The heroism of teachers: agility and adaptability through professional education

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The heroism of teachers: agility and adaptability through professional education

In the world of teacher education maintaining and developing, the teaching workforce has been a major challenge of this century (Ovenden-Hope and Passy 2020) and remains a strategic international goal (UNESCO 2015). Reasons for low recruitment and attrition have been much debated, not least in the contributions to successive volumes of JET. A recurring theme has been the rate of change in the educational landscape. This has of course seen an exceptional acceleration in the past year as teachers, student teachers and teacher educators alike have adapted to what has become familiar as ‘emergency remote teaching’. Learning to teach and developing professionally in this climate brings new challenges, so the fact that the teacher education community has risen to this with extraordinary agility, adaptability and inventiveness is a clear testimony to their heroism.

Teachers as heroes? Heroes are usually understood to be people admired for their courage, outstanding achievements and/or noble qualities. That teachers display these characteristics on a daily basis is undisputed and now, following periods across the world of enforced ‘home schooling’, widely acknowledged. The letters of the word hero also stand for the four components of the concept of psychosocial capital (Luthans et al. 2006): Hope, Efficacy, Resilience and Optimism. Represented in Figure 1, Hope is founded on agency and pathways to success; (self) Efficacy, on expectancy and capability; Resilience on the ability to rebound after negative experiences and Optimism, on the forward-looking belief of success.

That psychosocial capacity, the knowledge, skills and capabilities of the teaching workforce, can be nurtured and developed is highly pertinent to teacher education, as the papers in this issue reflect. Clearly related to job satisfaction, psychosocial capital is mediated through a measure of prosocial behaviour, i.e. the intention to benefit others. In the first paper of this issue, by Zeynep Aydin Sünbül and Meltem Aslan Gördesli from Turkey, self-efficacy, resilience and optimism are shown to be significant predictors of prosocial behaviours, which in turn lead to job satisfaction in teachers. Hope was found to be difficult to gauge within the methodology adopted, so this was left out of the analysis. As a quality, hope speaks of perseverance towards goals, including adaptation of the road map towards the goals as necessary: a hallmark of the teacher hero, surely? Nevertheless, satisfaction with their roles predicts teacher retention, which is the topic of the next paper.

Returning to the Strategic Development Goals of Unesco, SDG4 aims to ensure quality education for all. This means that the provision of ‘inclusivity and equitability’ relies on attracting high-quality applicants to programmes of initial teacher education (ITE). In the UK, as in many other countries, all candidates for ITE programmes are interviewed personally. Interviewers have a relatively short time to discern HERO qualities, so ensuring that those in possession of them are attracted to teaching is a priority. Robert Klassen and
The teacher as HERO. The central portion of the diagram represents the state where all four components contribute to a sum greater than their individual parts. Imagine the various circles moving inwards and outwards. This can be thought of as representing a teacher’s heroism in fluctuating circumstances.

colleagues from the UK and Australia examine successive teacher recruitment strategies in England and based on their analysis, suggest models for improvement. In contrast with those for the health service, teacher recruitment strategies are argued to benefit from a stronger foundation in relevant theoretical and empirical research. This represents another aspect of the theory and practice alignment needed in teacher education generally (La Velle 2019).

Ample and ably demonstrated in our next contribution by Brad McLennan and colleagues from Australia, self-determination theory provides the foundation for a piece of research on the basic psychological needs and self-efficacy of student teachers. A framework for measurement of the relationship between elements of an initial teacher education course, the meeting of the student teachers’ needs and the development of efficacy is presented. This model can contribute effectively to the design of learning and teaching at all levels and also to the development of the hero.

Our next paper, by Karen Peel, also from Australia, addresses the role of the teacher-as-co-researcher. Through the lens of professional development through appreciative enquiry and researcher-teacher collaboration, teachers at the primary-secondary transfer interface reflected on their multiple roles at this critical point of transition for pupils. Professional learning and reflection are highlighted as having a powerful impact on pupils’ learning outcomes. This surely is evidence of the hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism of the teacher who engages in collaborative, practice-orientated research?

The next two papers deal with the education of teachers of minority groups within the mainstream. The first, from Robert Coulter and his colleagues from the USA, presents the findings of a pre-service intervention in which student teachers were given specialised input on how best to serve teenagers identifying as LGBTQ. This was shown significantly to improve the student teachers’ active listening skills and self-efficacy in working with these young people. The other paper, by Gabrielle Flockton and Clare Cunningham from the UK, focusses on the work of teacher educators in preparing their trainees to work with pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), a situation that is increasing in
relation to English and other languages across the world. A disparity about the effectiveness of the EAL provision between the teacher educators and the student teachers/newly qualified teachers is discussed. In both these situations of inclusion teacher education policy and practice is shown to be informed by research to guide and improve alignment. Creation of inclusive school environments is again demonstrated to be through the work of teachers showing the four characteristics of heroism.

Our final two full papers concern educational matters of cyberspace. Katarzyna Potyrała and Łukasz Tomczyk from Poland tackle the problematic area of digital threats such as cyberbullying, sexting and reliability of information: all of very immediate concern for teacher education (Williams 2005; MacAulay et al. 2018; Pusey and Sadera 2011). A large-scale survey of serving teachers showed fine-grained variation in their digital literacy on the basis of which these authors make recommendations for professional development. A more positive affordance of ICT is highlighted in the contribution of Oliver McGarr from Ireland (whom incidentally I am delighted to welcome to the International Editorial Board of JET). The use of virtual reality simulations of critical incidents in the classroom is shown to enable student teachers to hone their class management techniques away from the stress of the ‘live’ situation during teaching placement. Both of these papers allude to a possible digital divide between teacher educators and student teachers in a fast-developing digital world. Again, the environment changes, the pressures increase, but the adaptable hero emerges.

Two contributions to our Research-in-Progress section follow: Erin Smith and colleagues from the USA discuss issues of trust between pupils and student teachers in the context of open-ended challenges in mathematics. Mark Feng Teng and Junjie Gavin Wu from China report on teachers’ proactive or passive agency during emergency remote teaching. In the Research-in-Practice section, we have two papers from China. The first, from Zi Yan, discusses the challenges for professional development posed by assessment-as-learning and the second, by Sohyun Yang and colleagues present a way forward for personalised professional development.

These short paper publications, which JET has championed for many years present a strong challenge for authors. It is very difficult to get into a piece under one thousand words something that is original, will interest our international readership and make a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of teacher education. Nevertheless, they are a popular form of academic output and we receive a high number of submissions in both categories. The Editorial Board has to be highly selective, so we urge potential contributors to these sections to perform a SWOT analysis: is it strong enough? What are the weaknesses? Is this the appropriate outlet opportunity? How great is the threat of rejection? If that ticks all the boxes, the next move is to make sure that all the advice and guidance for authors are followed to the letter to speed the article through the review process.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our published authors. Research is possibly the hardest of human intellectual endeavours. There is no doubt that on receipt of that email telling you that your article is accepted for publication, you will know in an instant that your hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism have paid off. Please keep those manuscripts coming, you heroes!
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References


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