New Lives of Teachers

By Christopher Day

Depending upon our own ontological and epistemological positioning we may believe that it is: (i) the meganarratives or grand stories (Cohen & Garet, 1975) of broader performativity, results driven, contexts which determine the changes in nature, shape, and direction of the new work and lives of teachers; or (ii) that the accumulation and persistence of what are sometimes called "small stories" (Georgakopolou, 2004) show that these only influence and thus may be mediated by individual and collective agency aided by a strength of vocation, the passion of moral purpose. Some researchers position themselves in a critical sociological perspective, often using Bourdieu (1970) or Foucault (1976) as their theoretical mentors. These researchers tend to write about teachers and schools as victims of policy-driven imperatives as bureaucratic surveillance and new pervasive forms of contractual accountability which (wrongly) assume a direct causal link between good teaching, good learning, and measurable student attainments persist and increase. I see research evidence of this but research evidence, also, of teachers who remain skilful, knowledgeable, committed, and resilient regardless of circumstance

Christopher Day is a professor in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom. This article is based on his invited address to the 2011 meeting of the Lives of Teachers Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association.

I subscribe to what Judyth Sachs identifies as the "activist professional" (Sachs, 2003). By a predisposition to hope, persistence in believing that I can make a difference to the lives of those who I teach, knowledge of a range of research and by conducting research which keeps me close to teachers, for example,

through a networked learning community of schools in one city in England, now about to celebrate a decade of teacher inquiry endeavours, I am persuaded that, like me, many teachers, despite some 'bumpy moments,' also maintain their commitment to teach to their best across a career and in changing, sometimes challenging, circumstances. We see this in the in-depth work of Susan Moore Johnson and her colleagues (2004) with new teachers, in Nieto (2003) and Hansen's (2001) writings, in the professional learning communities reported by Ann Lieberman and Bob Bullough's recent writings of happiness, hope, and hopefulness.

New Lives, Old Truths

The work and lives of teachers have always been subject to external influence as those who are nearing the end of their careers will attest, but it is arguable that what is new over the last two decades is the pace, complexity, and intensity of change as governments have responded to the shrinking world of economic competitiveness and social migration by measuring progress against their position in international league tables. This is in part the reason I have titled this article the 'New Lives of Teachers.' Parallel to these are the growing concerns with the new generation of 'screen culture' children who, suggests one author (Greenfield, 2008), spend more time interacting with technology than with family or at school and whose attention span and sense of empathy are diminishing alongside real and potential conflicts in increasingly heterogeneous societies.

As a result, there are regularly repeated claims that teacher educators are failing to prepare their students well enough and so, as in my own country, governments promote apprenticeship models of training (not education) (Donaldson Review, 2011; Hobson et al., 2009; Holmes Report, 1986). 'Teach for America' is one of the models borrowed by my own current government. Schools are encouraged to become 'Teaching Schools' which buy in teacher educators, who themselves are subject to new functionalist performativity demands. In these forms of teacher education students spend most of their time in schools learning the craft of teaching but not necessarily developing their thinking, capacities for reflection, and their emotional understandings; for teaching at its best is an intellectual and emotional endeavour.

In the new lives of teachers, schools and classrooms have become, for many, sites of struggle as financial self-reliance and pressure for ideological compliance have emerged as the twin realities. Externally-imposed curricula, management innovations, and monitoring and performance assessment systems have been introduced but have often been poorly implemented, and have resulted in periods of destabilisation, increased workload, intensification of work, and a crisis of professional identify for many teachers who perceive a loss of public confidence in their ability to provide a good service.

Governments seem not quite to realise the results of a range of robust, well documented research that tell us: (i) teachers' commitment to their work will

increase student commitment (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Louis, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1989); and (ii) enthusiastic teachers (who are knowledgeable and skilled) who have a sense of vocation and organisational belonging work harder to make learning more meaningful for students, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Guskey & Passaro, 1994). While governments in different countries of the world have introduced reforms in different ways at different paces, change is nevertheless not optional but, it is said, is a part of the "post-modern" condition, which requires political, organisational, economic, social, and personal flexibility and responsiveness (Hargreaves, 1994). Little wonder that the postmodern condition for many teachers represents more of a threat than a challenge, or that many are confused by the paradox of decentralised systems (i.e., local decision-making responsibilities), alongside increased public scrutiny and external accountability, and the associated bureaucratic burdens.

There are many other examples worldwide and educational researchers continue to critique policy and its consequences for recruitment, quality, and retention. However, it is important, having set the scene, to look more closely at what a range of research tells us about the new lives of teachers in terms of their continuing capacity to teach to their best.

Lessons from Michael Huberman's Research

More than 30 years ago, Huberman conducted a preliminary study (1978-79) with 30 teachers followed by an extended study (1982-85) with 160 secondary level teachers of all subjects in Geneva and Vaud, two cantons (districts) of Switzerland. Roughly two-thirds taught at lower secondary and the rest at upper secondary. There were slightly more women than men. Four 'experience groups' were chosen: 5-10 years of experience, 11-19 years of experience, 20-29 years of experience, and 30-39 years of experience. During a series of five-hour interviews, informants were asked to review their career trajectory and to see whether they could carve it up into phases or stages, each with a theme and identifiable features.

The career development 'process' that Huberman's research revealed, filled as it is with "plateaux, discontinuities, regressions, spurts, and dead ends" (1995, p. 196), has become the touchstone for researchers in this field world-wide.

Writing in 1995 about professional careers and professional development, Huberman (1995) stated:

> The hypothesis is fairly obvious: Teachers have different aims and different dilemmas at various moments in their professional cycle, and their desires to reach out for more information, knowledge, expertise and technical competence will vary accordingly…A core assumption here is that there will be commonalities among teachers in the sequencing of their professional lives and that one particular form of professional development may be appropriate to these shared sequences… (p. 193)

He suggested that we:

. . . can begin to identify modal profiles of the teaching career and, from these, see what determines more and less 'successful' or 'satisfactory' careers…identify the conditions under which a particular phase in the career cycle is lived out happily or miserably and, from these, put together an appropriate support structure. (p 194)

However, in a typical self critical note—a characteristic worthy of the best researchers—he warned of the ways in which ontogenetic, psychological research underestimates, as he had, the organisational effects and the importance (and influence) of social and historical factors. In addition, there continues to be is a need to conduct empirical research on teachers' professional life trajectories in all countries, for, as he acknowledged, his own work was limited by the cultural effect of a homogeneous teaching population and did not take place in times of turbulence in teaching.

Huberman was not afraid to speak to policy makers directly with the power of his findings:

Minimally, sustaining professional growth seems to require manageable working conditions, opportunities—and sometimes demands—to experiment modestly without sanctions if things go awry, periodic shifts in role assignments without a corresponding loss of prerequisites, regular access to collegial expertise and external stimulation, and a reasonable chance to achieve significant outcomes in the classroom. These are not utopian conditions. It may just be the case, in fact, that they have not been met more universally because policy and administrative personnel have not deliberately attended to them. (1995b, p. 206)

Michael Huberman's research provided a springboard for much of my own and others. Until recently, however, there have been few large scale longitudinal studies of teachers' lives and work and even those have tended to focus upon the first 0-to -5-year period of teaching, perhaps since this is where traditionally there has been considerable attrition (Moore-Johnson, 2004). The 'VITAE' project was a four-year national mixed-methods study of 300 primary and secondary teachers in 100 schools in seven regions of England who were in different phases of their professional lives (Day et al, 2007). That study, which I was privileged to lead, was designed to investigate variations in teachers' effectiveness over their careers. Effectiveness was defined as that which was both perceived by teachers themselves and by student progress and attainment which was measured in terms of attainment results over a three-year consecutive period. It is complemented by the work of my colleagues in the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP), a 14-country, highly collaborative research network of researchers which now has the largest international collection of now more than 100 case studies of principals who have built and sustained success in different contexts and sectors (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Moos, Day, & Johansson, 2011); and by the findings of a national, three-year mixed methods project in England which focussed upon associations between effective school principals and pupil outcomes (Day et al, 2011).

The findings of these and other recent research in this area (e.g., Robinson et al, 2009) are profoundly important for their contributions to knowledge of

conditions which contribute to teacher quality, retention, and achievement (for example, values, democratic leadership, collegiality, professional learning, learning communities, and forms of distributed leadership and trust) in ways which go far beyond those available to Huberman. The leadership literature tells us much about school environments in which teachers flourish and in which they are likely to sustain commitment as well as competence, a sense of well being and positive professional identity; and teachers over the years are consistent in telling us that where they experience sustained support, both personally outside and professionally inside their workplace, they are able not only to cope with but also positively manage adverse circumstances—in other words, to be resilient.

It is this close connection between teachers' lives, their work, its contexts, and its effectiveness for students and school leadership which marks the focus of my own work over the last decade in particular. 'New Lives, Old Truths' is the title of the final chapter of the second book which arose from the VITAE project. Whereas the first, "Teachers Matter: Connecting Work, Lives and Effectiveness" (Day et al, 2007), reported on and discussed the mixed methods project design and findings about variations in teachers' perceived and measured effectiveness and the reasons for this, the second, 'The New Lives of Teachers' (Day & Gu, 2010) draws primarily upon new qualitative data drawn from the project in order to tell the stories of teachers in what my co-author, Qing Gu, and I identified as teachers' 'professional life phases' (PLPs) in order to distinguish these from career phases, a term usually associated more with role changes.

What we learned about teachers who experience these PLPs enabled us to identify generic similarities and differences within each phase. It also allowed the identification of critical incidents or phases and, through these, provided new insights into positive and negative variations in personal, workplace and socio-cultural and policy conditions which teachers experience across a career and the consequences for teacher and students if support is not available. We found that teachers' ongoing capacities, commitment and passion to teach to their best for the benefit of their students relate to:

(i) professional life phase;
(ii) the relative instability and stability of their sense of identity—so
    important to their sense of self-efficacy and agency;
(iii) a passion for teaching: commitment, wellbeing and effectiveness.

(i) Professional Life Phases

We identified six professional life phases. We found that teachers' commitment, well being, identity, and effectiveness varied within and between these and that, within each phase, there were those whose commitment was rising, being sustained despite challenging circumstances, or declining.

Teachers' Professional Life Phases

Professional life phase 0-3 – Commitment: Support and Challenge

Sub-groups: a) Developing sense of efficacy
b) Reduced sense of efficacy

Professional life phase 4-7 – Identity and Efficacy in Classroom

Sub-groups: a) Sustaining a strong sense of identity, self-efficacy and effectiveness
b) Sustaining identity, efficacy and effectiveness
c) Identity, efficacy and effectiveness at risk

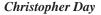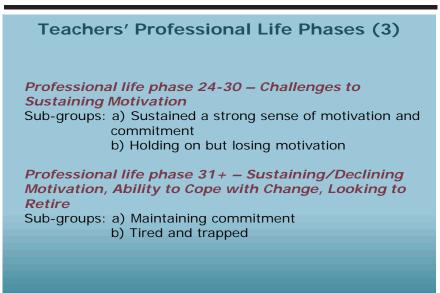## Teachers' Professional Life Phases (2)

Professional life phase 8-15 – Managing Changes in Role and Identity: Growing Tensions and Transitions

Sub-groups: a) Sustained engagement
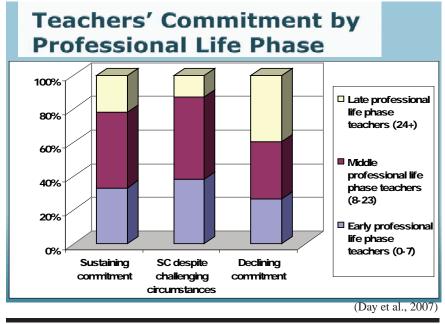b) Detachment/ loss of motivation

Professional life phase 16-23 – Work-life Tensions: Challenges to Motivation and Commitment

Sub-groups: a) Further career advancement and good results have led to increased motivation/ commitment
b) Sustained motivation, commitment and effectiveness
c) Workload/managing competing tensions/ career stagnation have led to decreased motivation, commitment and effectiveness

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Teachers' Professional Life Phases (3)

Professional life phase 24-30 – Challenges to Sustaining Motivation
Sub-groups: a) Sustained a strong sense of motivation and commitment
b) Holding on but losing motivation

Professional life phase 31+ – Sustaining/Declining Motivation, Ability to Cope with Change, Looking to Retire
Sub-groups: a) Maintaining commitment
b) Tired and trapped

The majority of teachers in the VITAE research maintained their effectiveness but did not necessarily become more effective over time. Indeed, we found that the commitment of teachers in late professional life phases, though remaining high for many, is more likely to decline than those in early and middle years.

Teachers' Commitment by Professional Life Phase

(Day et al., 2007)

It is especially important to note also that the commitment and resilience of teachers in schools serving more disadvantaged communities where relational ties are the "sources of reservoirs of resilience" (Tonnies, 2001, p. 27), are more persistently challenged than others. One implication of this is that schools, especially those which serve disadvantaged communities, need to ensure that their CPD provision is relevant to the commitment, resilience and health needs of teachers in each of their professional life phases.

Given the nature of teaching, particularly in inimical reform contexts, this is, perhaps unsurprising. An implication of this finding is that national organisations and schools need to target strategies for professional learning and development to support teachers in the later phases of their careers. Teachers will move backwards and forwards within and between phases during their working lives for all kinds of reasons concerning personal history, psychological, social, and systemic change factors. Taking on a new role, changing schools, teaching a new age group or new syllabus, or learning to work in new ways in the classroom will almost inevitably result in development disruption, at least temporarily. It is clear from this that there are problems, in a changing world, with assuming that the acquisition of expertise through experience marks the end of the learning journey. Huberman's work also provides an important in principle critique of linear, 'stage' models of professional development which ignore the complexity and dynamic of classroom life, the discontinuities of learning; and points to the importance of continuing regular and differentiated opportunities for deliberative, systematic reflection 'on' and 'about' experience as a way of locating and extending understandings of the broad and narrow contexts of teaching and learning, and reviewing and renewing commitment and capacities for effectiveness.

Becoming an expert does not mean that learning ends—hence the importance of maintaining the ability to be a lifelong inquirer. Experienced teachers who are successful, far from being at the end of their learning journeys, are those who retain their ability to be self-conscious about their teaching and are constantly aware of and responsive to the learning possibilities inherent in each teaching episode and individual interaction.

(ii) Teacher Identity: The Person in the Professional

> Being a teacher seems to involve a special relationship with other people that you don't find in most professions… (Trier, 2001, p. 35)

Much research literature demonstrates that events and experiences in the personal lives of teachers are intimately linked to the performance of their professional roles (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). In her research on the realities of teachers' work, Acker (1999) describes the considerable pressures on teaching staff, not just arising in their work but also from their personal lives. Complications in personal lives can become bound up with problems at work.

Woods and colleagues (1997, p. 152) argue, and in a forthcoming publication David Hansen (2011) agrees, that teaching is fundamentally a matter of values. People teach because they believe in something. They have an image of the 'good society.' If we are to understand the new lives of teachers, then, it is necessary to consider the importance of the part the person plays within the professional. This is essential because a raft of literature points to teaching as an essentially human endeavour in which who the teacher is is as important as what she teaches (Beijaard, 1995; Bullough & Knowles, 1991; Hamachek, 1999; Kelchtermans, 2009; Korthagen, 2004; Nias, 1989a; Palmer, 2007; Russell, 2007).

> …paying attention to the connection of the personal and the professional in teaching…may contribute to educational goals that go far beyond the development of the individual teacher. (Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2009, p. 308)

Several researchers (Hargreaves, 1994; Nias, 1989, 1996; Nias et al., 1992; Sumsion, 2002) have also noted that teacher identities are not only constructed from the more technical aspects of teaching (i.e., classroom management, subject knowledge, and pupil test results) but, as Van Den Berg (2002) explains:

> ...can be conceptualised as the result of an interaction between the personal experiences of teachers and the social, cultural and institutional environment in which they function on a daily basis. (p. 579)

It matters enormously what kind of person the teacher is because

> ...those of us who are teachers cannot stand before a class without standing for something...teaching is testimony. (Patterson, 1991, p. 16)

There is, then, an unavoidable interrelationship between the personal and the professional if only because the overwhelming evidence is that teaching demands significant personal investment. So when we think of the importance to good teaching of a positive, stable identity, it is necessary to construe such identity as being made up of these elements.

Dimensions of Identity: Professional identity is influenced by biography and experience—life outside the school—and reflects social and policy expectations of what a good teacher is, workplace conditions and relationships, and the educational ideals of the teacher. The VITAE project found that professional identity was, for the 300 participating teachers, a composite of the interaction in different work scenarios between socio-cultural/policy, workplace, and personal dimensions and that it was not always stable or positive (Day & Kington, 2008; Day et al, 2011).

Interviews with these teachers over a three-year period revealed four scenarios or sites of struggle which reflected different relationships between the three dimensions of identity:

• The first was holding the three in balance. The dominant characteristics

of this group of teachers included being highly motivated, committed, and self-efficacious.

• In the second scenario, one dimension was dominant, for example, immediate school demands dominating and impacting on the other two.

• In the third scenario two dimensions dominated and impacted on the third.

• The fourth scenario represented a state of extreme fluctuation within and between each dimension.

Teachers from across the professional life phases who expressed a positive sense of agency, resilience, and commitment in all scenarios spoke of the influence of in-school leadership, colleagues. and personal support. The supporting factors mentioned most frequently by teachers who expressed a positive, stable sense of identity (67%) were:

• *Leadership (76%).* "It is good to know that we have strong leadership who has a clear vision for the school" (Larissa, year 6).

• *Colleagues (63%).* "We have such supportive team here. Everyone works together and we have a common goal to work towards" (Hermione, year 2). "We all socialize together and have become friends over time. I do not know what we'd do if someone left" (Leon, year 9).

• *Personal (95%).* "It helps having a supportive family who do not get frustrated when I'm sat working on a Sunday afternoon and they want to go to the park" (Shaun, year 9).

Teachers who judged their effectiveness to be at risk or declining (33%) spoke of negative pressures. Those mentioned most frequently were:

• *Workload (68%).* "It never stops, there is always something more to do and it eats away at your life until you have no social life and no time for anything but work" (Jarvis, year 6). "Your life has to go on hold—there is not enough time in the school day to do everything" (Hermione, year 2).

• *Student behaviour (64%).* "Over the years, pupils have got worse. They have no respect for themselves or the teachers" (Jenny, year 6). "Pupil behavior is one of the biggest problems in schools today. They know their rights and there is nothing you can do" (Kathryn, year 9).

• *Leadership (58%).* "Unless the leadership supports the staff, you are on your own. They need to be visible and need to appreciate what teachers are doing" (Carmelle, year 2). "I feel as if I'm constantly being picked on and told I'm doing something wrong" (Jude, year 9).

An implication of this finding is that strategies for sustaining commitment in initial and continuing professional development programs should differentiate between the needs of teachers in different phases of their professional lives and experiencing different sites of struggle which may threaten their sense of positive stable identity and sense of wellbeing.

(iii) A Passion for Teaching: Commitment, Wellbeing, and Effectiveness

A lesson from the VITAE project and a range of research internationally (Day, 2004) is that passion for teaching, a commitment to understand and educate every learner, is necessary if teachers are to teach to their best, but that this may grow or die according to changes in personal and work circumstances. Being passionate about others' learning and achievement creates energy and fuels determination, conviction, and commitment. Yet passion should not be regarded only as a disposition—people are not born, nor do they die, passionate. Whilst many teachers enter the profession with a sense of vocation and with a passion to give their best to the learning and growth of their pupils, for some, these become diminished with the passage of time, changing external and internal working conditions and contexts and unanticipated personal events. They lose their sense of purpose and well-being which are so intimately connected with their positive sense of professional identity and which enable them to draw upon, deploy and manage the inherently dynamic emotionally vulnerable contexts of teaching in which they teach and in which their pupils learn.

Without organisational support, bringing a passionate and resilient self to teaching effectively every day of every week of every school term and year can be stressful not only to the body but also to the heart and soul, for the processes of teaching and learning are rarely smooth, and the results are not always predictable. Thus, the commitment, hope and optimism with which many teachers still enter the profession, unless supported within the school, may be eroded over time as managing combinations of low level disruption from those who don't wish to learn or cannot, or interfere with others' opportunities to learn, increasing media criticisms and lack of work-life balance take their toll on professional wellbeing. Teacher well-being is both a psychological and social construct:

> …a dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community. (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008, p. 10)

To achieve and sustain a healthy state of well being, teachers need to manage successfully a range of cognitive and emotional challenges in different, sometimes difficult sites of struggle which vary according to life experiences and events, the strength of relationships with pupils and parents, the conviction of educational ideals, sense of efficacy and agency and the support of colleagues and school leadership. As Moore Johnson (2004) reminds us:

… anyone familiar with schools knows that stories about the easy job of teaching are sheer fiction. Good teaching is demanding and exhausting work, even in the best of work places… (2004, p. 10)

Experience and research, then, suggest that, in terms of nurturing well being, a dichotomy between promoting technical competence and personal growth among teachers is a false economy. Rather, teachers at their best combine their professional craft expertise with their personal commitment, experience, and values in their work in the knowledge that teaching cannot be devoid from an interest in and engagement with the learner. In other words, it is the extent to which both learner, teacher, and teaching content are all fully 'present' which will influence, in interaction with the internal and external environments, the quality of the process and its results. This journey of the personal and the professional in the here and now of teaching is what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls 'flow' and Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) term 'presence':

Presence from the teacher's point of view is the experience of bringing one's whole self to full attention so as to perceive what is happening the moment. (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 267)

Many writers on teacher education focus on the role and presence of the teacher in the classroom(Meijer et al, 2009), emphasising the need for personal strengths or core qualities such as care, courage, fairness, kindness, honesty, perseverance (Frederickson, 2002; Noddings, 2003; Palmer, 2004; Seligman, 2002; Sockett, 1993). Others have combined this with research on the nature, purposes and forms of reflection in, on and about education (Schön, 1983), and developed humanistic pedagogies of teacher education which emphasise the importance to good teaching practice of understanding and interrogating teachers' own belief systems (Loughran, 2004) and the interchange between these teaching contexts and purposes (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

Teacher presence, while a necessary condition for successful teaching, is, however, not sufficient to achieve optimal learning. Students themselves must also be willing and able to be present. At this point, it is worth once again bringing to the attention of policy makers the observation that there is no necessary direct cause and effect relationship between high quality teaching and student learning (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005).

Five key observations about the qualities evident in good teaching and teachers have been made by researchers across the world:

(i) Good teaching is recognised by its combination of technical and personal competencies, deep subject knowledge and empathy with the learners (Hargreaves 1998, 2001; Palmer, 1998). Teachers as people (the person in the professional, the being within the action) cannot be separated from teachers as professionals (Nias, 1989a). Teachers invest themselves

in their work. Teaching at its best, in other words, is a passionate affair (Day, 2004).

(ii) Good teachers are universally identified by students as those who care. They care for them as part of their exercise of their professional duty and their care about them is shown in the connectiveness of their everyday classroom interactions as well as their concern for their general wellbeing and achievement (Ashley & Lee, 2003; Fletcher-Campbell, 1995; Noddings, 1992).

(iii) Teachers' sense of identity and agency (the means by which they respond, reflect upon and manage the interface between their educational ideals, beliefs, work environments, and broader social and policy contexts) are crucial to their own motivation, commitment, wellbeing, and capacity to teach to their best. It is how they define themselves as 'teacher' (Day & Lee, 2011; Schutz & Zembylas, 2010).

(iv) The extent to which teachers are able to understand emotions within themselves and others is related to their ability to lead and manage teaching and learning. Good teaching, "requires the connection of emotion with self-knowledge" (Denzin, 1984; Harris, 2007; Zembylas, 2003: 213).

(v) To be a good and effective teacher over time requires hopefulness and resilience, the ability to manage and lead in challenging circumstances and changing contexts (Bullough, 2011; Day & Gu, 2010; Gu & Day, 2007).

The Role of Teacher Educator Researchers

Finally, I want to grasp a difficult nettle which continues to be a source of discussion in universities and colleges. It concerns the role, influence, and impact of teacher educators who are also researchers as part of their commitment to learning. In his article in *Teacher Education Quarterly* (Fall, 2008), Bob Bullough wrote that in the current political context, researchers have, as Goodson (1992) earlier argued, a special obligation: "to assure that 'the teacher's voice is heard, heard loudly, heard articulately" (p. 112). It would be difficult not to agree with Bob that, "…At this moment in time, as we research teachers' lives there may be no more important task before us than championing the cause of teachers and making clear the ineluctable connection between their well-being and the well-being of children" (Bullough, 2008, p. 23).

However, in involving ourselves in research with teachers and schools, as university researcher educators and researchers we also need appropriate competencies:

…the competence to cross borders, cultures and dialects, the learning and translating of multiple languages (the political, the everyday, the academic) and the courage to transgress when faced with social injustices…How we practice our authority

is then the issue, not what we claim or profess: if we believe in something then we have to practice it. (Walker, 1996)

Finley's (2005) metaphor of 'border crossings,' together with Tony Becher's (1989) metaphor of 'tribes and territories' provide vivid illustrations of the persisting separation cultures both between university researchers and between researchers and teachers. In addition, the environments in which teachers teach and in which our research is conducted have become more problematic. So-called neo liberal 'performativity' results-driven agendas have invaded and changed our worlds of work, threatening hard-won and treasured practices and professional identities. In academia, we see this especially through the creeping erosion of time to conduct research, as bureaucratic procedures continue to increase; through the rise of research funding which is tied to short-term government agendas in some countries; and, in others, the imposition of national research assessment exercises associated with league tables and increases or decreases in finance, social citation indexes and judgements of research worthiness based upon evidence of impact on the user communities.

The implications of drawing lines of separation between policy makers, professional researchers (from the academy), and 'other' researchers (in schools) without considering their complementarity and respective development need to be carefully considered, lest continuing separation does a disservice to all. The evidence still points to a lack of use by teachers of much research when they themselves have not been involved in the research process. We know well that 'the gap between educational research and practice is a more complex and differentiated phenomenon than commonly assumed in the international literature' (Vanderlinde & van Broakk, 2010, pp. 311-312).

The separation between the school teaching, policy-making, and academic communities which exists partly because of history, partly because of function, and partly because of collusion *need not continue*. Worlds which emphasise the systematic gathering of knowledge, the questioning and challenge of ideology, formal examination of experience, professional criticism, and seemingly endless discussion of possibilities rather than solutions, need not necessarily conflict with those dominated by unexamined ideology, action, concrete knowledge, and busyness. Although it is interesting to observe that as researchers from universities and other agencies seek to work more closely with teachers and schools and policy formulation becomes more distant, there are examples of growing understandings of the possibilities for their complementarity. Research needs to be more open, more amenable to those interest groups which seek to influence policy. Part of higher education's responsibility is to use our 'room to manoeuvre' to critique policy where it flies in the face of research, to be rigorous in our own research, whether separate from or in collaboration with teachers, and to communicate with rather than colonise the voices of practitioners. In order to do this we need to maintain and develop critical engagement with policy-makers, interest groups and practitioners.

Ball and Forzani (2007) claim that:

> At the center of every school of education must be scholars with the expertise and commitment necessary to study educational transactions…(and that)…if they do not work actively to disseminate that knowledge among policy makers and members of the public, then educational problem solving will be left to researchers and professionals without the requisite expertise……Educational researchers must also arm themselves with the special analytical skills that will allow them to usefully bridge the alleged divide between theory and practice. It is along this divide that educational researchers have special expertise. (p. 537)

Essentially, Ball and Forzani are identifying what we call in England 'the elephant in the room,' something so obvious that we often overlook its huge importance. In this case, there are two elephants: researcher independence and moral purpose. While all of us would support Ivor Goodson's articulation of the researcher as independent, "a public intellectual, not a servant of the state" (Goodson, 1999), I would argue that alongside independence is moral purpose, a sense of deep responsibility of contributing to the 'betterment' of society though our work on, about, with and for teachers. As researchers, we do need to acknowledge what research tells us about ourselves, our endeavours and our influence (or lack of it). There are sceptics among teachers and policy makers—and even researchers of different ontological and epistemological dispositions—about the intrinsic value of research and about its relevance, language, and applicability. However, there are also examples of research which does lead to greater educational understandings, which influences policy and practice, which, ultimately, makes a difference to the contexts and quality of teachers' and childrens' experiences in schools and classrooms.

No single model of research will necessarily be best fitted to bridge the gap. However, whether research is constructed and conducted primarily for the purpose of furthering understanding or for more direct influence on policy makers and practitioners, whether it is on, about, or for education, the obligation of all researchers is to reflect upon our broader moral purposes and measure the worth of our work against their judgement of the extent to which we are able to realise this as we continue to develop our work.

The Challenge to Be the Best

The challenge for university faculties, schools, and departments of education, then, is to engage in strategic planning in which our capacity to respond to schools' agendas as well as to take forward those of the academy can be heightened. In developing new kinds of relationships with schools and teachers, we will be demonstrating a service-wide commitment in which traditional expertise (e.g., in research and knowledge production) is combined with new expertise in cooperative and collaborative knowledge creation, development and consultancy that are part of a more diverse portfolio that connects more closely with the needs of the

school community at large. Such a portfolio would demonstrate the commitment of university educators to improving teaching and learning in collaboration with schools and teachers through capacity-building partnerships through, for example, participatory forms of research, in addition to an ongoing commitment to producing knowledge about education and generating knowledge for education (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), through more traditional forms of outsider research which could be utilised and tested by the system for which it has been produced, both directly and indirectly. Currently perceived problems of credibility, relevance of research and fitness for purpose of programmes of study would thus be minimised.

The challenge to be the best, then, not only applies to teachers, but also to us as researchers whose work aims to further understandings of their work and lives in their personal, work place, and policy-related contexts and, in some cases, to influence them. To be the best ourselves requires us to be partisan (we are for teachers) but dispassionate, to be both close up and distant to our work, and, like teachers at their best, to monitor and reflect on the efficacy, processes, and impact of our work upon the policy and practice communities we seek to influence. Like Michael Huberman, to whom the work of all who are engaged in research on the work and lives of teachers owes a lasting debt, I urge us all to be active always in checking out and giving voice to the connections, at all levels, between policy, research, and practice, and most of all to become and remain, with integrity and passion, as he was and I remain, 'recklessly curious.'

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