Teacher professional learning in Scotland during (and after) the COVID-19 pandemic: A story of hope and humanity?

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic changed teachers' personal and professional lives almost overnight as we all moved our lives online to be at a safe social distance from each other. In some ways this has been a leveller in that almost nobody has escaped the influence of the pandemic, but COVID-related mitigations in teacher professional learning have undoubtedly made issues of access and equity better for some and more challenging for others. This article explores how changes to teacher professional learning in Scotland have both advantaged and disadvantaged particular teachers in particular contexts. It then goes on to illuminate how elements of the pre-pandemic dominant discourse in teacher professional learning have been both maintained and disrupted. The article concludes by articulating a series of lessons learned: things to be kept, nurtured and developed; things to be avoided or to be wary of; and excitingly, things that might be possible in the future as a result of this experience.

Keywords: teacher professional learning; COVID-19; Scotland; professional standards; discourse; rural

Introduction

This article explores teacher professional learning in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic with a future-oriented gaze. However, before exploring the history of teacher professional learning policy in Scotland, it is worth pointing out that despite Scotland being a part of the United Kingdom (UK), it has had its own separate education legislation since 1885, and that since 1999 and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, education has been a devolved function. Scotland has also long-enjoyed a professional body for teaching, with the General Teaching Council for Scotland being established in 1966. Since the late 1980s all teachers in Scotland have been required to have at least a Bachelor's degree, and all initial teacher education is university-based (see Shanks, 2020, for detailed exploration of initial teacher preparation in Scotland). Scottish education in general is shaped by a narrative known as 'the Scottish myth', which:

> 'takes the form of a story or 'myth' shaped by history but not always supported by historical evidence, to the effect that Scotland is less class-conscious than England; that ability and achievement, not rank, should determine success in the world; that public (rather than private) institutions should be the means of trying to bring about the good society; and that, even where merit does justify differential rewards, there are certain basic respects – arising from the common humanity of men and women – in which human beings deserve equal consideration and treatment.' (Humes and Bryce, 2013, p. 139)

While this myth undoubtedly shapes the narrative, there is significant debate about the extent to which it is actually borne out in evidence.

Scotland is a country of just under 5.5 million people, with 53,400 teachers, in which 96% of the population of young people is educated in state schools. The article starts with a brief history of teacher professional learning policy in Scotland in order that what follows can be understood in context. From this overview key markers of the current policy discourse are highlighted. With these discourse highlights in mind, the article then goes on to explore teachers' professional learning experiences during lockdown, examining the extent to which these experience support or challenge the pre-pandemic policy discourse. It concludes by considering what lessons might be learned from these experiences and what the future of teacher professional learning post-pandemic might look like. It is, above all else, a story of humanity and hope.

Teacher professional learning in Scotland: the policy context

Teacher professional learning in Scotland has been taken seriously in policy terms since the late 1990s, with the publication of '*Proposals for Developing a Framework for Continuing Professional Development for the Teaching Profession in Scotland*' (Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, 1998). This national consultation asked questions which have paved the way for more recent developments, and has arguably shaped the current dominant discourse. In addition to asking questions about whether or not there was a perceived need for such a framework, the consultation sought views on, amongst other things, who might oversee such a framework, whether continuing professional development (CPD) should be a contractual requirement of teachers, how records of CPD might be kept and whether a set of standards would be necessary. Interestingly, while the majority of questions focused on issues of regulation and accountability, the consultation also asked about what CPD might be needed in order to create greater job satisfaction for teachers, recognising what Biesta (2009) would categorise as a 'subjectification' purpose of education, that is, that education, or in this case professional learning, might also serve to fulfil one's own intrinsic motivation rather than existing purely to support the current social order. This is an interesting and often debated point – how can teacher professional learning policies and practices satisfy both teachers' own needs and desires as well as institutional and systemic needs and desires (assuming that these do not always align entirely).

Shortly after the 1998 consultation, an impasse between teacher unions and teacher employers (local authorities) resulted in a wide-ranging inquiry into teachers' working conditions – the 'McCrone Report' (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2000). The resulting agreement (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2001) made new provisions relating to professional development which included, for the first time, a mandatory additional 35 hours of CPD per year (over and above and professional learning/CPD that takes place within teachers' contracted 35 hour working week), and annual professional review. Alongside this, work had started on what we now call the suite of professional standards, initially focusing on initial teacher education and then provisional/full registration (Purdon, 2003). Work progressed at pace, but what was never truly articulated, was the underpinning purpose of CPD, thereby allowing competing agendas to co-exist – a situation which arguably still exists today, and which the COVID-19 pandemic has shone further light on, as explored below.

Over the intervening 20 years between the McCrone agreement and now, teacher professional learning has been subject to numerous reforms (see Kennedy, 2008; Kennedy, 2013; Kennedy and Beck, 2018), including, notably, the '*Teaching Scotland's Future*' report (Donaldson, 2011). Teacher professional learning is now well-embedded in the policy landscape, shaped by the suite of professional standards of which the General Teaching Council for Scotland is guardian (see www.gtcs.org.uk). This suite, the latest version of which was published in 2020, includes standards for: provisional registration; full registration; career-long professional learning; middle leadership; and headship. The standards follow the traditional format of listing competences under three key domains common to most sets of standards across the globe, namely, professional knowledge, professional skills and professional values. Sinnema et al. (2017) express surprise at this homogeneity over geography and time, stating that:

> Given the demands on teaching presented by the changes over time in the educational context—increasingly challenging curricula, exacting accountabilities, and serious issues of achievement inequity—it is striking that there have not also been more marked changes over time in the design of teaching standards. (p. 10)

This observation seems even more pertinent in the face of recent pandemic-related challenges. Coincidentally, the revised suite of professional standards puts even more emphasis on professional values, articulating these as being social justice, trust and respect, and integrity, and requiring the same values-based commitment of all teachers at every stage of their career, that is, this section is exactly the same in each standard. In addition, each of the standards puts explicit emphasis on teachers engaging critically with research and policy, and engaging in practitioner enquiry. The standards also expect teachers to know about learning communities, to work in partnership to support young people's health and wellbeing. The discourse evident in these aspects relates quite closely to the Scottish myth outlined earlier, conveying a commitment to the development and wellbeing of all young people and recognition of the individual communities in which they live and learn. However, the extent to which these aspects of the standards are valued and focused on compared with the more routine aspects of classroom organisation and management remains a point of debate.

In addition to the now fairly entrenched organising structure of the professional standards, teachers in Scotland are also expected to engage in the annual 'professional review and development' process which is associated with a process of 'professional update' where teachers are required to account for their ongoing professional learning to the General Teaching Council for Scotland every five years in order to maintain their registration. There exists, therefore an intricate web of professional learning policies which purport on the one hand to be developmental and collaboratively focused, yet on the other provide a fairly heavy externally-mandated and deeply individualised accountability mechanism. The developmental approach is encapsulated in policy discourse via the [national model of professional learning](#) . This model seeks to 'support education professionals to grow professionally and seek improvement in their practice' (Education Scotland website). It elucidates three ways of learning that it suggests derive from best evidence, namely:

learning-as-collaborative; learning by enquiring; and learning that deepens knowledge and understanding.

Outwith these mandated policy tools, there has been a general move towards supporting professional learning at Masters-level, something that first creeped into the discourse through the '*Teaching Scotland's Future'* report (Donaldson, 2011), which stated that:

> While I am not advocating a 'Masters profession' as a key policy driver, I do believe that advanced study is part of the enhanced professionalism which runs through the Review's recommendations, and that the quality and demands of CPD should reflect these expectations. (p. 10)

Since 2011 access to Masters-level professional learning has been on the Scottish Government's agenda, with annual funding made available to Teacher Education Partnerships (networks comprising each of the teacher education providing universities and their neighbouring local authority employers) to support specific targeted provision. In 2020/21 this amounted to £750,000 (approximately 1,041,675 USD), which if divided evenly amongst the 53,400 teachers employed centrally in Scotland in 2020 equates to only £14 (20 USD) per teacher. It seems impossible to think that this level of investment could make a major impact, but it does signal support for a particular policy direction. The growing emphasis on Masters-level teacher education is evident in terms of its use as a performance indicator in the annual National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2020), and can also be seen in initial teacher education policy development, yet there remains a lack of conceptual clarity as to the fundamental purpose of supporting Masters-level professional learning for teachers (Kennedy and Carse, 2020).

In summary, teacher professional learning policy in Scotland is shaped around the professional standards and includes a range of policy levers which require compliance and accountability. The policy narrative is simultaneously framed by a focus on social justice, collaborative learning and practitioner enquiry. These two perspectives sit alongside each other in the policy discourse, but their alignment in practice is perhaps more of a challenge, as is ensuring that all 53,400 teachers in Scotland are familiar with this complex collection of policy levers and expectations.

Teacher professional learning in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic: affordances and constraints
In March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic led to lockdown in Scotland, with 'The Coronavirus Act 2020' mandating school closures that lasted from March 2020 until the end of the academic session in late June 2020, and then again from January 2021 until roughly April 2021 for most schoolchildren. Since March 2020 teachers have had to work in a variety of ways: teaching fully online from home, in blended ways with some children in school and some working from home, and fully in school with social distancing measures in place. While the emerging literature reports fairly widely on the impact of these emergency measures on children and young people's experiences (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020; Green, 2020) and on initial teacher preparation (Flores and Swennen, 2020), it pays less heed to the impact on teachers themselves, and their professional learning in particular.

Mental health and wellbeing
It is fair to say that for most teachers the immediate priority was on the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils (Beattie et al., 2021), rather than on developing their wider pedagogical competence. This was first and foremost a moral commitment on the part of teachers, but never far from school leaders' minds was the ongoing pressure to account for improvement in relation to improving the poverty-related attainment gap (Scottish Government, 2021). There has been acknowledgment of the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on vulnerable young people (Green, 2020), and teachers have been very well aware of the implications of this for them and their practice, thus perhaps shifting professional learning priorities from what they might have been pre-pandemic. While this makes perfect sense in terms of teachers engaging in learning that serves immediate purposes, it does perhaps sit at odds with the well-established approach in Scotland of professional learning plans being related closely to longer term institutional and national development plan priorities.

Health and wellbeing was already a key element of Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* pre-pandemic, with every teacher, regardless of sector or subject taught having explicit responsibility for [teaching health and wellbeing](). The COVID-19 lockdown, however, exacerbated the need to teach health and wellbeing in a much more proactive way, as well as to ensure that the '*Getting it Right for Every Child*' (GIRFEC) policy was followed. The GIRFEC approach:

- Is child-focused
- Is based on an understanding of the wellbeing of a child in their current situation
- Is based on tackling needs early
- Requires joined-up working

([Scottish Government]())

These principles, demanding at any time, became even more challenging as teachers worked remotely from the young people in their classes. With many additional care and support services withdrawn at the start of the first lockdown (Couper-Kenney and Riddell, 2020), additional pressure was put on teachers to support young people's health and wellbeing in whatever ways they could. McLennan et al. (2020) report on teachers' sudden need to familiarise themselves with the implications of the UK's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in terms of how they might communicate with children and families. Teachers were having to learn in transmissive, technicist ways in order to gather information that would enable them to work in new and unfamiliar contexts, thereby often having to shift their previous professional learning priorities. However, despite the technicist need for knowledge, McLennan et al. (2020) reveal the moral dilemmas underpinning this need for new knowledge to operate in new times. They share a quote from Jeannie, a primary teacher in Scotland who says:

> "we've got to be really careful … with GDPR and all the rest of it. So yeah, there's a lot to think about, so initial ideas are like what can I do? What can I do? What can I do? But then it's whittling it down to what we are actually allowed to do." (p. 151)

McLennan et al (2020) point to the efforts that teachers made for the young people in their care, hinting at the emotional labour involved in not only caring in the first place, but working out how to care in a performative and heavily regulated context where accountability looms large. This suggests that professional learning during the pandemic which has been driven by emotion, exigencies and legal frameworks – a complex set of drivers.

While much of the focus of teaching through the pandemic has been on children and young people's health and wellbeing, there has also been some recognition of the toll on teachers' health and wellbeing. This had been on the agenda in Scotland for some time, but had not really been given due recognition in a systematic way. The pandemic has provided impetus to think more seriously about teachers' wellbeing, and considerable investment has been put into the provision of [1:1 coaching for headteachers and for teachers](#) new in post or working in pastoral or child protection roles. However, it has been recognised that in order to avoid teacher 'burnout', sustained positive intervention is required (Iancu et al., 2017), and so it will be important to ensure that these supports are not seen as purely measures to get through the height of the pandemic.

Digital competence
In addition to the pressing priority of supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, the requirement to engage in emergency remote teaching also forced teachers to have to familiarise themselves not only with how to use new digital tools, but also to engage in thinking about digital pedagogy (Brown et al., 2021). Emergency remote teaching should be considered as distinct from online or distance education which is pre-planned and pedagogically theorised (Beattie et al., 2021); crucially, the 'emergency' aspect presents several challenges: 'a weak theoretical underpinning; gaps in professional knowledge; and difficulties in application due to the novel contexts in which it occurs' (Beattie et al, 2021, p. 2).

The requirements of emergency remote teaching led to teacher competence being considered in different ways than it had hitherto (Brown et al., 2021), and those teachers who were considered as digitally literate or digital champions, were suddenly much more explicitly and actively valued than they had previously. In their study of new teachers' capacity to respond to emergency remote teaching in Scotland, Shanks and Carver (2021) found that many new teachers suddenly found themselves cast in the role of digital expert, and felt explicitly valued by their more experienced peers. The sudden requirement to be digitally pedagogically competent served to disrupt traditional hierarchies of expertise, and to focus in a more targeted way on the skills that individual teachers could bring to the school team that seemed more overtly based on actual competence than on time served. Importantly, for early phase professional learning more generally, this study suggests that there is no need for initial teacher education to prepare graduates for every eventuality, and that Scottish initial teacher education seems to be doing a good job of preparing graduates in a more sustainable way whereby reflexivity is sufficiently well-developed to enable them to apply broad concepts to specific situations. Interestingly, this perhaps challenges Beattie et al's (2021) suggestion that applying pedagogical skills and knowledge in a novel context, such as pandemic-related emergency remote teaching, is necessarily a barrier.

Abaci et al. (2021) report a change in teachers' attitudes towards professional learning for online and blended learning, stating that:

> Where online learning might previously have been associated with a "removed" or distant model of pedagogy, it now became the means for communities to stay connected and in this way meet teachers' deep need to communicate with and care for the students and their families.
>
> (p. 31)

Lundie and Law (2020) provide further evidence of teachers' enthusiasm for engaging in professional learning relating to online teaching, reporting that 81.8% of the 704 (mainly Scottish) teachers who responded to their survey had 'actively sought out CPD to improve their online teaching during the [school] closure' (p. 2). In addition, they too suggest that teachers are keen not to go back to how things were, with 78.1% of respondents predicting that 'a new balance will need to be struck between the former model of face-to-face teaching and the online model which has rapidly emerged' (Lundie and Law, 2020, p. 2). Thus, the previous focus on 'classroom management' or 'classroom organisation' as a central aspect of professional learning now needs actively reconsidered, as a wider conception of 'classroom' emerges.

Much of the professional learning referred to above, that teachers engaged in to enhance their online teaching, was teacher-initiated. It involved teachers networking with each other, often via Twitter, and a new market emerged where expertise was traded freely and willingly. Unfortunately, there is no empirical evidence of this, rather these claims are made based on observations and conversations during the lockdown period, but it seems highly likely that such practices will endure beyond the COVID pandemic. What is already known empirically, however, is that online platform such as Twitter can serve to shift traditional hierarchies, doing away with traditional gatekeepers, and allowing for the free trade of opinions and ideas (Visser et al., 2014). Greenhalgh and Koeler (2017) refer to this as 'just in time' teacher professional development, something that the sudden move to emergency remote teaching required in abundance. We also know that early career teachers, many of whom had been at the vanguard of this professional learning focus, were pleased to share their expertise with other colleagues (Shanks and Carver, 2021), trading their specific digital knowledge for the context and experiential knowledge of their more experienced colleagues, and challenging traditionally conservative hierarchies based on length of service. What is not so clear, is the extent to which teachers considered the quality of these professional learning experiences from a critical stance, but as schools and teachers felt increasing loss of control (policy decisions were often made and then overturned with little notice), teacher-initiated professional learning was something that they could exercise some control over.

Access to professional learning
In addition to increasing choice and fewer gatekeeping barriers, teachers were suddenly able to access a much greater range of professional learning opportunities that would previously have been closed to them due to geography and timing. For example, teachers were better able to attend events such as online conferences, and seminars that were

hosted outwith the UK. This enables teachers to engage in professional learning alongside other professionals such as policymakers and academics, as well as to make connections with teacher in other counties. This has long been an issue for many teachers in Scotland working in remote and rural locations. Scotland has a population of just over 5.46 million, 70% of whom live in what is called the Central Belt – the most densely populated area of the country, which includes the major cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Of the 30% of the population who live outside of the Central Belt, 17% live in what the Scottish Government classifies as 'rural areas'. This means that a not insignificant number of teachers work in rural areas – some in accessible rural areas and some in remote areas, including a number of islands off the north and west coasts.

While the accessibility of *initial* teacher education in remote and rural areas has been given some national policy attention (Redford, 2020), this has tended to be driven by recruitment concerns. Accessibility of good post-qualification professional learning has arguably been given less attention in Scotland, although there is evidence of more explicit attention elsewhere, particularly in Australia (Broadley, 2012) and China (Wang et al., 2017). One of the big barriers identified across the globe, and mirrored in Scotland (Coker, 2021) is the relative lack of digital access in remote and rural areas.

Broadley (2012) highlights not only the practical barriers of time and access, but also that many teachers in remote and rural schools work in very small schools where learning with and from colleagues cannot happen in daily practice, something Wang et al. (2017) highlight in identifying a relative lack of opportunity for peer-observation, collective lesson planning and mentoring and coaching in rural schools. Broadley (2012) also raises issues about access to opportunities that might support teachers in future promotion applications, such as working on projects at regional level, something that Coker's (2021) more recent work also found. This work points to two levels of disadvantage faced by rural teachers in terms of their professional learning: immediate barriers of access and the longer-term negative impact on future prospects. It is fair to say that these barriers most definitely would have been experienced by rural teachers in Scotland pre-pandemic. However, with the advent of online working, much, although by no means all, of this has been overcome. However, these positives come with one very important caveat which was raised not only by teachers, but also by health professionals and business professionals in a recent study in rural Scotland (Coker, 2021), that is, that while access to professional learning can be made easier via online means, 'digital technology mediated interactions present a challenge to the development of social capital, the nuances of dialogue are not picked up' (p. 664).

This concern about the development of social capital via online interactions points to barriers beyond simply those of geography. Macintyre and Macdonald (2011) pose the question 'remote from what?', pointing out that, from their study of remote rural students studying for Open University degrees (Open University was the UK's first fully distance learning university, established in 1969), remoteness is not necessarily simply geographical, but is also relative to an individual's personal circumstances. This distinction was brought into sharp relief during lockdown periods where some teachers found themselves remote, despite living in densely populated areas. In particular, teachers classified as medically vulnerable were forced to self-isolate while their colleagues returned to face-to-face teaching in school buildings.

The above discussion reveals a number of challenges, but also a number of affordances. What is absolutely fundamental at this point in time, as we turn out attention to post-pandemic ways of living and working, is how we capitalise on the affordances rather than simply slipping back into old norms. The following section considers the extent to which these affordances and constraints fit, or otherwise, with the pre-pandemic dominant discourse of teacher professional learning in Scotland.

Maintaining and disrupting the discourse
During COVID-19 lockdowns the policy discourse on collaborative professional learning and 'learning communities' remained but took a slightly different shape as traditional barriers and borders suddenly disappeared. Overnight, learning communities were not bound by geography or even by time zone, giving teachers new-found access to wider networks than had previously been possible. Teachers could finally access not only other teachers across the globe but could also attend conferences with Scottish policymakers and academics that often ran during the day. Thus, while the discourse of learning communities remained, it changed shape fairly dramatically.

From a slightly different perspective, the discourse of community challenged how relationships would be constructed between teachers and families. Teachers came into young people's homes via online teaching, something that some teachers found to be an additional pressure, with Brown et al. (2021) reporting that 'teachers felt their work was 'scrutinized' by parents' (p. 6). Yet this breaking down of traditional boundaries also opened up new possibilities in terms of mutual understanding and new relationships (Brown et al., 2021).

The importance of digital literacy has been creeping slowly into the professional learning discourse, but obviously, with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns, this priority has been exacerbated. In many ways this has acted as a significant affordance, as there has been investment in both hard and software and in teacher learning, advantaging rurally-located teachers in particular by removing some of the previous barriers to accessing professional learning opportunities. However, as we head towards a new post-pandemic way of working, there remain questions about the extent to which this unfettered access can continue. With the likelihood that some in-person meetings and gatherings will resume, rather than all being conducted entirely online, the system is facing new challenges in relation to both the resources and the pedagogy required to support events at which both in-person and remote engagement can occur simultaneously.

The pre-pandemic professional learning discourse in Scotland was very much about Masters-level, transformative professional learning, but the sudden requirements for emergency remote teaching arguably created a (temporary) shift in favour of what might be termed transmissive professional learning (Kennedy, 2014), that is professional learning that focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and skills rather than on the adaptation of 'meaning making perspectives' (Mezirow, 2006) which might lead to permanent changes in deeper understanding. In particular, not only did teachers have to learn how to use new digital tools, but as children and young people began to return to school buildings, teachers

had to learn, and keep up to date with, new health and safety procedures related to national public health measures around face-coverings, social distancing, cleaning and hand-washing/sanitising.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to pre-pandemic ways of working was the sense in which teachers' professional learning priorities become much more local and short-term rather than the longer-term, institutional priorities that most teachers would previously have identified through their professional review and development process. This, coupled with largely unfettered access to online learning opportunities placed control of their professional learning much more squarely in teachers' own hands. It is probably fair to conclude that many of the choices teachers made about their professional learning during lockdown were very clearly aligned with the professional standards' focus on values, particularly in relation to social justice. However, it appears that the focus on practitioner enquiry was perhaps one of the casualties of lockdown professional learning for teachers, owing to its slightly longer-term nature.

Lessons learned and future possibilities
Exploring teacher professional learning during lockdown surfaces many challenges, some longstanding that have been brought to the surface again recently, and some more recent as a result of the move to emergency remote teaching. In particular, the foregoing exploration suggests three key areas where teacher professional learning in Scotland might usefully be considered differently in the future: communication with young people and their families; a widening of what might be considered as pedagogical spaces; and the design and use of professional standards as the spine of professional learning policy.

Communication with young people and their families.
It is clear that when push comes to shove, teachers' priority is the wellbeing of the young people in their care. What the emerging evidence tells us is that COVID-19 has forced teachers to find new ways to communicate with young people and their families. This new and urgent demand requires professional learning in both how to communicate using digital channels and how to navigate what has sometimes seemed like insurmountable legislative and policy barriers (GDPR legislation being just one). The central message here seems to be that professional learning for teachers needs to be much more responsive to contemporary times, and that it needs to provide space for teachers to explore dilemmas and seek new solutions without being closed down because of rules that have been established for different purposes and in different times. As McLennan et al. (2020) powerfully claim, 'The lockdown gave these teachers new possibilities of caring, thus giving teachers the possibility to go beyond the 'norm' of care established within their classrooms and schools' (p. 179); surely this is something we want to keep as we move into a post-pandemic environment.

(Re)consideration of what constitutes pedagogical spaces
The pandemic surfaced the need for professional learning to expand teachers' ability to work in different pedagogical spaces. In particular, the move to emergency remote teaching has necessitated teachers' engagement with online and blended learning, in terms of both technical skills and pedagogical knowledge. More widely, this move has afforded the opportunity for teachers to reflect in a more focused way on what constitutes productive learning spaces, and the pedagogical approaches underpinning teaching in these spaces.

Pre-pandemic, a focus on digital pedagogy was really just beginning to gain traction in the teacher professional learning discourse in Scotland through, for example, its inclusion in the professional standards and the publication of a framework for digital literacy in initial teacher education (SCDE, 2020). Concurrent with this has been an increased emphasis on education for sustainability in Scotland, with a growing narrative around not only outdoor learning, but also place-based learning, which adapts the education experience to 'the unique characteristics of particular places' (Smith, 2002, p. 1). Smith (2002) advocates place-based learning as a means of helping to overcome 'the disjuncture between schools and children's lives that is found in too many classrooms'. Reflecting on the pandemic experiences of teachers in Scotland, it would seem that both digital pedagogy and place-based learning coalesce around notions of broadening where and how our young people can learn, and teachers can teach. The time is surely now for the focus of professional learning to be widened beyond thinking about teaching in traditional wall-bound classroom spaces.

Professional standards as the spine of professional learning policy
Finally, it seems that despite the very recent launch of a revised set of professional standards, there is a need to interrogate the shape and role of professional standards in a much more fundamental way. What this exploration of teacher professional learning during COVID-19 tentatively reveals is that while the professional standards perhaps still stand as the spine supporting professional learning policy, they are less impactful in terms of shaping teachers' professional learning choices. Rather, I suggest that in many cases they may well be used retrospectively to account for professional learning rather than prospectively to shape it. It seems much more likely that local exigencies and teachers' ethical decision-making in relation to young people's present needs have taken priority. There is now a conversation to be had about how exigency and emotion as drivers of professional learning can be balanced alongside institutional and national policy demands. The answer perhaps lies in Sinnema et al's (2017) suggestion that it is time to think radically differently about how professional standards are designed, and what they are used for. They assert that:

> 'If standards are to function as intended, as a lever for system
> improvement, then standards need to connect explicitly with the points
> of the system that, if "moved," will have the greatest impact. If standards
> concentrate attention on what teachers know, or on what teachers know
> how to do, their potential for actually improving practice is unlikely to be
> realized. Standards with that focus may well lead to greater teacher
> knowledge or know how but will not necessarily lead to better application
> of that knowledge.' (p. 21)

Sinnema et al (2017) therefore argue that the focus of standards should be on guiding and shaping practice through systematic and focused inquiries, thus locating teacher learning within its applied context. This proposal requires systemic trust in teachers, and a permissive environment which not only allows, but encourages teachers to be agentic in their professional learning. It implies a democratic orientation towards teacher professionalism, what Sachs (2001) describes as 'emerging from the profession itself' (p. 149). This stands in contrast to managerialist professionalism which she describes as 'being reinforced by employing authorities through their policies on teacher professional

development' (Sachs, 2001, p. 149). While the policy discourse in Scotland does promote a narrative of democratic professionalism, it seems clear that what we have seen during the pandemic has emerged much more clearly from the profession itself than previous professional learning practices had.

A professional learning landscape based on these underpinning values is, of course, a challenge, and some would argue, a risk, but arguably has a much better chance of creating a teaching profession fit for the future than models based on compliance and externally-mandated accountability mechanisms. This is not to say that teachers should not be accountable for their professional learning, rather that there are other ways to account that align much better with notions of professional trust and agency. More radically, we might consider what Ladson-Billings (2021) calls a 'hard re-set', taking the opportunity to focus on how education can truly be relevant for all young people, rather than going back to a pre-pandemic 'normal' in which thousands of students remain consistently under-served by state education. It seems that now is the time to take a risk with professional learning policies, and to place greater trust in teachers' own hands, embracing the humanity and hope so prominent in the pandemic experience.

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