

Editorial

The end of the teacher?

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The late Donald McIntyre, much missed, knew a thing or two about teachers and their work. Every one of us is a teacher, he suggests at the outset of his first book, *Teachers and Teaching*, co-authored with Arnold Morrison. We each influence how others think and feel and act, at home, at work and in the wider social world. So to teach in the professional sense ‘is not clearly distinguished from a number of other activities in many of its objectives and techniques, but does have particular priorities among its purposes and distinctive problems arising from the contexts in which it is done’. The dimension of ordinariness which infuses the activity of teaching, its natural human-kindness, is worth holding in mind.

Across 40 years of research and thinking, Donald McIntyre deepened our understanding of what it is to be a teacher. He valued thinking in the company of others and set great store by teachers talking together about their work. (All Professor McIntyre’s books as listed on the Cambridge Faculty of Education website are jointly authored collaborations: a lesson in itself.) He recognised the significance of teachers’ craft knowledge and the importance of teachers’ practical theorising, the knottier version of ‘reflective’ teaching. He saw the need to balance and reconcile what school-based and university-based initial teacher education (ITE) can each offer the neophyte practitioner.

How teachers are made, what they should know and the ways in which they think about and rethink their practice remain among the enduring intellectual concerns of a profession now confronting a sustained attempt by government to redescribe and reconfigure its work and hence its sense of itself. Policy is advanced in which the activity of teaching seems more and more conceived of as the enactment of pre-determined approved and uniform processes: a matter of applying in the classroom particular techniques and approaches which people other than the classroom teacher have arrived at and authorised. Curtailing teachers’ pedagogical freedom in respect of the teaching of reading is the most egregious example.

Several contributors to this issue advance critiques of the government’s core content framework (CCF) for initial teacher education, imposed on providers following the ‘market review’ and re-accreditation process. The Framework conflates learning with remembering and thus misconceives teaching as delivery, an instrumental technology merely. That misconception spells the end of the teacher if formal teaching is to be known as a theoretically engaged, imaginative and properly competent relational activity of judgement, one that can rise to the demands of the complex social world of

thought and feeling within which it is situated and to which it is responsibly answerable. Teaching of this kind Eddie Playfair calls 'a very consequential' political act, which may be one reason government seeks much less of it.

High stakes public testing regimes, centralised target-setting, league tables and impoverished frameworks of school inspection have played their part in constricting teachers' agency and dramatically curtailing the reach of the profession's autonomy in matters of assessment and curriculum design as well as in pedagogy. A profound withering of outlook – I am tempted to say, of culture – among educational policymakers has licensed the idolatry of the quantitative and all which follows from it. Every exhortation to narrow a so-called 'attainment gap' which the system itself is set up to reproduce confirms the gulf between official conceptions of teaching's prime purpose – the 'end' of the teacher – and the way those who understand teaching to be an emancipatory project think about it; again in Eddie Playfair's words as 'a practical project of worthwhile social change'.

Among those entering the profession, the desire to help improve the lives of young people by teaching them things and helping them learn for themselves retains its motivational potency. Many become teachers to this end. But as government pursues policies hostile to this way of conceiving what it is to be a teacher, the crisis in teacher recruitment intensifies. Year after year, and sometimes spectacularly, the government misses its recruitment targets. In 2022-23 it fell 41 per cent short for 'trainee' secondary teachers. The previous year it fell 21 per cent short. In the primary sector, the government fell 7 per cent short of its recruitment target last year. One in three teachers who qualified in the last decade has quit the profession. Constant measurement, comparison and hyper-accountability pressures bear down hard on that initial sense of commitment, service and responsibility. 'It is targets and accountability that drive teachers out of the profession', Kathryn Spicksley maintains in the powerful conclusion to her article. 'These are the issues which become barriers to enabling teachers to connect meaningfully with children and improve their lives. If we want teachers to stay in the profession, we need to help them to become the type of teachers they dreamed of becoming when they entered'.

Against the overbearing payload of a hostile policy, those who endorse critical thinking and imaginative practice still find ways to push back. Rosie Moore and Alison Herman want to 'hold fast to the spirit of teacher education as an open-minded and intellectually curious endeavour'. They describe and reflect on a module they offer their education studies undergraduates, one designed to help students 'develop a rationale for their stance as teachers'. Students are positioned as potential agents of change, as against agents only of delivery. Consequently, they begin to address questions about the forms of knowledge and how these come to be legitimated, and to raise questions about the relationship between knowledge and power. A distinguishing feature of the module

is the way it harnesses the energy of metaphor, whose explosive fusion can prompt original thinking.

Daryn Egan-Simon regards the Core Content Framework in the same light as Moore and Hermon. For him, as for them, it has become the de facto baseline curriculum for ITE. By installing as a necessary basis for becoming a teacher a narrow understanding of learning, one derived from certain kinds of cognitive science, the Core Content Framework is helping a new traditionalism take hold. In his article, Egan-Simon describes certain aspects of the history PGCE course he works on at Chester University, devised to help students move beyond the limits inherent in the new Framework. He reflects on the power of first-hand experience to remind students that learning has to do with meaning-making, and on the importance of positioning student teachers 'as knowledgeable and intellectual agents in the learning process rather than passive beneficiaries of narrowly defined core content'. His article, like the one by Moore and Hermon, includes comments by student teachers on the benefits of this approach.

A sometimes scathing analysis by Lisa Murtagh, Elisabeth Gregory, Rosa Archer and Karen Beswick lays bare many further shortcomings of the Core Content Framework, its over-reliance on elements of neuroscience, and the opportunistic elevation of the likes of Oak Academy as the way to reduce a teacher's workload. The government's continued use of the term 'teacher training' instead of 'teacher education' is symptomatic of its profound misunderstanding. The authors describe in some detail how ITE is addressed at their university. They offer a robust defence of the work being done, not least to weld a cohort of student teachers into a community of practice: 'One of the most effective resources [students] acquire during the training year is each other'. To enable student teachers to make sense of the demanding realities of the classroom, and to prepare them to implement informed judgements about how best to act there, an approach to ITE is required which is far more wide-ranging, informed and expert than anything the Core Content Framework can offer.

Once students become fully fledged teachers, how can they be nurtured in the role and supported as they develop a career? Kathryn Spicksley critically considers the early career framework programme which, in 2021, replaced the newly qualified teacher (NQT) year with two years of structured support. She argues that the programme retains problematic elements of the 'judgementoring' model it was meant to supersede. By combining observer and evaluator in the person of the mentor, the previous approach constrained possibilities for open and honest professional dialogue of the kind most likely to be helpful for the beginning teacher. Spicksley argues that the instructional coaching model she now finds prevalent replicates these problems. Instructional coaching is monologic and reductive, further authorising a technician (mis)understanding of the work of teaching. One of its consequences, ironically enough, is to enhance deprofessionalisation. Spicksley offers examples of

alternative non-judgemental and non-hierarchical approaches to mentoring which better establish space for trust and honesty in the conversation between early career teachers and their mentors, and better allow for the co-construction of knowledge about professional practice.

Brian Rock was until recently a classroom teacher. He draws on his experiences in school to consider how early career teachers can balance external expectations and requirements with their own pedagogical values and their desire to be the teacher they hope to be. This dilemma only sharpens as a neoliberal conception of education infiltrates further into professional discourse and practices. One consequence of this infiltration has been the expansion and amplification of what Brian Rock calls commodified learning and which others have termed 'deliverology'. One productive response, Brian Rock argues, is to maximise possibilities for surprise and spontaneity by obeying the 'dialogic impulse' and creating dialogic spaces in lessons. Brian Rock draws on Martin Buber's ideas to explore the damage 'deliverology' has done to the subject English and how it is taught. He considers the role an ITE lecturer can play in enabling critical questions to be raised and fruitfully addressed with students.

Like Brian Rock, Tony Eaude has observed how a contractual conception of professionalism associated with neoliberalism is ousting from the education sector a more complex, nuanced and appropriate 'covenantal' version. Eaude offers an historically informed and wide-ranging consideration of aspects of professionalism in relation to teachers, and a clear-sighted diagnosis of the contemporary situation. He argues that it matters greatly how teachers see themselves as professionals. Teachers' conceptions of their role directly bear on the decisions they make about what to do, or not do, in their work with children and young people. He calls on teachers to reassert a professionalism more in keeping with the daily realities and practicalities of their work as they themselves understand it, rather than as external authorities might present it as being. The understanding of role and work which teachers themselves come to is far richer, more nuanced and considered than that emanating from government or imposed by its agencies. Eaude suggests that to be more properly professional, teachers must be more forthright, less compliant, and if necessary more subversive.

As we have seen, for Eddie Playfair teaching is collective critical social engagement. His characteristically personable and informed article considers the nature of professionalism in further education, a sector which has endured a lengthy period of particularly deep cuts to funding. He upholds the value of a committed and intellectually involved community of practice, one that takes part in a continuing collegial dialogue and is aware of its own traditions of thought. His article references some of those whose writing has contributed to these traditions. Being a teacher is a dynamic process, Playfair maintains, not a fixed position. It remains of the essence that a teacher can change the life of a student.

David Kazamias, who teaches in Berlin, would agree. His article explores the educational identities of his Year 7 students as revealed through their relationship with that city. In the spirit of the late Michael Armstrong (and in the footsteps of Walter Benjamin) he acknowledges the high intent of these young people as they endeavour to make sense of the urban world and their own lives. His sensitive reading of their writing, photographs and illustrations leads him to reflect on what these acts of creation might reveal about aspects of current education. He notes that, as adults, ‘we no longer see it as our goal to ask fundamental and critical questions about schooling as these times are long behind us, buried’. In Germany as well as in England the school day is designed to squeeze out space for young people to imagine, reflect and create as they choose. But when they are afforded such space, much can be learned about who they are and what matters to them, and hence how they can be better supported in their learning.

In breezy style (deceptively breezy, for the issue he explores is deadly serious) Alex Gardner-McTaggart considers the way in which talk about teaching has been ‘colonised’ by terms and phrases from the playbook of neoliberalism. He offers examples, and traces the history of this slow infiltration which, it is argued, was set in motion after Margaret Thatcher’s fateful meeting with Friedrich Hayek. Changes in language don’t necessarily signal changes in practice, as the long history of linguistic shapeshifting with regard to ‘ability’ and its labels attest. But as Gardner-McTaggart makes clear: ‘words are powerful: they recruit us to causes’. He calls on teachers to reformulate our language in a way which better articulates ‘eternal educational realities’. We should not repeat the ‘nonsense words’ any more.

Dylan Adams and David Jardine offer a further perspective on the new Welsh curriculum about which Glenda Tinney and Caroline Lewis wrote in this year’s spring number. Wales has introduced a new MA in education alongside the curriculum reforms. Adams and Jardine draw on discussions among teachers at a conference for those taking the new qualification. Their article speaks directly to the attenuation and loss of those desires and commitments which prompt people to become teachers. Adams and Jardine point out the neo-Taylorism that infuses contemporary education policy. They note the deliberate refusal in the name of efficiency (a word parsed by Alexander-McTaggart) to extend agency to teachers or to cultivate teacher initiatives, and the continual damage this causes in teachers’ working lives as well as to their sense of possibility and renewal. Adam and Jardine end their article by considering how a sense of wholeness and ‘full-filled time’ can be rekindled, for example by taking seriously the new Welsh curriculum’s positing of well-being as an area of learning.

This number rounds out with a fairy tale and four book reviews, one of which considers the *Encyclopaedia of Marxism and Education*, edited by Alpesh Maisuria, who sits on *FORUM*’s editorial board.

If in a simple sense all of us are teachers in our everyday lives, then some of us go on

teaching – through the words we have written and the way we have lived – even after we have died. Who can gauge or quantify the influence any teacher may have, for good or ill, across an individual life? In this sense the ‘end of the teacher’, teaching’s fulfilment, by remaining unknowable diffuses through the work of teaching a tincture of the immeasurable which marks teaching as an ethical practice and not an instrumental one. To see it this way makes all the difference.

As the tenure of the current head of Ofsted comes to a close, and demands to reform or entirely reconstitute the inspectorate continue to intensify, the next number of *FORUM* will look at educational inspection. It will be co-edited with Professor Colin Richards.