

Acknowledging Teacher Professionalism in Ireland: The case for a Chartered Teacher initiative

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Abstract

The following paper presents an argument for the development of an Irish Chartered Teacher initiative which would acknowledge and accredit the professionalism of experienced and accomplished teachers. It begins by examining the current position of teaching as a profession based on findings from Irish and international research studies. Issues surrounding the accreditation of accomplished teachers are considered through the examination of a range of Chartered Teacher initiatives. Finally, the potential opportunities and challenges of accrediting teacher professionalism in Ireland are discussed with reference to the continuum of teacher education and recent developments introduced by the Teaching Council of Ireland.

Keywords: teacher professionalism, challenges and opportunities, Chartered Teacher, continuum of teacher education.

Introduction

The teaching profession in Ireland “has traditionally enjoyed high social status and there is keen competitiveness for entry to all categories of teaching” (Coolahan 2003, 26). Despite a shifting economic climate (Clarke and Killeavy 2012) and notable performativity pressures (Hyland 2011), teaching has remained an attractive profession in Ireland as reflected in the

number of students applying for third level degree courses in education. Data collated from the annual Board of Directors Reports (CAO 2001-2012) reveal that the number of first preference applications for level 8 degree courses in teacher education has seen a significant increase between 2001 and 2010, reflecting the general increase in student numbers applying for third level courses during the same period. First preference applications for teacher education courses are consistently above 30% of the overall higher level course applications as demonstrated in Figure 1, while the numbers applying to the National University of Ireland (NUI) colleges for postgraduate teacher education programmes has also increased in recent years, reaching a peak of 3,169 applicants in 2004. There was however a notable decline in 2012, for the first time in several years, with first preference application numbers for initial teacher education courses falling from 5,294 in 2011 to 4,963 in 2012 (CAO 2012). Up until the recent public service reforms (DES 2011) the high public status of teaching in Ireland was reflected in teachers' "relatively high salaries" (Coolahan 2003, 7). The recent Education at a Glance (OECD 2011, 410) report reveals that, when compared to GDP per capita, remuneration for experienced Irish teachers is well above the average for OECD countries. The status of teaching in Ireland is further supported by the relatively high levels of public trust and satisfaction with the work of teachers as identified by the recent iReach Market Research report (Teaching Council 2010) which supports Coolahan's (2003, 63) suggestion that teaching "is regarded by parents as very important and there is a public acceptance that the work of teachers, within a holistic approach to education, extends well beyond the direct business of teaching school subjects". Public confidence in the profession is bolstered by the improved completion rates of Irish secondary students with Ireland now "having the highest [international] share, at 87%" (OECD 2011, 48).

Please insert Figure 1 here.

However, despite the reported high levels of public satisfaction and the successful completion rates, teaching and learning in Ireland continue to face challenges and concerns. The following section considers many of these challenges and the paper outlines how a Chartered Teacher initiative may hold the potential to address some of the concerns and in so doing promote teacher professionalism in Ireland.

Challenges and concerns

The proposal for a Chartered Teacher initiative in Ireland is predicated on the belief that its introduction would significantly contribute to the advancement of teacher professionalism and educational practice. Such an initiative may serve to address some of the challenges facing Irish education today, namely marketisation and performativity pressures, the onset of performance indicators, the over-riding influence of the 'points system', falling literacy and numeracy scores and concerns regarding the professional development and the professional knowledge base of teachers.

Marketisation, efficiency and teacher professionalism

McCann (1999) cautioned that Ireland was undergoing a shift in societal values from an ethos of educating to enrich, to one of educating for influence and rebuked the emergence of corporate discourse and consumerist practice in Irish education. However, despite the opposition of international critics of neo-liberalism (Hursh 2001) this agenda has emerged as a normalised feature of the post-primary fabric of Irish education (Limond 2007; Lynch, Grummell and Devine 2012). Within this milieu, the constructs of success and achievement are redefined to narrowly classified 'standards', characterized by measurability and standardised output (Dyson 2003; Hargreaves 2003). From an Irish perspective Lynch (2006,

7) argues that “trust in professional integrity and peer regulation has been replaced with performance indicators”, and cautions that there is a deep alienation in the experience of constantly living to perform, which has a ‘devastating’ impact on teachers and students (Gleeson and Donnabháin 2009).

In this context, where achievement is measured in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, ‘good schools’ have become defined in technical and narrowly instrumental terms (Ball 1997) and ‘good teachers’ are characterised by efficiency and performance output with scant recognition afforded to the virtues of morality, imagination, enthusiasm, social commitment or creativity (McDermott 2012, 62). This emphasis, according to Dyson (2003), runs counter to the policy rhetoric of building more inclusive schools and can lead to the corrosion of originality through “assessment schemes which systematically reward a conformist kind of learning” (Hogan 2000, 17). This strong positivist tradition is also evident in educational research where the main focus to date has been on measurable outcomes (Sugrue 2009), such as test results and the achievement of pre-stated objectives and standards, rather than qualitative issues such as teacher beliefs, classroom practice and the influence of school culture (Gleeson and Donnabháin 2009, 40). Given the pervasive influence of this reform agenda on Irish educational discourse and practice, McDermott (2012) argues that the value attributed to teachers’ own experiences is ever diminishing. While Glatter (2003) argues that enhanced accountability encourages teachers to raise standards through the promotion of intellectually challenging and measurably effectual lessons, it is the contention of the authors that current performance indicators, signalling a bureaucratic model of accountability (Gleeson and Donnabháin 2009), have in fact served to limit, and in many cases, undermine teacher professionalism. Responding to the challenges to their professional identity faced by Irish teachers, Halton (2004, 65) argues the necessity for teachers to place their “own learning at the centre of their activities”. This recognition of

the significance of teacher agency in the drive towards enhanced professionalism is not a new proposal. For example, Barber (1996, 207) argued:

The only sensible way in which teachers can revive their sense of self-worth, rebuild their professional respect and begin to take control once again of their destiny is to take educational reform by the scruff of the neck and lead it.

The Teacher Council of Ireland has played a significant role in the promotion of teacher professionalism in recent years, while self-evaluation structures for schools which aim to “support schools as they evaluate teaching and learning” (DES 2012b, 8) also hold the potential to progress teacher agency. However, such movement towards teacher agency and professionalism in Ireland faces a serious challenge from the ‘backwash effect’ of the current ‘points system’ (NCCA 2007) employed for entry to higher education.

The ‘backwash effect’

In response to the pervasive influence of ‘conformist’ practices noted within the Irish post-primary classroom (Hennessy and Mannix McNamara 2011) and as a result of a growing awareness of the benefits of ‘leveraging creativity’ (Scase 2007) within education, current education policy discourse in Ireland has become replete with reference to innovation, creativity and enterprise (Granville 2004). Within this framework, current curriculum policy would replace course ‘coverage’ with ‘learner engagement’, curriculum ‘content’ with ‘skills’ and ‘knowledge acquisition’ with ‘learning’ (Looney and Klenowski 2008, 177). Here, the nature and function of assessment is also documented as a tool for engaging and promoting learning as a process rather than as a product oriented activity (ibid). However, reflecting that familiar Irish say/do dichotomy (Lee 1989), the reality of the Irish education system is well removed from this fine policy rhetoric, despite a plethora of recent reports highlighting the impact of the present examination system on school culture, teacher

accountability, pedagogy and pupil engagement (Hennessy and Mannix McNamara 2011; Hyland 2011; Smyth, Banks and Calvert 2011).

Against this background, the hegemonic ‘backwash effect’ (NCCA 2007) of the terminal examination has militated heavily against the drive towards enhanced student-centred pedagogy (Hyland 2011) and teacher professionalism in Ireland (Sexton 2007). Responding to a growing concern (Coolahan 1995) regarding the effect of the Leaving Certificate examination on the values and practices of teacher and pupils alike, a review of the ‘points system’ for third level entry was commissioned by the then Minister for Education and Science, Micheál Martin in 1997. The Commission sought to examine and provide a comprehensive report on the system of selection for third level entry in this country. One of the principal criticisms of the points system was that students preparing for and taking the Leaving Certificate are focusing to such an extent on the demands of the examination that many of their other school activities are ignored (Government of Ireland 1999). This was found to negatively impact on students’ personal development due to a narrowing of the curriculum and a tendency to teach to the examination rather than to the aims of the curriculum, resulting in high levels of stress among students and an undue focus on the attainment of examination results (ibid). The report also found that the Leaving Certificate examination focused on a narrow range of academic skills to the detriment of “many other qualities which young people need for life and work” (Government of Ireland 1999, 114).

Twelve years later, this situation has deteriorated further with Hyland (2011, 4) noting that during their senior cycle studies, “students (advised by their parents and teachers) will do everything possible to optimise their potential points”. The Leaving Certificate examination was also noted as having a considerable impact on pedagogy and on student experience, especially in senior cycle (Hyland 2011), an impact that is manifested in ways such as:

- the tendency for students to select subjects on the basis of their potential for attaining

a high grade rather than their relevance to future life,

- the truncation of syllabuses in order to focus on certain topics deemed as exam material,
- the request for ‘reasonable accommodation’ in the Leaving Certificate exam for students who have not previously been diagnosed with special education needs, possibly in order to gain extra time on the exam,
- payment for extra tuition either in grind schools or privately (Smyth, Banks and Calvert 2011).

Student performance and pedagogy

Findings from the recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report (OECD 2009b) expose a significant decline in the mean literacy and numeracy scores of Irish students between the years 2000 and 2009. Ireland’s mean literacy score had fallen some 31 points during this time, which was the largest decline across 39 OECD countries. Ireland’s mean mathematics score was below the OECD average (ibid) and had declined by 16 points since 2003 which was the second largest decline among countries participating in both years. In contrast, Finland was one of the highest performing OECD countries in PISA 2009, second only to Korea on the overall reading scale and up 10 points since PISA 2000. However, literacy, numeracy and science scores are a very narrow measure of student learning and arguably lateral to the overall goals of any holistic education system. A more accurate reflection of student learning may be better established through an examination of the teaching strategies employed by practicing teachers.

Research studies emphasise the importance of constructivism and discovery learning in promoting student learning outcomes (Windschitl 2002; Petty 2009). The recent TALIS

report¹ (OECD 2009a) examined teachers' beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning which include "direct transmission beliefs about learning and instruction" and "constructivist beliefs about learning and instruction" (ibid, 92). The findings of the TALIS report demonstrated a strong preference for direct transmission over constructivist beliefs in Ireland as evidenced in the widespread use of teacher-led instruction and the emphasis on 'practising exam papers' and 'doing homework' at Leaving Certificate level (Smyth, Banks and Calvert 2011). Such practice is often perceived by students as more advantageous than the former approach to the realisation of exam success (Hennessy and Mannix McNamara 2011).

Professional development

The construct of teaching as a continuum (OECD 1991; Government of Ireland 1995; Conway et al. 2009), has been adopted by the Teaching Council of Ireland, whose principal function is to "promote teaching as a profession", including the establishment of procedures for the "induction of teachers into the teaching profession" and the "professional development of teachers" (Government of Ireland 2001, section 7.2, 8). While some progress has been made on the induction of teachers into the teaching profession (Teaching Council 2012b) at this time provision for structured, in-career professional development for teachers remains problematic.

The TALIS Report (OECD 2009a) found that participation levels of Irish secondary teachers in continuing professional development (CPD) were well below average. While 90% had experienced some professional development, which was marginally above the OECD average, the average number of days attended by Irish teachers (5.6 days over 18 months) was the lowest out of the 23 TALIS countries (OECD, 2009a, 53). The Department

¹ For a breakdown of the questions and results from the TALIS report, please see: Freeman, C., O'Malley, K., & Eveleigh, F. (2010). *Australian teachers and the learning environment: an analysis of teacher response to TALIS 2008: final report*. Camberwell, VIC: Australian Council for Educational Research.
<http://research.acer.edu.au/talis/1>

of Education and Science has declared that “expenditure on teachers (pay and pensions), which accounts for over 80 per cent of the total education budget, further underlines the long-term importance of quality pre-service education, well-managed induction procedures, in-career development programmes throughout the teaching career” (Government of Ireland 1995, 126). However, when state expenditure on CPD is considered, their commitment to this principle and to the continuum of initial teacher education, teacher induction and in-career development opportunities comes into question. Investment in CPD for teachers during 2008 was less than 1% of the overall budget for teachers’ salaries and superannuation (Gleeson 2012) with priority afforded to “specific areas of professional development” such as Mathematics and Science (Clarke and Killeavy 2012, 133).

Indeed CPD in Ireland which has been “over a 40-year period... the subject of extended debate” (Clarke and Killeavy 2012, 131) now finds itself on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand the Irish teacher unions, very strong and influential by international standards (Gleeson 2010), while recognising the importance of on-going professional development, have insisted that such courses take place during the post-primary teacher’s official working year of 167 days. On the other hand the school management bodies, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and successive Ministers have been insisting on the principle of ‘the integrity of the school year’, meaning that teachers may not normally be absent from school for professional development purposes. Ongoing industrial relations negotiations around what is commonly referred to as the Croke Park agreement, including a commitment by public servants and their managers to work together to reform the public service (DES 2011), will have to address this dilemma.

Teacher professionalism in Ireland

While ‘classical professionalism’ (Hargreaves and Goodson 1996), has significant

limitations, its three characteristics of professional knowledge base, altruistic service and professional autonomy, provide a useful reference point when examining the potential of a Chartered Teacher initiative. The teaching profession has a good deal in common with the classical professions (Sexton, 2007; Gleeson, 2012) and these professions provide a useful frame of reference when developing a vision for the establishment of a Chartered Teacher grade in Ireland.

While teachers in Ireland have long enjoyed ‘legendary autonomy’ (OECD 1991), it was not until the formal establishment of the Teaching Council of Ireland in 2006 that the Irish teaching profession became self-regulated. Studies such as Sexton (2007) and Teaching Council (2010) reveal a strong commitment amongst Irish teachers to altruistic service. However, the findings of the TALIS report (OECD 2009a) regarding the dominance of direct transmission beliefs, raise questions about the extent to which professional practice is informed by ‘a professional knowledge base’ since a reliance on direct transmission reflects a strong focus on ‘knowledge-for practice’ (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999) where the “significance of pedagogy is down-played in favour of subject expertise” (Gleeson 2012, 5). Those who emphasise the importance of the broader pedagogical knowledge of teachers rail against this “clamour for technical competence and subject knowledge” (Hargreaves and Goodson 1996, 20). The priority afforded to subject expertise in Ireland is evident in the nature of Irish CPD where prominence is given to “changes in syllabi/examinations and national programmes” rather than to “teachers’ broader professional development needs” (Gilleece et al. 2009). Furthermore, the professionalism of Irish teachers is seriously undermined by the “inadequate support and structures for educational research and teacher development and the prevailing top-down, partnership-based model of curriculum reform” (Gleeson 2012, 13).

Characteristics of Chartered Teacher initiatives

Chartered Teacher initiatives are characterised by a commitment to practitioner research and the development of teachers' professional knowledge base (GTCNI 2005; GTCW 2007; Scottish Government 2009). For example, the aim of the Chartered Teacher grade created by the Scottish General Teaching Council (GTC), the oldest established teaching council in the world (Forde et al. 2006), is to advance the professional knowledge base of teachers through the promotion of teacher researchers. The Scottish Chartered Teacher is required to develop "new and improved ways of supporting pupils' learning through discussion, including engaging in practitioner research" (Scottish Government 2009, 3). Christie (2006) and Snoek and Moens (2011) regard practitioner research as essential to the continued enhancement of teacher professionalism. Christie (ibid, 64) highlights that "the Standard for Chartered Teacher provides a basis for this", advocating that a Chartered Teacher initiative can provide important support for practitioner-based research.

Commitment to continuing professional development (CPD) is also central to the pursuit of chartered recognition across many professions (Neal and Morgan 2000) and CPD has been mandatory for most chartered professions in the United Kingdom for many years (ibid 2000). Knowledge-of practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999) requires that CPD should "challenge existing conceptual frameworks by promoting a questioning and reflective approach to on-going practice, supported by the introduction of and reflection on new practice models through EBP [evidence based practice]" (Phillips 2006, 31). This means that CPD is a pre-requisite for the evolution, promotion and timely advancement of the teaching profession. It also averts stagnation, identified by Harford (2010, 349) as likely to "impede Ireland's capacity to adequately prepare teachers for the challenges of the twenty-first century." In order to further assess the potential of a Chartered Teacher initiative in Ireland we must first position it within the broader context and begin by examining international

initiatives aimed at acknowledging and accrediting *accomplished* teachers.

Existing models for accrediting accomplished teachers

The recognition of accomplished teachers is increasingly becoming part of international debate on the teaching profession, including teacher development. Since 2003, experienced teachers in Scotland have been able to gain the new grade of ‘Chartered Teacher’ by successfully completing award-bearing CPD courses (Connelly and McMahon 2007). The introduction of this new standard for ‘accomplished teachers’, was part of a move to redefine teacher professionalism in Scotland where CPD was regarded as both a “professional entitlement and ... a professional obligation” (Christie 2006, 54). Knight (2002) identified the need to go beyond structured, event-based CPD and to facilitate more non-formal professional learning and development through the informal interactions of teachers as they work collaboratively to develop the profession as members of ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger 1998).

The Chartered Teacher initiative in Scotland provides an opportunity to promote the principle of ‘teacher researcher’ insofar as “the Standard encourages teachers to be more active in originating research, to apply research findings to their own context, as well as to subject their work to critical analysis using research tools of various kinds” (Kirk 2004, 14). It also creates favourable conditions “for networks of teachers as researching professionals to develop” (Christie (2006, 446).

While the Standard for Chartered Teacher (SCT) is unique to the Scottish context, many other countries have either introduced or suggested similar initiatives to acknowledge accomplished teachers or what Berliner (2004) terms as ‘expert teachers’. For example, The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) have promoted introducing “two

new professional milestones of ‘Chartered Teacher’ and ‘Advanced Chartered Teacher’” (GTCNI 2005, V) as part of the continuum of teacher education. Along similar lines the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) has recommended a professional development framework with five milestones: Qualified Teacher Status, Induction, Middle Leader, Chartered Teacher, Senior Leader/Headship (Hulme and Menter 2008), and published its own Chartered Teacher standards in May 2007 (GTCW 2007). The Chartered London Teacher status was introduced in September 2004 as part of the London Challenge Strategy (DfES 2003), designed to help “secure transformation in educational standards and establish London as the world’s leading creative and learning city” (Bubb and Porritt 2008). Since September 2006 teachers in England can apply for Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) and Excellent Teacher accreditation (Connelly and McMahon 2007). Similarly in the United States of America, experienced teachers can apply to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) for National Board Certification, to “provide recognition to teachers who demonstrate superior knowledge and teaching skills” (OECD 2005, 187). Chile has also introduced a ‘Pedagogical Excellence Reward’ that recognises and rewards accomplished teachers, while in Mexico teachers can voluntarily apply for a salary increment through the Carrera Magisterial and Escalafón Vertical programmes (Connelly and McMahon 2007). Similar programmes have been introduced in Australia, Hungary and the Slovak Republic (OECD 2005).

Rewarding accomplished teachers: international examples

While altruistic service has long been regarded as a key characteristic of the teaching profession (Sexton 2007) the issue of remuneration cannot be overlooked. Many of the initiatives outlined above are similar both in their nomenclature and recognition procedures. Scotland however is quite unique in the level of remuneration for Chartered Teachers insofar

candidates undertake a twelve module Master's degree programme and receive one salary increment for every two modules successfully completed. The increase in the superannuable salary of successful candidates is approximately £6,000 (Connelly and McMahon 2007).

Purdon (2003) questions this level of financial reward for Chartered Teachers and questions its impact on teachers' motivation to undertake the programme as well as the absence of "systematic national planning" in the initial design of the programme. However, in a study of 28 teachers engaged in the Chartered Teacher programme, Connelly and McMahon (2007, 104) concluded that the major perceived strengths of the programme were the "entitlement of all teachers who meet the GTCS's eligibility criteria to take part, and to receive financial rewards for success which are not limited by a school's salary budget". Despite these findings the Chartered Teacher programme in Scotland was discontinued in 2011 on foot of the McCormac Report (2011) which, along with a report by the Chartered Teacher Review Group (Scottish Government 2008), found that a lack of clarity around the role of the Chartered Teacher and issues around self-selection were negatively impacting the potential of the programme. McCormac (2011, 30) also identified financial reasons for this policy shift – "the overall contribution made to education in Scotland by chartered teachers does not represent a good investment, due mainly to the lack of any formal role post qualification." The Scottish example highlights the significant challenges and difficulties around rewarding accredited teachers.

Those recognised as accomplished teachers in other jurisdictions do not receive the same level of remuneration or have to meet the same requirements for accreditation. Under the American model, applicants can apply for National Board Certification by presenting four portfolio entries and completing six assessment exercises (OECD 2005). Candidates are assessed against detailed teaching standards developed and reviewed in collaboration with

practicing teachers and experts. Some 50% of first-time applicants achieved certification between 1999 and 2002 (OECD 2005). Unlike the remuneration of Chartered Teachers under the Scottish model, certification of American accomplished teachers is designed to enhance a teacher's potential for promotion and many states subsidise the application fees, with some offering financial bonuses to retain teachers. However, the concept of enhanced teacher certification in the United States of America is complicated by the fact that "licensure requirements and certification vary from state to state" (Roth and Swail 2000, 9). Each individual state is responsible for the licensing and certification of teachers. Typically a teacher obtains certification by completing a course at a state authorised institution but there is now a "proliferation of programs designed to provide alternative methods of teacher certification to those traditionally employed by institutions of higher education" (Roth and Swail 2000, 9). Such inconsistencies in the requirements for the licensing and certification of teachers make National Board Certification more attractive for both teachers and potential employers.

Berliner (2004, 201) recommends that 'expert teachers' have at least seven years' experience and a "minimum of 7,000 hours in classrooms as a teacher". The 'Excellent Teacher Scheme' in England was created as "a new career route for experienced teachers as an alternative to management and leadership posts" (Hutchings et al. 2009, 1) with schools creating specific posts for experienced and accredited teachers. Excellent Teachers (ETs) are deemed to have reached 'pedagogic excellence' as well as coaching and mentoring skills of a high order and the ET scheme is quite unique in terms of "experience, performance and role responsibilities" (Hutchings et al. 2009, 139). Remuneration under this initiative is tied to additional responsibilities regarding the coaching and mentoring of newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

Teaching performance is linked with pay in other jurisdictions as part of national endeavours to monitor quality and improve teaching and learning. For example in St. Gallen, Switzerland, a link between teachers' performance and pay scale was introduced in 2000 through the 'Systematic Salary-effective qualification' (OECD 2005) with teachers' salary scales consisting of four grades with progression through the grades depending on positive assessment using criteria that are jointly agreed by teachers and assessors. In Zurich there are similar links between performance and pay through the 'Salary-effective qualification system' (OECD 2005).

Potential of a Chartered Teacher Initiative in Ireland

The central argument presented in this paper is that an Irish Chartered Teacher initiative would acknowledge and promote teacher professionalism, which in turn holds the potential to advance the professionalisation of teaching in Ireland. This argument is predicated on two assumptions, namely that there is a need to promote teacher professionalism in Ireland, and that teacher professionalism can be accredited. Also inherent in this argument is the supposition that the future accreditation and recognition of accomplished teachers has the potential to promote teacher professionalism and enhance pedagogy, just as the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes is seen as a necessary requirement for the betterment of education across many countries (Patrick 1986; Ingvarson et al. 2006; Conway et al. 2009). This position is perhaps best captured in Smith, Winship and Harris's (1937, 17) premise that there is "no hope for the betterment of education except through the betterment of teachers". The authors contend that a Chartered Teacher initiative has the potential to enhance teacher professionalism, particularly in relation to the development of the professional knowledge base, the mentoring of NQTs and CPD within the context of the continuum of teacher education (Teaching Council 2011b), as well as the promotion of

educational research and evidence based practice.

Developing the professional knowledge base

As noted earlier the absence of a strong professional knowledge base militates against the promotion and development of teaching as a profession in Ireland. The Teaching Council (2012a) acknowledges the importance of practitioner researchers in its Research Policy and through its bursaries scheme to support practitioner research, launched in May 2007. This is further supported by the Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland (also known as the Sahlberg Report) which stresses the importance of “reflective practice and research among teachers” (DES 2012a, 14).

However, there remains a notable over reliance on subject specific knowledge as reflected for example in the Teaching Council’s registration regulations (Teaching Council 2009) for the recognition of post-primary teachers, which place a particularly heavy emphasis on knowledge of syllabus content. Members of other professions e.g. doctors enjoy very high social status and professional recognition due to the strong professional knowledge base of that profession (Theorell 2000; Khan et al. 2009). However, expertise in particular school subjects is not the exclusive preserve of teachers and must be complemented by pedagogical knowledge (Gleeson 2012) if it is to assume a higher position than it currently occupies in the profession. Consequently, any initiative designed to acknowledge accomplished teachers in Ireland, such as the Chartered Teacher initiative, should advocate practitioner researcher and evidence-based pedagogy.

One way to ensure the validity and reliability of practitioner research would be to incorporate it into a level 9 Master’s degree programme similar to the Scottish Chartered Teacher initiative. The Finnish model requires that all teachers (except kindergarten) have a Master’s degree (Aho, Pitkanen and Sahlberg 2006), while most teacher education providers

in England offer “some form of continuing professional development provision that is usually linked to postgraduate diplomas or to Master’s level degrees” (Moon 2003, 78). It is important to note that in Ireland there is now a move towards the award of Professional Master of Education (at level 9) in response to the recently published Teaching Council’s Guidelines for Programme Providers (Teaching Council 2011a). While the latter qualification is aimed at pre-service teachers, a Master’s degree associated with the proposed Chartered Teacher initiative would be undertaken by established and experienced teachers, thus promoting enhanced practitioner research within the profession.

The inclusion of practitioner research as a prerequisite for accreditation as a Chartered Teacher would also address the perceptible theory-practice divide in education (Cheng, Cheng and Tang 2010). In Finland, a long-term policy plan has been established, based on the assumption that a research generated knowledge base, and the accompanying research-based way of thinking and acting, will enhance teachers’ professionalism (Westbury et al. 2005). However, despite the noted accomplishments of the Finnish system, many other jurisdictions have yet to adopt a similar strategy. Though the promotion of practitioner research has an important role in bridging the theory-practice divide (Englund 1996), Irish teachers are notably reluctant to engage in research (Kiely 2003). Defining and protecting the space required for teachers to engage in situated and responsive research may form a strategic step in bridging this divide and advancing teacher professionalism.

Teacher mentors

Mentoring is an essential aspect of induction into many professions that have a chartered grade and require appropriately accredited members to mentor new entrants to that profession (Cross 1998; Knight and Trowler 1999). To advance the comparison made earlier with

medicine, students wishing to qualify as doctors in Ireland must complete an internship year with a minimum of three months spent in ‘Medicine in general’ and at least three months in ‘Surgery in general’ under the guidance of an experienced and accredited doctor “who takes on the role of mentoring interns” (Medical Council 2007, 25). While the medical profession has long recognised that medical education is a continuum, Ireland is only beginning to formally recognise “that teaching is an instance, par excellence, of life-long learning and that initial teacher education cannot furnish ‘finished products’” (Teaching Council 2011b, 16). A Chartered Teacher scheme would provide an opportunity to educate and accredit experienced and accomplished teachers capable of mentoring newly qualified teachers (NQTs). While such services are currently being offered by many teachers throughout the country on an informal basis, this would ensure that those best qualified to mentor NQTs are officially accredited and recognised for doing so.

Continuing professional development

In view of the Irish findings of the TALIS report noted earlier, the introduction of a Chartered Teacher initiative would promote enhanced engagement in CPD and life-long learning. Accreditation of Chartered Teachers would be dependent on evidence of satisfactory engagement in CPD through participation in a Master’s programme with renewal of registration as a Chartered Teacher being subject to satisfactory participation in structured CPD events.

Given the importance of altruistic service within teaching as a profession (Sexton 2007; Gleeson 2012), accreditation of Chartered Teachers could seek evidence of such engagement. This would acknowledge the on-going work of teachers in the promotion of students’ holistic development, as well as their contributions to the wider community.

Evidence of student and community development is possibly best presented through the development of a professional portfolio as advocated by Zeichner and Wray (2001). The professional portfolio could also be employed to evidence the sustained, and effective professional practice of accomplished and experienced teachers seeking accreditation.

Through the promotion of collaboration a Chartered Teacher initiative also holds the potential to disentangle the obstinate ‘culture of individualism’ (Hargreaves 1988, 77) and the ‘balkanization of school teachers’ (Hargreaves and Macmillan 1995). Again through the professional portfolio, Chartered Teachers could be required to provide evidence of collaboration with, and support of, colleagues. This would encourage accredited Chartered Teachers to play a leading role in the professional development of colleagues and to make a recognised contribution to the educational effectiveness of the school and the broader professional community.

Looking to the future

The Irish Teaching Council (2011b, 4) policy on the ‘Continuum of Teacher Education’ acknowledges the significant challenges and opportunities facing Irish teachers in contemporary classrooms and provides a “framework for the reconceptualisation of teacher education across the continuum”. Included in this framework is an acknowledgement that continuing professional development is both a “right and responsibility” of all registered teachers (Teaching Council 2011, 17). This policy also highlights the need for an Induction Programme for NQTs in response to the current “overreliance on initial teacher education” (Teaching Council 2011b, 9).

The purpose of an induction programme is to offer systematic professional and personal support to the newly qualified teacher. The support is primarily school-based and is given

at school level by an experienced teacher, usually called a mentor, in collaboration with colleagues and initial teacher education providers (ibid, 16).

It is proposed that such mentors should have a minimum of five years teaching experience, that they should undertake “specific mentoring development programmes” and that “accreditation opportunities should be provided for both mentors and NQTs” (Teaching Council, 2011, 17). The out-of-school aspects of the proposed Career Entry Professional Programme (CEPP), which was designed as part of a National Induction Programme to meet the Council’s statutory responsibilities in relation to the induction of NQTs, was introduced in September 2012 (Teaching Council 2012b). This is happening in a context where there are no formal, structured supports for the accreditation of accomplished and experienced teachers who could provide the required mentoring for NQTs. The proposed Chartered Teacher initiative could provide accreditation for teachers, not only as mentors, but also as accomplished teachers that actively engage in research, professional collaboration, continuing professional development and the promotion of sustained, enhanced and effective pedagogy across the school community.

Defining the role of the Chartered Teacher in Ireland

The purpose of this paper has been to raise the issue of acknowledging accomplished teachers. The authors are not seeking to map out a precise pathway for the accreditation of accomplished teachers but are endeavouring to open constructive discourse around the potential for such an initiative within the Irish context. In the current economic climate, negotiations should focus on finding positive ways of recognising accomplished teachers in parallel with discussions around underperformance. In this regard there are valuable lessons to be learned from neighbouring jurisdictions. These lessons will provide a valuable starting point for discussion between the main partners in mapping out a Chartered Teacher Initiative

in Ireland. The McCormac report (2011) on the Scottish Chartered Teacher Scheme highlights the importance of a clearly defined role for Chartered Teachers within the school system. The English Excellent Teacher Scheme provides valuable insights in this regard, with specific posts being created within schools as alternate career paths to ensure that accomplished teachers do not always have to move into management to advance their careers (Hutchings, et al., 2009). This strategy keeps professional expertise in the classroom while also providing role models and mentors for NQTs, as well as supporting accomplished teachers as they develop their own pedagogy and that of their colleagues through research and collaboration (Hutchings, et al., 2009).

The latter approach would provide a badly needed career path for experienced and accomplished teachers in Ireland where the “main opportunity for making major status gains in teaching rests in leaving classroom work for full-time administration” (Drudy 1993, 184). Having a Chartered Teacher post in schools could support and acknowledge experienced and accomplished teachers while also retaining their professional expertise in the classroom. Such post holders would play a mentoring rather than a managerial role within the school. In supporting these teachers, a Chartered Teacher initiative has the potential to promote teacher leadership and therein “the building of capacity to transform schooling” (Lieberman and Miller 2005, 153). The proposed initiative would also give due recognition to the continuing professional development activities of those participating in post-graduate and CPD programmes, and to the efforts of those engaged in evidence-based pedagogy and collaboration, as well as to the mentoring work that many experienced teachers are currently undertaking. While international initiatives highlight many of the practical constraints in acknowledging and accrediting accomplished teachers, the most pressing challenge to the implementation of a Chartered Teacher initiative in Ireland is arguably ideological in nature. Given the prevalence of bureaucratic models of accountability (Gleeson and Donnabháin

2009) in Ireland, the imperative to develop an initiative which is genuinely empowering rather than restrictive and which serves to enhance cultures of professional practice rather than reinforcing the dominant audit culture is of utmost concern.

Conclusion

Our examinations highlight both opportunities and challenges in accrediting teacher professionalism. It is clear from international initiatives that the development of what Liebermann and Miller (2005) term ‘teacher leaders’, through the identification and accreditation of accomplished teachers, can be both problematic and divisive. The self-selection and remuneration of Chartered Teachers, as well as the application process and its criteria for assessment, may be antithetical to the overall aim of Chartered Teacher initiatives designed to promote teacher professionalism (Connelly and McMahon 2007; McCormac 2011). When teacher professionalism is conceptualised in terms of bureaucratic accountability (Gleeson and Donnabháin 2009) and the maintenance or promotion of externally mandated standards, it is fated to flounder.

If the assessment procedures [for accreditation] become merely a series of externally imposed hoops through which they have to pass, merely serving the summative function of measuring attainment within the Chartered Teacher programme, then there is little likelihood of the programme succeeding in its aim of creating the conditions for continuing enhancement of teacher professionalism (Christie 2006, 65).

While acknowledging the apparent impediments to accrediting teacher professionalism and the limitations of such an enterprise, if conceptualised in collaboration with teachers and educational experts, and administered through the Teaching Council and teacher education providers, a Chartered Teacher initiative would protect, enhance and promote teacher professionalism in Ireland. Building on the positives identified earlier, such an initiative has the potential to provide the necessary ‘space’ for teachers to address the significant concerns

and challenges outlined in this paper.

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