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Teachers' learning and knowledge: motivation and self-efficacy

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Recurring themes in teacher education: pedagogy, practice and policy

The final issue of this year's volume of JET contains a set of articles that were researched, written and submitted before the CV-19 pandemic and lockdown that has so profoundly changed the world of teacher education, as it has most other human activities. Conversations with other journal editors indicates that like JET, they are receiving an increasing number of articles focussing on the impact of CV-19. It is clear that next year's volume will be dominated by its effects; one special issue of JET is planned for this and it will be fascinating to see how research can, and the extent to which it does, inform the inevitable changes in teacher education pedagogy, practice and policy.

It is, however, interesting to see a broad set of international articles reflecting a number of themes that have resonated through recent issues, namely, the development of teachers' knowledge, teacher education methods, including school based learning, and policy reform. Frustratingly, this important research appears not to have had much impact beyond the teacher education community ourselves. Clear evidence is presented in each of these articles for improvement of provision, which has important implications for stakeholders other than teachers and teacher educators, be they curriculum designers, educational leaders or, crucially, policy makers.

The first paper is from Jenny Niu and her colleagues from the University of Helsinki in Finland, who consider how student teachers perceive their preparedness for C21st competences. These were grouped into four sections: the impact of technology for learning (internet, social media, etc); working with others (communication, collaboration, etc); self-directedness (creativity, critical thinking, taking responsibility, etc) and social responsibility/citizenship (local and global). The findings indicate that student teachers are most confident in the collaboration competences and least with regard to the 'global connections'. Important implications for teacher education curriculum design and pedagogy are discussed in terms of the integration of theory and practice.

Knowledge of these competences, substantive, syntactic and pedagogic is integral in learning to teach and our second paper, by a group of researchers from Thailand and the USA, led by Sokhom Chan, focuses on co-operative learning. In this well-used approach, small groups of learners work together, mutually to benefit their learning outcomes. The originality of this study lays in the context of EFL teacher education provision in Cambodia, where student teachers learned together in co-operative groups and showed improved content knowledge of grammar and vocabulary for teaching English as a foreign language as well as a marked improvement in their self-efficacy for doing so. An international teacher education journal such as JET plays an important role in finding and publishing pieces of the global jigsaw of issues such as the development of teachers' knowledge.



And so to Ethiopia for our next paper. Melese Astake and her colleague from Woldia College of Teacher Education together with others from Taiwan surveyed Ethiopian teachers to find the extent to which they heeded advice from their teacher educators during their initial training. The findings were not positive. The paper discusses the reasons for poor uptake of advice and the quality of advice given. Again, there are important implications here for policy development, curriculum design and professional learning opportunities in the context of that and other developing countries.

Echoes of a colonial past reverberate through the next paper, from Joseph D'Intino and Lifang Wang from McGill University in Canada. Inclusive learning spaces in that context need to address the variety of learning, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic differences of those within them. A review of the course content of teacher education provision across the provinces of Canada showed that most contain an introduction to inclusive or differentiated instruction, but this only represents a small percentage of the course credits. These authors argue strongly that newly qualified Canadian primary school teachers will need additional professional development in this important aspect of their practice to meet the needs of the wide range of pupils in their classrooms. The implications of this have potential impact on the work of virtually all professionals in the education sector: teachers at all levels, including in universities, policy-makers and administrators.

A long established foundation of teacher education is the importance of school-based praxis in learning to teach. The next paper, by Troy Heffernan and colleagues from Monash and La Trobe Universities in Australia, argue for the mutual benefit to both schools and universities of a strong partnership between institutions. Through a literature review citing four contrasting case studies as examples, this paper discusses the benefits beyond the creation of learning advantages based on a business model. The authors suggest that a broader definition of the notion of partnership in teacher education is appropriate. Clearly this has repercussions for teacher supply, which is a current global concern.

School-based learning activities for teachers is the focus of the next article, by Xiaolei Zhang and her colleague from two geographically separated universities in China. Returning to the theme of teachers' knowledge development, this article examines the dynamics and effects of practical knowledge development through the lens of organisational knowledge. Findings indicate that school-based knowledge is grounded in both local and self-knowledge. However, this was not shown strongly to contribute to an engagement with the school's objectives in terms of innovation in practice, with obvious implications for teachers' professional development. How to optimise a framework for knowledge development within the school organisation is discussed. Finding and establishing an effective system for this is an important objective for school leaders and policy makers alike.

Xin Zhang and colleagues from the University of Leiden in the Netherlands take up the theme of motivation for professional development in the next article. They found that both personal and organisation factors at the school level contribute to teachers' motivation for professional learning. Personal factors included prior experience with learning activities, length of service, level of self-efficacy and their own concepts of learning, which organisational factors comprised work load, emotional pressure, support for and by colleagues and leadership styles. Taking account of and balancing, these are necessary for the provision of enhancing teacher education at all career stages. More work for the curriculum developers and educational leaders.

The final full paper in this issue offers a ray of hope that teacher education research can make a direct impact on policy. Elena Aydarova and colleagues from the USA seize the thorny matter of teacher education policy churn. Concerned at the lack of agency in these matters of teacher educators themselves, these authors describe the work of a group of teacher educators in resisting the imposition of a system of assessment of student teachers for their licensure, or attainment of qualified teacher status. Through policy advocacy, this group of determined colleagues managed to redirect their State's reform intentions. The policy makers invited them to participate in deliberations about the future of teacher education, providing a model for other contexts in which teacher educators might make a difference to policy.

One short paper in our Research-in-Progress section follows. As part of a larger project, this paper reports on the professional agency and resilience during the pandemic of a group of Chinese student teachers. Four types of resilience are described and the implications for developing professional agency discussed.

Our Research-in-Practice section follows with an article echoing the same topic: Benjamin Moorhouse from Hong Kong Baptist University invited newly qualified teachers who had had their initial teacher education disrupted by CV-19 come to the university to give advice to the current cohort of student teachers, who themselves were still under various restrictions due to the pandemic. Three pieces of advice were clear: be mentally prepared; be practically prepared and be flexible and adaptable.

The final contribution to this final issue of the year comes from Hong Kong and reports on a focus group study in which early years teachers considered the importance to their professional learning of promoting the development of motor skills in young children.

So concludes Volume 47 of JET. It has been another disrupted year, but one in which teacher education research has flourished, albeit in difficult circumstances. I would like to pay tribute to the small, but doughty JET Editorial Board and thank them for their hard work in maintaining the intellectual integrity and enhancing the reputation of our journal, which has demonstrated an upward trajectory on all publishing metrics this year. Professor Catherine Montgomery leaves us for a new academic challenge and she has our very best wishes for success in her new field.

Our move to an online submission system has introduced the option of anonymity for our referees, which some have opted for. Traditionally, in the first issue of each volume, we name and thank each of them for their unpaid time and expertise in the peer review system, which is central to the academic process. I therefore take this opportunity to acknowledge this work and to thank all of our loyal and devoted referees, including the members of our International Editorial Board for their vital contribution to the growing success and popularity of JET.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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