

SE5 Chapter 91: Teacher Professional Learning

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GLOBAL CONTEXT

Since the first edition of *Scottish Education* was published nearly twenty years ago, the world of professional learning for teachers in Scotland has changed hugely, and terminology has evolved alongside this changing policy and practice. What was originally seen in rather simplistic terms as ‘in-service education’, became known as ‘continuing professional development’ (CPD), but is now more commonly referred to as ‘professional learning’, as the purpose becomes more explicitly focused on teacher learning rather than development in a more general sense. These changes in terminology reflect the ongoing debate about teacher professional learning across the globe. Indeed, the trajectory of many professional learning policies worldwide can be seen to reflect ideas promoted in globally influential documents such as those produced by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU).

This global move is driven by increasing competitiveness as nation states seek to strengthen their own economies by improving the educational attainment of their citizens. Thus, global measures of pupil attainment such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Programme for International Reading Literacy Survey) have become indicators of the success of nation states’ school systems. They are part of a cultural movement that Biesta (2017) refers to as the ‘age of measurement’ (p. 315); a powerful movement which Stronach (2010, p. 10) contends is resulting in a ‘global homogenizing effect’. This competitive environment has resulted in nation states seeking to replicate the policies and practices of the countries seen to be the best ‘performers’, and organisations such as the OECD have played their part in this by sharing evidence of ‘what works’. At the root of this narrative is the influential pronouncement in the 2005 OECD report *Teachers Matter* which stated that ‘raising teacher quality is perhaps the policy direction most likely to lead to substantial gains in school performance’ (p. 23). More than a decade later, the global meta-narrative of professional learning continues in this vein, with the OECD background report for the 2017

International Summit on the Teaching Profession, stating that 'The education systems that have succeeded in improving student outcomes in our rapidly evolving landscape point the way forward: teachers must be the top priority.' (p. 11). However, while the message that 'teachers matter' persists, the demands on teachers appear to be growing; not only are they expected to engage in lifelong professional learning, but they must be able to 'prepare students to face technologically-driven change, to work in different jobs and fields or create their own work environment, to distinguish the quality of sources of information, to become critical thinkers, to adapt to change, to relate to people with different cultural background and beliefs, to persevere when confronted with adversity and to learn throughout their lives.' (ibid.). There is an explicit recognition here that the pupil population is becoming increasingly diverse, and that teachers require critical and relational skills in addition to excellent professional knowledge. The global meta-narrative has moved from simply expecting excellence, to an unequivocal position that the best education systems in the world focus on 'excellence and equity'. Readers familiar with the Scottish education policy context will recognise this mantra from our national policy documentation, but it would appear that the 'excellence and equity' panacea has crept into global discourse, with concomitant expectations on teachers in relation to their professional learning.

This twin-pronged emphasis on excellence and equity brings with it a number of challenges, both practical and conceptual. In terms of professional learning, it challenges the relative importance of gathering evidence of excellence, often equated with competition and a managerial conception of professionalism, vis-à-vis an emphasis on values and local solutions, often equated with collaboration and a democratic conception of professionalism. As global trends aspire to this twin-pronged focus, so the challenges for teacher professional learning policies and practice intensify.

Scotland, of course, has responded in its own way to this wider context and this chapter focuses on the 'glocalisation' of the global discourse: it begins by giving an overview of the current Scottish policy context. Thereafter it outlines the current structures of professional learning in Scotland, exploring the forces which shape it, before drawing to a close with discussion of some contemporary tensions and challenges.

SCOTTISH POLICY CONTEXT

At the time of writing, we are now almost seven years from the publication of 'Teaching Scotland's Future' (Donaldson, 2011). The Donaldson Report, as it is more commonly known, contained fifty recommendations for the improvement of teacher education across the early, career-long, and leadership phases. Given the broad scope of this policy and the ambitious nature of some of its recommendations, the Donaldson Report was heralded as one of the most radical reforms in the history of Scottish teacher education. The extent to which we can say that radical change has actually occurred is unclear; however, the Report has played a fundamental part in shaping the nature of teacher professional learning in Scotland today.

Of specific relevance to this chapter is the way in which this policy attempted to re-conceptualise teacher professionalism, thereby promoting particular forms of professional learning. The core of the Report hinges on the development of teacher professionalism, referred to throughout the report as 'twenty-first century professionalism', 'extended professionalism', 'enhanced professionalism' and 'reinvigorated professionalism', with no definition of what 'professionalism' actually means (Kennedy & Doherty, 2012).

The Report entertains a vision of teachers as 'expert practitioners' who are 'engines of professional progress' and distinguished by their capacity for self-determination and judgement. It also highlights the intellectual nature of teaching, positioning it as 'complex' and 'challenging' and promoting the importance of Masters level learning. Central to this vision is the belief that teachers should take responsibility for identifying their own professional learning needs and locating the relevant provision required. This was significant as it suggested a move away from top-down local authority funded 'CPD events', and a move towards grass-roots teacher-led learning. This sort of transition required a fundamental shift in the culture of the teaching profession and undeniably raised a number of issues around engagement and motivation.

The implementation of Donaldson was in the hands of two partnership groups, the National Partnership Group (NPG) and the National Implementation Board (NIB). Both of these groups were comprised of representatives from key organisations in Scottish education, including the Scottish Government, GTCS, Education Scotland, local authorities, universities and individual classroom teachers. The combined work of these partnership groups, and wider networks, resulted in a number of changes to the content and structure of teacher education. The most obvious examples in relation to professional learning are: the development of partnerships between local authorities and universities to support student and classroom teachers; increased uptake of Masters level learning; the revision of the suite of professional standards, including the introduction of the 'Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning'; the establishment of a system of reaccreditation, later to be conceptualised as 'Professional Update'; and, the establishment of the Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL).

While some academics have carried out small-scale, unfunded analyses of aspects of the Donaldson Report and its implementation, there has been very limited planned, systematic research. To date, the only piece of research that evaluates the impact of Donaldson as a whole is a Scottish Government commissioned evaluation carried out by a market research company in 2015: 'Evaluation of the Impact of the Implementation of Teaching Scotland's Future' (a full report can be accessed through the Scottish Government webpages). The evaluation provides some insightful information into the landscape of professional learning, suggesting that there has been a significant cultural shift amongst the teaching profession in relation to their engagement in professional learning with a greater willingness to try new approaches. Possible reasons for this shift included an increased focus on professional learning; increased ownership of professional learning with acceptance that it is now the teachers' responsibility; a greater awareness of activities leading to professional learning and the decline of 'CPD events'. Although the evaluation points to the beginning of a re-conceptualisation of professional learning, the authors warned that there was still a considerable distance to be travelled before Donaldson's 'vision' could be realised. It is important to note that the findings of this evaluation might not be a direct reflection of the impact of Donaldson, but of a wider shift in the landscape in which Donaldson has played a part.

This wider policy landscape extends beyond Scotland, and across the globe there has been a significant shift in the nature of curriculum policy discourse from prescriptive curriculum, testing and inspection to policies that seek to re-professionalise teaching, highlighting the importance of teacher professionalism and teacher judgement. These policies position teachers as active agents of change in curriculum development and appear to recognise teacher agency, the ability to critically shape our own response to perceived change, as an important feature of teacher professionalism (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015).

In line with this wider global shift, the original discourse around Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in Scotland emphasised the role that teachers should play in forming and shaping policy, positioning teachers as ‘agents of change’ and ‘co-creators’ of the curriculum. On the surface, this move appeared to provide a degree of flexibility to schools, providing teachers with opportunities to use their professional knowledge and judgement to adapt the key principles from CfE into classroom practice. In reality, it led to concerns being raised about the lack of guidance and the potential time commitment required of classroom teachers, and raised issues about the type and amount of teacher professional learning required to implement CfE as originally conceived.

In 2014, the Scottish Government commissioned the OECD to conduct a review of the implementation of CfE and related impacts on quality and equity in Scottish schools. The report, ‘Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective’ was published in 2015 (and can be obtained through the OECD website: www.oecd.org). It made a set of recommendations to improve the continued implementation of CfE, the impact of which are fairly significant for teachers and the context in which they work and learn. Increased evaluation on teaching practice and a move to measure individual pupil learning place the classroom teacher in a vulnerable position. Furthermore, the enforcement of stricter curriculum guidelines removes the flexibility and opportunity for teacher autonomy that the original intentions of CfE created.

The OECD review also suggested that the proposed National Improvement Framework (NIF) had the potential to provide the robust evidence base that CfE lacked. As the NIF was under

development during the time that this review was conducted, this recommendation might be read as more of an endorsement. Given the increasing influence of the OECD on national education reforms, it is perhaps unsurprising that this suggestion was followed by a succession of policy documents supporting the NIF and plans for its delivery.

The NIF and the subsequent 'Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education' (DEESE) set out the Scottish Government's vision for education, listing six key drivers of improvement, one of which was teacher professionalism. A succession of NIF-related documents has been released, including detailed 'delivery plans', all of which draw on the OECD rhetoric around 'teacher quality' and its role in achieving 'excellence and equity'. Each of these documents contain statements about the importance of improving teacher professionalism and professional learning and it is clear that professional learning is being used as a tool to drive change (Sachs, 2016). There is some indication as to how the Government plans to do this, but a number of claims are made about the skills that teachers should possess in order to deliver this plan. They should develop as enquiring professionals and as experts in teaching literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing while increasing their participation in Masters level learning. They suggest that school inspection, local authority self-evaluation reports, information about teacher engagement in Professional Update and the collection of teacher views should assist in this. With the subsequent parliamentary focus on gathering evidence around teacher workforce planning and teacher education (see records for the Education and Skills Committee business in May 2017, at www.parliament.scot) it has become clear that teachers, and teacher professional learning, have become an increasingly more prominent part of the 'age of measurement' (Biesta, 2017). This has important implications for the ways in which teacher professional learning is made accountable.

Of course, this whole context is made even more precarious in the wake of the outcomes of the Governance Review, '*Education Governance: next Steps*', published in June 2017. The 'excellence and equity' mantra is found throughout the report, and the argument for change draws heavily on OECD publications. In terms of professional learning, there is a clear call for greater coherence and 'streamlining', under the auspices of a 'renewed and revitalised Education Scotland' (p. 38) which will support new 'regional improvement

collaboratives'. These regional collaboratives, the Government argues, are 'best placed to co-ordinate hands-on professional learning and leadership development to teachers in line with a focus on developing methods of improvement that work for local circumstances.' (ibid.).

Teacher professionalism, teacher leadership and professional learning are all positioned as key drivers in the Government's plan to deliver their vision of 'excellence and equity'. The use of the term 'empowering teachers' in the review title suggests that the reform might align with a democratic model of teacher professionalism. However, this appears less likely when a case is made for a system based on 'effective accountability' where individuals can be held 'responsible for their actions'. A further tension emerges when professional learning is positioned as an 'expectation' as well as an 'entitlement', pointing to divergent conceptions of professional learning and professionalism. The aftermath of the Governance Review represents a time of uncertainty around the future of school education, and it is likely that the significant changes proposed will change the way that professional learning is structured, funded and supported, and potentially influence the types of professional learning that are valued.

Around the same time as the Governance Review was open to consultation, the most recent results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were published (see Chapter 68 for details). PISA, a product of the OECD, is a triennial assessment of mathematics, reading and science that evaluates education systems by testing the skills and knowledge of a sample of fifteen- year-old students. Despite being the subject of much methodological criticism, PISA data is a key driving force of policy and is often used by governments to compare education systems within what is becoming an increasingly competitive space. Its most dominant use in Scotland tends to be as a policy tool: it appears and re-appears in political discourse to justify educational reform, despite the criticisms and concerns that surround it.

In a similar vein, the results of the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN) were published in May 2017 and showed a decline in literacy, leading to panic about 'falling standards' and a knee-jerk response which lay the blame, in large part, at the feet of

teachers, and teacher education. Given the globally assumed link between teacher quality and student attainment, recent PISA and SSLN results have further increased expectations on teachers to improve ‘excellence and equity’, with a consequent focus on teacher professional learning.

THE STRUCTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND THE FORCES THAT SHAPE IT

This section outlines the key structures that currently shape and govern teachers’ professional learning in Scotland. In line with the move from ‘in-service education’ to ‘professional learning’, there has been a gradual diversification of different types of professional learning with informal teacher-led events such as TeachMeet, live discussions on Twitter and collaborative blogging, growing in popularity. Traditional forms, such as one-off CPD events, still exist, alongside more formal accredited Masters-level CPD, and these activities also now often interweave new technologies into their existing format (e.g. using hashtags to share events and stimulate discussion). With the emergence of new technologies and new platforms, CPD is not restricted to the local, but can involve teachers engaging internationally. This brings enormous possibilities, but also interesting challenges and a need to reconceptualise where the control of professional learning lies.

There are a number of organisations involved in the delivery and support of professional learning, including Education Scotland, local authorities, charities, private providers, professional associations such as the Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS) and, of course, the Scottish College for Educational Leadership, established as a result of the Donaldson Report. Some of these can be considered as shaping forces in their own rights, and make important contributions to the overall professional learning narrative, but the organisation that arguably plays the most significant role in shaping and governing teacher professional learning is the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) (see also discussion in Chapter 94). Alongside the development of policies and standards, the GTCS supports and promotes the development of high-quality professional learning in Scottish education through a number of different platforms and tools. It provides a range of resources and systems to encourage teachers to engage with various aspects of professional learning. For example, it

provides access to a catalogue of academic journals and e-books for all registered teachers in Scotland and has developed 'Education Hub', an online space to promote discussion around research. It also has the capacity to award 'Professional Recognition' to individual teachers, acknowledging formally their enhanced learning in specific areas, and soon, to make 'Professional Learning Awards' to institutions which demonstrate organisational commitment to professional learning. However, its formal functions in relation to post-qualification professional learning focus on two interlocking areas: Professional Standards and Professional Update.

Professional Standards

The GTCS maintains a 'suite' of Professional Standards for all registered teachers. However, the standards within the suite perform a range of both mandatory and developmental functions, rendering it, arguably, a suite in name only (Kennedy, 2016). The current version of the standards was introduced in 2012, and they are currently under review again, with the revised suite due to be launched in August 2019. The current suite comprises the following:

- **The Standards for Registration**, encompassing the Standard for Provisional Registration (SPR) and the Standard for Full Registration (SFR). These are mandatory for all registered teachers in Scotland. Student teachers are expected to meet the SPR on completion of their ITE course, and the SFR on completion of their induction year. The SFR provides the baseline for career-long competence, and therefore performs a significant regulatory function (Watson & Fox, 2015).
- **The Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning (CLPL)** replaces the Standard for Chartered Teacher, which underpinned the Chartered Teacher Programme, prior to its abolition in 2012. The Standard for CLPL is 'not designed as a benchmark of teacher competence; rather it is distinctive in that it is designed to inform and support teachers to develop and improve their learning and practice in a systematic way which reflects their growing expertise and their ability to work in different contexts' (p. 5)
- **The Standards for Leadership and Management** supersede the 2005 Standard for Headship and include both the Standard for Middle Leadership and the Standard for

Headship. They were 'developed to support the self-evaluation and professional learning of those in, or aspiring to, formal leadership roles in schools' (p. 2)

Each of the Standards is built around three inter-related categories: 1) Professional values and personal commitment; 2) Professional knowledge and understanding; and, 3) Professional skills and attributes. Although the content and format of the second and third categories differ between each standard, the list of professional values remains the same throughout the entire suite: social justice, integrity, trust and respect, and professional commitment to life-long enquiry, learning, professional development and leadership.

The importance of educational research and an enquiry-based approach to professional learning is built into the Standards from the very beginning. For example, to 'achieve' the SFR teachers must be able to engage critically with literature, educational research and policy; engage in reflective practice to enhance professional learning; and, contribute to the professional learning of colleagues.

Professional Update

In 2012, the Scottish Government tasked the GTCS with developing a system of active registration within which all teachers would be required to participate. Following a consultation process and a two-phase pilot, the GTCS introduced 'Professional Update' (PU) in 2014. In order to maintain registration with the GTCS, all teachers are required to engage with PU and participate in a 'sign-off' process every five years where their participation is confirmed officially to the GTCS. Two key purposes of PU as stated by the GTCS on its website are to:

- Maintain and improve the quality of our teachers as outlined in the relevant GTCS Professional Standards and to enhance the impact that they have on pupils' learning.
- Support, maintain and enhance teachers' continued professionalism and the reputation of the teaching profession in Scotland

PU is promoted as an ongoing process that brings together two pre-existing elements of professional learning: a system of self-evaluation against appropriate GTCS professional standards and participation in the professional review and development process (PRD). As

such, PU might be recognised as the driving regulatory force behind professional learning. Watson and Fox (2015) highlight a tension here between divergent functions of the process. On one hand, it is promoted to teachers as an 'entitlement' to help and support in various aspects of their professional learning journey, while on the other, it has the potential to be used as an accountability tool to measure teacher professionalism as a condition of ongoing licensing.

A Framework for Professional Learning

At the time of writing, the GTCS was developing a new framework for professional learning, which articulates an enhanced model of teacher professionalism. The purpose of the model is to outline the core purposes and principles of professional learning. Essentially, it will provide a rich and detailed description of the type of learning perceived to have impact on student learning. The framework is intended to work alongside the current Professional Standards and PU, serving as a conceptual umbrella under which the various aspects of professional learning sit.

Reflecting the shift from 'teacher development' to 'teacher learning', the central focus of the model is the teacher as *learner* and the relationship between teacher learning and student learning. The development of this model is underpinned by educational research and theory and the theoretical element of the model is promoted as one of its driving features. Although the development of Professional Standards and PU were informed by research, the links to theory were less clear.

Drawing on work by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), the model promotes the importance of *professional capital*, suggesting that it can only develop when teachers have access to the following:

- 1) High-quality, career-long professional learning that helps to develop deep knowledge and critical understanding about learning, teaching and education (human capital)
- 2) The development of relationships and partnerships through collaborative practice: learning with and from others (social capital)

- 3) Effective and informed professional judgement driven by an 'enquiry stance' and shaped by professional values (decisional capital).

Another body of research that this model draws on is the literature around teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), claiming that teacher agency is an important and necessary element of teacher professionalism. Teachers are viewed as 'active agents of change' and the model recognises that the development of agency requires the appropriate support structures to be put in place.

Given the timing of the development of the model, it could be assumed that it has been developed in response to the NIF and subsequent DEESE. The increased focus on the 'impact' of teacher learning might be seen as an attempt to better align the agendas of improved professional learning and the development of a system characterised by 'excellence and equity'. The GTCS explicitly states that teacher professionalism is the most important driver out of the six drivers listed by the NIF for closing the attainment gap. Although this framework appears to empower teachers by highlighting the importance of teacher agency and professional capital, it also positions individual teachers as fundamental to change, and therefore central to delivering government's policy objectives. The extent to which this overarching conceptual framework will impact on practice remains to be seen.

Teacher-led Professional Learning

There has recently been a significant shift towards teacher-led forms of professional learning in Scotland: informal events or collaborative spaces that encourage teachers to promote or share ideas, enquiry or research. The most important feature of this kind of learning is that it is organised by teachers for teachers, although is sometimes supported by organisations such as GTCS and SCEL.

Perhaps the most well-known example of teacher-led professional learning is 'TeachMeet'. This began in Scotland, but can now be found across the globe. TeachMeets are described as 'unconferences' and are organised as informal meetings for teachers to share ideas and good practice. Although grass-roots professional learning existed pre-Donaldson, it is

possible that its increasing popularity is partly due to the increasing narrative promoting the importance of teachers to take responsibility for their own professional learning.

Social media platforms, such as Twitter, have continued to grow in popularity as online spaces for collaborative professional learning. An increasing number of teachers are engaging in online discussion groups, which are accessed through shared hashtags. One example of this is #ScotEdChat, which is a weekly online discussion on Twitter on various topics in Scottish education. This can be seen as a form of collaborative professional learning, where a network of teachers can connect with other teachers across Scotland and internationally.

Another form of online professional learning that has recently increased in popularity is teacher blogging, one example of which is Pedagoo. This is a growing community of teachers who support each other in a collaborative way, encourage each other and share innovative and effective approaches to education, taking the form of a collaborative blog, which is promoted and discussed through Twitter.

The focus on teacher professional learning in Scotland appears to have intensified in the past twenty years since it first became a policy priority. The foregoing discussion has sought to provide an outline of the current structure and policy context. The chapter now concludes with some observations about challenges and the potential future direction of professional learning.

CONCLUSION

The current policy context, both nationally and internationally, provides a number of significant challenges for teacher professional learning. Internationally, the continued heralding of a meta-narrative which links teacher quality to pupil outcomes sets a high-stakes agenda for teachers and for those who shape and support their learning. The importance of this agenda to governments globally serves to further support the principles underpinning the 'age of measurement'. Nationally, this global agenda is playing out explicitly in the Scottish Government's 'National Improvement Framework' with its growing

emphasis on identifying and employing tools for performance measurement. There is a danger that the 'evidence' arising from these performance measurements (which are not always able to measure what counts) will be used to suggest that teachers are not appropriately equipped to carry out the demands of the role, and that a culture of blame will ensue. While not denying the link between great teachers and good pupil outcomes, the age of measurement appears to bypass issues of ideology, values and the fundamental purpose of education.

The performative measures valued in this age of measurement could, of course, be balanced to an extent by the existence of a wider range of research evidence focusing on teacher professional learning. This should include high quality policy studies which focus not simply on measurable outcomes of professional learning, but on the unintended or unplanned outcomes, on the policy process itself, and on developing more nuanced and sophisticated ways to identify and evaluate the impact of teacher professional learning. This would require two things in particular (Kennedy, 2017, pp. 580-581): policy research which is planned at the outset of policy developments; and teacher education/professional learning policy to be deemed to be of significant enough value to be granted funding. With a Western university research culture which tends not to value 'local' or 'insider' research, this could prove to be a significant challenge.

In calling for greater value and investment in policy research which focuses on teacher professional learning, it is important also to acknowledge that such research is not without its conceptual challenges. Measuring 'quality' in professional learning would require us to define more clearly and accurately what such quality looks like, and to be able to understand causal conditions, even if they are at the level of broad contextual features. When we consider the range and type of activities that might be considered to constitute professional learning, we can begin to see the size of this challenge. For example, this chapter highlights a growth in teacher-initiated professional learning, and yet this is happening alongside an increased focus on the importance of Masters-level, and increasingly, formal, Masters-accredited learning. The challenge of identifying factors within each of these two spheres that lead to 'good' professional learning is not insignificant.

In conclusion, we suggest that in order for Scottish professional learning to continue to be seen as world-leading, we need to reconsider the balance between externally-imposed accountability, and teacher-initiated accountability which provides space for individuals and school communities to drive the nature and priority of professional learning activities. Above all else, this should not be a discussion which exists only among senior policy-makers, it must include teachers and the wider education community in talking together about what constitutes valuable and worthwhile professional learning, and how we might best account for our actions in this sphere.

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