'The Village and the World': Research with, for and by Teachers in an Age of Data

Editorial

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In 1981, Lawrence Stenhouse argued that too much research has been conducted for the world and not enough for the village. In 2021, as we mark the 40-year anniversary of Stenhouse's provocation, this Special Issue asks what it might mean today for teachers to be engaged with educational research. What is happening in the 'village' of schools, and how is that related to what is happening in the 'world' of educational research? What might such a distinction mean today, and is it still a useful one?

Teacher research, in its various guises (such as 'action research' and 'practitioner inquiry' in education) has a long history of: advocacy internationally as a pathway for professional knowledge building (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993); teacher professional learning and development (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009); professional renewal (Sachs, 1997); professional, personal and political transformation (Noffke, 1997); and broader democratic and transformational possibilities for schools and teachers (Zipin & Hattam, 2009). More recently, teachers' research literacy has also been seen as important for building a self-improving education system, as highlighted in an influential joint report by the British Education Research Association (BERA) and the Royal Society for the Arts (RSA) in 2014 (Furlong et al., 2014).

These shifts could be taken to reflect the re-emergence of a focus on 'teacher centrality', as termed by Larsen (2010). The role of the teacher in producing positive student outcomes has arguably received renewed focus over the past twenty to thirty years across the global North, with a focus on 'teacher quality', for instance, evident in national contexts including Australia (e.g. Skourdoumbis, 2017), New Zealand (e.g. Thrupp, 1999), the United Kingdom (e.g. Ball, 2003), and the United States (e.g. Kumashiro, 2012). The acknowledgement of teachers as important in student learning processes has also been underpinned by key research on teacher pedagogy (Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard, 2006) and, more particularly, school and teacher effectiveness, such as the well-known meta-analysis work of John Hattie (2008, 2012). Such work highlights that teachers are important, which indeed we would agree they are.

It is also true, however, that recent years have provided reports of growing working hours for teachers. The OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) indicates that globally, teachers are experiencing increasing teaching hours (OECD, 2019). There have also been other reports of high teacher workload in specific national contexts including, for instance, in Australia (Gavin, McGrath-Champ, Wilson, Fitzgerald, & Stacey, 2021), New Zealand (Bridges & Searle, 2011), the Republic of Ireland (Morgan & Craith, 2015), the UK (Burrow, Williams, & Thomas, 2020) and South Korea (Kim, 2019), for example. These reports are frequently seen as instances of 'intensification' – "working longer and working harder" (Fitzgerald, McGrath-Champ, Stacey, Wilson, & Gavin, 2019, p. 614). Within such reports, expectations around 'data' are particularly salient; for instance, in a 2018 survey from the Australian State of NSW, 96% of respondents reported increases in the collection, analysis and reporting of data, and 97% reported increases in administrative tasks, over the past five years (McGrath-Champ, Wilson, Stacey, & Fitzgerald, 2018).

This context reflects, we would argue, the 'auditable teacher' as the preferred model of teacher. Many national and state/provincial education systems have constructed teacher frameworks and indicators of, for instance, 'advanced', 'proficient' and 'newly qualified' teachers, frameworks which are often used to assess teacher practices. Teacher professional learning and development is often quantified and linked explicitly to the technical descriptors found in these standards frameworks. The criteria by which teachers are judged in these categories relegates teaching to an individualised activity whereby teachers are held accountable for their own 'achievements' and 'failures' (Connell, 2009).

What is the nature of teachers' use, involvement in and exploration of their own practice via research in such a climate? Some would argue that such activities are now limited to, for instance, the analysis of individual classroom data (Mills & Goos, 2017), or indeed the analysis of large-scale system data so as to draw inferences, however inappropriately, at school and even classroom level (Ladwig, 2018).

These concerns resonate with what has been referred to as an era of 'datafication' in education (see e.g. Stevenson, 2017), where teachers come to understand and define themselves according to the 'numbers'. Such an environment has been identified as creating "dualisms or tensions ... between belief and representation" (Ball, 2003, p. 221) for teachers in their work; a kind of 'doublethink' (Hardy & Lewis, 2017, p. 682) has been identified, with data seen as both important, yet problematic. For some, this has been linked to the identification of "new teacher subjects" who are wholly "marketized, managed, and performative" (Holloway & Brass, 2018, p. 379) in their engagement with the education policy space and what it seems to be asking of them. Lewis and Holloway (2019) write of how "data-driven practices and logics have come to reshape the possibilities for what the teaching profession and professional are and can be" (p. 35). In this, they argue, educational data have become "both *effective* – i.e. they effect tangible changes to what counts within the teaching profession – and *affective*, in so far as they produce new expectations amongst teachers to openly profess data-responsive attitudes and dispositions" (Lewis & Holloway, 2019, pp. 36-37). Discourses of data and evidence have thus been argued to have the power of changing how teachers see and understand themselves and their work, resonating with broader analyses of the 'quantified self' of today (Lupton, 2016). This body of work raises important concerns around what is being done to teachers' work and raises key questions about how the present policy settlement may unfold if left unchecked. In times of performativity, the teacher's very 'soul' may be at stake (Ball, 2003), as teachers' learning practices become 'targets' of intervention (Hardy, Reyes, & Hamid, 2019) and their practices become, it is feared, more a matter of paint-by-numbers than professional judgement (Player-Koro, Bergviken Rensfeldt, & Selwyn, 2018).

Within this context it may be more important than ever to ensure a 'research rich' teaching profession with strong research and data literacy – not only for the benefit of students but also teachers, given their workload concerns. Determining what research and data can tell you, and what it can't, may be particularly important in a world emerging from a 'post-truth' Trump presidency. Elsewhere, two of us have argued that what we may need to work towards is, for instance, teaching as a profession with 'intelligent' rather than 'performative' accountability, the former being something many teachers already demonstrate (Mockler & Stacey, 2020). We are also reminded of Gore's (2020) argument that effective research engagement for teachers requires the development of support systems both within and beyond the school.

The papers in this Special Issue take up this thread, exploring the prospects of teacher research in an age in which educational data proliferates and instrumentalist notions of 'evidence-based practice'

have taken precedence. The papers explore these matters from Initial Teacher Education (ITE) through to ongoing teacher professional learning in schools, raising both contrasting and complementary perspectives.

The first article in the issue, from Brooks, draws on data collected at universities with large-scale ITE provision in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA. Brooks sets out four significant challenges preventing teaching from becoming a research-based profession: the erosion of universities' roles in ITE, the expectation that training will prioritise practice over theory, the lack of emphasis on research as part of the core knowledge required for teaching, and teacher educators' own research engagement being limited by their contractual arrangements. This leaves ITE as an area with limited capacity to research itself or to base teacher education in research, and results in teacher education as a research-poor area of universities' work. Brooks calls for teacher educators, with teachers, to argue for the relevance of research to the teaching profession, a move which she claims could address the identified challenges and 'enhance the status of teaching as an educated, competent and reflective profession [and lay] the groundwork for the ways in which such a profession should be educated and informed.'

Tatto's provocative contribution to this Special Issue also engages with the content and structure of ITE, working out of the North American policy context. Tatto identifies a perceived move away from fields such as psychology and quantitative methodologies in university-based teacher education, and argues that this needs to be reversed for teacher educators to reclaim control over the development (and evaluation) of the profession. Whilst important, qualitative research – it is argued – has proliferated at the expense of (quantitative) methodologies more at-scale, providing an opening for reliance on administrative data such as value-added modelling and for economists of education, to fill. In this context, Tatto argues that teachers need to know quantitative, qualitative *and* mixed-methodologies, and to be in a position enabling them to evaluative their own programmes, "using rigorous qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods".

The White article moves us to the Australian context, drawing on the work of a study sponsored by the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA), the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) and the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) to investigate the barriers and enablers in moving towards a research-rich teaching profession (see also White et al., 2020). While the paper, as others, critiques the current moment shaped by 'standardisation' and 'datafication' and a de-professionalisation of teachers, the paper is particularly focused on the 'enabling conditions' that can facilitate the growth and development of such a teaching profession. The paper draws on data collected in roundtable workshops with teachers, teacher educators, pre-service teachers and system leaders, and the qualitative responses from surveys of the same groups. At the heart of the paper is recognition that the classroom-based work of teachers and opportunities to engage in research are interlinked. While the sample was clearly selective in favouring those who had a positive disposition to research, the questions posed here (for example: what counts as research; who conducts the research, and for whom; what role does 'data', and what kinds of data, play in teacher research; how should teacher educators prepare their students to be research literate; what opportunities do schools and systems provide for teachers to enhance their research capacities and disseminate their findings; and how do academic researchers ensure that teachers and others have access to their work and findings) are all critical for the enhancement of a mature teaching profession (Sachs, 2016).

The next article in this issue, from McLaughlin and Wood, explores the way in which in-service teachers use research to inform their practice, drawing on two case studies conducted in Kazakhstan secondary schools and in the early childhood education context in England. They contend that

contemporary orientations require an understanding of the dialectical relationship of theory, practice and policy with reference to teachers' engagement in and with research as professional development, and argue for the development of what they term a 'hybrid' approach to professional development, "that connects professionalization and professionalism, from within/from without approaches, and close to practice/close to policy research". Such an approach, they argue, builds teachers' autonomy, professional judgement and "acknowledges the development of situated professional knowledge, which may act a counterbalance to short-term and ideologically driven policy goals, and to their unintended outcomes".

The penultimate contribution to the issue, from Mills, Mockler, Taylor and Stacey, provides a comparative study of teachers' engagement with research in England and Australia. Drawing on similar surveys conducted in both locations their work demonstrates that even teachers highly motivated to engage with research feel that educational research is an 'add-on' to their everyday labour. Thus, while many of the participants in their surveys were avid consumers of research, they were far less likely to be producers of research. The paper takes up the argument of Sachs (2016) that a mature teaching profession is a research literate one that is actively engaged in the production of research. There is a recognition of the ever-increasing demands being put on teachers in both locations, and that the exhortation for teachers to be conducting research projects on top of what is already being expected of them is unreasonable. Hence, for teachers to become more engaged with research, they argue, it cannot be seen as an imposition, it has to be meaningful to teachers, they have to be involved in the conception of research projects as well as their execution, and they have to be given the necessary time and resources to undertake the research.

The issue concludes with a commentary piece contributed by Cochran-Smith and Lytle, which serves to turn the conversation from research as an 'add-on' to something that can be, should be, and arguably is, a central feature of the everyday work of teaching. Using their concept of *inquiry as stance,* developed from 1999-2009, Cochran-Smith and Lytle explore an understanding of teaching in which inquiry is not a "time-bounded project or a strategy for problem solving", but a way of understanding teaching, teacher learning, and professional development. As the authors put it, "teachers theorize all the time". The authors conclude with directions forward towards an understanding of teachers, schools and research "wherein the inquiries of teachers and their colleagues drive change rather than having it imposed upon them in very particular, and often very narrow, ways". The authors argue that this will need us to: first, work from the position that teachers *are* professionals, whether others in the community see them as such or not; second, to deepen and link the work of local practitioner inquiry communities; third, to look seriously at the culture of universities and how university-based researchers conceptualise research in relation to teaching; and finally, to "connect initiatives that support teachers' engaging with research to larger transformative agendas".

Cochran-Smith and Lytle do not believe that "the kinds of work that needs to be done in support of the development of inquiry as stance – even in the age of data – is too far fetched". We hope that this Special Issue may enable readers to feel the same, drawing from the range of contributions herein to envision positive futures for the kinds of 'villages' and 'worlds' that may be possible when enabling meaningful and rich research with, for and by teachers.

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