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**Changing Scottish education policy definitions of what it means to be a  
teacher: fit for a diverse system?**

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## **Introduction**

*Professional learning is not developed through simply gaining more knowledge... professional learning is enhanced by... becoming more perceptive to the complexities, possibilities and nuances of teaching contexts.* (Loughran, in Nilsson, 2014, p.3)

The publication and governmental approval of Graham Donaldson's review of teacher education (Teaching Scotland's Future) has initiated a number of policy and practice changes centring on the teacher as an extended professional, the importance of career-long teacher professional learning, and the constructs of collaboration and collegiality. In discussing these issues, we begin this paper by highlighting the main points of the Donaldson review (Scottish Government, 2010) and the subsequent National Partnership Group (NPG) report (Scottish Government, 2012). We then analyse these changes to the design and provision of teacher education and development in Scotland and situate the emerging constructs in existing theoretical frameworks for collaborative practice. We then ask to what extent does the revised professional of the Donaldson review and McCormac report (Scottish Government, 2011) bring us closer to a diverse teaching profession able to support a diverse range of learners in Scottish classrooms?

## **Recent policy constructions of teacher education and teacher learning**

Teaching Scotland's Future (2010) argues for teachers being (or becoming) reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals. The report positions the teacher's role as primarily concerning implementation of the curriculum and presents teachers as those who 'value and sustain the intellect', who 'work collaboratively with other stakeholders in education', are 'responsible and accountable', and are 'committed to lifelong learning and reflexivity' (Scottish Government, 2010). In this configuration, the identity of 21st century teachers has been expanded into the realm of extended professionalism where teachers 'understand the broader context within which they are working' and act as agents of change (Scottish Government, 2010, p.18). In addition, the Donaldson review suggests significant changes in respect of initial teacher education (ITE) to enhance the quality of the profession in the recruitment, training and induction phases. The report also raises issues concerning the 'quality, coherence, efficiency and impact' of career long teacher learning in Scotland, which it argues is 'fragmented and often haphazard' (Scottish Government, 2010, p 2).

While presenting a detailed consideration of, and recommendations on, different phases of teacher learning, Donaldson maintains the central argument for coherence, continuity, collaboration and consultation across all phases of teacher learning as well as among all stakeholders in the process. Within these themes, collaboration emerges as the main focus through which quality, coherence, efficiency and impact of teacher learning will be enacted. The school experience segment of teacher education is again linked with the central theme of collaboration, with Donaldson suggesting assessment as a strengthened responsibility of the school within school-university partnerships. This is an aspect picked up on by the NPG (set up to implement the recommendations of the Donaldson Review). The NPG recommended that universities and local authorities establish formal partnerships to ‘extend and improve the experience of those undertaking initial teacher education and probation’ (Scottish Government, 2012, p 8).

The McCormac Report (Scottish Government, 2011, p.4), *Advancing Professionalism in Teaching*, asserts that there is ‘strong political and professional consensus that Scotland’s young people should benefit from teaching of the highest quality, designed to allow them to become responsible, well-rounded, productive and successful individuals and citizens’. It then cites evidence from HMIE and PISA as indicating that ‘Scotland has still to address fully some longstanding educational issues and is standing still in terms of its relative international performance’ (Scottish Government, 2011, p.4). The core responsibility of teaching and teachers is here stated as being to reduce inequalities, reduce underachievement, and work collegially within ‘an ambitious education agenda’ (Scottish Government, 2011, p.6). The McCormac Report considers school-level educational planning to be a collaborative and collegiate process between management and teachers. It also emphasises the development of new standards for teachers, which are ‘pupil centred while encouraging a culture of partnership and collegiality’ but which have ‘clearly defined and measurable outcomes’ (Scottish Government, 2011, p 14).

The McCormac Report focuses on outcomes rather than teaching and learning processes, recommending use of PRD ‘to improve the performance of teacher’ and to relate ‘professional development to its impact on learners’ (Scottish Government, p15). It suggests the system of annual review is used to identify professional development needs, recognise good performance and address underperformance. The NPG report (2012) negotiates this emphasis by declaring the focus of change to be on facilitating teachers into the role of enquiring professionals by identifying ‘appropriate learning opportunities’ and applying ‘new

skills and knowledge to their practice’ instead of ‘seeking to further specify entry requirements or continually expanding the list of areas to be covered within initial teacher education’ (Scottish Government, 2012, p 5). The NPG report moves on from recruitment and teacher education to enquiring professionalism through career-long professional learning, which emerges as a concerted focus throughout the report. The NPG also recommends schools and universities plan the early phase of teaching career as a single experience. Issues of coherence, relevance and collaboration also emerge around the quality and impact of professional learning.

These policy changes promote the image of an enquiring professional strongly linked with the construct of career-long professional learning. The prime driver for this career-long professional learning rests with the Donaldson Report (2010), but it has been implemented in terms of mechanisms and processes by the General Teaching Council Scotland in their review of professional standards (GTC Scotland, no date). In particular, the *Standard for Career-long Professional Learning* (GTC Scotland, 2012) sets out the expectations of teachers to engage with professional development. It does so not from a standpoint as a set of benchmark statements – though it remains to be seen whether it will be used as such during performance development and review processes– but rather ‘to inform and support teachers to develop and improve their learning and practice in a systematic way which reflects their growing expertise and their ability to work in different contexts’ (GTC Scotland, 2012, p.5). The vision of the teacher that arises from these standards is of a leader of learning, who has deep and extended pedagogic and subject knowledge, can account for practice in ‘critically informed ways’, enquires and reflects in a ‘rigorous’ way, and shows characteristics of the extended professional in understanding wider contexts for learning (GTC Scotland, 2012).

### **Collaboration: collegiality or conformity?**

The Donaldson Report presents an agenda to ‘reinvigorate’ teacher professionalism. The main aim behind the proposed changes is an improvement in learning for children and young people with diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds as well as those with differing learning needs. Both Donaldson and the NPG stress the need for collaboration and partnerships among different stakeholders in the education system in order to raise standards and modernise the profession. In practice, the quality, coherence, direction and impact of these partnerships has either not been taken up explicitly or has at best been left to the

discretion of the parties involved. In part, this attests to the relative lack of coherence and conceptual clarity in the Donaldson and NPG reports as to what collaboration means in reality. Collaboration and collegiality do not simply occur, as has been discovered in the wake of the McCrone Report. Simply allocating time for collegiate activity does not ensure collegiate practice or collegiate decision-making, nor do policy statements necessarily lead to the culture change that tends to support collaborative approaches to working (see McPhee and Patrick, 2009, p.95). The policy tendency from McCrone onwards is for collaboration and partnership to be viewed as ‘panaceas’ in the drive for an assumed need for reprofessionalisation (see Kennedy and Doherty, 2012).

Contexts for collaboration require both thought and nurturing. However, as Dooner et al. point out, ‘we know little about how effective professional learning communities develop, how they are sustained, and how teachers work collaboratively’ (Dooner et al. 2008, 565). In reality there may be no one best method to enable collaborative practice and learning, but understanding can be gained of some of the contexts in which collaborative practice is most likely to flourish. Teacher professional learning as it is conceived in Scottish policy firstly operates at the level of individual teachers, and the theorisation by Lasker and Weiss (2003) is relevant. They recommend encouraging a collaborative environment for collective projects that act at individual, interpersonal and group levels by empowering individuals, strengthening social ties and creating synergy in terms of the development of group knowledge, skills and resources. Tiainen and Koivune (2006) have also suggested a model of collaboration based on the development individualised thinking about actions and purposes, collective thinking, and then the evolution of a shared framework. In both these models there is recognition of individual presence, collective purpose and shared intent. Developing a culture that nurtures and sustains these aspects requires patience, time and effective leadership as well as a strong justification for the collaboration to start with (Robinson and Cottrell, 2005).

Successful collaboration tends to rest on what Bagley et al. (2004) refer to as ‘social capital’ (following the framework set out by Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). In their exploration of the Sure Start initiative, Bagley et al. (2004) refer to the structural, relational and cognitive dimensions of effective collaborative practice through the building of shared social capital in terms of networks of connections, trust, norms, and identification of shared meanings and narratives. Project leadership based on commitment to a ‘bottom-up’ process of collaborative practice rather than top-down imposition was also important to collaborative

working (Bagley et al., 2004, p.604). Bagley et al. also note inhibitors of effective collaboration, particularly in inter-agency settings: the need to share different forms of professional knowledge and extend working practices across different cultural work contexts; external monitoring; pressures of time; externally imposed targets; and challenges to the building of trust and reciprocity in collaborative processes (Bagley et al. 2004, p.603).

These findings are of interest in terms of understanding the collegial, consultative and collaborative model of professional learning being promoted in Scotland. Collaborative learning and practice needs to be nurtured and facilitated in an environment which promotes shared identity, meanings, and professional understandings as well as developing trust and connectedness (see Patrick et al., 2010). For each education setting, the question then arises as to how best to create an environment which inspires and supports the development of the relational and cognitive dimensions that enable effective collegiate and collaborative working. Patrick et al. (2010, p. 280) state that in the new era of Scottish policy following McCrone, teachers' work 'can no longer be conceptualised as what the individual does alone, since expectations of collegiate working extend the professional role and mean that a range of skills has to be developed to facilitate successful professional interactions'. They also highlight the dangers of policy leading to 'contrived collegiality' rather than authentic and meaningful collaborative practice that leads to sustained positive change for learners (Patrick et al., 2010, p. 280).

In all of this, it should be asked whether or not collaborative practice acts to enable positive change, or acts as one more force of control and homogenisation? In addition, a question arises of who is the professional at the heart of collaborative learning and practice: is there room for diversity of voice, opinion, and practice? It is difficult to imagine how policy can enable a teaching profession capable of supporting and celebrating a rich diversity of learners if collaborative learning and practice create conformity of teaching and learning approaches. What then might the role of initial teacher education and professional learning be in supporting collaborative working that rests on individual understandings of diversity as a positive factor rather than as a challenge to be overcome?

### **The professional at the heart of collaboration**

Florian et al. (2010) comment on the possibility that ITE programmes are reproducing educational inequality. In addition, teachers' beliefs about their responsibilities towards diverse learners are important in terms of creating classroom environments in which all

children can learn or in creating classrooms where children believe that there are hierarchies of ability into which they will be slotted. Teachers' thinking is important because their beliefs about ability and about their professional role shape the decisions they make about pedagogic choices and the creation of classroom culture (Pratt, 1992). Moreover, it is debatable that education policy in Scotland frames learners in ways that celebrate diversity or that lead to positive change. One reason for this relates to the complexities of translating policy into practice:

*Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete insofar as they relate or map on to the 'wild profusion' of local practice. Policies are crude and simple. Practice is sophisticated.* (Ball, in Wright, 2010, p. 160)

Another reason may be that, in Scotland, learning diversity falls within the policy context of additional support for learning. This is problematic, in that learner needs are characterised not as diversity to be celebrated but as challenges to be addressed. This can lead to approaches to learning that Florian et al. (2010) call the 'most learners and then some learners' perception of the teacher's role.

Florian et al. (2010) therefore note the importance of teacher education working with students to:

1. *understand inclusive practice as respecting and responding to human differences in inclusive rather than exclusive ways;*
2. *understand curriculum content as available to all rather than less for some and more for others;*
3. *understand pedagogy as approaches that include all in learning rather than approaches for most and then different approaches for some* (Florian et al, p.712).

The starting point for individual and collaborative learning and practice perhaps needs to have a basis in thinking about what it means to be *able to learn* and whether what is to be learned is worthwhile from the learners' perspective. This requires extended thinking about what teaching and learning mean as activities and why we as teachers choose certain ways of teaching, why we hold certain beliefs about ability and learner capability, and what we believe are the purposes of our teaching (see Biesta, 2010).

Initial teacher education could provide opportunities for beginning teachers to think individually and collaboratively about what constitutes ‘good education in an age of measurement’ (Biesta, 2010), and what constitutes ‘good education’ for all children within culturally diverse contexts for learning. As Nuthall states: ‘[o]nly when teachers understand the principles by which their actions shape the learning process going on in the minds of their students will they be able to ensure effective learning regardless of the abilities of cultural backgrounds of the students’ ( in Nilsson, 2014, p.4). Perhaps the issue is that courses of initial teacher education try to do too much in too short a time – particularly when they are one year courses such as the PGDE. The intensive nature of these courses tends to push students towards taking an instrumental approach to their learning, and perhaps pushes teacher educators (against their better judgement) into unwittingly modelling learning and teaching as linear functional activities. As teacher educators, we talk about the complexities of learning and then, because of economies of scale and time, we have to base our teaching in lectures that promote the input-output subtext that many of us try to avoid otherwise. Teaching practice should indeed be sophisticated, but how often does this sophistication become negated by pressures of time, of workload, of stress, and of meeting competing demands (see McPhee and Patrick, 2009)?

Perhaps for these reasons - as well as doubts over the extent to which professional teacher culture engages with theory and research - individual and collaborative learning in ITE (and beyond) too easily ends in a one size fits all approach to teaching based on quick fixes. As Watson (2010) highlights, the complexities of theory and research concerning formative assessment have become reduced to WALT and WILF, traffic lights, two stars and a wish, and so on. It is to be hoped that a similar approach does not befall understandings of diversity. However, Education Scotland’s *Promoting Diversity and Equality* document offers a narrow vision of cultural diversity as firstly being tied to the outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence (questionable though these are), and secondly as related to the ‘four contexts for learning’ in terms of *teaching about* the need for acceptance of diversity. Well meaning though this is, it again presents the vision of the teacher who implements lessons on diversity rather than questions seriously how we create learning opportunities arising from acceptance and celebration of diversity (based in complex and situated understandings of learning theory, research and professional practice).

Watson (2010) notes how powerful it can be when professionals resist practice and policy orthodoxies. She also suggests that questioning policy and practice in TEIs and in

schools can lead to professionals being isolated rather than seen as inspiring figures (Watson, 2010). This is disappointing, since education policy does not often view teaching as a transformative enterprise (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2010) in the sense of transformation of student teachers' thinking and understanding, or in terms of transformative practices that might make a significant difference to all young people's learning. Education policy in Scotland views learning as a process of transfer of bodies of knowledge and of cultural norms (see *Curriculum for Excellence: The Four Capacities*, Education Scotland, no date). In contrast, transformative learning is risky and potentially dangerous ideologically in that it always questions power bases and asks serious questions about inequalities - often tying the root of inequalities to government action and inaction.

What then becomes the role of teacher education in respect of mediating education policy to create inclusive learning for all learners? For Kozleski and Waitoller (2010, p.665) it is this:

teacher preparation programmes for inclusive educational systems must develop teachers who have the skills, contextual awareness and critical sensibilities to teach diverse groups of students that are being denied full participation in society.

But in so doing, teacher education courses have to celebrate diversity and avoid simplistic homogenous approaches to teaching. Rather than locking us into ill-thought-through notions of partnership and collaboration, we perhaps need to return to a belief in teacher education and teaching as intellectual as well as ethical enterprises. Student teachers need to create their own understandings of learning through being challenged to think about why they want to teach, what the broader aims of education should be (as opposed to the 'four capacities') and what are their understandings of, and beliefs about, learners and learning. If we build education in classrooms on the basis of learners' needs, with access to the same curriculum for all children in mainstream schools, where diversity is accepted as a positive rather than as a problem to be solved via differentiation or additional support, then we might be going some way towards providing sophisticated and inclusive practice in teacher education and in schools. We cannot rely on the vision of the teacher in Scottish policy to enable us to do this: the vision is too conformist and too compliant for that.

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