



# **POLICY, TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE QUALITY OF TEACHERS AND TEACHING**

Edited by  
Christopher Day



# Policy, Teacher Education and the Quality of Teachers and Teaching

This edited collection brings together papers written by a number of experienced international academics who share a passion for promoting research-informed, high-quality pre-service and in-service teacher education that makes a positive difference to the lives of teachers and their students. Taken together, the contributions to this book represent a call to arms for all who lead education policy at local, regional, and national levels, teacher educators, and schools themselves, to engage in sustained and productive collaboration.

Topics include:

- the centrality of empathy in the classroom, ‘practical theorising’ that is a central part of all good teachers’ armoury;
- the possibilities for collaborative professionalism which enables them to extend and enrich their thinking, commitment, and capacity for resilience;
- the pedagogical reasoning, habits of mind, critical reflection, knowledge, and skills that lead to the best classroom practices.

Only when the voices of stakeholders at all these levels are brought together, heard, and enacted, are students in all schools in all contexts and in all jurisdictions likely to receive the quality of education to which all are entitled.

The chapters in this book were originally published as a special issue of *Teachers and Teaching*.

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Robert V. Bullough Jr

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## Chapter 2

*Pedagogical reasoning: the foundation of the professional knowledge of teaching*

John Loughran

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## Chapter 3

*Teacher candidate learning of action-oriented knowledge from triggering incidents in teaching practice*

Auli Toom, Mikko Tiilikainen, Lauri Heikonen, Äli Leijen, Juanjo Mena and Jukka Husu

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## Chapter 4

*Teachers and teaching in China: a critical reflection*

Leslie N.K. Lo

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**Chapter 5**

*The Universities and initial teacher education; challenging the discourse of derision. The case of Wales*

John Furlong

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*Changing policy contexts and teachers' work-life narratives: the case of Estonian vocational teachers*

Ivor F. Goodson and Meril Ümarik

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**Chapter 7**

*Teacher collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations and effects*

Andy Hargreaves

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## INTRODUCTION

# Policy, teacher education and the quality of teachers and teaching

As we travel through the many waves of policy promoted changes in the governance, conditions, curricula and performance demands by education systems internationally, it is worth pausing to reflect upon what these might mean for the worlds and work of teachers. This special 25th anniversary Issue of the journal, my last as Editor-in-Chief, contains papers by a number of experienced academics from Australia, Canada, China, England, Estonia, Finland and the USA. Regardless of the negatives or positives of policy reforms, the cultures, contexts and particularities of their particular histories and jurisdictions, the authors share a passion for promoting research-informed, high-quality pre-service and in-service teacher education that makes a positive difference to the lives of teachers and those of their students; and whilst what they write is often critical of education systems which have intensified the working lives of teachers and threatened definitions of professionalism which have autonomy at their heart, their stance as academics is essentially one of collective hope and determination for a better future for teacher education and teachers.

The configuration of the papers in this Issue is unusual. They are neither sequential nor randomly ordered. Rather, the first and last paper bracket the middle five. There is a reason for this. The first is a close, detailed examination of empathy, arguably central to every good teacher's habit of mind and daily practice (Bullough, USA), and the last (Hargreaves, Canada), is a critical appreciation of the benefits to good teaching of collaboration based upon the author's long experience and supported by a range of international literature. These two papers complement each other, the first representing both the deep individual psychological mindsets which underpin best classroom relationships and the second articulating the powers of positive social relationships between teachers in schools and beyond, and providing challenge and support for their ongoing critical reflection and development of the quality of the education they bring to their work.

In 'Empathy, teaching dispositions, and teacher education', a thought essay, Bob Bullough (USA) explores in fine detail what lies at the heart of the teaching endeavour. He unpacks the meanings of words that many scholars use in their attempts to define and assess the drivers for teachers' purposes and actions—'dispositions', 'values', 'virtues', 'care', 'characteristics', 'moral purposes'; and focusses particularly on the cognitive and emotional dimensions of 'empathy', asserting that, 'the strong expectation among many teacher educators that empathy ought to be taught and increased'. He alerts his readers to the responsibilities that teachers have as they seek to know and understand the inner selves of their students in order to teach them well without causing them to be vulnerable, for, 'If, for example, in trying to be helpful she enters into a child's hurt or needs fully and forgets for the moment she is the teacher, justice may suffer as her concern narrows on that particular child as she understands his need and perhaps forgets other, seemingly more distant,

interests, including those of other children'. He calls for 'emotional self-regulation', among teachers, who must exercise 'effortful control' if they are to avoid 'emotional contagion' when empathising with students. He discusses the challenges of attempting to measure empathy, and the disadvantages of relying upon self-report only.

In all of this, as he forensically weighs the evidence, he is clear that empathy in all its forms in teaching and learning contexts, however defined, is central to (good) teachers and (good) teaching, and that assisting teachers and student teachers to find creative ways to access students' social and cultural perspectives should be an explicit goal of teacher educators. However, he issues a health warning as he alerts his readers to the dangers, for example, of 'low level empathy', and is skeptical of claims that merely exercising empathy can right wrongs of social inequities, in itself cause teachers to be able to 'connect meaningfully and compassionately with children', and promote social justice.

With the same common focus upon improvement, the next five papers build on the theme of the first paper and provide connections to the last. The second and third papers focus upon issues in pre-service teacher education (Loughran in Australia, Toom and her colleagues in Finland), and the next three upon the effects on teacher education and teacher professionalism of policy-led reforms that challenge teacher autonomy and agency (Goodson and Umerik in Estonia, Furlong in Wales, and Lo in China).

In 'Pedagogical reasoning: the foundation of the professional knowledge of teaching', John Loughran, revisits the persisting problems of the perceived theory practice divide between universities and schools, teacher educators and teachers, examining how academically derived 'formal' knowledge connects with the 'practical', bounded and context-specific knowledge created in the somewhat crowded 'messiness' of teachers' work lives as they strive to manage the multiple variables of classroom life. Whether, and if so how, formal academic and practical, directly experienced knowledge about education may be combined remains an important issue. Loughran argues for integration, through pedagogical reasoning, 'the thinking that underpins informed professional practice ... [and that] ... Through exploring pedagogical reasoning, the why of practice quickly surfaces and offers insights into understandings of teachers' knowledge *for*, *in* and *of* practice,' as teachers engage in a search for pedagogical equilibrium. If teachers do not engage in pedagogical reasoning, Loughran argues, then, 'teaching experience is more likely to be about 'doing' than informed 'knowing'. In a sense, Loughran is calling for every teacher to be thoughtful, engaging in regular, critical reflection on their purposes and practices. The abiding issue is whether teachers have the time and energy to do so, especially in the increasingly intensive, emotionally challenging, and some might claim, toxic policy environments which exhaust and demoralise many.

It would be easy to dismiss this as an anachronistic debate, especially in countries such as England where the role of universities in supporting student teachers, teachers and schools has diminished as school-based and school-led training and development have begun to dominate and universities have become junior partners in education plc. However, higher education remains an important player in many countries. An issue for further discussion and debate that arises from the paper concerns leadership. Given the acknowledged exigencies of teaching and uncertainties of the provision of learning opportunities, who will be the champions of pedagogical reasoning both in universities and schools? Who will ensure that its undoubted value is grasped and nurtured by teachers as a key component in their striving to teach well and to their best? Who will connect 'theory' with 'practice'? Who

will convince policymakers, principals and teachers that those outside, as well as those inside schools, can be trusted as champions? Do the conditions in which many allies of teachers and supporters of their continuing learning now work, themselves mitigate against creating the learning partnerships which are implied?

In 'Teacher candidate learning of action-oriented knowledge from triggering incidents in teaching practice', Auli Toom, Mikko Tiilikainen, Lauri Heikonen, Äli Leijen, Juanjo Mena & Jukka Husu report positively on the results of an 'action-oriented knowledge' programme in two Finnish universities, involving 82 student teachers, designed to increase the cognitive and action competences and capacities of student teachers in preparing for their practicum. The programme was based upon video-recordings on empowering and challenging 'critical incidents' experienced by students, followed by a three part 'stimulated recall' process, using guided reflection. The study was a part of a broader research project in five European countries into enhancing students' reflective capabilities. The authors' assumption is that, 'In order to learn action-oriented knowledge during teacher education, student teachers need to take responsibility for their own learning as future teachers and develop their expertise intentionally themselves, theoretically and practically, and in collaboration with others', so that they would be better able to be effective teachers. Although the researchers found that teacher candidates' responses indicated a move from evaluative descriptions to practical justifications of their teaching actions, most responses indicated descriptive and opinion-based, rather than inferential and justified action-oriented, knowledge, and very few indeed offered theoretically grounded justifications and argumentation. The authors' claim is that action-oriented knowledge through the use of critical incidents, 'provides a tool to determine the ways teachers perceive, analyze, and reflect on their professional practices,' which is relevant to the complex worlds of practice that teachers inhabit. However, its use, effectiveness, and impact is likely to be dependent upon the skills of those who lead the processes of guided reflection, and the extent to which new habits of mind are able to be sustained.

The next three papers focus upon education policy reforms and their effects in three countries: China, Wales and Estonia. In 'Teachers and teaching in China: a critical reflection', Leslie Lo presents a critically informed view of an education system that is driven by national policy rhetoric that seems to encourage system-wide change but does not achieve this. He addresses three key aspects of policy led reform in China over three decades that have posed challenges to strengthening the work and lives of teachers and notions of teacher autonomy: curricular and pedagogical changes; teacher preparation and training; and teacher professionalism and leadership. He begins by painting a detailed, evidence-based picture of existing and persisting variations in schools and in teachers' conditions of service which largely advantage students and teachers in urban settings, whilst disadvantaging those in rural areas and in the central and western regions of China. Alongside this, he points to evidence of significant dissatisfaction of many teachers, and a crisis of wellbeing and attrition, particularly among early career teachers in the rural areas, as, similar to those in Western countries, their workloads and work intensity increase.

A key factor which, Lo claims, prevents many teachers in China from engaging in pedagogical change, relates to tradition and culture. Despite attempts by national policymakers to encourage the adoption and use of new, creative classroom pedagogies and integrated curricula, teachers in China, by and large, have continued to place great emphasis on preparing their students for national examinations which open windows for successful

entry into universities of either national, provincial or local prestige, and thus are supported by the majority of parents. Lo claims that, 'The influence of the university entrance examinations (*gaokao*) has been the central concern of Chinese schooling, for it is the only avenue for aspiring students to receive higher education in China'. Teachers have thus been able to defend their subject and identities as knowledge holders who teach through direct instruction, and thus resist policy imperatives to engage in new pedagogies related to new educational purposes. He describes teachers as subservient in a culture of teaching that is characterised by docility, self-sacrifice and devotion. As a consequence, teaching in China remains teacher-centred, textbook dependent, and examination-oriented. Teacher competence is judged by the command of subject knowledge, pedagogical skills and student test scores. In revealing and discussing the tensions throughout the system between traditional notions of instruction and the 'modern science' of learning, Lo calls for a 'new consciousness' which would enable teachers to develop their sense of mission and agency in teaching to a broader curriculum through which they would define, 'What is really good for the child'.

In 'The Universities and Initial Teacher Education; challenging the discourse of derision. The case of Wales', John Furlong challenges the long-standing 'discourse of derision' about university-led initial teacher education and training in Western countries, notably England, USA and Australia, that led to central government, on the basis of lack of confidence in the epistemological positioning of work of universities, ensuring that schools now take an increasingly dominant role. The author was appointed as a senior adviser with specific responsibility for the ITE sector to provide leadership in policy advice and in raising the standards of all providers in Wales. The paper presents his work and recommendations for systemic change. He presents a case study, in which universities have taken a more central role, on the proviso that they put the learning of the student-teacher at the heart of their course planning, that they, 'clarify their own distinctive contribution to professional learning, and that they work in close collaboration with schools'. Such reform is based on a Welsh government view that teachers in the future should take the lead in defining and implementing the curriculum and assessment, work collaboratively, and lead professional development; and that in order to carry out these tasks, they need to engage both with the intellectual rigour embedded in university generated, scholarly but accessible knowledge and epistemologies, and the practical knowledge of teaching and learning that only schools can provide. In other words, the underlying assumption was that high-quality professional education necessarily involves a number of different modes of learning, and different forms of knowledge. The clear implication is that partnerships between schools and universities need to be based on joint curriculum and assessment planning, by teachers who are knowledgeable about how students learn, structured in-school mentoring and 'practical theorizing'. This is one of only a handful of studies of whole system change internationally in which both accredited school teachers and university academics are jointly accountable for the content, quality and outcomes of their programmes.

In 'Changing policy contexts and teachers' work life narratives', Ivor F. Goodson and Meril Ümarik focus on ways in which vocational teachers' understandings of their work and professionalism have been shaped by the interplay between changes since the re-independence, in 1991, in the governance of Estonia at national level, organisational work contexts and individual work lives. Based upon twenty-four life history narrative interviews, the authors argue that policy reforms have taken place over particular 'periods of practice' and that these have impacted differentially on the work and careers

of vocational teachers, influencing their understanding of their roles and how they see themselves as professionals who may perceive that they have, for example, different degrees of autonomy in different periods. They draw upon Giddens' (1984/1991) structuration framework which emphasises the presence of and dynamic interplay between the socially constructed nature of reality and individuals' agency, to explain, 'why educational innovations are always resisted by some teachers and how similar reform efforts results into different outcomes', arguing that the concept of refraction (Goodson & Rudd, 2017) makes it possible to show how top-down initiated educational reform policies refract at different levels and pass different points of refraction (e.g. at national, school or individual levels). Portrayals of three VET teachers are discussed to illustrate different responses to the 'windows of opportunity' provided by reforms for them to assert their agency during the transition periods from communism to neoliberalism. During that period, schools were provided with more independent decision-making but, as in many other countries, individual teachers autonomy was decreased. This study demonstrated, however, that autonomy had not only been experienced in different ways, but also conceptualised differently. Teachers who were involved in the development processes, felt a sense of ownership of the changes, while others have had difficulty in making sense of the changing requirements resulting from the parallel reform policies introduced. The paper provides an important and under-reported, nuanced perspective which challenges the generalised mantras that neoliberal reforms necessarily result in negative consequences for all teachers.

In the final paper, 'Teacher Collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations and effects', Andy Hargreaves takes a historical perspective, bringing the attention of the reader to the strong associations over many years between strong collaborative cultures in schools, and teachers' sense of self-efficacy, job satisfaction and social capital. Whilst this is well established in the literature, what is less well researched empirically, he argues, is the nature of collaboration itself. Using his own experience as an undergraduate as part of a small team undertaking a practical project as a point of departure, he found that the quality of social relations was more of a determinant of productivity than the environment in which the project took place, but that, within this, personal friendships were not in themselves necessarily a sufficient determinant. Later, he found that differences in the cultures in primary (elementary) and secondary schools were likely to influence the nature and degree of teacher collaboration, the latter being more likely to be dominated by departmental identity 'silos' and 'individualism' than the former; and he dissects different forms of collegiality, pointing to Little's (1990) much cited seminal discussion of 'weak' and 'strong' forms of collegiality in schools. Among all teachers, research in the twentieth century in the USA found that prevailing characteristics were presentism, conservatism and isolation. In some jurisdictions, working conditions for teachers have improved (even acknowledging the negative effects of neo-liberal reforms); and as the important role of principals in creating and developing school cultures of transparency alongside professional trust has become acknowledged, so opportunities to develop and sustain strong collaborative relationships have been enhanced. However, this is still not the case in many others. Yet, even there, the author argues, without the willingness of teachers to engage with necessary processes of re-culturing in which they have a sense of ownership and voice, change is likely to be hampered. Engagement, he argues, does not result in real change without teacher empowerment.