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The appropriation of the professionalisation agenda in teacher education

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher quality and its improvement are increasingly being seen as fundamental to the quality of a nation's workforce and its ability to compete in the global economy (OECD 2005; Furlong et al. 2009). This linking of education and the economy, particularly in policy terms, is underpinning many current debates and perceptions of a crisis in schooling. The problem is usually identified as one of teacher quality (OECD 2005; Barber & Mourshed 2007) and more specifically the failure of teacher education in adequately preparing teachers.

KEYWORDS

PROFESSIONALISATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION

PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

In this context, policy debates have become increasingly polarised, with arguments for the deregulation and marketisation of teacher education being positioned against a defence of professionalism grounded in the university academy (Mayer et al. 2008). Those promoting deregulation argue there is little evidence of the value added by teacher preparation as it is currently practised, calling for alternative pathways into teaching which usually mean bypassing teacher preparation as it is offered in universities. On the other hand, those calling for increased professionalism suggest policies and practices that promote professional self-regulation, arguing the most important factor in student learning is the teacher and therefore that time and money should be put into professionalising the teaching workforce with high-level qualifications and ongoing professional learning. However, some aspects of the professionalisation agenda are being appropriated by the very deregulation agenda they set out to challenge. In this paper, I briefly examine this development and consider teacher education professionalism into the future.we were interested in figuring out if the students learned more and kept working harder while being more motivated on their projects compared to the other learning environments.

The results show that this kind of 'constructionist' coursework is superior with regard to many criteria and preferred by the students compared to the other learning approaches. The students also reported that they worked with much more enthusiasm and delight. Our analysis shows that the ten principles are working in practice and could be an advantage for students and teachers.

THE PREVAILING RHETORIC: TEACHER EDUCATION IS BROKEN AND NEEDS TO BE FIXED

Teacher education is, and has been for some time, a highly scrutinised domain. In Australia for example, there have been more than 100 reviews of teacher education in the past 20 years usually framed by a logic arguing for 'the improvement of student performance through the improvement of teachers via the improvement of teacher education' (Bates, 2004: 119). In this way, teacher education has been positioned as a policy problem (Cochran-Smith & Fries 2005; Grimmett 2009), one that can be fixed by attention to various policy levers thought to enhance teacher quality. As a result, issues to do with teacher recruitment, preparation and retention are now near the top of many national policy agendas. Prior to the mid-1990s, teacher education quality was judged according to 'inputs' such as an institution's resources, its commitment to teacher education, the qualifications of the teacher education academics, and the content and structure of programmes and professional experiences in schools. More recently, however, the focus has turned to outcomes, specifically student learning outcomes, and the perceived lack of evidence linking teacher preparation and student learning. This has resulted in increased attention to standardised student test scores and mechanisms for linking those results with judgements about teacher quality, with the value-added modelling approaches in the USA (Cochran-Smith et al. 2013) gaining much attention. This has set the scene for growing discontent in policy circles about the value of teacher education as it has been traditionally offered in countries like Australia and the USA.

As early as 2003, the US Secretary of Education's Annual Report suggested controversially that colleges and schools of education simply get in the way of good people becoming teachers and argued for ways to reduce the barriers to becoming a teacher among otherwise highly qualified individuals (US Department of Education 2003). Similarly, in 2010, the UK Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, announced his intention to move pre-service teacher education out of higher education and back into schools because of his belief that 'Teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice, observing a master craftsman or woman. Watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best route to acquiring mastery in the classroom' (Gove 2010). The most recent inquiry in teacher education in Australia, announced in February 2014, was accompanied by a media article written by the federal Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, in which he stated:

> And there is evidence that our teacher education system is not up to scratch. We are not attracting the top students into teacher courses as we once did, courses are too theoretical, ideological and faddish, not based on the evidence of what works in teaching important subjects like literacy. Standards are too low at some education institutions - everyone passes.' (Pyne 2014)

This (re)turn to a craft view of teaching and an emphasis on practicality and relevance has resulted in a model of initial teacher education which privileges performativity, and practical and experiential knowledge over theoretical, pedagogical and subject knowledge (Beauchamp et al.2013) and is often informed by the 'seductive pursuit of what we now call "best practice": namely, single, best solutions, to complex problems' (Bullough 2012: 344). The situation is 'imagined' by many countries as necessitating the pursuit of neo-liberal policies in order to 'fix' the problem (Furlong, 2013) usually incorporating notions of competition and consumer choice. In the sphere of teacher education, this has reached flashpoint in the USA with the evaluation of collegiate teacher preparation programmes conducted by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) and results to appear in the U.S. News and World Report. Even though

> NCTQ has no official standing as a regulator or accreditor of teacher education ... it has become a powerful influencer of policies regarding teacher quality, and since 2006, it has conducted four national evaluations of teacher preparation focused on reading, mathematics, assessment, and student teaching. (Cochran-Smith et al. 2013: 18)

In this context, the Teach for All 'franchise' has grown and spread throughout the world – Teach for America, Teacher for Australia, Teach First in the UK, and so on, now in more than 30 countries, approaches which focus on recruiting high-performing graduates from undergraduate non-education programmes to teach in disadvantaged schools after a short intensive preparation and then ongoing support and professional learning mostly on the job as they teach. These 'teaching associates' are often talked about as being high-quality, the 'quality' moniker being more to do with success in non-education undergraduate degrees rather than success in any formal qualifications to teach and credentialling or certification. So, the 'teacher education is broken and needs to be fixed' mantra is commonly heard across many countries. It is argued that there is no evidence that teacher education is preparing teachers who are improving student learning, thus providing a context within which governments and the business community have posited alternative 'solutions'. What has been the academy's response?

THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION: THE ACADEMY'S RESPONSE

Many in the academy have argued that maintaining and sustaining the professionalism of teacher education means teacher educators taking control of the accountability agenda by developing

and implementing professional standards for teachers as outcome statements for teacher education that explicate what beginning teachers should know and be able to do, and also by providing opportunities for graduating teachers to demonstrate their capability in relation to those standards, For example, Linda Darling-Hammond and her colleagues have argued for some time that framing teachers' work in terms of what they should know and be able to do is a valid way of capturing the complexity of teachers' work (eg Darling-Hammond & Bransford 2005) and thus presenting teaching as intellectual work informed by a specialised knowledge base and involving professional judgement. However, the proliferation of professional standards for teaching during the 2000s for a range of different purposes – some industrial, some professional, some for policy purposes – in many ways complicated the field. There was often little clarity about the purposes of the standards, with arguments supporting them amounting to little more than that developing and publishing standards statements would somehow increase teacher quality. The academy engaged with the challenge to ensure that the standards must reflect teaching as deliberative intellectual work, as social, collaborative and collegial work, and as emotional work based on a close examination of the work of teachers, their professional judgements, and the practice of teaching in relation to student learning (Darling-Hammond 2013). This requires sustained and rigorous research over time, not the somewhat anecdotally informed and consensus-oriented ways in which various groups have regularly decided statements that constitute standards for teaching.

However, developing such professional standards for teaching has only been part of the story. Even when standards are used to frame the intent of teacher education, graduates are often judged as meeting the standards using a range of not always reliable approaches. Work on developing alternative and more meaningful ways of

judging the quality of graduating teachers instead of the pass/fail summative assessments (eg practicum supervisors' reports) and graded assessments (eg university assignments) has resulted in a range of structured portfolio approaches as capstone assessments. One example of a capstone teacher assessment that aims o 'measure and promote candidates' abilities to integrate their knowledge of content, students and instructional context in making instructional decisions' (Pecheone & Chung 2006: 24) is the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (Darling-Hammond 2006). In Australia, the Authentic Teacher Assessment (Dixon et al. 2011; Allard et al. 2014) was developed drawing on the work in California. In these assessments, graduating teachers demonstrate their capacity to plan, teach and assess in ways that take account of the particular context and the students with whom they are working. The rubrics used to assess these structured portfolios are informed by professional standards for teaching. In this way, it is argued that teacher educators can provide evidence of the effectiveness of graduating teachers through authentic assessment that captures teaching in all its complexity.

Thus, standards and authentic assessment against those standards provide a framing for sustaining the professionalism of teacher education wherein teacher educators control the accountability agenda assuring the profession, governments and the general public of the quality of the graduates they prepare. However, in many ways this work has been appropriated by those aiming to deregulate and marketise teacher education.

APPROPRIATION OF THE PROFESSIONALISATION AGENDA

The outcomes discourse has become somewhat normalised to the extent that both those arguing for the deregulation and marketisation of teacher educa-

tion as well as those arguing for a professionalisation agenda focus on outcomes to frame and support their case. While the deregulation agenda frames the outcome of teacher education as its effect on student learning (as measured by standardised tests), the professionalisation agenda argues for teacher educators taking ownership and responsibility for teacher education outcomes. As outlined above, this has mainly involved developing and implementing professional standards for graduating teachers and authentic assessment of knowledge, practice and engagement against those standards. In addition, gaining employment and retention and progression in the profession have been promoted as quality indicators in relation to the outcomes of teacher education. Even though I have argued elsewhere that focusing on outcomes in terms of professional standards and authentic teacher assessment holds most promise for professionalising teacher education into the future (Mayer 2013), I am forced to ask whether teacher educators are losing control of this agenda. For example, the Performance Assessment for California Teachers referred to above which was developed by teacher educators and endorsed as a viable alternative for credentialling to the teacher assessment developed by the Educational Testing Service, has now informed the development of a national teacher performance assessment which is managed by a corporate entity, Pearson, 'tak[ing] away the autonomy of schools of education and, in a certain sense, thus contribut[ing] to the deprofessionalization of teacher educators' (Cochran-Smith et al. 2013: 17). The irony is that while supported as a way of professionalising teacher education, the assessment of graduating teachers is increasingly being taken away from the site of local learning. Increasingly, teacher educators do not have access to the results and the portfolios for research and use in improving their own programmes. In this way, the active involvement of teacher educators and the

reported programme improvement made possible by interrogation of the candidate data (Peck et al. 2010; Dixon et al. 2011) is compromised. The notion of teacher educators having some control of the accountability agenda is being lost.

Likewise, while professional standards for teaching provide the foundation for a professional framing of teaching and teacher education, many argue that the development of professional standards (often 'for teachers' rather than 'teaching') 'has resulted in the reduced professional autonomy of teachers through prescription, target-setting and evaluation techniques that strip away the subtleties and complexities of the teaching role' (Storey 2006: 218). Many of the current statements of professional standards portray teaching and teachers' work as little more than a technical activity, and the

'language is much more strongly influenced by corporate managerialism. The texts are heavy with "challenges", "goals", "stakeholders", "partnerships", "strategies", "commitment", "capacity", "achievable", "effective", "flexible", and "opportunities". These terms have a powerful rhetorical effect. They construct the good teacher as an entrepreneurial self, forging a path of personal advancement through the formless landscape of market society with its shadowy stakeholders and its endless challenges and opportunities.' (Connell, 2009: 219–20)

In addition, it is argued that the standards do not appear to come from any systematic view of education as a field of knowledge. So, what to do moving forward?

RECLAIMING THE PROFESSIONALISATION AGENDA

As can be seen, governments across the Western world are providing 'national solutions' to the perceived problems of teacher quality and teacher education, with policy and resources directed to initiatives that bypass traditional teacher education, tighter regulation of entry into teacher education and more control over the content and site of delivery of teacher preparation. For teacher educators to reclaim the professionalisation agenda, it is necessary to engage with the teacher standards agenda and the teacher evaluation agenda through teacher education research to counter the anecdotally informed 'teacher education is failing us' headlines and the naïve view of teacher quality which assumes a linear relationship between policy and educational outcomes without accounting for school culture, resources, and communities. However, we need to rethink how we do this (perhaps differently) given the appropriation of many of the current professionalisation arguments and actions by agendas designed to deprofessionalise teacher education.

The recent British Educational Research Association–Royal Society of Arts (BERA–RSA) report highlights four main ways in which research can make a contribution to teacher education:

- content of teacher education programmes to be informed by research-based knowledge and scholarship

- research used to inform the design and structure of teacher education programmes

- teachers and teacher educators equipped to engage with and be discerning consumers of research

- teachers and teacher educators equipped to conduct their own research, individually and collectively. (BERA 2014)

These provide an interesting framing with which to think about next steps in the professionalisation agenda. As teacher educators, we have been told for some time that 'we seem ill prepared to respond to critics who question the value of professional education for teachers with evidence of our effectiveness' (Grossman 2008: 13) and that it is important for us to systematically connect the small-scale case study and ethnographic work that typifies a lot of our research with other studies that have asked similar questions and to conduct research which builds on its own findings and where possible use common instruments and outcome measures that make it possible to aggregate findings (Zeichner 2005) These capture two ways of thinking about teacher education research: research on teacher education and research in teacher education. While not denying the importance of these purposes, perhaps increased attention to research for teacher education will provide a future direction for the professionalisation agenda in which teacher educators as practitioners and researchers will find leadership and influence. ■

May 2021 Postscript

In 2014, I wrote that initial teacher education in many countries (usually in the global north) was seen as a problem in need of fixing. It was positioned as a policy problem and a view was cultivated that teacher quality could be improved by manipulating various policy levers related to teacher recruitment, preparation and retention. Seven years later, nothing much has changed. Policy change continues at a pace, and continues to focus on aspects of teacher recruitment, preparation and retention. Likewise, the professionalisation agenda has continued to be appropriated and constructed according to a focus on practice and what works approaches to educational research, with little room for the ways in which the 2014 British Educational Research Association–Royal Society of Arts (BERA–RSA) report suggested that research could make a contribution to teaching and teacher education.

In Australia, for example, the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group

(TEMAG) review tasked with making 'recommendations on how ITE in Australia could be improved to better prepare new teachers with the practical skills needed for the classroom' (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014, p.ix) had just been announced when I wrote the 2014 article. Late in 2014, their final report titled Action Now: Classroom ready teachers constructed a deficit view of teacher education in Australia and highlighted the importance of 'classroom ready' graduates. It provided 38 recommendations and the Australian government's response promised swift and decisive action to ensure:

- Stronger quality assurance of teacher education courses

- Rigorous selection for entry to teacher education courses

- Improved and structured practical experience for teacher education students

- Robust assessment of graduates to ensure classroom readiness

- National research and workforce planning capabilities

(Australian Government, 2015)

Since 2015, the Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, 2019) document which regulates teacher education programmes has been updated to reflect the new policy directions resulting from the TEMAG report. As a result, teacher professionalism in Australia has been constructed as being the 'right type' of person with appropriate personal characteristics and levels of personal literacy and numeracy, who can demonstrate appropriate teaching practice against standards within a system that determines performance indicators and mechanisms for classroom readiness. Moreover, teacher educator professionalism can be interpreted as ensuring the production of graduates who are classroom ready at point of graduation via programmes that are accredited using nationally consistent standards. The regulations also construct teacher education work by defining outcomes by which programmes will be held accountable, some of which bear little direct relationship to the work of professionally educating new teachers (for a fuller analysis, see Mayer & Mills, 2020).

Similarly, in England, initial teacher education continues to be buffeted by policy changes with increasing numbers of pathways into teaching (Whiting et al., 2018), many which reduce or eliminate the role of universities in teacher education. There has also been a perceived need to increase the regulation of teacher education. This has included developing an initial teacher education framework in 2016, which was updated in 2019 (Department for Education (DfE), 2019b), and an Early Career Framework (ECF) (Department for Education (DfE), 2019a). Both reflect a practice turn (Zeichner, 2012) and 'what works' framings of educational research (Biesta, 2007).

The policies are being formulated in what Helgetun and Menter (2020) call an 'evidence era' where 'evidence' is constructed as a 'truth'. Certainly, claims of evidence to justify various reforms are engaged. But claims for evidence-based teaching is often associated with a 'what works' agenda that takes no account of context and does not nuance findings. Thus, teachers are expected to engage with and be uncritical consumers of existing evidence to improve their practice. In 2021, there is still much work to be done for teacher educators to reclaim the professionalisation agenda. ∎

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