

Chapter 3: Innovative Teachers: Promoting Lifelong Learning For All

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THE CHANGING CONTEXTS OF TEACHING

Teaching now takes place in a world dominated by change, uncertainty and increasing complexity. As a reflection of this, government publications in Europe, North America and Australasia stress the technological, economic and social challenges which schools (and therefore teachers) face. They are confronted, it is said, by a number of changes which lead to contradictory demands. As a UNESCO paper put it:

“On the one hand:

- a commitment to education for all;
- an extension of the period of initial schooling;
- recognition of the growing importance of life-long education;
- more emphasis on general education for children and young people which prepares them for life rather than providing vocational skills for specific jobs;
- increasing emphasis on teamwork and co-operation;
- a consensus that general education should include attention to environmental issues, tolerance and mutual understanding

On the other hand:

- growing inequalities, deepening social differences and a break-down in social cohesion;
- an increase in alienation among youth and dropping out of school;
- high levels of youth unemployment and charges that young people are ill-equipped to enter the world of work;
- a resurgence of inter-ethnic tensions, xenophobia and racism as well as the growing influence of religious sects and problems of drugs and gangs, with associated violence;
- increasing emphasis on competition and material values”.

(UNESCO, 1996)

Concern with the need to raise standards of achievement and improve their positions in the world economic league tables has prompted governments to intervene more

actively in all aspects of school life to improve school systems over the last twenty years. Financial self-reliance and ideological compliance have become the twin realities for many of today's schools and their teachers (Hargreaves 1994, p.5). Externally imposed curriculum, management innovations and monitoring and assessment systems have often been poorly implemented; and they have resulted in periods of destabilization, increased workload, intensification of teachers' work and a crisis of professional identity for many teachers who perceive a loss of public confidence in their ability to provide a good service (Day *et al* 1996).

Whilst governments have introduced changes in different ways at different paces, change is nevertheless not optional but a part of the 'postmodern' condition which requires political, organizational, economic, social and personal flexibility and responsiveness (Hargreaves 1994). Little wonder that the postmodern condition represents more of a threat than a challenge for many teachers, or that many are confused by the 'loose-tight' paradox of partially decentralized systems, i.e. local decision making responsibilities, alongside increased public scrutiny and external accountability.

THE NEW PROFESSIONALISM?

Interventions, which some regard as a root and branch attack upon teacher autonomy or teacher professionalism, are welcomed by others as necessary change. Competing and contested definitions of what it means to be a professional lie at the heart of this controversy. Some argue that increased bureaucratic control of schools and intensification of teaching over the last twenty years have reduced individual teachers' areas of discretion in decision making, and led to 'chronic and persisting' overload which has effectively resulted in de-skilling and poor quality teaching (Harris 1996). The establishment of competency-driven, school-based apprenticeship models of pre-service teacher training and systems of in-service teacher development which emphasise short term training needs related to nationally rather than locally or individually defined priorities, are cited as examples of this in the UK. In England the National Curriculum has been described as '*a serial killer*' in the demands it makes upon teachers (Campbell & Neill 1994a), and there is widespread evidence of increased levels of stress and decreased morale.

From these perspectives, teachers are indeed on the way to becoming '*technicians*' whose job is to meet pre-specified achievement targets and whose room to manoeuvre, to exercise discretion – a hallmark of an autonomous professional – is thus increasingly restricted. An alternative view is expressed by David Hargreaves who identifies the shifts in culture, values and practices of teachers which have resulted from government reforms in England, but may be applied equally in many other countries of the world. He describes the '*piecemeal*' and '*fragmented*' emergence of a '*new professionalism*' and identifies trends in which teachers' work is becoming less isolated, their planning more collaborative, their teaching more outcome-oriented and their relationships with students and parents more overtly contractual. Crucially, he identifies a '*a post-technocratic*' model of professional education in which professional development is approached from four interconnected premises:

- teachers are understood to have life-long professional needs and these will be met only if treated as in the case of any learner, in terms of continuity and progression;
- for continuity and progression to be realised teachers' developmental needs must be assessed on a regular basis;
- schools devise a plan for development from which also flow needs for professional development if the schools development plan is to be implemented successfully;
- professional needs arising from personal sources (eg appraisal) have to be reconciled with school needs from institutional sources (eg a development plan).

In this model, all teachers are held to have rights to professional development, and opportunities must be distributed equitably (p.430). Hargreaves places two propositions '*at the heart of*' the new professionalism:

“To improve schools, one must be prepared to invest in professional development; to improve teachers, their professional development must be set within the context of institutional development.”

(Hargreaves, D. p.436)

There are three conclusions which may be drawn from these perspectives and the contexts in which they are framed:

- The impact of the changing economic, social and knowledge contexts upon the education service as a whole has caused a move from the traditional post-war model of the autonomous professional. In particular, what students learn, what they must achieve as the outcome of learning and what standards apply are now explicitly the everyday business of government. Teachers are increasingly expected to conform to a social market model of education in which an increased range of stakeholders define learning needs.
- The circumstances in which teachers work and the demands made upon them are changing as communication technologies erode the role of teacher as exclusive holder of expert knowledge. As the social fabric of society becomes more fragmented, the educative role of schools becomes more complex. Higher expectations for higher quality teaching demands teachers who are well qualified, highly motivated, knowledgeable and skilful not only at the point of entry into teaching but also throughout their careers.
- A focus upon teachers' continuing career long professional development is now a key responsibility of governments, schools and teachers themselves. This is so because '*behaving as a professional*' involves:

“displaying ... degrees of dedication and commitment, working long hours as a matter of course and accepting the open-ended nature of the task involved, which often impinge.. upon home and personal life it also entails maximum effort to “do the best you possibly can” and a constant quest for improved performance. At the same time it involves developing appropriate and caring relationships with students, which gave priority to their interests and well being, as well as dealing

“professionally” with colleagues, parents and other external agencies where appropriate. Finally, because of the complexities of the task of teaching and the obligation to meet varying individual needs, high levels of skill are necessary to respond intelligently to multiple demands in a complex and changing environment...”

(adapted from Helsby, Knight, McCulloch,
Saunders & Warburton 1997, pp.9–10)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHING STANDARDS

Acquiring the qualifications to become a teacher has always been a necessary but not a sufficient condition to succeed as a professional over a career span. Inevitably, subject knowledge needs to be regularly updated. Teaching organization, methods and skills also need revisiting as, on the one hand information becomes more accessible through advances in technology, whilst on the other, teaching pupils who are less socially compliant in conditions which are less conducive to promoting learning becomes more challenging. The maintenance of good teaching demands that teachers review regularly the ways in which they are applying principles of differentiation, coherence, progression and continuity. They also need to establish balance in the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of their teaching and revisit their core ‘moral’ purposes. To be a professional means taking up a lifelong commitment to inquiring practice. Yet under normal circumstances, teachers’ learning is limited by the development of routines ‘single loop learning’ (Argyris & Schon 1974) and taken-for-granted assumptions which limit their capacity to engage in the different kinds of reflection necessary for learning and change (Day 1999). Research tells us that there are both positive and negative reasons for providing a range of continuing professional learning and development opportunities:

Positive

- teachers’ commitment to their work will increase student commitment (Bryk & Driscoll 1988, Rosenholtz 1989, Louis 1998)
- enthusiastic teachers (who are knowledgeable and skilled) work harder to make learning more meaningful for students, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated. (Guskey & Passaro 1994)

Teachers who are most likely to increase commitment to learning were identified by 12–16 year old students in England, over 4 years of interviews as those who:

- enjoy teaching the subject
- enjoy teaching students
- make the lessons interesting and link them to life outside schools
- will have a laugh but know how to keep order
- are fair

- are easy for students to talk to
- don't shout
- don't go on about things (eg. how much better others are)
- explain things and go through things students don't understand without making them feel small
- don't give up on students.

(Rudduck, Day & Wallace 1997)

Negative

- only 50% of the teachers looked forward to each working day in school. (Rivera-Batiz & Marti 1995)
- the demands of students for attention (in large classes) are likely to lead to staff exhaustion and burnout. (Esteve 1989)
- burnt-out teachers give less information and praise to students and interact less frequently with them. (Mancini *et al*, 1984)
- in UK, 23% of sample surveyed indicated having significant illness over the last year (Travers & Cooper 1996).

Teachers' visions of themselves as educationalists with broader purposes are likely to dim without continuing professional development (Farber 1991, Tedesco 1997).

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF LIFELONG LEARNING

David Hargreaves' call for investment in professional development within the context of institutional development is far from being realised. Most teachers still work in isolation from their colleagues for most of the time. Opportunities for the development of practice based upon observation and critique of that practice remain limited. Despite the best efforts of many school leaders to promote collegial cultures, they are most frequently at the level of planning or talking about teaching rather than at the level of examining practice itself. In this context, Barth's observation of the 'perilous place' of learning in the life of teachers is not, perhaps, surprising:

"... the voracious learners are the beginning, first year teachers who care desperately to learn their new craft. The learning curve remains high for three or four years at which time the life of the teacher becomes highly routinized and repetitive. The learning curve flattens. Next September, the same as last September. After perhaps ten years, many observers report that teachers, now beleaguered and depleted, become *resistant* to learning. The learning curve turns downward. With twenty-five years of life in schools, many educators are described as 'burned out'....It appears that life in school is toxic to adult learning. The longer one resides there, the less the learning. Astonishing."

(Barth 1996)

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