implies a commitment to the practice’s inherent values, and an enthusiasm for engaging with continual learning and development. From The International Alliance of Leading Educational Institutes Donaldson cites the following passage, urging a “redefined professionalism’ of teaching’:

... improvement in teacher quality requires a reconceptualisation of how we prepare a new generation of teachers... It is manifested in qualities that require teachers to value and sustain the intellect, to work collaboratively with other stakeholders in education, to be responsible and accountable and to be committed to lifelong learning and reflexivity. (14)

Further attributes of the teacher as ‘extended’ professional include ‘critical and creative thinking skills’ and other qualities associated with leadership. Leadership abilities are particularly important for Donaldson, and as well as ideas more traditionally associated with the concept such as expertise, inspiring others, nurturing talent and facilitating teamwork (e.g. Bass and Riggio, 2006; Haslam et al. 2010), the importance of personal responsibility, accountability, initiative and development are also emphasised (Donaldson, 2010:16, 18; Forde et al. 2011). This is linked to increased flexibility in terms of a teacher’s range of activities, including engagement with research (see also Oancea and Orchard 2012:582; Furlong, 2013); being educators of colleagues as well as students, and making stronger connections with ‘universities and other agencies’ (p. 5).

Underpinning Donaldson’s extended professionalism is a set of qualities that reflects current thinking concerning ideal characteristics of all university graduates, including those from non-

vocational degrees. At a theoretical, level Barnett's notion of 'critical being' (1997) and recent interest in 'intellectual virtues' in educational contexts (Baehr, 2013) are particularly pertinent. At an applied level, so too are some of the recommendations of the Dearing Report (NCIHE 1997); the concept of 'graduate identity' (Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011:580), and the 'graduate attributes' approach (e.g. University of Sydney, 2016; University of Glasgow, 2016a). As an example of graduate attributes, the ten core 'academic abilities, personal qualities and transferable skills' listed by the University of Glasgow include 'independent and critical thinkers', 'investigative', 'adaptable', 'ethically and socially aware', and 'reflective learners' (University of Glasgow, 2016a). Being 'subject specialists' is also on the list and is unpacked in terms of the graduate's 'breadth and depth of knowledge' and 'understanding and respect [for] the values, principles, methods and limitations of their discipline(s)'. The graduate who knows enough to succeed in assessments is not guaranteed to embody these attributes, something that appears strongly analogous to Donaldson's distinction between being 'highly proficient in the classroom' and having 'deep understanding' and 'enthusiasm'.

It is, it seems, the knowledge, skills and values that for many should be a defining outcome of all degree courses that Donaldson, like Sutherland (1997, para. 62) before him, wants to see instilled in our future teachers. If our thesis about the closeness of this relationship is right, then it has considerable consequences in terms of the relevance and value of concurrent teaching in education degrees. On the one hand it lends support to the model of concurrent teaching we will be arguing for, and on the other it provides some plausibility for Donaldson's conviction that engagement with the wider university is an important route to extended professionalism.

A curriculum for twenty-first century teachers

It is against this background that many primary education courses in Scotland have been re-designing their curricula. The section of the Donaldson Report that generates the relevant recommendation (11, see above) - entitled 'Undergraduate provision in initial teacher education' - argues against 'over-emphasis on technical and craft skills at the expense of broader and more academically challenging areas of study' (2010:39), and recommends students engage with 'in-depth academic study in a discipline other than education' (40). Four reasons for this are explicitly stated in this section of the Report: 1) that it helps provide primary teachers with the foundation for topic and subject specialisms; 2) it will better enable primary teachers to teach in high schools; 3) it will provide greater opportunity for teaching graduates to move into other careers allied to teaching and 4) a teaching degree will function in the broader job market in a fashion similar to non-vocational degrees. (Donaldson mentions students who do not 'find' teaching jobs, but perhaps of greater importance are those who realise too late that they do not want teaching jobs.) A fifth reason for this recommendation can be derived from the philosophical core of the Report: concurrent learning's part in building 'the capacities, knowledge and attitudes which are required for the extended professional' (84).

On the surface then, Donaldson's rationale for a concurrent curriculum is clear enough, and seemingly defensible in so far as it coheres with his prototype of the twenty-first century teacher. However, deeper consideration of its purposes, and our experiences of teaching students on a concurrent curriculum programme, uncover a messier situation. One reason for this is that the five stated purposes of concurrent teaching are not entirely compatible. For example, some disciplines (e.g. physical geography) may lend themselves better to 'providing the basis for specialist interests' than others (e.g. psychology); and some (e.g. social psychology) may better fulfil aspects of the leadership element of extended professionalism, while others (e.g. physical geography) may not. Moreover, if broadening knowledge, general academic development and an appreciation of the value of deep learning for its own sake are emphasised then, while any subject that suits a student's

interests and abilities will suffice, to emphasise this rationale will jar with the stated vocational purposes for concurrent teaching (reasons 3 and 4).

Before discussing this issue further and offering some solutions we will first say something about why we feel it is important to devote energy to this issue of concurrent teaching, beyond a desire for conceptual tidiness. Having worked in contexts that emphasise concurrency for over a decade (on education and other degrees) we know that many students are suspicious of learning they perceive as being at odds with their purpose for being at university (see also Nathan 2005: 43). This is understandable, and needs to be mitigated by a clear and coherent rationale for curricula requirements that pre-empts any sense of incongruity or purposelessness. Two requirements emerge from this state of affairs:

- 1) We need to be able to provide students with robust answers to questions like 'Why do I have to take these courses?'
- 2) Institutions need to provide curriculum design and course options that are compatible with those answers.

In other words, there needs to be clarity about what Donaldson wants from concurrent teaching; this notion then needs to be adequately translated to practice, and it needs to be adequately communicated to all relevant parties: teacher education staff, staff involved in concurrent teaching, student advisers, and the students.

What we offer in the next section is intended to be a helpful way of understanding possible relationships between the concurrent content in a primary teacher's education and the core purpose of that education. We propose that setting out some broad dimensions, which then inform some possible models, is a necessary first step if teaching degrees are to articulate a rationale for the inclusion of concurrency in their primary education curricula. We should also make clear that what we propose here is based on the assumption that a typical primary education student has arrived at university with a reasonably firm idea that primary education is the career they want to pursue, and that their desire is for quite a narrowly focussed programme. We acknowledge, however, that if new models of primary teacher education were to change degree entrants' desires, along with their expectations, then some of the challenges we discuss would be less relevant, and a slightly different take on approaches to concurrent teaching would emerge.

Modelling the relationship between core and concurrent courses

The Donaldson Report involves a rejection of a crudely instrumental approach to teacher education. To an extent this will be facilitated by core education courses that are theoretical, critical, and focused on subjects and topics that do not have a direct influence on lesson plans, or are not simply training in how to manage a class: for example courses on education theory, philosophy, and policy. If this much is relatively uncontroversial and already standard among primary education degrees, what is it that courses from the wider university are meant to be offering to augment the core curriculum?

We suggest two dimensions along which this can be understood. The first concerns the content and learning outcomes of concurrent courses, ranging from subject matter that can be taught in the classroom through to 'wider issues which set the context for what should be taught and why' (Donaldson, 2010:15). In between these we can locate exposure to related professional practices such as social work, and the development of attributes such as critical reflection and leadership skills.

The second dimension concerns the ways in which the student is encouraged to engage with concurrent teaching. This can fall between the lecturers on concurrent courses making the relevance

of aspects of their curriculums to primary education highly explicit (clear signposting and maybe even education-oriented assessment options) at one end of the spectrum, and no explicit guidance and no attempt to adapt assessments at the other end.

We are supposing, however, that both in terms of content and lecturer-led guidance, no matter where on the spectrum the culture of concurrent input falls, there will be careful and repeated information and encouragement from education degree leaders and student advisers about what is expected of students. So, for example, if students will receive only a minimum steer from concurrent course lecturers, they must be prepared for this, and therefore prepared to take the initiative and be continually seeking out the relevance of what they are learning to their 'extended' professional identity.

In order to make clearer, and to develop, the significance of these dimensions, we will now outline three ways in which differing approaches within them might be integrated. We refer to these as Models 1, 2 and 3, and in each of these is contained an attitude or broad ethos. This can be framed in terms of a continuum between narrow instrumental learning and a more open approach in which the student, while broadly seeking to integrate the subject matter and disciplines she is exposed to, does not do so with a rigid agenda that might deter her from making unexpected connections or fully embracing the value of learning for its own sake (Blake et al 1998; Williams 2008; Nussbaum 2010; Rogers, 2011). In each case we will indicate the fit between the model and Donaldson's vision of the relationship between education and the wider university.

Model 1

Model 1 refers to the teaching of non-education subjects in a way that the education student can see how to apply the subject-specific knowledge they are learning in the primary school classroom. With respect to the second dimension described above, there is an explicit steer from the course in terms of topics and assessments, or from the concurrent course lecturer, who points out the educational relevance of material covered. This steer could come in several forms. It could, for example, be strongly lecturer-led and include details on how the subject might be taught, and the ways in which different age groups might understand and engage with it. However, since the course comes from a discipline other than education, it is unlikely lecturing staff will be confident in this knowledge. Under these circumstances links to education can be gestured to by the lecturers, and dialogues in which the education students proactively consider the educational potential of what they are learning are consistently encouraged.

One way of formalising this process is via assessments. For example, in the authors' institution each of the three assessments in the Level 2 history course *Scotland and the World* (an optional course for several degrees, including Primary Education) has an either/or form, with one choice being education-related. The first assignment, for instance, involves a choice between an 800-word primary source analysis and the 'production of a teaching aid, e.g. historical timeline, map or mock exam paper'. The oral assessment can be an academic presentation or 'a mock lesson designed by the student' (University of Glasgow, 2016b). If student input is to be formalised in this way, however, education staff could well need to be involved in the marking of assignments.

Donaldson recognises the value of this approach, saying, for example, that such learning can provide primary teachers with 'the basis for specialist interests during their career' (p. 40). He also indicates, however, that it is not enough in itself. Early on in the report he says, The values and intellectual challenges which underpin academic study should extend [teaching students'] own scholarship and take them beyond any inclination, however understandable, to want narrow training of immediate and direct relevance to life in the classroom. (p. 6)

For Donaldson the subject-specialist depth that typifies higher education will be hindered by a student mind-set that tends to be looking for 'direct relevance', or assessments that permit or encourage students to engage with non-education courses through an applied educational lens. In terms of the history course mentioned above, the either/or nature of the assessments does not necessitate this attitude, but if Donaldson is right about teaching students' 'inclination ... to want narrow training of immediate and direct relevance to life in the classroom' it is reasonable to assume it will be a common response.

Model 2

Rather than just the development of subject specialisms that can be taught in the classroom, Model 2 concerns the broadening of professional identity and reflective capacity via subjects that can be adjudged to have relevance to the *full context* of the professional development of teachers. Without precluding learning that can be adapted to and inspire lessons, this model extends the perspective of primary education students beyond lesson content. Two examples of this kind of input might be 1) the philosophy and history of education, and 2) other (non-education) subject areas (e.g. theory and practice of leadership, critical thinking, communication, social psychology, politics and citizenship), that will enhance professionally relevant knowledge and skills.

The first of these we are assuming to be part of the core teaching curriculum as envisaged by Donaldson (and, of course, envisaged prior to his report as well). The second type of example is clearly concurrent. These contextual issues could refer to political and social trends, psychological discoveries, and a range of other knowledge that informs, or might inform, education policy and practice. It is here that we can locate Model 2's connection with extended professionalism and the aims of higher education as previously discussed. The student engaged with their concurrent teaching with a Model 2 mind-set is motivated to learn deeply about a wide range of subjects because within them they hope to extend their sensitivity to answers to (and indeed the meaning of) the question, 'What should be taught and why?' And since reflexivity, open-mindedness, critical and creative thinking – all desirable attributes of graduate identity - underpin the Model 2 attitude, the acquisition of these would be valued by the student as well.

In a way that is similar to Model 1, lecturers on concurrent courses under Model 2 could in theory make explicit to students certain education-relevant aspects of what they teach, but unlike Model 1 the spirit of Model 2 moves against this. By being more 'extended', Model 2 implies individual responsibility and pro-activity on behalf of the student teacher; characteristics less compatible with this kind of lecturer guidance. An equally important difference, though, is the broadened sense of what 'relevant to teaching' means. Connections are made by the student not just to the matter of how topics can be taught, but to all the dimensions of the extended professional: reflection on policy, research possibilities, application to non-classroom based practice such as management and leadership, and so on. With Model 1 the lecturer makes explicit (and possibly assesses) the connection between course content and classroom applications, but with Model 2 the onus is on the student to integrate their concurrent learning in the various senses in which it might be construed as relevant to their degrees and continuing professional development.

Model 2 can also incorporate another important aspect of Donaldson's recommendations; the exposure of education students to courses on professional degrees connected to education, such as social work, youth work, health policy or community studies (p.40). The concurrent degree set-up envisaged by Donaldson does not seem able to accommodate the ideal of interprofessional education – where many courses are shared by students studying for distinct professional qualifications – but it would facilitate some of its advantages; for example, allowing for a better understanding of the value and processes of inter-agency working

Model 3

Model 3 can be understood as 'learning for its own sake' in the sense typified by the student on a non-vocational degree whose main reason for being at university is not to get a better job, or perhaps even to attain a qualification, but to know more about a particular subject or subjects (Newman 1982: Discourse 5). Learning for its own sake presumably cannot be the sole rationale for learning on vocational degrees, but it can be applied to the concurrent aspect of such degrees. In order to achieve this, however, the student would need to have a dual-identity; they would be both an education student and a non-vocational student.

Little in the Donaldson Report suggests that this is what he has in mind, but there could nevertheless be reasons for promoting such an approach. One argument could be to explore other disciplines in case the student might want to take directions other than teaching (as a degree or as a profession). A second is the generalised self-development that comes from broadening the mind. And a third is to help instil the value of learning for its own sake and, among other things, be able to inspire this in the children they teach (Baehr, 2013: 259; Hare, 1995).

There are, however, a number of reasons why the Model 3 approach appears unsuitable for teacher education. One, practical, reason is that it will be particularly hard to engage education students with such an agenda. Our experiences suggest that Donaldson is right when he comments on an 'inclination, however understandable, to want narrow training of immediate and direct relevance to life in the classroom' (2010: 6), and for this reason it is enough of a challenge to instil a Model 2 approach, let alone one that asks the student to develop a second identity that explicitly ignores their purpose for being at university.

There is another reason; one that in a sense obviates Model 3 as an alternative at a theoretical and not just a practical level. A feature of Model 2 previously commented on is how the primary responsibility lies with the student to make links between their concurrent and core learning, and their developing sense of the teacher as a professional. In other words, lecturers on concurrent courses, according to Model 2, will not pander to the education students in their classes, and this disjunction leaves space for the student to engage with a purer sense of learning for its own sake. A student might even choose to engage in this way in order to open their mind to connections that even a Model 2 mind-set might close off. For example, as they progress through their degree programme, education students, like all students, will not be aware of the full significance of what they are being taught and what they are experiencing (e.g. see Hart, 1997). As their careers develop, therefore, they have the potential to find aspects of their concurrent learning relevant that were not previously seen to be so. To assume a dual identity in one's concurrent teaching and learn for the sake of learning has the paradoxical advantage of helping them attend to certain education-relevant topics and ideas that a Model 2 approach would have them switch off from, or quickly forget, because of their inability to see or grasp any direct or indirect relevance it might have to the teaching profession.

It is not an absurd or even impractical idea to recommend this approach to education students, but it is important to recognise that this is closer to Model 2 than to Model 3. Our mildly dissociative minds (Oksenberg Rorty, 1994) helpfully allow for the Model 3 approach to be assumed whilst at the same time knowing that it supports only Model 2.

Finally, it should be noted that Models 1 and 2 are compatible approaches, at least in so far as they involve no logical contradiction. A student can engage with a course via both perspectives, and arguably this is what should be encouraged. The potential problem is the risk of the 'immediate and direct relevance to life in the classroom' (p.6) lure of the Model 1 frame obscuring the less immediate Model 2 frame. However, teacher guidance and the general flavour of the degree and its emphasis on extended professionalism could well serve to mitigate this problem.

Conclusion and further research

Two dimensions and three models of how a primary education student might be expected to engage with concurrent teaching have been outlined, ranging from narrow and explicit relevance, through broad and implicit, to none at all. The broad and implicit Model 2 appears to be uppermost in the wording and spirit of the Donaldson Report. While the Report would support the benefits to teachers that come from academic learning in any discipline, there is a steer towards that which has indirect relevance to the identity of the 'twenty-first century teacher'. This is also the approach supported by the authors, particularly if two further considerations are acknowledged: that Model 2 is a) not incompatible with aspects of Model 1, and b) that it is not incompatible with attitudes associated with Model 3. It is a model that, delivered well, can foster a valuing of the intellect and of learning for its own sake, develop other relevant attributes such as critical and creative thinking, while at the same time retaining a clear connection with the teaching profession understood in terms of 'extended professionalism'. If the education student asks 'Why should I take this (concurrent) course?' Model 2 provides an answer that is compatible with a contemporary profile of the purpose of higher education and with the desired attributes of a Scottish primary education teacher.

In response to Donaldson schools of education in Scottish universities have been adapting their curricula, and in several cases deciding on the new structure of their primary education degrees with respect to concurrent teaching. A range of designs exist and clearly many involve quite extensive engagement with the wider university, particularly in the first and second year. However, knowing this tells us little if anything about the models of concurrency being encouraged, or indeed how explicit a particular school of education has been about the purpose of concurrent courses when deciding on the structure of their curriculum. For this reason, progress with research into the nature, purpose and effectiveness of concurrent teaching must involve close engagement with the degree organisers and lecturers themselves, and indeed with the students. From academic staff we need to find out how they have interpreted and implemented Donaldson's recommendations, and how they promote these ideas to their students. From the students we need to find out if and how this message is received, what they think of it, and how in practice this affects their engagement with their concurrent courses. For example, are most education students able to appreciate the meaning and significance of extended professionalism to the extent that they can make the most of their concurrent teaching? How does the barrier of the student's 'inclination ... to want narrow training' affect their engagement with these classes? A related issue concerns how Model 1 input or a Model 1 approach to a course might interfere with Model 2 engagement. Will, for example, topics and assessments of direct relevance to the classroom tend to overshadow those of indirect relevance?

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