Connecting research and professionalism in teacher education

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

The three main themes of this Special Issue of *European Journal of Teacher Education* are brought together and considered in the light of what has been said in the articles included. These themes of teacher education, professionalism and research are all dynamic in the way they have been developing over time and also demonstrate considerable geographical diversity in their manifestations. This paper considers the extent to which these temporal and spatial differences indicate a series of tensions, difficulties and paradoxes as the processes of globalisation continue to influence educational policies and practices around the world. The extent to which the outcomes represent increasing convergence or divergence is discussed and the paper concludes by suggesting a number of key questions that may be asked within a particular context in order to make an assessment of the state of health of the teaching profession within that setting.

Introduction

This special issue of EJTE brings three themes together – teacher education, teacher professionalism, research – in order to consider their interconnections. Although each of the three has attracted much commentary over many years now, it is less common to see the three brought together in order to identify how they interrelate. Our own work over recent years has frequently led to us noting how important these relationships are and how often there are tensions and sometimes apparent contradictions between them. Teacher education has been a central focus for policymaking in nations all around the world, not least under the influence of 'globalisation' and various forms of 'neoliberalism'. Increasingly the focus on the quality of teacher education has been related to issues of globalisation of standards and the increased marketisation of education, thus, 'quality' has become, at the same time, a prominent and contested field (Tatto and Pippin 2017; Akiba and LeTendre 2018) as no single definition of quality applies universally nor is there a single recipe for improving quality in initial teacher education programmes (Russell and Martin 2016). Similar influences have also introduced new dimensions to the longstanding debates about the nature of teacher professionalism. The contribution made to these developments by educational research has varied greatly in different contexts, but there are frequently claims being made about policy developments being 'evidence-based'.

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It seemed timely therefore to invite a number of scholars from different contexts to analyse how these changes are emerging and affecting policy and practice in teaching and teacher education. We have long understood the important contribution that comparative study of education can make, not least in better understanding our own situations. It is often through the eyes of strangers that we come to achieve deeper perceptions of what is happening 'under our own noses'. Furthermore, when bringing these different perspectives together into a shared discourse we can more readily identify the distinctive features which otherwise we may all too readily take for granted.

Comparative study in teacher education may sometimes be used as a basis for 'policy borrowing' by politicians and policymakers, but as researchers we are more interested in how comparative perspectives highlight similarities and differences and how they can reveal underlying values, suppositions and commitments of those with power and influence, as well as of those with the responsibilities of enacting policies through their practice (see Alexander 2000, for an outstanding example of such work). The importance of 'context sensitivity' cannot be overstated in such work and at the crudest level it would be deeply erroneous to assume that 'what works' well in one context would also be effective in a different context (Crossley and Watson 2003).

When we set out to undertake the editing of this special issue in 2019, we could not have predicted what would happen during 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic rapidly spread around the globe. The havoc wreaked on 'normal life' on all continents included major disruptions to teacher education, not least through the sudden closures of schools and universities. The cessation of face to face contact as routine in teaching and learning led to the rapid development of many forms of distance learning and to new electronic forms of communication. Most of the contributors to this issue refer to some of the impacts of this – and it is likely that the changes brought about by this unpredicted global phenomenon will be longlasting and in many aspects permanent.

Recent publications, since the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic, point to the unique experience lived by student teachers despite the lack of direct interaction with learners and the sudden change of setting (Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020) and to a sense of both sameness and difference in some of the innovative pedagogies developed on the (g)local level as many principles and 'intentionalities' of practice and orientating values of teacher educators remained unchanged (Kidd and Murray 2020). The 'virtualisation' of the Initial Teacher Education programmes raised issues of both equity and pedagogy related to the loss of time on school placement (la Velle et al. 2020) and to the role of practice within the context of a practicum as a 'real practice' versus 'an ideal(ised) practice' (Flores and Gago 2020). While there were challenges related to time spent in real classrooms and schools, positive aspects were also identified such as more time for reflection (la Velle et al. 2020; Flores and Gago 2020) and an innovative stance associated with perceived overall improvements in the *quality* of teaching, including the development of placements in 'virtual schools' (Ellis, Steadman, and Mao 2020, original emphasis). Nevertheless, the need for a social-emotional orientation in teacher education curriculum was identified (Hadar et al. 2020) as well as the importance of investing in high-quality teacher preparation and professional learning opportunities to match current needs, supporting mentoring and the development of new teacher roles, and creating time for educators to collaborate with each other and key partners (Darling-Hammond and Hyler 2020).

It remains the case that in spite of the supranational tendencies referred to earlier, education systems, not least the systems for preparing and supporting teachers (pre-service and inservice teacher education) continue to be organised predominantly at a national level. There are a number of variations on this assertion (for example in Germany where the lander (states) continue to play an important role, or in Australia or the USA where federal governments are counterbalanced in the extent of their control by state governance) but it is nevertheless the case that teacher education may be seen as predominantly a feature of national culture and policy. As a number of the contributions to this special issue point out, the pressures for greater 'harmonisation' may come in response to major international exercises from transnational organisations such as the OECD (PISA and TALIS for example) or from major regional polities such as the European Union, with its 'Bologna Process' increasingly affecting higher education.

The purpose of this paper is to draw together the insights offered in the six foregoing articles and to identify what connections they show between teacher education, teacher professionalism and research. Drawing on the papers included in this Special Issue as we proceed, we consider how teacher professionalism appears to be undergoing processes of redefinition in several settings, not least through major changes within teacher educa-tion. We then turn to consider the connections between teacher education and educa-tional research in order to identify implications of these discussions for the future of teacher education and teacher professionalism around the world.

As indicated earlier, we identify a number of paradoxes, tensions and contradictions, some within particular nations and some that are revealed when different contexts are compared. There are, we conclude, tendencies both for convergence and also for divergence in policy and in practice. Our conclusions are that it will remain very important to monitor what is happening in teacher education around the world and that the spatial dimensions to our analysis must always be considered within a temporal framework. In experiencing the impact of the first global pandemic in our lifetimes, we can never predict the future with certainty.

The papers included in this Special Issue demonstrate not only the value of interna-tional comparative work, but also how volatile the worlds of teaching and teacher education have become. The tensions, paradoxes and contradictions about the nature of teaching and the processes of teacher education are clear to see. In particular the tension between a populist and simplistic view of teaching (and hence teacher education) that have become dominant in policy circles in the USA and England for example, may be contrasted with a view that emphasises complexity, professional growth, agency and autonomy, such as may be found in Finland, the Republic of Ireland and in some aspects of provision in Japan and Hong Kong. We turn now to synthesise what may be said about the changing nature of teacher professionalism in some more detail.

Changing teacher professionalism

The theme of teacher professionalism has been much debated over many years in many different contexts, local, national and increasingly, global. In 'western' nations, it may be generally agreed that teaching in the twentieth century, saw a steady increase in the level of the professionalism of teachers, however this still begs the question of what is meant by that term. Dictionary definitions tend to refer to a distinct body of knowledge and/or skills that are a component part of recognising an occupation as a profession. Furthermore, it is usually

suggested that members of a profession are expected to have a certain degree of autonomy in the decisions they take and the actions they undertake. Simultaneously a profession is expected to adhere to a code of practice which is based on a set of ethical propositions. At times commentators have suggested that teaching is more a semi-profession than a full profession, that there may be more extended or more restricted versions of teacher professionalism and even at times that teaching is threatened with 'proletarianisation' (Ellis and McNicholl 2015). This last term reminds us also of the relationship between professionalism, social class and social status.

The links between professionalism and professional education are also key indicators of the extent of professionalism. The professional education of doctors, lawyers and engineers for example is firmly established as an element of university provision in most countries. These occupations also have self-governing professional associations which control entry to the respective profession and can also disbar individuals from practising that profession if their code of conduct is breached. For teachers, we can see that things are less clear cut. Professional education for teachers has not always been associated with universities. There are traditions of 'normal schools' and of 'training colleges' in many countries and such institutions are of lesser academic standing than universities. Furthermore, and as demonstrate in a number of the contributions to this special issue, there are contexts where professional preparation of teachers is being taken further away from higher education and 'apprenticeship' types of craft learning are being promoted. And while there are teachers' professional bodies in many countries they often do not have the same level of independence as those of other professions.

In addition to the factors already mentioned, we also need to raise the question of the relationships between teaching and educational research. In the professions of higher standing, it is the case that research, for example in medicine, law or engineering provides a fundamental underpinning to the work in those occupations. To what extent the same can be said of teaching is a matter of some variation in different contexts. Certainly, our intention in seeking to examine the links between teacher professionalism, teacher education and (educational) research is to draw attention to some of the contemporary dynamics in these relationships which appear to indicate continuing tensions and even turbulence in the shaping of teachers' work.

Existing literature points to teacher professionalism as a contested site (Sachs 2016) which is dependent on a variety of complex and dynamic array of variables representing, in different times and contexts, old and new professionalisms linked to drawbacks and progress in looking at the teaching profession (Estrela 2014). Issues such as performance management and cultures, increased accountability, and the imposition of teacher standards along with teacher autonomy and agency, long and research-based teacher education have been discussed. The concepts of organisational and occupational professionalism as ideal-types identified by Evetts (2009) are useful to understand tensions and even contradictions in how the teaching profession is understood, namely in regard to issues of the need to increase the quality of teaching and student achievement and the importance of teacher autonomy and agency. These two discourses identified by Evetts (2009) parallel the notions of managerial professionalism with a focus on performance and accountability and democratic professionalism focusing on collegial relations and collaborative work practices identified by Sachs (2016).

The growing intervention of many governments into the definition of what teaching is and how teachers should be prepared has coincided with growing international awareness of the economic and thus political significance of education and teaching. The national and

the global forces have interacted in many interesting ways, leading to manifestations of what has been called vernacular globalisation. We have seen in a study of teacher education in twelve nations around the world (Tatto and Menter 2019) how national cultures and histories have intersected with global pressures for the improvement of 'quality' in teaching and teacher education, leading to many common features but also to significant elements of national distinctiveness. Among the most obvious common features has been the growing emphasis on standards and/or competences in teaching (see Goodwin in this issue) and greater reliance on measurable 'outcomes'. However, again as Goodwin demonstrates (and the same is shown in the two way comparisons offered by Mayer and Mills and by Clarke and O'Doherty in this issue) there are significant differences in how standards are defined and also in how outcomes of teacher education are assessed (see also Teacher Education Group 2016).

The struggles for professional self-definition are perhaps exemplified by bodies such as Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in Australia, or The Teaching Council in Ireland. Many teaching bodies look to the General Teaching Council of Scotland as an example of what has become a fully independent body, that is upholding standards within the profession (Matheson 2015), in the way that the UK's General Medical Council does for doctors or The Law Society does for lawyers. But equivalent teachers' organisations in England or in the USA struggle to establish themselves as independent of government or as genuinely representing the teaching profession.

As governments have become increasingly interventionist in teaching they have tended to use policy documents as their main tool for achieving conformity and compliance to their understanding of what teaching is and how it should be prepared for. In England we have talked about 'the tightening grip' exercised by national government on teaching and teacher education since the early 1980s (Childs and Menter 2013). The other main tool that is used by governments is setting up reviews which lead to reports and this has clearly been the approach in both parts of Ireland (Clarke and O'Doherty in this issue), in Australia and elsewhere. The extent to which such reports lead directly to change can vary considerably depending on the political and cultural context, as is well demonstrated in the different effects of reviews in the two parts of Ireland. The third tool in achieving compliance can be the introduction of sometimes heavy-handed inspection procedures, as in England, introduced in the name of improving accountability and raising standards (see also Cochran-Smith et al. 2018).

In a recent review of 40 years of publications in the *European Journal of Teacher Education*, Livingston and Flores (2017, 555) highlight 'a language shift from teacher training to teacher education alongside philosophical and political shifts in beliefs about the role of teachers in the twenty-first century. This includes shifts in expectations about the contribution education makes to the economy and society and what contribution teachers make to improving student learning'.

But to return to the question of the social standing of teaching as a profession – and this is high in both parts of Ireland – we can see how in many situations this can lead either to an enhancement of professionalism or to its diminution. Finland is one of the most frequently cited examples of where teaching has a relatively high standing and where there are far too many applicants for student teacher places. Here, according to Sahlberg (2011), we see high levels of trust in the profession and that the preparation for teaching is firmly based in the university sector and research activity is integrated into

professional education (see also Townsend 2011). Similarly, the contrast between teaching and teacher education in Scotland and England may be seen not only to reflect different ideological positions of governments, but also to reflect the cultural and social positioning of teaching and teacher education (Hulme and Menter 2011).

If a distinctive element that makes an occupation into a profession is a particular body of knowledge, then considering this in an international context two questions arise. First, what is that body of knowledge and how is it defined? Secondly, who is in the position to offer those definitions and set out the processes? Again we see considerable variation between the very open ended approach taken in Hong Kong, through much more prescriptive and contained approaches elsewhere including Germany or England. When the controls are tight this tends to be associated with control being exercised by central government forces rather than by teachers themselves or their organisations. As indicated earlier, statements of teaching standards or competences are often used as a means of defining this knowledge. However, there are a number of problems with this. First is the question of whether everything about teaching can actually be communicated through verbal statements. There are some who have argued, often from a Romantic perspective, that there are essential elements of the best teaching that are intangible or evanescent. Secondly, even if we do accept the possibility of converting teaching into a series of statements, there are many different aspects of professional knowledge that must be included as Shulman has eloquently argued over a number of years (Shulman 1987; see also Philpott 2014). We may also note in passing that if professional knowledge for teaching is multi-faceted and complex, then professional knowledge for teacher education will need to include all of that but also add further knowledge in the form of knowledge about professional learning for adults, not to mention the regulatory frameworks that govern how it is organised, provided and assessed.

Other colleagues have pointed to the sometimes uncritical use of professional teaching standards and discuss the ways in which they may contribute to develop certain views of teacher professionalism (Sachs 2003). Whilst standards may be seen as a basis for defining what teachers should be able to do and to develop and think, they may also entail a narrow view of teaching and learning, undermining teacher professional autonomy, along with the fact that some dimensions of teacher knowledge (practical, private and tacit) may be difficult to be translated into the language of standards (Smith 2005).

The professional identity of teachers (and teacher educators) is largely based on the professional knowledge that is required of them. Menter, Hulme, Elliott, and Lewin (2010), for instance, in reviewing teacher education in Scotland, identified four 'influential paradigms' of teacher professionalism: 'the effective teacher' – associated with a standard-based approach to teaching; 'the reflective teacher' – related to the teacher as an active participant in his/her own learning and improvement with colleagues; 'the enquiring teacher' – linked to the reflective paradigm but with an emphasis on improving teaching and learning through systematic inquiry; 'the transformative teacher' – associated with the promotion of equity and social change in classrooms and beyond. The extent to which teachers have a distinctive professional identity will reflect the stage of development they have reached in their professional learning and their ability to put their professional knowledge (including their skills) to good use in the classroom (or lecture room). Interest in professional identity has significantly increased over recent years, not least because of the growing tensions that have arisen from the reshaping of the nature of teachers' work in so many different contexts in recent years (see eg Helsby 1999; Day 2017; Thomas and Beauchamp 2011; Pillen, Beijaard, and den Brok 2013).

To summarise what we have suggested in this section, from an international and comparative perspective we point both to forces for convergence and forces for divergence in the ways in which teacher professionalism is being shaped and reshaped at this point in the twenty first century. Among the former we can identify the influence of OECD exercises such as PISA and TALIS that are encouraging international comparisons and the league tables frequently derived from such exercises which lead to policies seeking to emulate those systems that are most 'successful'. We could also point to transnational agreements such as the Bologna process in Europe which bring new alignments between diverse systems of teacher education, for example in terms of course structures, durations and credit points. One the other hand we may continue to see how some elements of teaching and teacher education may be very closely connected to issues of national identity and for example we can see distinctive approaches to languages and language education, to cultural diversity, to civics (or citizenship education). Finally, we can see how different relationships between the three key communities representing policy, practice and research in any particular setting may lead to more or less alignment or congruence between these communities.

Our conclusion is that questions of trust and agency are central to the nature of teacher professionalism in any context. The greater the degree of mutual trust (and respect) between policymakers, teachers and researchers, then the greater the level of self-determination and 'agency' we may expect to find.

Research and teacher education

Research has been identified as a key dimension in enhancing the teaching profession and teacher education. However, this idea is controversial as it depends on political, institutional and ideological aspects. It depends, for instance, on how the teaching profession is defined by governments and on the how the professional profile of teachers is defined in teacher education programmes. In addition, it is possible to identify different understandings of research (Cain 2015; Matheson and Edwards 2016; Flores 2016, 2018). What does it mean to include research as a key component in teacher education programmes? How is it conceptualised and put into place? Issues such as the relationship between theory and practice in professional learning, the role of mentors and supervisors, the articulation between schools and higher education institutions and the connection between teaching and research in initial teacher education and beyond have been discussed.

Menter (2017) identified three approaches to teacher education research: i) research *in* teacher education, mainly carried out by teacher education practitioners; ii) research *on* teacher education, mainly carried out by education policy scholars; and iii) research *about* teacher education, carried out by scholars in a range of disciplines and seeking to explore the wider social significance of teacher education. He suggests all three approaches are important.

Teachers' research literacy has been defined as 'the ability to judiciously use, apply and develop research as an integral part of one's teaching' (Evans, Waring, and Christodoulou 2017, 404), and it is, along with other features such as teacher collaboration, seen as an indicator of teacher professionalism as well as a goal of initial teacher education (Bullock 2016). As teachers are professionals, their education requires more than teaching and management skills (Zeichner 2014). If teaching is to be seen as an inquiry-based activity, then a wide-ranging and *inclusive* definition of research needs to be taken into consideration, including enquiry-based learning and reflective professional practice (usually familiar

to teachers in their schools) and a range of other forms of research, including large-scale and longitudinal studies of learning and teaching (usually undertaken by full-time researchers) (BERA-RSA 2014).

The contested and complex nature of research in teacher education has been documented in studies that highlight teacher candidates' diverse understandings of and responses to research-based learning (Puustinen et al. 2018; Van Katwijk et al. 2019; Flores et al. 2016), as well as teacher educators' diverse understandings and experiences of research and how this may influence their teaching approaches (Brew and Saunders 2020; Cao et al. 2019; Vieira et al. 2019).

An inquiry-based approach to teaching in teacher education, both initial and inservice, is crucial in order to overcome a technical and sometimes simplistic view of teaching. It implies necessarily moving away from a theory-to-practice rationale based on instrumental rationality, and developing a praxeological epistemology whereby professional knowledge and agency are developed on the basis of critical reflection on practice (Kincheloe 2003; Schön 1987; Zeichner 2010).

A broad and inclusive perspective on the role of research in teaching and teacher education programmes is proposed in the BERA-RSA report (2014, 5):

(i) the content of teacher education is to be informed by research-based knowledge and scholarship;
(ii) research can be used to inform the design and structure of teacher education programmes;
(iii) teachers and teacher educators can be equipped to engage *with* and be discerning consumers *of* research;
(iv) teachers and teacher educators may be equipped to conduct their own research, individually and collectively, to investigate the impact of particular interventions or to explore the positive and negative effects of educational practice.

Teacher education is seen as a key space for developing a research stance. As Loughran, Keast, and Cooper (2016, 416) suggest, teacher education is not 'about training, it should be an educative process that develops thoughtful, informed and highly able professionals'. As such, 'the epistemology of learning from experience can be developed through framing teacher candidates as researchers' (Bullock 2016, 396). Such a vision entails the need to foster partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools, and to enact more collaborative forms of inquiry (Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998; Willegems et al. 2018), so that 'schools and colleges become research-rich environments in which to work' (BERA-RSA 2014, 5).

Bullock has argued, that in initial teacher education:

> one powerful way to encourage teacher candidates to develop authority over their own experiences (and hence a personal, practical, professional knowledge) is to engage them in one or more forms of teacher inquiry including but not limited to action research and self-studies of their own experiences during practicum placements and during their teacher education programmes (Bullock 2016, 381).

While inquiry-based teacher education has been advocated, it is far from representing the state of the art in different contexts. The move towards higher qualification for entrants

into teaching at master's level (e.g. Norway, Portugal) has entailed a view of the teacher as a professional whose knowledge base and competencies includes an inquiry-based approach to teaching. In Portugal, for instance (particularly at the University of Minho), due to the fact that student teachers need to obtain a master's diploma in order to be able to teach, research was tacitly understood as a key feature to be included in the teacher education model as a result of the Bologna process (Flores et al. 2016).

The importance for all beginning and early career teachers to become 'research literate' and to be provided with opportunities for engagement in research and inquiry has been advocated (for example, see Beckett 2020). However, the place of research in teacher education continues to be contested and is seen by some as controversial. For instance, the emergence of an inquiry-based culture in the practicum was seen as both innovative and controversial, incorporating tensions and challenges in regard to visions of teacher education, as well as (mis) matches between curriculum rhetoric and implementation (Flores et al. 2016; Vieira et al. 2019; Vieira, Flores, and Almeida 2020). As Flores et al. (2016) have noted, the integration of an inquiry-based approach to teaching in teacher education faces a number of challenges. First of all, inquiry demands time and the condensation of initial teacher education in a two-year master programme represented a reduction of time allocated to school-based practice with implications for the opportunity to engage in pedagogical inquiry. Along with this is the risk of making the practicum more academic and less profession-oriented, for instance, by conceiving practicum reports as theoretical monographs or descriptions of empirical research unrelated to pedagogical action (Flores et al. 2016). In addition, as the same authors also stress, supervisors and cooperating teachers need to reshape their traditional roles and expand professional competences in order to become partners of pedagogical inquiry and renewal. As such there is a need to develop a scholarship of teacher education, whereby teacher educators work in communities of practice to investigate their own practices and to engage in collaborative research-based partnerships with school mentors, student teachers and teachers. Such an approach would contribute to make teacher education as a space of transformation through an inquiry-based teaching.

Conclusion: connecting research and professionalism in teacher education

We have shown how the relationships between teaching, teacher professionalism, teacher education and educational research have been developing in many contexts over recent years. It is our contention that these relationships can now provide key indicators for the evaluation of the condition of teaching and teacher education in any particular context. We wish to conclude by offering a series of questions which might be used as the basis for such an evaluation.

- How is teacher professionalism defined and by whom?
- What is the nature of the relationships between the respective communities of policy, practice and research in teaching?
- To what extent is an enquiry approach embedded within, respectively, initial teacher education, teacher induction, continuing professional development?
- In pursuing opportunities for positions in educational leadership (senior posts in schools or local management) are candidates' experience and skills in educational research taken into account?

- Who undertakes research into teaching and teacher education and what is its nature? Is a broad range of research methodologies employed? Is there evidence of independence and criticality in the research undertaken? How is such research disseminated and made use of?

If we can pursue answers to questions such as these within a particular context, we may then be able to offer an assessment of the state of health of the profession of teaching in that context. It is certainly not intended that such an approach will be in any way constraining. Indeed, we would expect to see great variation between the approaches taken in different settings, relating to the national specificities of the context, including historical trajectories and distinctive cultural characteristics. Indeed, as we have pointed out earlier on, the forces of globalisation have led to a certain degree of convergence at least in educational policy – if less so in educational practices – leading to forms of vernacular globalisation. In a world where education is still mainly organised at a national level – albeit with some regional elements, as in the European Union – it is desirable that such diversity continues. It is through the sorts of comparative analysis that are carried out in journals such as this one, that we may come to understand better both our own approaches and the approaches taken by others.

The second important rider to our conclusion is to remind ourselves of the dynamic and diachronic nature of teaching as a profession and of the interactions between research, policy and practice. The year 2020 (as we were writing this paper), has shown dramatically how events can change expectations and experiences. The rapid move to online learning in response to the viral pandemic, the increasing urgency in addressing educational in/equality in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement, the desperate need to ensure a sustainable future for our planet in response to dramatic and damaging climate change – all of these are matters that have enormous implications for education. And, if they have implications for education systems, then they clearly have dramatic implications for teacher professionalism. Teaching is after all a profession concerned not only with knowledge and cognition, crucial though these are, but also with values and morality. It is challenges such as these that require a full recognition of the need to imbue teaching – and teacher education – with a sustainable enquiry orientation, indeed a base in education research. Through such an orientation teachers may be in a much stronger position to respond positively to the challenges they face on a day to day basis, but also to take a continually developing approach to their own capacity and skills over the lifetime of their careers. This we suggest must be the basis of contemporary teacher professionalism and should shape our approaches to all aspects of teacher education.

Disclosure statement

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