

Book Review

Magnússon, G., Phelan, A., Heimans, S. and Unsworth, R. (Eds.) (2025), *Teacher Education and Its Discontents: Politics, Knowledge and Ethics (1<sup>st</sup> ed)*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, pp. xviii+208, ISBN 978-1-032-72750-9, pbk, £35.99.

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This is a significant, timely and thought-provoking book which illustrates common themes and problems in the politics of teacher education such as standardisation, marketisation, governance and policy, with both country-specific cases and generally formulated theoretical discussions. It has three primary aims: to illustrate and critique the ethical, epistemological and political discourses shaping teacher education; to identify and unravel the entanglements of politics, knowledge and ethics in teacher education in a range of international settings; and to revitalise teacher education by proposing and exploring alternative modes of thought and practice.

The book is one in a series based on a partnership between Routledge and the Australian Association for Research and Education (AARE) which is particularly interested in the interplay between local and global forces in education. It begins with an introduction that addresses the background context associated with “Teacher Education and its Discontents” and outlines its theoretical framing and overall approach. This is followed by nine chapters that reflect a range of country-specific cases, a chapter which aims to set a direction for future work and an Epilogue.

The content and approach on which this book is based has emerged from the collaboration of the authors in the International Teacher Education Research Collective (ITERC). In their introduction the editors describe the “emerging signature” (p. 2) of this group of scholars and teacher educators as their experience of ‘contemporariness’ and the insights gleaned from that experience. In doing so they reflect a very novel and interesting approach towards research in the field inspired by the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben and his notion of ‘the contemporary’. Central to being contemporary for

Agamben (2009) means to neither perfectly coincide with one's historical moment nor adjust to its demands.

Contemporariness involves a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. The editors argue that to be totally immersed in the present, "that is to be absolutely up to date like a devoted follower of fashion", is blindness (p. 40). Agamben asserts that an understanding of the deeper currents of our time requires us to be critical contemporaries. Furthermore, any effort to understand or grasp the present must engage with history as 'the shadow of the present'. Acknowledging the obscurity of the present leads on to an explanation of the second characterisation of being contemporary as knowing how to recognise the light in the darkness of the present. Finally, there is a section on the essay as form in which the editors justify the essay as the genre of choice for the collective writing in this book.

Readers of the Fabian Education Policy Review are likely to be especially interested in the two chapters that focus on the context in England. Both focus on the highly contested and controversial introduction of the [ITT Core Content Framework and the Early Career Framework](#). In chapter 5, Mathew Clarke and Ruth Unsworth frame their contribution as "Teacher education, agency and knowledge: Conditions of epistemic (in)justice in teacher education". The current English education reform is also the focus of chapter 8 by Lisa Murtagh and Louisa Dawes and their case study of the associated "managerialism, performance and marketisation" (p. 143) should be required reading for all education policy makers in England at this time. They outline how recent policy changes in pre-service teacher education have led to a narrowing of curricula with highly prescribed, scrutinised and authorised pedagogic practices. Against this background the work of teacher educators has become subject to homogenized, generic and narrowly conceived knowledge-led practices. In their summing up, they draw attention to the current recruitment and retention crisis in England and turn to the significant work of the education philosopher Doris Santoro (2018) in arguing that the adoption of such techno-rational practices that are premised on the measurement of performance and student outcomes will lead to 'demoralisation' across the profession. Demoralised teachers believe that education practices and/or policy mandates enforced on the profession are harmful to students and

education in general, including the teacher profession. In turn this can lead to ‘principled resistance’ and to teachers leaving the profession as they hold on to their moral and ethical principles.

The final chapter of the book is entitled “Towards a new standard of dissensus: Notes on de-standardising teacher education”. The argument is made that professional standards can be seen as part of a trend to turn teaching from a moral, ethical and politically informed practice to a technical matter of implementing official knowledge in the shape of formal, government-delineated curriculum and with reference to the work of Gert Biesta thereby de-contesting, de-intellectualising and de-educationalising education. This statement stimulated me to reflect on my own experience of contemporariness and to think about where to find the light in the darkness of the present. It prompted questions concerning what exactly is meant by professional standards and whose professional standards are being referred to? My reflections led me to think about my time working at the University of Dundee from 2009 to 2012 and to the very constructive collaboration with colleagues at the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). The GTCS was set up in 1965 and in 2012 it became the world’s first independent professional and regulatory body for teaching. It is governed by a Council of 37 members, the majority of whom are elected teachers or college lecturers. The [Standard for Full Registration](#) is the foundation of the Professional Standards and is the benchmark of competence required of all registered teachers in Scotland. In the introduction it stated that The Professional Standards, with professional values at the heart, support and promote partnership, leadership, enquiry and professional learning. They describe teacher professionalism in Scotland, our “way of being” (p. 3). The Professional Standards are organised around Professional Values and Professional Commitment, Professional Knowledge and Understanding and Professional Skills and Abilities.

The Professional Standards describe what it means “to become, to be and to grow as a teacher in Scotland” (p. 3). A distinctive characteristic is the Professional Commitment to upholding the Professional Values of social justice, trust and respect and integrity which are at the heart of the Professional Standards, and which underpin relationships, thinking and professional practice in Scotland. My reflections took me back to the paper that I wrote (Hudson, 2011) following the keynote that I gave to the Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) Conference in November 2010 at

the University of Stirling. In this paper I wrote about the very close correspondence between the Standard for Full Registration of the GTCS and the national goals of Higher Education (the Examensordningen) in Sweden. The latter are structured around the three broad areas of Kunskap och förmåga, Färdighet och förmåga and Värderingsförmåga och förhållningssätt. The first two terms correspond to “Knowledge and understanding” and “Skill and ability” in turn, whilst the third goal is composed of terms that are difficult to translate. The concept of värderingsförmåga can be translated as “values ability”, indicating a student’s ability to value and evaluate aspects of their learning and experience, including self-evaluation. Regarding the concept of förhållningssätt, this concerns values and attitudes, including the ability to relate to others and to knowledge itself through the development of a “praxis of consideration” (ibid, p.32) which resonates with the work of Ernest Boyer concerning an extended meaning of scholarship. In contrast there was no dimension in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) at that time which addressed professional values in this way. Accordingly, it is proposed that in its future work the group distinguishes between a *restricted* conception of professionalism as is the case in England or an *extended* conception in relation to the case in Scotland as we discuss in Hudson and Outhwaite (2025). Furthermore, it is proposed that group takes account of the governance of the professional standards e.g., governed by the teaching profession itself, as is the case in Scotland or by the Secretary of State for Education as is the case in England.

Finally, from the book under review I must make a comment about Figure 10.3 which is one of seven figures that are used to exemplify professional standards across a range of international settings. The figure is presented as an example standard of Professional Standards for Teachers (Scotland). However, the representation is partial and thereby very misleading as it outlines only the Professional Knowledge and Understanding required without any reference to the Professional Skills and Abilities or most crucially to the Professional Values and Professional Commitment that are at the heart GTCS Professional Standards. Furthermore, it is both surprising and puzzling to see that the source is listed as the “UK Government, Department of Education, 2021” (p. 182).

## References

Agamben, G. (2009) *What is an apparatus and other essays*. (trans. D. Kishik and S. Pedatella). Stanford University Press.

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