

## **Teaching for a 21st Century Profession**

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#### **The purpose**

Drawing on the evidence on what it means to be a teacher in the 21st century this study will begin with an analysis of the current situation in differing countries of the world. It will examine the policies which frame teachers' work and the underpinning assumptions on which those policies rest. It will illustrate how policy has been shaping the nature of practice, often with effects that limit teachers' professional judgment and which may, in the process, constrain student achievement. Drawing on the evidence from international research and fact finding this study will offer alternative propositions for system redesign, illustrating these with vignettes of breakthrough practice from around the world, drawing out the key principles that characterise such practice.

#### **The readership**

The content style and presentation will make this accessible to three key international constituencies – teachers, teachers' professional organisations and policy makers. However disparate their interests and priorities this publication will provide the basis for an informed dialogue as to where policy and practice can, and ought to, meet, both in respect of national policy and in the discourse that takes place among policy makers in international forums.

#### **The format**

The publication will take the form of an initial paper which will provide the basis for a discussion among invited experts at a conference workshop to be held in Cambridge. On the basis of that discussion the publication will be revised and published, perhaps adopting the format of previous IE publications, punchy, accessible with vignettes and short case studies drawn from countries around the world.

#### **The background**

The last half century has marked a turning point in the evaluation of teaching and learning. There has been a gradual but profound shift in public attitudes to education, to teaching and of school purposes and functions. The causes are multiple but much is owed to a seminal report in the mid 1960s which signalled a sea change in the evaluation of schools and of learning and teaching. It has had a profound effect on policy nationally and internationally and the professional autonomy of teachers. The publication in the United States of the Coleman Report in 1966 (*Equality of Educational Opportunity*) set in train a movement which has gathered momentum over the intervening years.

We have, in the intervening years, witnessed increasingly sophisticated methodologies designed to identify and compare the effectiveness of individual teachers, providing governments with instruments to

'measure' schools and teachers and hold them to account for the performance of students. It has furnished us with a new vocabulary now deeply embedded in the daily discourse of schools and classrooms – value added, accountability, targets, performance appraisal, and 'delivery' – teachers as intermediaries, the intervening variable between a prescribed curriculum and student 'outcomes'.

Over the same half century the scale and pace of social change has had a major impact on the nature of 'family' life, bringing with it a radically changing profile of the occupational structure, witnessing unforeseen and unforeseeable advances in information technology all of which demand a recasting of how teaching effectiveness is understood and evaluated.

The need for a revisiting of what it means to be a teacher in this new global policy environment will include some deconstruction and reconstruction of teacher 'effects', addressing contested issues of professional autonomy, collegiality, accountability and equity. There is a need to revisit the disjunctions between the rhetoric of a changing world and the role of teachers; and to critically review the meeting point of policy prescription and professionally driven pedagogy.

Mick Waters, in his role as Director of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England, captures the disjunction of rhetoric and practice in a global context.

In the job I've just left I got the chance to go to ministerial meetings in so many places, from America to Australia, to China to India, to Egypt to Scandinavia, where Ministers would unfailingly stand up and talk about how the world is changing, its uncertain, technology, global sustainability, rich and poor, economic challenge, movement of people, threats to our civilisation, etc. Then they all say, therefore, what youngsters need to be is adaptable, flexible, ever to cope with change, and words like that. Then, within an hour, all of them are marching to another drum which is about how we hold on to tradition and how we don't let things that we have traditionally tested drift away because they're fearful of their electorate thinking that they've lost what they thought matters to the electorate. (quoted in Bangs, MacBeath and Galton, *Re-inventing Schools, Reforming Teaching*, 2010)

'Marching to a different drum' offers a metaphor for this study which will describe the incessant beat of policy direction on the one hand, and the rhythm of learning and teaching on the other. It will question whether the discord between policy direction and pedagogical principle is inevitable or reparable? Is there a resolution to this tension which now looms so large much of the international research on the lives and work of teachers?

*For every complex problem there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong* (H.L. Mencken)

### **In search of an effective science**

The last four to five decades have seen a quest among researchers for a 'science', robust enough to explain and predict 'outcomes' and to tie these to the impact and 'effect' of the teacher. This rests on quantitative measures which have to be both valid and reliable, amenable to defining and manipulating data such as 'effect sizes', holding variables constant in a quasi experimental process. However, researchers themselves are careful to add the caveat that an effect size is no more than a relative measure. They are cautious to qualify the language, referring to 'a *more* effective' or '*less* effective' school, department or teacher, pointing out that statistical differences are often marginal and tend to conceal a significant latitude for error. This does not, however, prevent a casual slippage and conflation of 'effective' and 'good' – one intended as a scientific statement and the other as a value judgment. One is concerned with 'value-added' (a statistical term borrowed from economics), the other is more concerned with values in their moral, 'human', professional and (in some cases) a religious sense. The result is unsubstantiated conclusions and definitive prescriptions.

Translated into policy it locates teachers as the instrument of administrative mandate, their impact ascertained by the degree to which a standardized curriculum has been successfully 'delivered'. Researchers who have been scrupulous in warnings of oversimplification have distanced themselves from the uses and misuses of comparative data and its unintended consequences.

As researchers within the field readily acknowledge, teacher effectiveness research is still far from an empirical process robust or valid enough to factor into the equation the 'variables'; to tease out the dynamic interplay of factors that tell the story of what good teaching looks like in the many different contexts in which it takes place. The challenge is one of grasping the complexity and dynamic of schools and classrooms as living growing entities. As studies proliferate and as meta studies validate them there is an inherent danger of 'legitimacy by attribution' (Bogotch, Miron and Biesta, 2007:93).

### **Painting on a larger canvas**

The inherent flaw in black box studies is in allowing the tight focus on the school or classroom to discount, underestimate or misconceive the impact of what happens outside the black box of the school. Consistent among school effects studies since the 1966 Coleman Report has been the identification of the school effect as being between 8 and 15 per cent. While this is a statistic to be treated with much caution and qualification, the interplay of school with family, neighbourhood and community needs to be taken into account in any judgment made about teaching quality and effect. The relationship of school and classroom, school and

community, home and school takes very different forms in Nordic countries, in Eastern Europe, in Japan, Australia and countries of the Middle East, for example. The French researcher Wacquant's studies in Paris banlieus (2001) found that different neighbourhoods established different norms, potent in effect, observed by insiders but difficult to get a handle on by outsiders. He described these as:

- Economic and social disenfranchisement
- Insularity and disillusionment
- Transience and instability
- Erosion of work-based identity
- Racism, violence and intimidation
- Media images, rumour and disinformation
- Lack of mobility and navigational know-how on the part of children and parents

These are all inter-related and although these play out in different ways in different countries, nowhere are they not significant factors in determining engagement, success and life after school.

This is brilliantly depicted than in the Palme d' Or award winning film, 'Entre les Murs', in which what happens *within the walls* has to be understood by what these young people bring with them and the heroic attempts of a highly dedicated teacher to get on to their wavelength. It is a reminder of the Leif Moos, the Danish researcher's metaphor of 'bandwidth' which implies tuning in to the multiple and disparate voices, sensitive to the 'bandwidth' on which messages are carried and can be heard. It is also a reminder that whatever the collegial and managerial support at the end of the day, to quote the recent publication (*Reinventing Schools, Reforming Teaching*) 'you are on your own in the classroom'.

In respect of each and all of these issues there are research studies and meta studies which will be subjected to critical examination.

### **Questions which will be addressed**

What do we know about the incentives and disincentives, 'satisfiers' and 'dissatisfiers' to becoming and to remaining a teacher in the first decade of the 21 century?

What is the international evidence as to what motivates teachers and sustains teachers' enthusiasm and commitment? What are the key similarities and differences among countries?

What assumptions underpin the policy rhetoric and how valid and reliable current attempts to measure teachers' effectiveness?

In what ways is teaching analogous to business in which the workforce need to be monitored, supervised and held to account on the basis of productivity?

What is the evidence on what parents value in their children's teachers? What do children and young people value in their teachers?

What has been, and is, the role of teacher unions in shaping, critiquing and providing alternative perspectives on government policies and priorities?

How have differing governments and political administrations responded to advice and counsel from teacher unions?

Who do teachers learn from? And with? And in what context(s) ?

What is the nature of professional dialogue? How is it constrained and diminished? How can it be revived and sustained?

What can we learn from ethnographic studies of life in classrooms? How can we better depict the meeting point of children's aspirations and anxieties and teachers' investment in children's learning and welfare?

What contributions are being made, and can be made, by bodies which represent teachers? By teachers professional associations and unions?

What are the key messages for the life and work of teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

What are key messages for policy makers nationally and super national bodies?

## **Chapter 1**

### **The state of nations**

The first chapter will describe the many ways in which schools world wide are now better places for children, better resourced, more humane and intelligent in respect of diversity and special needs and yet... what counts as 'improvement'? What have we learned? What ought we have learned? And what we have still to learn about the needs and aspirations of children and parents? And what are the implications for teaching and learning in a changing and sometimes volatile climate?

## **Chapter 2**

### **The way we were?**

This chapter will chart 'the way we were' before the age of managerialism and accountability. It will both demythologise a 'golden age' but also acknowledge what has been lost in the drive for uniformity and policing of classroom practice. It will identify the origins of school effects and teacher effectiveness studies, the progressive refinement of measurement, the accompanying shifts in language, the emergence of 'outcomes' and the progressive narrowing of professional latitude and discretion. While pointing up the aridity of studies which fail to get beneath the skein of classroom life, this will not be a counsel of despair but counterpoint this with the 'genius' of teachers who are able to catch the moment, who are tune in to what terms the 'bandwidth' of their students' experience.

These issues and exemplars, drawn from engagement with teacher unions in diverse national contexts will be set within a broad global context in which there are both common strands and significant contextual differences.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Getting a measure of teaching?**

*We must learn to measure what we value, rather than valuing what we can easily measure*  
(Education Counts, 1991)

In a climate of pervasive measurement and accountability what is the most appropriate way in which to capture and share the quality of pedagogy? The numerous different ways in which the quality of teaching may be identified rest on different premises. The strengths and weaknesses of the following will be considered, with a view to proposing what approaches will be most likely to enhance teachers' confidence, competence and collegiality.

- Performance management and appraisal

- Peer observation
- Collaborative lesson planning
- Lesson study
- External review and inspection
- Co-teaching
- Mentoring and critical friendship
- Portfolio management
- Self evaluation

How can we derive more authentic and nuanced ‘measures’ of teaching quality? What approaches provide the most insights and serve the interests of the profession rather than simply party political imperatives? This section will conclude with argument that we need to foreground what we value in the education of children and in the quality and professional development of those who teach them.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Towards a professional future**

What are the likely scenarios for the future which follow from different policy premises? Which of these is most likely to enhance teachers’ sense of self worth and self efficacy? Which of these is most likely to enhance the self worth and self efficacy of those they teach?

Drawing on best evidence synthesis on an international scale this concluding chapter will examine implications for change which can be driven by the profession and by essential professional values. It will suggest seminal principles for a more confident autonomous profession and for the nature of practice and policy which this implies.

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