

12-1-2004

Uncovering the Inner Power of Teachers' Lives: Towards a Learning Profession

Ora W.Y. Kwo
The University of Hong Kong

Sam M. Intrator
Smith College, sintrato@smith.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.smith.edu/edc_facpubs

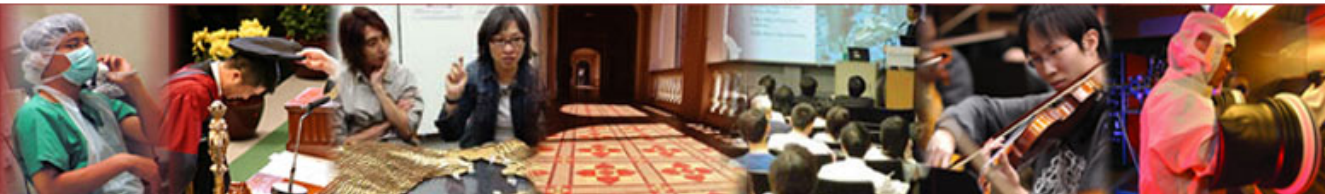


Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kwo, Ora W.Y. and Intrator, Sam M., "Uncovering the Inner Power of Teachers' Lives: Towards a Learning Profession" (2004). Education and Child Study: Faculty Publications, Smith College, Northampton, MA. https://scholarworks.smith.edu/edc_facpubs/8

This Editorial has been accepted for inclusion in Education and Child Study: Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu



Title	Uncovering the inner power of teachers' lives: Towards a learning profession
Author(s)	Kwo, OWY; Intrator, SM
Citation	Uncovering the inner power of teachers' lives: Towards a learning profession, International Journal of Educational Research, v. 41 n. 4-5, p. 281-291
Issued Date	2004
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10722/50108
Rights	Creative Commons: Attribution 3.0 Hong Kong License

Guest Editorial

Uncovering the Inner Power of Teachers' Lives: Towards a Learning Profession

An Introduction to the Special Issue

Ora W.Y. Kwo, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, China

&

Sam M. Intrator, Smith College, Massachusetts, USA

1. Learning as the focus of the profession

Over the last decade, educational policies worldwide have given significant attention to teacher accountability. They have promoted a model of professionalism that is rooted in the growth of a scientific knowledge base, and have mapped professional standards for practice. Systematic recommendations for continuing professional development have been presented with the intention of advancing teachers' professionalism (see e.g. Roth, 1996; Scottish Executive, 2001; Ministry of Education, People's Republic of China, 2001; General Teaching Council for England, 2003; Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2004).

In Hong Kong, the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ) – a body with membership drawn from school, university and government sectors – had produced a Generic Teacher Competencies Framework to improve the professional quality of teachers (ACTEQ, 2003). The Preamble (p.1) highlights language and policy directives linking the quality of teacher learning to an educational system's capacity to prepare students to thrive in a global world:

For educators, the rapid changes taking place in contemporary society have meant an end to the sole emphasis on academic achievements. Instead, our schools are concerned to foster the whole person development of students. A new curriculum has been designed – one capable of responding to individual needs and to be tailored by individual school communities. Teaching and learning is no longer confined to classrooms, but extends into the wider community.

The willingness and capacity for lifelong learning, which we expect from our students, should also be reflected in our teachers. Every teacher should be a continuous learner in order to advance the quality of our education system and the quality of students' learning. Continuing professional development of teachers today is crucial to preparing the citizens of tomorrow.

The implied premise is that successful educational reform hinges on teachers with both the disposition and the capacity to grow, learn and expand their repertoires as professionals. Similar policies that recognise the value of mapping dimensions and stages for teachers' engagement in learning has taken hold in international contexts of teacher education (see e.g. Moran, 1998; Yinger, 1999; Gopinathan, Ho & Tan, 2001).

These ambitious goals imply that teachers must be continually learning about content, pedagogy and learning theory if they are to develop students as flexible, responsive and active thinkers in a rapidly transforming world. It follows that workplace conditions and professional development experiences should be sympathetic to cultivating teachers' pedagogical discretion and understanding of practice. One way to accomplish this is by engaging teachers in a range of experiences that bring them into collaboration with colleagues to develop their knowledge bases, teaching selves, and understanding of learners (Hiebert et al., 2002). Learning as the focus of the profession calls for

understanding of the environment in which teachers' lives are situated. In addition, how teachers react to the environment reveals the core of this learning that cannot be understood without addressing their inner lives.

Despite the emerging research base that recognises teachers as people with biographies and changing life circumstances and not merely as repositories of skills and techniques, the personal realm of teachers has mostly been considered private terrain (Goodson, 1994). As observed by Hargreaves (2001): "Becoming a tactful, caring, or passionate teacher is treated as largely a matter of personal disposition, moral commitment, or private virtue, rather than of how particular ways of organizing teaching shape teachers' emotional experience." Teachers' inner qualities are often taken as inherent in the individuals and either present or absent; but there instead scope for understanding these qualities as latent for all and capable of being actualized through critical challenges. Through a focus on such private and personal dispositions, inner power can be identified and discerned for building of the learning profession.

2. The inner power of teachers' lives

Despite the policy rhetoric that advocates flexible, responsive and intellectual educators capable of operating with expanded roles and obligations, in many workplaces the general conditions and professional development programmes adhere to technocratic practices that constrain teachers' discretion, dictate curricular choices, and mandate practices (Hargreaves, 1994). Huberman and Guskey (1995, p.269-270) have contended that changes in instructional theory, in assessment, and in the curriculum tend to be associated with training in a 'deficit' model of professional development. This model is based on the idea that something is lacking and needs to be corrected. Typically these deficits are determined by others, such as administrators and researchers. Teachers are taken as

inadequate, and do not control the agenda by which they are ‘developed’. Following an overview of 10 studies, Huberman and Guskey challenged the disempowered, passive image of teachers that prevailed in many futile attempts to meet teachers’ needs for professional development, and instead proposed a growth model built on site-based continuous inquiry into instructional practice.

Additionally, teachers’ lives include more than instructional challenges and intellectual learning. Teaching also tests the heart, and calls upon inner strength, spirit, vocational passion, and resilience. This view of education holds that sustainable and enduring change can only be achieved by providing educators with the opportunity to explore the dynamic interplay between the inner lives of spirit, self-knowledge and emotional presence and the outer lives of work in schools. This element of teachers’ lives and work is what we mean by the inner power of teachers’ lives.

Scholars examining dimensions of this approach assert the critical role of the inner life (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Palmer, 1998); the integral role of emotions (Goleman, 1995; Hargreaves, 2001); the necessity of qualitative aesthetic judgment (Eisner, 1994); the importance of caring (Noddings, 1992); the importance of relational trust in schools (Bryk and Schneider, 2002); the importance of psychological presence and personal engagement (Kahn, 1992); and the virtues for considering the whole or “total teacher” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Jackson, 1992). The collective focus contends that for teaching and leading to be done well, educators need to be psychologically present and capable of drawing on their personal selves in ways that allow them to be attentive to their work, empathically connected to others, and creatively invested in teaching and learning. (Argyris, 1982; Kahn, 1990). The orientation of this body of work suggests that all human activity emerges from intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities, and that as people work and live they project the condition of their identity onto their relationships. Who people are animates the work they do; and sustaining good relationships

and doing productive work in the professions requires ongoing development and exploration of people's inner terrain.

3. Critical orientation of this special issue

This issue of the journal is a product of a collective discourse conducted during the 2004 World Assembly of the International Council on Education for Teaching (ICET) held in Hong Kong. The event led to a joint focus on the inner power of teachers' lives in the global context of professionalising the teaching force. The contributors to this special issue view the teaching profession as situated in lifelong habits of learning, and depict teachers as professionals with a capacity to overcome 'alienating external structures' through the power of developing self-knowledge. The chapters consider the pressures that teachers face from many different directions – the external political and educational environment, societal and parental expectations, and reform agendas that emphasise measurable outcomes of student learning. The contributors also examine the tensions caused by conflicting expectations that have often led to teacher disempowerment.

All nine contributors share a basic identity as teachers. Writing about teachers' lives by teachers is a significant feature of this issue. All have been school teachers prior to involvement in university-based teaching and research. To be involved in teacher education, we still have to play a teacher's role facilitating learning and the acquisition of knowledge. However, our challenges are more acutely related to our commitments to the teaching profession, as we identify contemporary problems in order to embark on our inquiries as researchers. In different contexts and at various levels, the contributors have raised concerns from which research questions are identified and addressed:

- understanding the awakening spirit of a professional teaching force where pressures of educational reform and workplace culture are recognised;
- teacher learning as the nourishment of life, and curriculum innovation as the reclaiming of an authentic language for harmonising work and life;
- dialogues of civilisations in place of objectivist social science theories as a means of doing research into 10 influential educators of China;
- articulating contrasts in kindergarten teachers' implicit knowledge to identify the locus of learning power;
- turning obstacles into opportunities for co-learning of student teachers and teacher educators; and
- re-conceptualising teacher leadership in a shift towards greater autonomy in students' learning.

Collectively, these chapters address the changing realities of teachers' lives that demand not just continuing learning but also a renewal in spirit. However, the drag of inertia is also apparent. In many ways, the majority of teachers are not naturally inclined to change and renewal. This creates a gap between the discourse on the desirable, as commonly articulated in policy documents, and routine practices in authentic settings not conducive to learning and development. As researchers, the contributors of this special issue have gone through processes of detecting the location of inner power in teachers' lives. The concept of 'uncovering' is best suited to describe such processes of inquiry, and the chapters contribute through various methodological approaches.

4. Uncovering as a common methodological stance in inquiry

Inquiring into the inner terrain of teachers presents a range of methodological challenges, as the subject of study involves penetrating into the subtle and hidden dimensions of teachers' make-up. 'Uncovering' as a methodological stance is associated with the conceptualisation of knowledge as representation by Wells (1999, pp. 67-76). He concluded:

Knowing can thus be most adequately understood as *the intentional activity of individuals who, as members of a community, make use of and produce representations in the collaborative attempt to better understand and transform their shared world.* (p.76)

Viewed from this perspective, the activity of knowing is made central, and the status of knowledge becomes the 'object' of the activity of knowing. In this light, all six studies initiated the activity of knowing with two basic questions on the object of teachers' inner power:

- How can researchers trace the impact of professional development activities on teachers' lives?
- What methods can be used to reach an understanding of the inner power of teachers?

While the six studies have been set up in their own contexts and have different approaches to data-collection, all researchers carry a common stance of *uncovering* as the activity of knowing. Collectively, they present conceptualisation of knowledge about teachers' inner power from different angles.

4.1 Observation and discourse in research sites

Observation is a form of systematic noting and recording of events and behaviour in the social settings chosen for the study. The observation record is here referred to as field notes that are detailed

description of what has been observed. This collection of studies contains interesting contrasts between two traditions: unobtrusive investigation, and participatory action learning. With the common tool of observation and discourse development, the researchers related to the participants in different orientations.

Two studies involved regular visits to the research sites with an unobtrusive approach to note salient features of the respondents' viewpoints and beliefs (Cheng & Stimpson; Katyal & Evers). As interviews were conducted with various individuals and focus groups, the researchers encouraged the expression of viewpoints which were then subjected to systematic analysis. In the process, the researchers were disciplined to prompt and facilitate articulation, but tried not to influence respondents' construction of ideas. From different cohorts of respondents, the researchers converged for the focus on the significance of teachers' inner power in living up to new challenges.

By contrast, approaching the inquiry from scholarship of teaching and learning, Kwo embarked on data-collection in the naturalistic context of her own teaching, during which the initial observations led to conceptualisation shared with the participants. This conceptualisation in turn generated discourse in a progressive manner, and culminated in the construction of a framework alongside validation with data from different cohorts of teachers. Likewise, Harfitt and Tavares investigated modes of learning from different cohorts of student teachers, and from these domains built their own learning as teacher educators. In both studies, the professional dialogues developed in the direction of co-construction of understanding of teachers' inner power.

4.2 Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry can take the form of portraying life histories, as the stories that people tell about their lives are gathered, analysed and interpreted. By pursuing an understanding of the complex interaction

between the individual's world and the surrounding world, the research can extend understanding of cultural change.

Hayhoe's study is the closest to the life histories, as the researcher was interested in dialogue among civilisations as a means of reaching the secrets of inner power of outstanding teachers in contemporary China. The 10 stories were recorded in the period since the early 1980s. Instead of positioning herself as their biographer, Hayhoe chose to see herself as a portrait painter, sketching their faces and demeanour from personal interactions over the years. The portrait-writing became a process of uncovering the vitality of these special educators. Hayhoe's report is indeed vibrant, portraying the dynamics of her natural interaction with the 10 educators in her life that has been transformed over many years of data-collection. The philosophical grounding can be further elucidated by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997, 13-14), when they critiqued the constraints within the traditions and values of the phenomenology and ethnography. Hayhoe's portraits illustrate a creative method for pushing against boundaries of traditions. Specifically, the push is manifested in its standard of authenticity, and in its explicit recognition of the use of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied.

The uncovering stance is also central to the study presented by Wu, who challenges the traditional notion of knowledge-based teaching and teacher education by asking a philosophical question about teachers' sense of being. Wu sees the narrative inquiry from his data as leading to a non-technical, non-rational mode of curriculum change. He also shows ways in which his sample of teachers followed the natural formation of a new curriculum system in their pursuit of learning. Harmonisation of life and work emerges, where knowledge and action are united. Wu's study has required him to engage in a discipline of intensive and active listening, and has given the narrators full voices in the co-constructed dialogues. In this inquiry process, strong researcher-participant

relationship is vital, as noted by Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p.419): “what is told, as well as the meaning of what is told, is shaped by the relationship”. The study combines narrative analysis of the changes in the teachers’ lives with a philosophical inquiry of teaching and learning, with integration of perspectives from western and Chinese literature.

5. Uncovering the inner power of teachers’ lives

The concept of uncovering is relevant beyond methodological considerations: this special issue is not about an assertion about teachers’ inner powers; instead, it is about teachers’ inner power being uncovered amidst their challenging lives. Indeed, several studies have revealed teachers’ sense of powerlessness from conflicting expectations and competing demands. In the pedagogical domain, the articulation of teachers’ implicit theories by Cheng and Stimpson exposes teachers’ lack of readiness for the pedagogical shift advocated in reforms due to their technical and fluctuating orientations. Likewise, the study by Harfitt and Tavares elucidates the obstacles to pedagogical changes perceived by both pre-service and in-service teachers. If teachers are expected to act as change agents for educational reforms, it is crucial to locate the inner power of teachers, especially by recognising challenges in teachers’ lives and their perceived constraints.

5.1 Challenges in teachers’ lives

From the outset of this Editorial, we have highlighted policy aspirations for the teaching profession and raised concerns about how teachers are ready to respond to the expectations of life-long learning. Contributors to this special issue have presented findings to challenge the implied linear flow of reform measures from documentation to implementation. Teachers’ learning or *non-learning* is located in critical challenges related to external and internal constraints.

Externally, dominance of technical concerns in teaching has been well critiqued in the chapters by Wu and by Cheng and Stimpson. However, administrators' concern for neatness makes technicality a dominant focus in public discourse, and meets the comfort zone of weak teachers who are not ready to engage themselves in learning. As argued by Harfitt and Tavares, obstacles to desirable changes are often rooted in mental blocks. Teachers who are weak learners often perceive challenges as impossible to meet with the available levels of support, as they are ready to find reasons to justify giving up on learning. When teachers are not able to learn, they tend to conform to the prevailing culture of routine teaching. They cease to aspire to innovation, even though such conformity cannot free them from recurrent problems. They wait for directions from their perceived authorities, be it the practicum supervisor or the school panel heads. Without evoking the inner power of teachers' lives, reform initiatives will be confined to external lip-service, in parallel to and frustrated by, teachers' internal inhibitions.

5.2 Location of inner power

A key element of these chapters is the mapping of uncovering those sources that both dampen and nourish the inner power of teacher's lives. Important themes emerge from the chapters.

5.2.1 Power to learn

The case of Beatrice, reported by Cheng and Stimpson, demonstrated a significant dimension of inner power – the power for learning. Beatrice stood out from other cases, as she was able to break away from a play-work dichotomy and routinisation of practice. She had the persistence to confront challenges and uncertainties to enrich her belief in play-based learning. Her power to learn was featured by her inquiry orientation, by which she was open to risk-taking, collaboration with her pupils

and mobilising learning resources. In a different context, Harfitt and Tavares recognise power to learn as rooted in the teachers' readiness for change and deployment of compensation strategies. Teachers having evoked this inner power are characterised by a sharp awareness of their own progress and capacity for improvement. Both studies demonstrate that obstacles can be taken as resources for learning, when support can be given to match with the need at such opportune moments.

5.2.2 Power to understand

This inner power is vividly reported in Hayhoe's chapter, particularly in the section on a journey of learning and unlearning, in which she describes the change in her research work with an increasing emphasis on inter-subjectivity in collecting data about China's educational development. She managed to reach for *understanding* of the change processes in institutions and society, rather than interpreting them through an external theoretical lens. In narrative understanding, she deals with multiple layers of time – time past in memory, time present in attention, and time future in expectation. The chapter contributes significantly to the scholarship of creating portraits of educators. The power to understand is also revealed in Wu's study, as understanding is built into the reclaiming of authentic language instead of rational manipulation of curriculum systems.

5.2.3 Power to reconnect

This inner power is certainly most direct in combating the deficit model of thinking about teacher development. Reconnection denotes resilience against critical experiences. Reconnections can take the form of enforcement of teacher-student relationships in building learning environment, as discussed extensively in the chapter by Harfitt and Tavares. Those teachers who can make a difference are able to reconnect with their knowledge system for adopting of compensation strategies in tackling problems. In

Kwo's chapter, the integration of research and teaching has brought about a co-learning culture in which teachers can be reconnected for story-sharing and joint reflections. This reconnection is vital for a broadened view of the teaching force, where educators from different sectors engage collectively in building a learning profession.

5.2.4 Power to make critical choices

The power to make critical choices is highlighted in Kwo's study as located in the pivotal point of learning. The decision to choose between a downward drift from guilt traps and an upward shift to personal and professional growth is an opportunity latent in all teachers, yet only actualised by some teachers. Teachers' perceptions of challenges are muddled when they lose sight of their inner values. Difficult experiences that challenge decisions for critical choices are considered as opportunities for teachers to reclaim the values from within. With this reclaim comes the liberation from a personal attachment to the encounters, as teachers become aware of the moral commitment in handling situations, with strengthening inner power for coping with new challenges.

5.2.5 Power to lead

In this era of technological advances with students' autonomous access to learning in the Internet, the traditional classroom instructional role of a teacher has been challenged. Teachers' inner power is then identified by Katyal and Evers as located in their renewed instructional leadership. Teachers need to exercise a more holistic form of pedagogy with a focus on meaning-making and practical application of school knowledge. A further dimension of teacher leadership concerns role-modelling and pastoral care in helping students in their socialisation process. This power for leadership, with its traditional origin, has renewed significance in the Internet era. Katyal and Evers view teacher leadership as embedded in

their professional lives, and generally not impeded by organisational constraints in bringing effects on student engagement.

6. Taking a persevering stance for the learning profession

Taken in sum, the chapters approach the theme of the special issue from multiple dimensions. They combine philosophical inquiry and empirical research, posed with critical review of problematic issues. This special issue has been based on a dynamic actualisation of inner power to attend to the co-learning process as much as reaching the writing output as a result of many rounds of learning discourse. With an overview of all the studies presented, it is concluded that the inner power of teachers comes from self-understanding, whereas collective understanding of inner power will advance self-empowerment as a profession. In essence, teachers need to reach understanding of the selfhood when related to knowledge, students, colleagues and the world inside and beyond the classroom. Collectively, such understanding signifies a sense of professional identity.

With aspirations for a learning profession, we are alert to the critical obstacles that discourage learning. Under the pressure of accountability, teachers tend to be constrained by increasing external demands, and take learning opportunities as extra burdens for fragmented deliveries. While it is desirable to view teacher development as a continuum of initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development, the studies in this special issue reveal the significance of grounding professional development activities in the understanding of teachers' inner power. For teaching to become genuinely a learning profession, teachers need to feel able to be emancipated from the rules and constraints that inhibit the growth of full personal or collective awareness. They need to engage in a process of actualising shared vision with policy makers, teacher educators and school leaders for building a mutually reinforced capacity to learn in an emerging community of knowledge-

seeking. Only through such knowledge-seeking and persistently developing an environmental culture of learning can communal understanding be cultivated, from which teachers can claim professional autonomy. In parallel, it is the power of professional collaboration that consistently fine-tunes the focus on learning, especially amidst problematic circumstances. Systems inevitably are designed to hold individuals accountable, and it is a learning environment that can build integration between initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development for the accountability needed.

References

- Argyris, C. (1982). *Reasoning, learning, and action: Individual and organizational* (1st edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bryk, A.S., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F.M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds). *The handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 413-427.
- Deal, T.E., & Peterson, K.D. (1999). *Shaping school culture: The heart of leadership* (1st edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Eisner, E. (1994). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs* (3rd edition). New York: MacMillan College Publishing.
- Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (1996). *What's worth fighting for in your school?* New York: Teachers College Press.
- General Teaching Council for England (2003). *The teachers' professional learning framework*. London: General Teaching Council for England.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Goodson, I. (1994). Studying the teacher's life and work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 10 (1), 29-37.
- Gopinathan, S., Ho, W.K., & Tan, J. (2001). Teacher education and teaching in Singapore. In Y.C. Cheng, M.M.C. Mok & K.C. Tsui (Eds.), *Teaching effectiveness and teacher development: Towards a new knowledge base*. Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Institute of Education, and Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 407-430.

- Hargreaves, A. (2001). Emotional geographies of teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 103(6), 1056-1080.
- Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hiebert, J., Gallimore, R., & Stigler, J. W. (2002). A knowledge base for the teaching profession: What would it look like and how. *Educational Researcher*, 31 (5), 3-15.
- Huberman, M., & Guskey, T.R. (1995). The diversities of professional development. In T.R. Guskey & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press. 269-272.
- Kahn, W.A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33 (4), 692-724.
- Kahn, W.A. (1992). To be fully there: Psychological presence at work. *Human Relations*, 45 (4), 321-349.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ministry of Education, People's Republic of China (2001). The development of education for all in China, International Conference on Education, 46th Session, Geneva.
- Moran, A. (1998). The Northern Ireland professional growth challenge: Towards an integrated model of teacher education. *Teacher Development*, 2 (3), 455-465.
- Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *Courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Roth, R.A. (1996). Standards for certification, licensure, and accreditation. In J. Sikula, T.J. Buttery & E. Guyton (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education*, 2nd edition. New York: Macmillan. 242-278.

Scottish Executive, The (2001). *A teaching profession for the 21st century: Agreement reached following recommendations made in McCrone Report*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Executive.

Victorian Institute of Teaching (2004). *Standards of professional practice for full registration*. The Institute, Melbourne, Australia.

Wells, G. (1999). *Dialogic inquiry: Towards a sociocultural practice and theory of education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yinger, R. (1999). The role of standards in teaching and teacher education. In G. Griffin (Ed.), *The education of teachers: The 98th yearbook of the NSSE*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 85-113.