1 Teacher education policy and research: An introduction

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Abstract: In many countries, teacher education is being increasingly framed as a policy problem that requires national solutions and large-scale reforms. In this context, a group of leading teacher education researchers from 15 nations formed the Global Teacher Education Consortium (GTEC) to investigate the impact of these policies and the associated reforms within and across these jurisdictions. This book represents the first collective work of GTEC. The chapters provide analyses of current policy in Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, Finland, Hong Kong SAR, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Ireland, Portugal, Scotland, the USA and Wales. This introductory chapter provides an overview of global trends in teacher education policy and associated notions of professionalism, and the connections and disconnections between teacher education policy and research.

Introduction

In recent decades, teacher education has been subjected to changing policies and reforms as governments aim to improve teaching quality. The policies often looks surprisingly similar in many countries. However, there are also interesting and unique outliers. In this book, leading teacher education researchers from Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, Finland, Hong Kong SAR, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Ireland, Portugal, Scotland, the USA and Wales examine teacher education policy and research in each of their contexts. This is the first body of work of the Global Teacher Education Consortium (GTEC) which was formed in 2019 to explore teacher education policy and research across the constituent nations. In many cases teacher education is framed as a policy problem with national solutions and large-scale reforms being developed in the hope of 'fixing the problem' (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018; Furlong, 2013; Furlong, Cochran-Smith, & Brennan, 2009). However, many policies are ideological in nature rather than research informed, even though they claim to be evidence-based. In most instances, a limited amount of the available teacher education research is drawn on to inform the policies and it is usually selected according to specific criteria associated with scale,

methodology, generalisability, or simply that the findings align with preferred ideological and political positions.

The policies and associated reforms usually incorporate more complex and tighter systems of accountability based on the assumption that this is the basis for improving teacher education and thus teaching quality. Sometimes new policies and reforms are formulated and implemented even before the effects of the previous reforms are really known. This can be because of change of governments and new political agendas. At other times, the catalyst for change is concern about the most recent results on international assessments and the perception that another country is 'doing teacher education better'.

In this increasingly regulated context, researchers are encouraged to investigate the impact and effectiveness of teacher education programmes. Government priorities and associated research funding opportunities often frame the preferred indicators of effectiveness to be researched that are aligned with a range of accountability requirements. These can include things like graduating teacher employment rates, attrition and retention of new teachers, and levels of student achievement claimed to be directly attributable to teacher quality. The opinions of employers and the new teachers themselves is regularly sought on whether they feel prepared for teaching. Usually this happens at the end of a teacher education programme, or soon afterwards, even though the type of employment (that is, whether it is permanent and ongoing, contract or casual) and the opportunities for support and ongoing professional learning and development in the school context during the first year of teaching have been shown to significantly mediate the ways in which new teachers describe themselves as being prepared and being effective (Mayer, Dixon, et al., 2017).

GTEC argues that a more comprehensive approach to understanding the consequences of various teacher education policies and practices is needed and that these should incorporate investigating their impact on: teachers and teaching; teacher educators; schools and their communities: school students and their learning; and, education systems as a whole. We suggest that such a positioning of teacher education as part of a complex system (Cochran-Smith, Ell, Ludlow, Grudnoff, & Aitken, 2014) will enable a more nuanced understanding of the impact of the policies as they frame and reframe teacher education, and indeed the teaching profession. We argue that such a research agenda on an international scale will enable both comprehensive analysis of the impact of various teacher education policies and also provide the basis for informing future policies and practices.

This chapter provides an introduction to the collected works in this book which provide analyses of teacher education policy and research in Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, Finland, Hong Kong SAR, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Ireland, Portugal, Scotland, the USA and Wales. It provides an overview of global trends in teacher education policy and associated notions of professionalism, and discusses connections and disconnections between teacher education policy and research.

Teacher education policy

Like education policy more generally, teacher education policy has become an expression of global neoliberal policy imaginaries and reform movements (Ball, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The neoliberal dominant discourse of teacher education is framed as the 'construction of the problem of teacher education' (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013). Various policy initiatives exhibit aspects of marketization, free market competition and accountability mechanisms using measurement of graduating teachers' readiness for teaching and graduating teachers' impact on school students' learning outcomes. Country comparisons and competition associated with international assessments fuel policy production that is intended to improve teacher quality and the effectiveness of teacher education. Often, governments identify aspects of teacher education that they are able to control via various accountability mechanisms and these become the foci of reform agendas.

Globalisation and the related flows of people, knowledge and practice, means teacher education policy, or at least components of it, can look quite similar from country to country. In some cases, global corporate actors like McKinsey and Company (McKinsey & Company, 2007) as well as trans-national entities like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) become significant drivers in policy development and disperse the foci of policymaking away from education bureaucracies (Sellar & Lingard, 2013). Reports from these entities are often cited as evidence for the need for policy change and reform. In this context, decontextualized policy borrowing occurs, but often resembles 'a piecemeal, "pick n mix" approach that ignores the fact that educational policies and practices exist in ecological relationships with one another and in whole ecosystems of interrelated practices' (Chung, 2016, p.207). However, others have argued that what is happening is better characterised as policy translation because 'policies are not merely being transferred across time and space… [but] their form and their effect are transformed by these journeys' (Peck & Theodore, 2015, p.29).

Another aspect of globalisation influencing teacher education policy is the movement of people across borders. The travelling teacher or teacher as cosmopolitan (Mayer, Luke, & Luke, 2008) is often seen as a problem by governments as they seek to secure an adequate supply of teachers in their jurisdiction particularly in contexts where growing school student populations and teacher attrition and/or lack of attraction to the teaching profession, have prompted predictions of teacher shortages. Thus, the movement of newly qualified teachers to other jurisdictions is seen as 'wastage' and there are instances where national regulation is attempting to make teacher education providers accountable for the rates of employment of their graduates (and sometimes their retention in the profession) as well as the impact of their teaching (see for example the program standards of the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation in the US).

Despite the travelling, mobile and translating policies, governments strive to ground their new policies and reform agendas locally and provide country-specific justifications for the change agendas. This often takes the form of setting up government selected review panels which are tasked with calling for submissions from relevant stakeholders, reviewing practices in other countries (usually those deemed to be high performing in international assessments), reviewing relevant research (often the reports from the trans-national entities referred to above), and making a set of workable recommendations which can be directly translated into policy and reform agendas within the political cycle. Quite often, the preferred direction is unambiguous, as for example in Australia when the Minister for Education announced the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) review to the media in 2014:

> And there is evidence that our teacher education system is not up to scratch. We are not attracting the top students into teacher courses as we once did, courses are too theoretical, ideological and faddish, not based on the evidence of what works in teaching important subjects like literacy. Standards are too low at some education institutions - everyone passes.[1]

A crisis discourse about the quality of teacher education emerges which is further stoked by claims that the country is falling behind its competitors in international assessments and that there is significant public concern about the quality of teacher education. So, as well as teacher education being a problem to be fixed, these reviews create a sense of it needing to be fixed urgently. The answer is usually seen as more rigorous accountability frameworks and standards as well as a substantial emphasis on making teacher education providers accountable for ensuring the 'right' people come into teacher education and that new teachers are 'classroom ready'. In some cases, alternative pathways into teaching are seen as the answer, pathways which reduce or eliminate the role in universities in teacher education. Some of these issues are explored further in the chapters that follow.

A practice turn (Zeichner, 2012) becomes evident and the role of teacher education becomes framed more narrowly as developing competence in practical skills for teaching. At the extreme, teaching is seen as a craft that is best learned on the job (e.g.Department for Education (DfE), 2010). In England, this view has resulted in significant growth in 'school-led' routes into teaching (Whiting et al., 2018) and policy discourses have become increasingly dominated by binary debates about whether the professional education of teachers should be school-led or university-led.

Thus, it is clear that teacher education policy has many influencers and it, in turn, influences practice and research, but, of course, none of this is linear. As Vidovich (2007) reminds us, educational policy research 'has shifted from a macro focus on central authorities to incorporating a micro focus on the multiple (often contradictory) policy practices within individual institutions' (Vidovich, 2007, p.285). Like others, she argues for 'policy analysis which explicitly links the 'bigger

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picture' of global and national policy contexts to the 'smaller pictures' of policies and practices within schools and classrooms (p.285). To do this, she developed a framework for policy analysis which is shown below in Figure 1. In the figure, the influences which frame the entire policy process are presented at macro, intermediate and micro levels of a policy trajectory. At the macro level, the global and international influences impacting on the policy process are considered. The micro level influences include analysis of the specific localized contexts. The policy effects are produced by the complex interactions of the 'influences' and 'text production' at different levels and can cycle back as influencers.
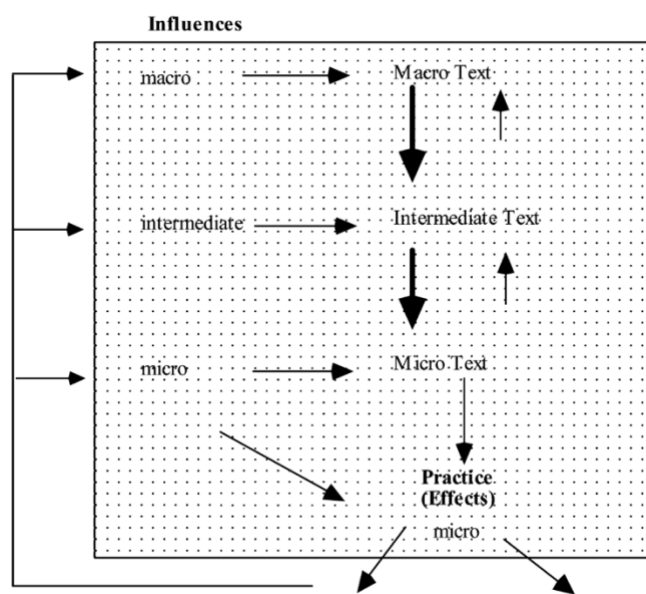

Figure 1: Hybridized framework for policy analysis. Source: Vidovich (2007, p.291)

Vidovich (2007) proposed this framework to guide analysis of the complex relationships between global influences, national policies and local interpretations and practices. The chapters that follow highlight some of these influencers and relationships in the policy trajectory in each of the nations.

Teacher education policy and notions of professionalism

As argued above, teacher education is being constructed as a policy problem with governments setting out to improve it by increasing regulation and tightening accountability. Professionalism has become associated with increased levels of accountability with greater use of professional standards and measures of teacher

performance linking teachers' work with national goals and economic agendas (Connell, 2009). At the same time, looming teacher shortages have prompted governments to support alternative pathways into the profession such as the various country instantiations of the *Teach for All* network and these also become part of the solution to the problem of teacher education. The role of teacher education in developing knowledge for teaching is devalued while discipline knowledge and learning on the job are positioned as key determinants for effective teaching.

The increased accountability and standards, as well as a growing performance culture, are shaping policy and practice and constructing organisational or managerial professionalism which in turn is creating a risk averse profession exhibiting compliant professionalism (Sachs, 2016). Likewise, Evetts (2013) highlights the notion of organizational professionalism which acts as a discourse of control by incorporating rational-legal forms of authority and hierarchical structures of responsibility and decision-making. It involves the increased standardization of work procedures and practices and managerialist controls and relies on externalized forms of regulation and accountability measures such as target-setting and performance review' (p.787). These types of performance cultures and standardisation imply a low level of trust in teachers and teacher educators. Thus, governments set out to define their work (in standards) and establish accountability mechanisms by which they are required to provide evidence of their (increased) performance. This type of professionalism is evident in many of the chapters as they outline their policy contexts.

On the other hand, occupational professionalism is framed according to collegial authority, trust, autonomy, professional judgement and guided by codes of professional ethics (Evetts, 2013). Similarly, Sachs' (2003) notion of an activist teaching profession incorporates democratic professionalism focussing on collegial relations and collaborative work practices. However, these ways of thinking of professionalism are usually favoured by teachers rather than governments. Teachers' and teacher educators' enacted professionalism comprises behavioural (what they actually do at work), attitudinal (attitudes held) and intellectual (their knowledge and understanding and their knowledge structures) components (Evans, 2011). This enacted professionalism is constantly re-shaping itself through the dynamic agency of the teachers and teacher educators.

Thus, the teacher education policy context discussed above, with its focus on increased accountability, standards and performance exhibits organisational or managerial professionalism – both for teachers and teacher educators. While research for teaching has been increasingly judged through a 'what works' lens and its value for teachers judged according to the use or not of prescribed methodologies (Burns & Schuller, 2007), there are calls for rethinking professional identity around practices that are informed and improved by and through teacher and classroom research. This involves teachers being research literate in order to judge the value of publicly available research for their teaching, and also being researchers themselves in order to investigate and improve their classroom practices. Both of these approaches frame a professionalism that involves informed professional

judgement and teaching decisions designed to enhance student learning. The BERA-RSA report envisages a repositioning of teacher professionalism where 'a new environment of self-improving education systems teachers will need to become research literate and have opportunities for research and inquiry. This requires that schools and colleges become research-rich environments in which to work' (British Educational Research Association, 2014, p.5). Again, there is some evidence of this framing of professionalism in some chapters in this book.

Teacher education research and policy

Teacher education research, as distinct from research on teaching, is a relatively new field of research. While teacher education research has evolved and grown over the past decades, reviews of this work often conclude that it is underdeveloped, small-scale, undertheorized, fragmentary, and somewhat parochial (e.g. Menter, Hulme, Elliot, & Lewin, 2010; Murray, Nuttall, & Mitchell, 2008; Sleeter, 2014). The small-scale studies do inform local teacher education practice in helpful ways, however they do not produce the data sets and findings that policy makers generally appear to be seeking. The prevailing view is that this body of work has not systematically built a knowledge base for teacher education policy (Sleeter, 2014). Recommendations often call for more large-scale and longitudinal studies. There are suggestions that the current body of teacher education research has been distorted and misused (Zeichner & Conklin, 2017) in order to manufacture a narrative of failure and a rationale for tighter accountability and significant reform in teacher education (e.g. Cochran-Smith et al., 2018). Moreover, claims about the paucity of rigorous research get interpreted as a lack of evidence of teacher education's effectiveness and conclusions are made that therefore it must be ineffective.

In the main, teacher education research seems to occur parallel to teacher education policy, rarely informing policy and even more rarely considered as part of teacher education accountability frameworks. Drawing on Vidovich's framing, teacher education research seems to occur mainly in the local space and rarely becomes an influencer in the space of policy text production and even more rarely in the broader space of policy discussions. However, it must be remembered that teacher education programmes are constantly changing and adapting so researching such a dynamic system is difficult if what might be considered more traditional methods of research and analysis are being used (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; Gray & Colucci-Gray, 2010).

The notion of evidence is being widely engaged in accountability frameworks with teacher education programmes being required to provide evidence of their effectiveness and impact. While this could be seen as an opportunity for teacher education research, the evidence requested in the regulations usually relates to aspects that have little do with the actual teacher education programme and its curriculum. As noted above, these include things like graduating teacher employment rates, attrition and retention of new teachers, and levels of student

achievement claimed to be directly attributable to teacher quality. However, examination of the relevant literature and analysis of the discourses informing teacher education policy in Australia suggest that much closer examination of how effectiveness is understood and framed is needed by both teacher educators and policymakers before teacher education research might gainfully be employed in accountability requirements (Mayer, Cotton, & Simpson, 2017). Moreover, as Helgetun and Menter (2020) remind us, in the current policy 'evidence era', evidence is often constructed ideologically for political purposes. This can mean privileging particular types of research both in topic, method and purpose. Instead, the evidence being required usually refers to data rather removed from the programme and in this way teacher education research is further marginalised and the work of teacher educators further de-professionalised.

Another dimension requiring more interrogation to inform future research directions is the assumption of a singular and unproblematic connection between teacher education and the quality of graduating teachers. Again, while this does seem to suggest possibilities for future research directions, the multiple ways in which university-based teacher education impacts on the education system needs to be considered so that teacher education is positioned as more than just a source of newly qualified teachers. Ell et al. (2019) draw on complexity theory to suggest a nuanced way to conceptualise the impact of teacher education that acknowledges the integrated nature of the education system and the way in which all stakeholders work together to improve student learning. In this way, teacher education research would   investigate the impact of teacher education on: teachers and teaching; teacher educators; schools and their communities: pupils and their learning; and, education systems as a whole.

The contribution of this book

This edited book represents the first collective work of the GTEC group and provides analysis of the current policy context and teacher education research in Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, Finland, Hong Kong SAR, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Scotland, the USA and Wales. The analyses of teacher education policy and research across these 13 nations provides the basis for researching teacher education using a more comprehensive research framework and indictors of effectiveness than is currently being encouraged by governments and some funding bodies. GTEC members have made a commitment to ongoing work together within and across the nations. This edited volume highlights connections and disconnections between teacher education policy and research, and will inform and guide future teacher education research. In the concluding chapter, we provide an analysis of the issues, opportunities and challenges across the nations and consider future policy and research possibilities and opportunities for: teacher education research; equity and preparing teachers for work within contexts of super-diversity; and early career teaching.

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