REVIEW ESSAY

Teacher learning: A call to complexity

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> **S. Groundwater-Smith and N. Mockler** (2009) *Teacher professional learning in an age of compliance: Mind the gap.* Dordrecht: Springer, Hardcover, 150pp, 59.95 € ISBN: 978-1-4020-9416-3
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> **A. Campbell and S. Groundwater-Smith** (Eds.) (2010) *Connecting inquiry and professional learning in education: International perspectives and practical solutions.* New York: Routledge, Paperback, 210pp, $38.66, ISBN: 9780415478137
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> **J. Pickering, C. Daly and N. Pachler** (Eds.) (2007) *New designs for teachers' professional learning.* Bedford Way Papers, IOE Publications.

Introduction

Within the aegis of the 'audit society' (Power, 1999), national education systems have become increasingly focused on a more narrow educational discourse (Walsh, 2006), particularly around the quantification of performance and results – a process of 'governing by numbers' (Grek, 2009; Rose, 1999). This is occurring alongside the intensification and deprofessionalisation of teachers' work more generally (Apple, 1986; Apple & Jungck, 1996; Easthope & Easthope, 2000). Under such circumstances, there is the very real temptation that teachers may similarly narrow their focus by simply responding to pressure for improved test scores as evidence of compliance with demands to efficiently and effectively engage in standardised curricula, teaching and assessment practices; under these circumstances, students' 'learning' is that which can be measured. Such an approach runs the risk of providing an education not worthy of the name – indeed, a schooling experience which could hardly be described as educative at all. Instead of providing the conditions for active inquiry on the part of students, and similar

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inquiry processes by teachers into students' learning, such approaches encourage passivity on the part of both teachers and students.

Under these conditions, it is important to foreground efforts by educators to respond differently, to promote those instances of more productive, equitable, generative educational practices experienced by teachers and students. Such stances may be conceptualised as 'speaking back' (hooks, 1994) to anti-democratic, managerial forces, and serve as instances of vernacular globalisation (Appadurai, 1996) – that is, as more grassroots-based responses, whether nationally or at more local levels, to homogenising global influences. In part, such responses are akin to Ballet, Kelchtermans and Loughran's (2006) call for a nuancing of the intensification thesis in the context of increased demands created by more economistic and managerial pressures. However, while this may be necessary, it is important to not lose sight of how these broader conditions continue to influence educators' work in problematic ways.

It is in the vein of both revealing the nature of current conditions which challenge substantive, broadly-defined conceptions of teacher learning for student learning, and drawing upon specific instances of teachers' learning which challenge more reductive conceptions, that the three books discussed in this review essay are considered most valuable. Collectively, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's (2009) *Teacher professional learning in an age of compliance: Mind the gap*, Campbell and Groundwater-Smith's (2010) edited volume *Connecting inquiry and professional learning in education: International perspectives and practical solutions*, and Pickering, Daly and Pachler's edited (2007) *New designs for teachers' professional learning* provide a useful and necessary focus upon both the nature of teacher learning within what Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) describe as 'an age of compliance', as well as, and possible ways forward.

Current conditions for teachers' learning

Of the three books, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's (2009) *Teacher professional learning in an age of compliance: Mind the gap* is perhaps the most overt in foregrounding (and challenging) the nature of current conditions under which teachers' work and learn. The authors provide a useful overview of the current state of play, reflected in the subtitle of the introductory chapter: 'Current problematics in teacher professional learning'. They call for a much more robust engagement with teachers' learning, rather than succumbing to simplified and simplistic prescriptions enshrined with current discourses of standards and measurement:

> This book emerges ... from our staunch belief in the transformative and liberatory capacities and responsibilities of education, from a strong concern for what we perceive to be the 'gap' between these and current regimes of audit and 'standards', and from a deep desire to reverse the trend whereby simple, 'common-sense' solutions are applied to problems and contexts which are highly complex and ambiguous. (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009, pp. 3-4)

Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) critique the notion of 'schooling the audit society', providing useful insights into how the management of risk has the potential to undermine the very professional capacity essential to making decisions for the benefit of

students. They similarly challenge reductionist applications of professional standards, and the standardisation movement more generally, construing them as part of broader managerial logics which have pervaded the public sector, including education, in recent decades. This increased standardisation is seen as challenging teachers' capacity to make decisions based on their own professional judgment.

Similarly, Pickering, Daly and Pachler (2007) provide useful insights into the nature of current conditions for teachers' professional development in several chapters within their edited collection. In the introduction, they emphasise how educational policy-making has reflected centralised efforts by governments to steer teachers' PD in response to broader global trends. Pachler's chapter on 'Teacher development: A question(ing) of professionalism' provides useful insights into the tensions which attend more traditional conceptions of professionalism, including specialised knowledge and autonomy, as well as revealing how more restricted, state-based conceptions of professional conduct are advocated with the push for competence against prescriptive standards. The result is a much stronger focus upon PD provided by governments, and a rearticulation of the roles of other players within the broader educational field. However, at the same time as these authors reveal how PD practices have been influenced by broader global processes, they simultaneously reveal how such practices are undertaken and shaped differently in different national contexts within the UK.

This specificity is similarly reflected in Campbell and Groundwater-Smith's (2010) book, which draws upon inquiry-based studies in Australian, English, Scottish, Dutch and North American settings. Miletta's chapter, for example, reveals how teachers within a postgraduate Master's seminar in the US engaged in qualitative research in urban schooling settings under trying conditions. These teachers were seeking to better understand and challenge the constraints of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation in a high-stakes testing environment, which has led to an overemphasis upon improving test scores at the expense of more substantive approaches to students' learning. This is occurring in a context in which half of the teachers working in these neighbourhoods leave within five years.

It is within this broader context of constraint and pressure for increased regulation of the teaching profession that O'Brien (Pickering *et al.*, 2007) asks the question, in his chapter, whether professional learning of Scottish teachers in the post-McCrone/post-devolution period (since May 1999) is an instance of control or empowerment. Even though there is evidence of professional engagement in the development of teaching standards in Scotland, the lack of understanding about the nature of these standards within the profession suggests continued gaps between policy and practice, and a continued need for enabling structures to foster learning at sites of policy implementation (Coburn & Stein, 2006). The 'Standard for a Chartered Teacher' in Scotland may serve as a vehicle to facilitate accomplished and effective teachers to provide pedagogical leadership for other teachers, as is hoped, or it may serve as a controlling device, inhibiting teacher autonomy and engagement.

Learning to mediate current conditions

Rather than becoming overwhelmed by the 'intensification thesis' or audit cultures (Strathern, 2000) more generally, there is considerable evidence within each of the three volumes of the mediation of the considerable and increasing demands upon teachers in current schooling settings. Drawing upon Sarason's original (1971) and later (1996) reflections on the *The culture of school and the problem of change*, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) call for teachers to resist routinisation – to push back against being 'trapped by the "regularities" of schooling' (p. 84). For teachers, such regularities include highly specified and standardised approaches to their learning – perhaps best embodied in state-sanctioned PD days/events/workshops which adopt passive, transmission approaches to teachers' learning, thereby fostering similar dependencies in relation to student-teacher learning relationships. Pickering (Pickering *et al*, 2007) also challenges the 'best practice' approach to teachers' professional development that has come to dominate PD provision in England at present. Pickering calls for an emphasis upon the 'how' of professional development, challenging excessively narrow and prescriptive approaches to teachers' PD. Drawing upon experiences of teachers in the Master of Teaching programme at the Institute of Education, University of London, such an approach is described as being of most benefit when it is: 'cross-curricular, cross-phase, cross-experience' (p. 192) and when it 'acknowledges and celebrates *all* teachers' experiences, expertise and insights, rather than privileging the voices of those who have their professional status through their appointed position' (pp. 192-193). It is the interactive co-construction of knowledge between teachers reflecting on their own practice, in relation to existing knowledge/research, which is considered most valuable.

However, this is not to suggest that the knowledge disseminated during more traditional PD events cannot be of value. As Lingard and Renshaw remind us (in Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2010), the content of research undertaken by researchers, academics or other educators beyond specific school settings is also important for cultivating informed discussions amongst, within and beyond these settings. In this way, teaching and teacher education (initial and continuing) may become both 'research-informed', and 'research informing'. This contrasts with more narrowly conceived 'evidence-based' approaches, with their reductionist implications of the valuing of research undertaken within the academy, but critical of research undertaken in schooling settings by practitioners themselves. It also goes beyond teachers only inquiring into their own practice. In Lingard and Renshaw's words:

> ... we reject a model of teachers as simply translators or interpreters of educational research done elsewhere. We also reject a view of teachers as only the 'objects of research'; they are, can and ought to be researchers too. However, we also reject a view which sees teachers' research options as only teacher inquiry or action-research. We argue for the necessity of a 'researchly' disposition for teachers, a disposition which ought to be instilled, we argue, through initial and continuing teacher education, all located within an ecumenical definition of education research, recognising that this needs to be a broad field and that this needs to be defended... (Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010, p. 27)

It is this ecumenical approach to education research which holds out the hope of fostering genuinely inclusive, productive – that is, truly educative – stances amongst teachers, and their students. As broad-based compendia which have the potential to inform educators and students of initial and continuing education, the three books mentioned all contribute

to this process. Collectively, these works call for a more complex relationship between educators and their PD practices.

Such complexity, under sometimes trying circumstances, is evidenced in the way Murray (in Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2010) describes the academic induction of one new teacher educator, and how the identity development of teacher educators as researchers is essential to the research-informed and research-informing habitus essential for intellectual growth and development of teacher educators, their students – future teachers – and these teachers' students. Murray reveals how informal workplace learning connects with formal accreditation – through the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education – via practitioner inquiry. This is occurring within a broader research context in which changes to the Higher Education Funding Council for England mean there is the very real possibility of a disjunction between the provision of teacher education, and the provision of core research funding for universities. Under these circumstances, Murray argues improved induction into research for teacher educators who traditionally are unfamiliar with such practices is increasingly important. She explains how she endeavoured to modify a generic enquiry-based learning module in the certificate in HE to take into account teacher educators' specific circumstances. Specifically, she sought:

- to ground the work in what current research indicated about academic induction, with particular reference to teacher education;
- to ensure that the enquiry focus was individual, deriving from the personal practice of each new academic and generated through the analysis of her/his informal learning in the workplace;
- to consider the biographical and professional starting points for individuals, aiming to draw on the existing skills and experience that each brought from previous careers in schools;
- to ensure that the research generated by each teacher educator had general relevance for the field of teacher education and the potential to contribute to further professional development for the individual including furthering her/his awareness of practice as a teacher educator (p. 102).

Murray argues that this process of engaging in inquiry into teaching-related practices enabled the specific teacher educator in her illustrative case study to both engage in inquiry into her own practice, and to simultaneously cultivate a pertinent, sustainable research identity. Within a broader English context in which research-related funding is no longer provided to the majority of universities providing teacher education, such inquiry-based approaches provide opportunities for teacher-educators to engage in research as part of their work, serving to validate teacher education research which relates directly to the daily work of teacher educators.

Similarly, for Turvey and Kemeny (in Pickering *et al.,* 2007), inquiry-based practice serves as an alternative to traditional approaches to building research literacy in education. Rather than being introduced to research approaches, and being expected to adopt accepted definitions, students/teachers are encouraged to take a more inductive approach to research, and to do so as members of a community of educators seeking to share and critique their practice, and to support one another in this process. Within the 'Research and Professional Practice' module in the Institute of Education's Master of

Teaching, students engage in on-line interactive discussions to build upon previous engagement with theory and small-scale projects to critique the nature of research itself. This is in contrast with a simplistic acceptance of research *per se*. This is similar to Hardcastle's (in Pickering *et al.*, 2007) focus upon how teachers in the 'Teaching and Learning in Urban Settings' module in the Master of Teaching engage in collective reflection upon teaching and learning in and across schools in challenging urban conditions

Breaching boundaries

The call to complexity I am advocating also necessitates educators working together within and across disciplinary and institutional settings and boundaries in perhaps unfamiliar ways. Pickering, Daly and Pachler's (2007) book exemplifies an in-depth instance of how such boundary-crossing – in this case between teachers in schools, and academics in Education faculties – may result in the collective production of new knowledge and understandings about their work. Campbell and McNamara's (Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010) struggles to map out a conception of practice-based research, and their efforts to begin to delineate some of the principles to help differentiate between practitioner research, inquiry and professional learning, reveal that such boundary-crossing is not straight-forward. That efforts to differentiate between practitioner research and practitioner inquiry require consideration of cultural and linguistic concerns, rather than simply ontological and epistemological concerns, further reinforces this complexity.

Hulme and Cracknell (in Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010) also provide useful insights into the inquiry practices that characterised a group of mid-career public servants from different government departments, who came together to develop a more integrated response to the *Every Child Matters* (ECM) public sector policy in England. The authors' efforts to develop what they describe as a 'trans-professional' understanding of practice, through practitioner inquiry, is a direct outcome of the expectation for personnel from different agencies to work with one another:

> The most significant challenge presented by ECM is its requirement for inter-agency and multi-professional working. Practitioners are required to overcome professional boundaries in moving towards the goal of a more 'holistic' and ultimately, 'trans-professional' knowledge. There has been much recent work on the value of 'action research' or 'practitioner inquiry' in the promotion of collegial practices within areas of professional practice ..., although there has been little attention to work across professional boundaries .... (Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010, p. 53)

Drawing particularly upon Bhabha's (1994) notion of 'Third Space', Hulme and Cracknell reveal how working across the tensions and interstices between different governmental service departments can provide the possibilities to think anew the provision of children's services, particularly in relation to a more integrated model. However, at the same time, they caution that broader managerial contexts, and the dominance of reductionist 'evidence-informed' policy, also make it difficult to achieve the sorts of conditions to effect substantive interaction and learning opportunities across departmental boundaries.

Ponte (in Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2010) draws upon Smith's (2000) notion of postgraduate programmes as 'platforms' to exemplify how a more genuinely collaborative relationship between academics and practising teachers can lead to more productive inquiry approaches. Such approaches challenge what Ponte describes as more traditional 'transfer-type programmes' (p. 68), which are seen as providing students with fragmented knowledges insufficiently related to practice, as distant from necessary school reform, and as inadequately focused upon cultivating a more just and democratic conception of education. Ponte advocates the concept of platform as a space which enables educators from different institutional settings to come together to collectively determine students' learning experiences:

> I interpret [Smith's] use of platform as a consistent body of goals, content, methods and organisational measures, which create a meeting place, where the worlds of researchers, teachers, teacher education staff and others can learn from each other and engage in debate. The central idea is that the participants consult each other to decide what they will learn and how. (Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010, p. 71)

Ponte argues that the notion of a platform in the Dutch context is also more overtly political than that inferred by Smith (2000). Such groups have come together to take a stand on, and advocate for, particular issues. Importantly, such an approach is also construed as a vehicle for socialisation into action research into educators' practices, rather than treating such research as undertaken simply for accreditation purposes alone.

This collective process is similarly exemplified in Livingston and Shiach's chapter (in Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2010) in which educators in local authorities, universities and schools seek to work together to foster improved learning in relation to both initial and continuing teacher education. These authors argue a need for much stronger and deeper relationships than the more superficial advisory grouping arrangements, which may typify interactions between educators in schools, local authorities and universities. Importantly, there is also support for the involvement of students in the development of teacher education programmes. This mirrors Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's (2009) call for the inclusion of students in the development of learning opportunities for students, and teachers. Amongst other activities, students and adults in schools are involved in focus group discussions in which students use visual images and music, amongst other prompts, to discuss and provide evidence of ways in which they learn in groups in school. Such 'co-production' (Dunston, Lee, Boud, Brodie & Chiarella, 2009) processes between 'providers' and 'clients' lead to more meaningful and engaged opportunities for those involved, even as the meaningful enactment of such an approach can be difficult work.

Such 'co-production', arguably, is also evident amongst teachers and academics as they seek to work together to inform one another's learning. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010) reveal how academics and teachers co-produced knowledge in the context of a small network of secondary Economics and Business teachers from four school sites who worked with an academic partner to improve their discipline-based teaching practices. Rather than focusing solely upon teachers' lessons within a more narrowly conceived 'lesson study' approach, these educators sought to engage in a 'learning study', discussing together what had occurred

within the lessons they observed, foregrounding the learning they took away from student feedback, individual observations and collaborative discussions.

Such collaborative arrangements across institutional settings are not without their difficulties. Menter and Hulme (in Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010) provide useful insights into the challenges that also attend interactions between university-based academics and teachers. They do so within the context of the *Schools of Ambition* policy in Scotland, and a broader policy milieu supportive of critical engagement by teachers with and in research. However, this context is also one in which teachers sometimes engaged in action research initiatives for more performative reasons, rather than out of an intrinsic desire to inquire more fully into elements of their own practice. Some senior teachers, for example, were engaged in research because it was seen as associated with their responsibilities, rather than out of a genuine desire and proclivity to engage in inquiry into their own practices. A quote from one of the participants in the research reveals the frustration created by such a situation:

> I wish it had been put out to staff to say what are you interested in? 'Do you wish to do any sort of research?' so you could have chosen your own; so you had a burning desire. It would be much easier to do the action research if you genuinely had a real issue with it. (Classroom teacher, cited in Menter & Hulme, 2010, p. 112)

Conservative approaches to evaluation encouraged teachers to opt for more generic research foci, rather than foregrounding the situated and context-specific nature of their work and learning. Relations between teachers and mentors were sometimes strained within these conditions, as teachers struggled to find time to engage in research into their own practices – research which was often seen as an onerous expectation, rather than a vehicle for improved understanding and practice. And, as Menter and Hulme conclude, these challenges occurred within a policy context which is less influenced by performativity and accountability pressures than many.

Nevertheless, in spite of these challenges, the three volumes reveal that 'cross-boundary' teacher inquiry is ultimately beneficial. Collaboration between schools was found to foster engaged inquiry amongst educators. McLaughlin (in Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010) reports on the Networked Learning Communities' programme in the UK, a large-scale initiative designed to explore the nature of teachers' professional learning, school partnerships and school development in settings where teacher research was undertaken. These networks were found to act as sites for professional development, particularly the sharing of ideas and support amongst members. Such networks were also useful for fostering school improvement, including establishing links to school policies and decision-making. Many networks encouraged research within member schools, rather than across schools within the network. Other networks placed more emphasis upon the networking aspects – the ability of educators to meet together, not so much for research purposes, but to discuss ideas or to engage in visits to members' schools to undertake 'learning walks' (p. 158). While beneficial, such learning was not unproblematic. While dissemination of knowledge was shared locally, teachers sometimes felt uncomfortable about engaging in more public dissemination practices. The development of true knowledge creating networks was also elusive, with structural impediments upon the nature of the research considered of most value in both schools and universities making it difficult to establish the links which could lead to improved

practice. Johns-Shepherd and Gowing (in Pickering *et al.*, 2007) argue networks between schools foster shared responsibility and ownership, promote common causes, contribute to innovation, develop leaders, and recognise and transfer effective practice. However, they also require planning, commitment on the part of school leaders, and need to be managed for maximum effect.

Multiple settings, modes and modalities

Finally, and importantly, the three volumes reveal learning is validated across multiple settings, and in multiple modes and modalities. This includes, but is not limited to, what Tickle (2005) describes as the 'crucible of the classroom'. In the context of increasing performative pressures, there is a substantial tension between the classroom as a site for learning, or as 'a site of crucifixion' (Tickle, 2005). Drawing upon Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark and Warne (2002), Tickle calls for teachers and other educators to work with the tensions created by conflicting performative and learning preoccupations in the classroom, rather than trying to find a simplistic (and non-existent) 'solution'. Instead, it is the tensions and difficulties which characterise sites for learning and genuine development, even as they signify sites of risk and apprehension.

Groundwater-Smith and Kelly's (in Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010) exploration of Museum Education is a particularly interesting example of an alternative 'classroom' setting for both teachers and students. The authors describe a partnership between a group of schools – the Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools ('the Coalition') – the University of Sydney-based Practitioner Research Special Interest Group, and the Australian Museum. This cluster of educators is interesting on a number of levels, including how members have drawn upon student voice and students' experiences to inform the development of educational programmes and practices within the museum. The chapter reveals the power of drawing upon student voice, and importantly, how student voice can be utilised to inform students' educational experiences: 'What is remarkable about the work of the AM [Australian Museum] and the Coalition is that increasingly the voices of young people are built into the design process itself.' (p. 187). Similarly, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's (2009) book provides brief but useful references to specific cases of students' voice in action, and how the development of students' voice informs teacher learning.

Other sites of learning include on-line professional degree programmes. Kearns and Thatcher (in Pickering *et al.*, 2007) reveal how on-line technologies have made it possible to more readily recognise and accredit teachers' workplace-based learning in Northern Ireland. Such learning is possible as universities partner with schools to ensure critical and ongoing reflections upon practice. Tutorial on-line postings serve as vehicles to develop teachers' sense of their practice within a broader tapestry of codified knowledges. Daly and Pachler (in Pickering *et al.,* 2007) are more explicit in their description of the value of collaborative on-line discussion amongst teachers and university personnel. They describe how they adapted and applied Garrison and Anderson's (2003) content analysis approach to better understand teachers' reflections on their practice. Unwin (in Pickering *et al.*, 2007) analyses the Master of Teaching programme at the University of London via Mishra and Koehler's (2006) 'Technological

Pedagogical Content Knowledge' model. Research into this programme reveals a valuing amongst students of the focus of a specific module, 'Understanding Teaching' on classroom experience, connecting theory and practice, sharing ideas with colleagues (face-to-face and on-line), but also that responding to other students' postings is considered a less valuable learning experience. Such research informs further developments of the 'Understanding Teaching' module amongst tutors.

Davies (in Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010), focuses upon how assessment, particularly pre-service teachers' 'Praxis Inquiry Log', 'Evaluation of Pedagogies', and the delivery of a 'Professional Exposition', served as vehicles for praxis development through inquiry for students in the second year of Bachelor of Education programmes at Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia. The Praxis Inquiry Log is designed to encourage descriptive and reflective accounts of students' experiences in Partnership (school settings), and university. The Evaluation of Pedagogies requires inquiry into the pedagogical approaches/teaching strategies witnessed by pre-service teachers during focused, year-long, weekly visits to school classrooms. The Professional Exposition involves the compilation of a portfolio based on evidence of practice in the school/educational settings in which students are placed. These may include planning documents, personal reflections, and teacher-mentor's comments. While carefully designed assessment instruments did not always lead to changed practice/praxis, Davies provides sufficient evidence in her own inquiry into the use of these instruments to justify their value and validity.

Turner and Shirley (in Pickering *et al.,* 2007) also describe how portfolios within the Master of Teaching were useful vehicles for learning, but that assessment of performance also led to tensions between portfolios to foster learning, and for accreditation purposes. However, rather than being concerned about standards *per se*, as is the case for many assessment portfolios, the assessment related to more traditional academic criteria. In this context, the portfolios were found to stimulate genuine inquiry to improve practice, but there were also concerns to ensure portfolios did not provide a 'glossy showcase with little reflective analysis' (p. 109). There was also evidence of the value of on-line dialogue between students and tutors, as well as a need to interrogate further what it meant to critically reflect on practice.

Finally, Cordingley and Needham's (in Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010) podcast discussion between Philippa Cordingley (founder and chief executive of 'The Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education'), Kristine Needham (from the 'Professional Learning and Leadership Development Directorate' of the Department of Education and Training, New South Wales, Australia), and principal, Mark Carter, is itself a product of inquiry into ways of disseminating research, and a reflection upon the challenges which attend the development and use of research. Podcasts are vehicles for inquiry into the research-practice nexus, and a means of challenging the binaries and divisions so often associated with discussions on the theory and practice of leadership and learning.

Conclusion

At present, there is considerable interest in education in general, and teachers' learning in particular. At the same time as there is pressure 'to perform' – to 'be operational ... or disappear' (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv), there is also an opportunity to redirect the focus on teacher learning towards more substantive, sustainable approaches which foreground students' needs, in context. Individually, the three books discussed in this essay review provide useful insights into the conditions under which such learning occurs, how these conditions inhibit and promote such learning, and what productive teacher learning may look like even as the conditions for such learning are less than ideal. However, while each volume has its own has peculiar strengths, it is what can be learnt from them collectively which makes them most useful. When read in conjunction with one another, they reveal the complexity of the task of effecting socially and academically productive teacher learning practices – a complexity which contains the seeds of new and as yet, unforseen possibilities. It is in pursuit of these possibilities – of learning to mediate current conditions, of breaching sometimes entrenched institutional and professional boundaries, and of learning in multiple settings, modes and modalities – that a new politics of teacher professional development can be developed. I commend the three books to any educator serious about teachers and students' learning.

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