

Good Teachers are always Learning. Editorial

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In launching a 2020 policy brief, the United Nations Secretary-General asserted that ‘Education is the key to personal development and the future of societies...As the world faces unsustainable levels of inequality, we need education – the great equalizer – more than ever’ (Guterres, 2020). UNESCO (2021) regards teachers as ‘...one of the most influential and powerful forces for equity, access and quality in education and key to sustainable global development.’ Equally, Wasmuth and Nitecki (2020: 697) suggest that parents’ experiences of attempting to introduce formal education into the home during the pandemic have led to wider recognition ‘that teachers cannot be easily replaced by unqualified people’. Yet while high quality education is dependent on high quality teachers (Barber and Mourshed, 2007), teacher supply is insufficient globally. 69 million more teachers are needed for the World to have any chance of securing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (United Nations (UN), 2021; UNESCO, 2021). UNESCO (2021) acknowledges that teachers’ training, recruitment, retention, status and working conditions remain poor in many countries across the World and there is a worldwide shortage of well-trained teachers, not least due to teacher attrition which stands at around 14% on average in OECD countries (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2019; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2018a; Zhu, Rice, Rivera, Mena and Van Der Want, 2020). These issues are even worse among early childhood teachers (Bassok, Markowitz, Bellows and Sadowski, 2021; Menon and Brackin, 2021). Paucity of good quality professional development for teachers has been identified as one reason for teacher attrition (Mayer et al., 2017; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2020). Four decades ago, this point had already been appreciated: the motto of the higher education institution in England where I studied for my initial teacher education degree was ‘*Disce ut Doceas*’, or ‘learn in order to teach’. As a lifelong teacher, I have never stopped learning. In this article, I address three questions - ‘What makes a good teacher?’, ‘Why should teachers be learners?’, and ‘How can teachers keep learning throughout their careers?’ to argue that good teachers are always learning.

In respect of the first question - ‘What makes a good teacher?’ – standards, including teacher standards have risen to prominence in recent decades in a global context influenced increasingly

by neo-liberalism (Hall and Pulsford, 2019; Patrick, 2013). Teacher standards articulate the teacher identity desired by policymakers and may be used as the basis for indicators measuring teacher quality. For example, in England the good teacher is required to...

'Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils, promote good progress and outcomes by pupils, demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge, plan and teach well structured lessons, adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils, make accurate and productive use of assessment, manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment, and fulfil wider professional responsibilities' (Department for Education (DfE), 2013: 10-13)

Underpinning these eight standards, teachers in England are also required to '...demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct' (p.14). The US National Board Standards require teachers to be *'committed to students and their learning... know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students...are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning...think systematically about their practice and learn from experience (and be) members of learning communities'* (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), 2017). Equally, on the African continent, Ghanaian teachers must engage in professional development and community of practice as part of demonstrating professional values and attitudes, demonstrate professional knowledge through their knowledge of educational frameworks and curriculum and their knowledge of learners, and demonstrate professional practice by managing the learning environment, teaching and learning and effective assessment (National Teaching Council (NTC), 2017). Whilst comparison of teacher standards in these diverse countries reveals differences, there are also discernible similarities. For example, all three sets of standards require teachers to demonstrate subject knowledge, management of students and their learning, assessment, and professional values.

Nevertheless, in their global report 'How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top', Barber and Mourshed (2007:17) conclude that a good teacher is a teacher with a 'high overall level of literacy and numeracy, strong interpersonal and communication skills, willingness to learn and motivation to teach'. The two criteria 'willingness to learn and motivation to teach' resonate with the notion of 'growth mindset' (Dweck, 2006): a 'can-do' approach that promotes learning. The teacher with a growth mindset questions, keeps trying, draws on strategies she or he has learned, and uses mistakes as leverage for new learning. This orientation might be termed the yearn to learn.

A teacher with the yearn to learn may engage more readily in heutagogy - self-determined learning - than others. Proponents of heutagogy recognise that the technological revolution is making it easier for teachers to learn as and when they wish to do so through effective uses of technology (Hase, 2021; Hase and Kenyon, 2000). However, teachers tend to use online learning environments as part of a mixed economy of learning environments, which may also include their settings or classrooms, their kindergarten and school communities and their professional development programs. For teachers' learning to be effective in online learning environments these must offer teachers opportunities to learn informally so that they can develop professionally in ways that enable them to resolve problems (Beach, 2017; Mayer et al., 2017). The heutagogic view is that people are capable learners with control over the content and the process of their learning at a deep level, as well as its applications. Their learning leads them on to new questions, behaviours and actions which are relevant to them. Teachers' deep knowledge of pedagogy positions them well to adopt a heutagogic approach for their own learning and development throughout their careers, provided they are afforded appropriate support to do so.

The yearn to learn, characterised by a growth mindset or motivation to learn, exemplifies teachers' dispositions to learn (Dweck, 2006; Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Teacher standards tend to frame teachers' dispositions to learn as activities which can be measured. For example, statutory requirements of teachers in England to 'demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct and fulfil wider professional responsibilities' include 'taking responsibility for improving their teaching through appropriate professional development' (DfE, 2013: 14). Equally, US teachers must be committed to students and their learning and are also required to join learning communities (NBPTS, 2017), while in Ghana, teachers are also required to join communities of practice and engage in professional development to demonstrate their professional values and attributes (NTC, 2017). In a 2017 study, Stegemann and Roberts asked teachers and principals what dispositions they thought teachers really need. Their responses included adaptability, problem solving, being warm and caring, ability to understand and nurture every student's needs, supporting others to meet goals, treating students with respect and dignity, being calm and self-controlled, and ability to manage crisis and handle stress and frustration. Whilst these may be vital dispositions for a teacher to function effectively, they are not easy to measure.

Freire (1998) addressed the second key question framing this paper - 'Why should teachers be learners?' He recognised the importance of teachers as learners, while also valuing students as teachers, arguing that "There is, in fact, no teaching without learning. One requires the other... whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning' (1998: 31). As indicated earlier in this paper, the World needs high quality teachers (UNESCO,

2021); indeed ‘The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers’ (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). However, maintaining high quality teachers requires provision of high quality professional development for teachers (Mayer et al., 2017; OECD, 2020). When teachers are lost from the system, the costs can be high, and not only in financial terms. In their 2019 USA study Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond found that teacher attrition causes poorer curriculum, inexperienced teachers in the system, weak teacher collaboration, impediment to school improvement and higher financial costs for replacing teachers, all of which lead to increased student under-achievement and educational disadvantage.

Conversely, when policymakers direct funding to high quality, accredited teacher development, they raise the status of teaching and promote teachers’ professional competence (Eklund, 2019; Lavonen, 2016). For example, in Finland teachers are required to study for a Master’s degree (Lavonen, 2016). Teachers in Finland have autonomy in designing the curriculum and deciding the pedagogic strategies and assessment methods they use: ‘Teacher professionalism in the Finnish context means a versatile knowledge base, collaboration and networking skills, competence for life-long-learning and an ability to use them innovatively in order to act effectively’ (Lavonen, 2016:51). Only 11% of teachers in Finland want to leave teaching in the next five years, compared with 14% of teachers across the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2018b). Equally, Finnish graduates want to be teachers, Finnish teachers are trusted by parents and ‘Quality, equality, decentralisation and teachers’ professionalism have been identified as characteristics of the Finnish education system that have led to the country’s PISA success’ (Lavonen, 2016:52).

The value of teachers undertaking further study which includes critical reflection and research is also recognised in other countries, though few governments are willing to fund accredited Master’s level study. In England, a research-practice model for teachers mirroring that used by doctors was advocated in a 2013 paper commissioned by government. Goldacre (2013:7) proposed that ‘...there is a huge prize waiting to be claimed by teachers. By collecting better evidence about what works best and establishing a culture where this evidence is used as a matter of routine, we can improve outcomes for children, and increase professional independence’. Equally, in the USA, Kincheloe (2003) advocated for teachers’ research of their own practice as a ‘path to (their own professional) empowerment’ with potential to mitigate against mediocrity in education caused by ‘top-down standards and the desecration of teachers’ (p.5). He proposed that ‘Teachers as researchers could develop and implement a curriculum connected to the vicissitudes and exigencies of their unique situations’ (Kincheloe, 2003: 5).

Given that Finland is unusual in funding its teachers to study to master's level, the third question framing this paper arises: how can teachers keep learning? There is recognition that pre-service teachers need to learn evidence-based subject knowledge, pedagogic strategies and skills and theory linked to practice on programmes that build and maintain strong partnerships with schools, adhere to professional standards for teachers, and focus on children's outcomes (Carter, 2015; Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG), 2014). These features suggest a model that goes far beyond initial teacher training: they imply teacher education. They are the initial steps of a sustainable programme that is effective in preparing, maintaining, monitoring and supporting a teacher workforce at all levels, including high quality continuing professional development for teachers, post-qualification (Carter, 2015; TEMAG, 2014).

Whilst funded Master's level qualifications for all teachers may be considered the gold standard (Lavonen, 2016) they are a feature of teacher education to which many governments and teachers - only aspire. Conversely, continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) is a realistic ambition for most countries: '...ongoing education and training for practising teachers, with the aim of supporting them in keeping abreast of the rapid and numerous changes taking place in the school milieu' (Engelbrecht and Ankwicz, 2016). Evidence-based CPDT is important because we live in a fast-evolving knowledge economy (Choong and Leung, 2021) so we cannot afford for our teachers to suffer from 'metathesisphobia' - fear of change (D'Ancona, 2021). Equally, the importance of teachers thinking critically is well established. Dewey (1910) regarded critical thinking as a vital element of teachers' work: 'Only by taking a hand in the making of knowledge, by transferring guess and opinion into the belief authorised by inquiry, does one ever get a knowledge of the method of knowing'. Importantly, CPTD requires the allocation of dedicated time for teachers to learn (Akinyemi, Rembe, Shumba, and Adewumi, 2019).

In summary, there is consensus that a teacher's disposition to continue learning is part of what makes a good teacher. However, policymakers tend to frame that disposition – and other aspects of what they identify as a good teacher - in terms that are easy to measure, whereas that which is easily measurable may not reflect fully the characteristics of the good teacher. It is important that teachers continue to learn throughout their careers because the costs of losing teachers are high and the World needs many more high quality teachers. Equally, high quality CPDT reduces teacher attrition, raises educational quality, the status of teaching and it promotes teachers' professional competence. Teachers' engagement as researchers is recognised as effective CPDT. Evidence suggests that other ways teachers can be supported to learn as part of their CPDT may build into a roadmap for high quality teacher education from the start to the end of a teacher's career. That roadmap features funded higher degrees, links between research and practice, ring-fenced

development time, high quality online learning resources, communities of learning practice and mentoring, partnerships between schools, applied theoretical understanding, practical expertise, opportunities for critical reflective thinking, and support for enhancing subject and pedagogic knowledge and applications and pedagogic skills, attitudes and values. The reasons why teachers learn and how they can learn may be many and varied, but the evidence remains strong that good teachers are always learning.

The articles in this issue focus on teachers and their learning. The first article is by Cathy Nutbrown. *'Early childhood educators' qualifications: a framework for change* was written in the context of a 'policy crisis' around early childhood workforce qualifications in England, and proposes a framework to address challenges concerning recruitment, retention and progression. The article highlights the importance of appropriate qualifications for early childhood workers. In their paper *'What character strengths do early childhood educators use to address workplace challenges? Positive psychology in teacher professional development'*, Michael Haslip and Leona Donaldson report on a qualitative study about in-service early childhood educators' engagement in positive psychology training as professional development in a large, urban city in the United States. Participants explored the application of character strengths to workplace challenges and Findings have implications for future professional development to improve teacher well-being in early childhood settings and support teachers to model character strengths for children. An article by Sara Barros Araújo and Ana Pereira Antunes examines pathways of professional learning of students on an ECE professional Master's programme in Portugal. In *'Assessment of Workplace-based Learning: Key Findings from an ECE Professional Master Programme in Portugal'* the authors report on data that were collected at Master's students' interim regulatory and final workplace assessments using an assessment grid organised according to four domains and 25 dimensions. *'The role of vicarious experiences in the development of pre-service teachers' classroom management self-efficacy beliefs*, authored by maria El-Abd and Youmen Chaaban, reports on a mixed-methods study for which observation and focus group interviews were used to investigate classroom management self-efficacy beliefs of early childhood pre-service teachers in Lebanon.

In the article *'What counts as Learning in Play? Uncovering Patterns in Perceptions of South African Early Educators'*, Hanne Jensen, Jane Kvalsvig, Myra Taylor, Snehlanhla Sibisi, David Whitebread and Ros McLellan share findings from a study that explored South African early educators' perceptions of play as pedagogical practice and its perceived relevance for learning by contrasting their interview and questionnaire responses. Manuela Konrad et al

discuss their evaluation of training for kindergarten staff about nutrition in an article entitled *'Development of a nutritional sensory toolkit for kindergarten teachers'*. In the final article in this issue, Patricia Shaw, Joanne Traunter, Nam Nguyen, Huong Thi Trinh and Thao-Do Thi Phuong share research concerning challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in engaging children in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) education in Vietnam. They argue that findings shared in their article *'Immersive-Learning Experiences in Real-Life Contexts: Deconstructing and Reconstructing Vietnamese Kindergarten Teachers' Understanding of STEAM Education'* indicate the necessity for Vietnamese kindergarten teachers to undergo prolonged training using immersive learning experiences to enable their development of pedagogical approaches to STEAM education. This excellent set of articles highlights further the value of high-quality professional development for our early childhood workforce internationally, and it is my privilege to commend them to you.

This issue of the *International Journal of Early Years Education* ends with a series of recent abstracts from articles focused on mental health issues that have appeared in other early childhood journals. We are grateful to our Education Research Abstracts Editor Elizabeth Coates for curating this section.

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