RESEARCH PAPER

Care, hope and resistance: Reshaping teacher professional learning for inclusive education

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This paper explores the transformative possibilities of drawing on a 'pedagogical methodology' (Burke, Crozier & Misiaszek, 2017) in working for inclusive education through professional learning in schools. Our paper discusses how corporate management models, neoliberal education standardisation and test-based accountability impact on teacher status, professional identity and feelings of trust and autonomy. Writing from our perspective, that is, of four Australian school teachers who are all committed to educational equity, we deconstruct how the 'professional teacher' is being framed as the 'rational man' (Coole, 1993; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). We discuss the latter concept and examine how it leads to particular forms of technical and instrumentalised professional learning. Then, drawing on critical, feminist and post-structuralist perspectives and theory, we explore how a critical and reflexive approach to professional learning enabled us to glimpse the possibility of a professional learning process which is both generative and potentially transformative for teachers as they create a space of resistance against hegemonic neoliberal assumptions. Our methodological approach involved Freirean notions of dialogue and praxis to interrogate our own practices and assumptions concerned with notions of 'capability' and 'misrecognition'. From our reflections and insights, we hope to contribute concepts that might be helpful for improving teacher professional learning and reinforce recognition of teacher expertise because of the unique effect teachers have on students and their engagement with education. This is especially important to students in disadvantaged areas, and, in broader terms, for widening participation of equity groups in education.

Keywords: teacher professional learning; care work; pedagogical methodology; widening participation; inclusive education

Introduction

Neoliberal concepts of managerialism, performance measurement and marketisation of education are increasing educational inequity for students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Ball, 2003; 2014; Connell, 2013; Lingard, Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013; Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998). As four teachers committed to educational equity, we chose to

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participate in an 'inclusive education professional learning' project with a pedagogical methodological approach.[2] In this paper, we deconstruct how the 'professional teacher' is often framed as the 'rational man' within contemporary neoliberal discourse and examine how this leads to particular forms of technical and instrumentalised professional learning (Ball, 2003; Butler, 1990; Connell, 2009; 2013; Dillabough, 1999).

Historically, teaching has been perceived as a low status career, with teachers struggling to exert political power and influence in areas of education policy, research and practice even though as practitioners they are experts in teaching and learning (Connell, 2009; Dillabough, 1999). Neoliberal reforms in public education in Australia and elsewhere across the globe further contribute to this struggle through markets, managerialism, and performance measurement being used to govern teachers and corporatise education systems (Ball, 2003; 2015; Hardy, 2018; Lingard et al., 2013). As part of these reforms there is a drive to 'professionalise' teaching which aligns with a neoliberal ideology, changing not only how teachers approach their teaching but also how they see their role (Ball, 2003; Burke et al., 2017). The question of what constitutes the 'professional teacher' is significant as the neoliberal view of the teacher becomes normalised within educational and popular discourses as 'truth' (Foucault, [1979] 2000). This shift, in turn, folds into individual perceptions of the 'professional teacher' and impacts teachers' self-identities (Ball, 2003; Connell, 2009; Dillabough, 1999*).* Teachers have a unique effect on students and their engagement with education and so the potentially damaging impacts of a reductive notion of the teacher's role and lessened recognition of their expertise, not only affects teachers but also their students. In particular, students living in areas experiencing disadvantage who need engaged and empowered educators to provide access to learning may be negatively impacted, which can have lifelong implications for their relationship with education. In this paper we highlight concepts and processes that may be helpful for improving teacher professional learning that recognises teacher expertise and promotes pedagogies of care.

Theoretical background

There is a growing body of research on the importance of care and relationships in teaching and learning pedagogies (Motta & Bennett, 2018), however, these principles are not reflected in neoliberal 'professional teacher' discourses or teacher professional learning (Chen, 2016). Critical, feminist and post-structural perspectives and theory informed our approach and we drew on the concept of 'pedagogical methodology' (Burke et al., 2017) to guide the research design. Pedagogical methodology aims to "cultivate spaces of praxis and critical reflexivity for 'research that makes a difference'" (Burke et al., 2017, p. 49). We also drew on equity epistemologies, which construct knowledge as about understanding the ways that social relations underpin economic, cultural, global, national, local and institutional structures, relations, discourses and practices, to critically approach an exploration of our own understandings of how complex relations of power and inequality in educational contexts impact on our processes of constructing knowledge and meaning (Foucault, [1979] 2000; Freire, 1972; 1985; 2014). Using a Foucauldian lens to view the dynamic and fluid nature of power relations and the concept of power as a dynamic that everyone has access to in a range of different forms, whilst acknowledging some individuals and groups may be socially positioned differently (and unequally) in relation to power. This conceptualisation of power assisted us to destabilise binary notions of advantaged or disadvantaged and of teachers as 'practitioners' only (not having knowledge) and 'experts' as having knowledge and helped us to understand that it is more an argument of whose knowledge is valued and legitimised (Burke & Jackson, 2007; Foucault,

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[2] This project emerged from the Writing Program for Equity and Widening Participation Practitioners at the University of Newcastle which was attended by the lead author.

[1979] 2000).

Caring in teaching can be described as "those emotions, actions and reflections that result from a teacher's desire to motivate, help or inspire their students" (O'Connor, 2008, p. 117). Starting from the premise that education is a deeply care-driven activity (Noddings, 1984), we employed a feminist approach to guide our thinking about teaching and learning as well as drawing on the notion of relational pedagogies of care. Relational pedagogies of care argue that together teachers actively caring for students, and students being aware of that care, is a core requirement and function of education and a prerequisite for student participation in learning, and ultimate educational success (Noddings, 1984; 2012; 2013). Care theory embraces the role that intuition and emotion play in relationships and recognises how these are embedded in our everyday practices and experiences inclusive of being a teacher and a professional (Noddings, 1984; 2012). Empathising with students, by using intuition and emotions, and sharing emotionally in their struggles and successes informs pedagogical decision-making processes and assists teachers to act in their students' best interests (Slote, 2007). Ethics of care develops this further by placing importance on teachers' ethical relations in responding to difference and of recognising alternative ways of being (Slote, 2007). These affect, not only the ways teachers form relationships with students but also how they make learning accessible for students (Noddings, 2012; 2013). Caring in this way is at the heart of a social justice agenda to improve students' lives (Bondy & Hambacher, 2016). Further to this Engster (2005) asserts that caring for others in a caring way is a fundamental human value and can be expressed as a form of justice theory. We wanted to build on care theory to use critical action, critical reflection and reflexivity to investigate our own histories, assumptions and beliefs in the wider social context of historic, systematic, and structural inequities to examine their impact on own practices within the classroom (Freire, 1972; 1985; 2014).

A pedagogical orientation was taken to frame this paper; that is, understanding pedagogies to be lived, relational and embodied practices in education closely connected to identity formations, subjectivities and the emotional layers of pedagogical experiences, so an explicit engagement with emotion was recognised as an important dimension of our project (Burke et al., 2017; Burke & Crozier, 2014). We employed concepts of pedagogical methodology (Burke et al., 2017) to guide our research design, methods of data collection and iterations of analysis and interpretation of examples of teacher professional learning.

Deconstruction of the 'professional teacher'

Teaching has been seen traditionally as a caring profession, however, neoliberal framings and approaches within the Australian and other education systems increasingly leave little space and time conceptually and structurally for care work (Hargreaves, 2000; O'Connor, 2008; Uitto, Jokikokko & Estola, 2015). The neoliberal 'model citizen' is defined as a rational being who contributes to economic, political and cultural life in the public sphere (Dillbough, 1999; Lynch, Lyons & Cantillon, 2007). The neoliberal 'professional' is someone who possesses specialised knowledge and techniques and who has a 'value free' education, that is, an education in which acquiring the skills to make value choices which support the holistic development of a person is not seen as important (Dillabough, 1999). Therefore, the neoliberal 'professional teacher' is someone who imparts skills and knowledge logically and objectively to provide students with a value free education with the goal of them being primarily for the growth of the economy (Connell, 2009; Dillabough, 1999; Sachs, 2001; 2016). This construction of the 'professional teacher' excludes the important emotional and moral aspects in teaching and devalues the broader purposes of education to prepare students to live relational lives as independent and caring people in society, as well as to contribute to socially and economically (Lynch et al.,

2007).

The rational man

Statistically, in Australia teaching is female dominated, with female teaching staff comprising 70% of the full time equivalent of all teaching staff (ABS, 2011), and is historically constructed as a feminised space connected to 'caring' work. Yet hegemonic neoliberal discourses of professionalism, underpinned by notions of objectivity, logic and rationality, operate to marginalise caring practices associated with the female body and to reject these values (Dillabough, 1999; Uitto et al., 2015). In order to further deconstruct notions of the neoliberal 'professional teacher', the role of gender requires attention. Neoliberal politics are situated within broader sociological contexts and forces and, therefore, gender relations. Thus, histories of male dominance in politics, philosophy and education are central to our current understanding and formation of teacher 'professional identity' which draws on the binary of the 'rational man' as opposed to the 'irrational woman' (Butler, 1990; Dillabough, 1999). The concept of the 'rational man' is at the centre of neoliberal educational reforms; he is competent and possesses rationality, reason and political power. In contrast, the 'irrational woman' is 'emotional' and regarded as the 'other', and so the more feminised activity of caring in the teachers' role is not acknowledged or valued (Dillabough, 1999; Lynch et al., 2007). In this construction of the 'professional teacher', an embodied, subjective, discursive notion of the teaching 'self' is often lost, and the complexity of education and its socialising mechanisms are diminished so that teaching is seen as imparting certain skills and knowledge, and *not* as a relational, social process (Burke et al., 2017).

Neoliberal 'professional teacher' discourses

Dominant deficit discourses of 'fixing' public education problems, 'raising standards' and employing 'quality teachers' have resulted in a culture of performance measurement and teacher regulation associated with the 'competent' teacher (Ball, 2003; Burke & Whitty, 2018; Connell, 2009; Lingard et al., 2013). This culture displays a lack of trust in teachers' professional judgements, as decisions regarding what is important in education are imposed from above, undermining teachers' autonomy and agency in the classroom (Beckett, 2014; Mockler, 2011). The constant pressures of performance measurement (improving student test results) has caused many teachers to adopt reductive notions of education which can lead to practices that contradict their professional expertise and ideology of what it means to be a teacher (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Friedman & Pine, 2009; Shapiro, 2010). Many teachers enter the profession because of their social justice values and a desire to 'make a difference' for students; in other words, they care for the students they teach (Noddings, 1984; O'Connor, 2008). Thus, relational and emotional dimensions are key in their formation of professional identities (Uitto et al., 2015). However, teachers often feel the need to choose between being the 'competent teacher' or being the 'caring teacher' (Hargreaves, 1998; 2000) as "the intangible emotional and empathetic qualities which make a 'good teacher' from the viewpoint of students cannot be measured and so is considered worthless" (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004, p. 247) by policymakers. In trying to align with the neoliberal 'professional teacher' many teachers describe having their values challenged, compromised, or displaced which can lead to ideological, emotional and practical misgivings (Ball, 2003; Uitto et al., 2015).

Deconstruction of 'teacher professional learning'

The construction of the neoliberal 'professional teacher' has influenced the development of 'teacher professional learning' as it is viewed through this particular lens and as a result is

designed to meet the demands of performance measurement and 'standards' (Ball, 2003; Mockler, 2013; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). In Australia, teacher professional learning is mapped out in hours focusing on the acquisition of knowledge and skills, aligned with the mandatory teacher professional standards which have been formulated within a neoliberal understanding of education (Mockler, 2013). In this context, professional learning can be seen as a mechanism for accountability, as well as an attempt to change teachers' practices to align with neoliberal educational reforms (Hardy, 2008; Hargreaves, 2000; Lingard, 2009). As an example of the limited opportunities to deepen professional learning beyond this frame, a study conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2009) of 75, 000 teachers across 26 countries reported that nearly 70% of teachers indicated that there was no relevant or suitable professional learning. The introduction of professional learning linked to specific standards has not only led to a narrowing of approaches (Connell, 2009; Hardy, 2015; Lingard et al., 2013) but also takes away ownership and relevance of professional learning from teachers (Beckett, 2014; Korthagen, 2017).

As outlined in the OECD (2009) report, the main types of teacher professional learning are technical-rational approaches in the form of traditional top down one-off workshops or training and because of this teachers are reporting feeling increasingly apathetic toward participating in them. The technical-rational approach is a simple conceptualisation of teacher professional learning that focuses on specific activities to technically deliver objective knowledge to teachers in isolation from the complex teaching and learning environments in which they operate (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). This approach appears to have limited influence on improvements in educational practice due to a perceived irrelevance to the immediate practical concerns of teachers and a gap between a teacher's lived experience as a practitioner in the classroom and the representation of teaching and learning in the professional learning activity (Korthagen, 2017; Mockler, 2013). Teacher professional learning that responds to real learning needs situated in diverse contexts may be of more benefit (Mockler, 2013). Academic education researchers and teachers in professional development roles who develop and facilitate professional learning activities bring important and valuable research knowledge, expertise and understandings of teaching and learning which provide enormous support and benefit to teachers. However, it is the technical-rational approach to professional learning which can be problematic as it is based on an assumption that an outside 'expert' knows what is important for teachers to learn (Beckett, 2014; Gore & Gitlin, 2004; Korthagen, 2009). And technical-rational discourses of 'expertise' can potentially transform subjectivities into 'objective' knowledge, with feelings, emotions and values not being acknowledged, and lead to hierarchical 'expertise' of reliable (theoretical) and non-reliable (practical) knowledge which may devalue teachers' practitioner knowledge (Burke, 2013; Foucault, [1979] 2000). A teacher's knowledge can be viewed as dynamic and evolving, embodying complexity and subjectivity, and shaped explicitly by beliefs, values and emotions (Hargreaves, 1998; Nias, 1996). Therefore, the technical-rational approach may be limiting as it only considers learning from a cognitive viewpoint and neglects the emotional dimension in the process of learning (Korthagen, 2017).

There are many alternative more effective approaches to professional learning which can be drawn on, each with different purposes and foci that can provide a different lens on professional learning (Boylan, Coldwell, Maxwell & Jordan, 2017). One approach is Guskey's (2002, cited in Boylan et al., 2017) focus on supporting teachers and professional developers to understand how changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs occur. Guskey recognises that professional learning is complex and argues that it needs to be seen as a process not an event, with continuing support and continuing practice of the learning. Another approach is Opfer and Pedder's (2011) use of a complexity theory framework which emphasises the importance of connections and

relationships in and between the teacher, the school and the learning activity, as well as placing importance on the teachers' personal preference for a learning activity. The complexity of professional learning as a process means that seeking just one model or conceptualisation which is effective for all teachers and contexts is unrealistic, and so it may be more helpful to consider different theoretical and methodological approaches (Boylan et al., 2017; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

With increasing teacher attrition rates and reported dissatisfaction with current technical-rational approaches to professional development (OECD, 2009) the question is: How can generative and transformative professional learning approaches be developed to meet the needs of teachers despite being constrained by the current culture of performance measurement and teacher standards? Deconstructing how the 'professional teacher' is currently being framed and how this leads to a certain type of teacher professional learning has drawn us to Burke et al.'s (2017) 'Pedagogical Methodology' to explore the emotional aspects of teaching and teacher professional learning. As a methodological framework, it provided a space for a group of teachers committed to equity to develop a potentially transformative professional learning approach.

Methodology

Inequality in education is intricately tied to processes of misrecognition about 'capability' (Burke, 2013; Burke et al., 2017). In the neoliberal context, questions about educational outcomes and success are framed in terms of traditionally defined cognitive skills and 'achievement' is understood in terms of individual ability, efficacy, potential and hard work with little acknowledgement of structural, cultural and institutional inequalities and processes of misrecognition across a student's life trajectory of engagement with education systems (Burke et al., 2017). Sociologists of education have exposed that what is often being measured is social privilege and not intrinsic potential, talent and ability (Burke & Crozier, 2014; Connell, 2013). In this sense, pedagogical practices which privilege certain subjectivities, ontologies and epistemologies above others contribute to the reproduction of educational inequalities (Burke et al., 2017). So, there is a need to problematise how we define 'ability' and 'knowledge' and, consequently, who is perceived as the 'best and brightest' if we are to stop inadvertently reproducing inequality (social class) through education (Burke & Whitty, 2018; Burke et al., 2017).

We chose pedagogical methodology (PM) (Burke et al., 2017) to guide our 'inclusive education professional learning' for several reasons. PM draws broadly on post/structuralism, Freirean perspectives and feminism which helped us to develop an approach that is focused on moving towards more socially just possibilities and educational pedagogies. PM enabled us to interrogate and expose our understandings of material inequality, social structures and the politics of misrecognition through the examination of our own assumptions, beliefs and classroom practices. We drew on Paulo Freire's (2014) notion of praxis as reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed, as we aimed to transform our practices to further engage in pedagogies of social justice for our students. An important aspect in the 'inclusive education professional learning' was to include the often-excluded emotional domain. PM allowed us to incorporate both cognitive and emotional domains as it is attentive to the complex formations of masculinities and femininities in pedagogical practices and draws on liberatory pedagogies, which value empathy, connection and care. PM emphasises the importance of generating spaces for critical reflexivity and praxis and new ways of knowing and understanding that may not otherwise be available (Burke et al., 2017; Clegg, Stevenson & Burke, 2016). We hoped to create a generative space, where we could engage in deep considerations of power, gender, identity

formation and difference, as well as talk about our pedagogical experiences, expectations and frustrations. Ultimately, we hoped that by drawing on PM to guide our professional learning it would enable us to open up collaborative, dialogical, and participatory spaces which would engage us in pedagogical relations to resist hegemonic epistemologies (Burke et al., 2017).

A key aim was to create a generative space in which we, as researcher-practitioners, could engage in a potentially transformative approach to teacher professional learning. As teachers working with students experiencing disadvantage, we wanted to explore an approach to inclusive education professional learning that could contribute to more socially just educational realities for our students. The central focus for the professional learning was to provide a space where we were able to acknowledge discourses of deficit and the politics of misrecognition – of who is 'capable' in education – and engage in critical questioning and dialogue to understand how our own assumptions, beliefs, values and classroom practices may be challenged by these discourses as we work within dominant neoliberal agendas that promote the standardisation, privatisation and centralisation of education (Burke & Whitty, 2018).

Method

Our methods reflect the nature of the methodology outlined above. As the participant in the writing program, Nicola, had the idea for the project and then recruited three colleagues to develop and participate in the project. Over the space of three months, we four school teachers came together to engage in three inclusive education professional learning sessions where we attempted to engage with 'Freirean' dialogue. Freire (1972) understands dialogue as a relational process between equals, one that requires mutual trust and respect, care and commitment (Lumb & Roberts, 2017). This 'dialogic' method of enquiry required us to question what we knew and to accept that the process is intended to make it possible for existing thoughts to shift and for new knowledge to be created (Burke et al., 2017; Freire, 1972; 2014; Lumb & Roberts, 2017). We attempted to keep a focus on PM's methodological elements, such as recognising power relations and reflexivity within our dialogue (Burke et al., 2017). Notes were taken throughout the sessions and reflections were written afterwards. Our written reflections on the sessions also included reflections of our classroom practices penned during times between the professional learning sessions. These reflections and notes were read and re-read several times. The written reflections helped us to make sense of our dialogues through identifying emergent themes and concepts and the links to our practice.

Before each dialogic session we used stimulus reading material drawn from *Teaching Inclusively: Changing Pedagogical Spaces* (Burke & Crozier, 2013) and our dialogues were guided by such questions as:

   i)   How do we construct the meaning of 'capability' through the lens of our different histories?
   ii)   How does this relate to our histories and current roles in education?
   iii)   How do these constructs of 'capability' impact on our teaching and learning practices (constrained by systems and structures)?
   iv)   How does this impact on the reproduction of inequality in education and society?

Reflections and insights

This 'inclusive education professional learning' took place in a specific situation with four teachers who are committed to equity, however, on the basis of our reflections we share our

insights in the hope that maybe they can be helpful for improving teacher professional learning and reinforce recognition of teacher expertise because of the unique effect teachers have on students and their engagement with education. Some of our insights include: participating in professional learning as 'practitioner-researchers'; the centrality of emotions in our ongoing identity formation; the inseparability of our emotional and cognitive domains, and of our personal and professional selves in our daily work as teachers (Hargreaves, 2000); and, the complexity of power relations (Burke et al., 2017). As Miller (1995) discusses, the autobiography of the question is an important starting point for research; that is, understanding what brought you to the questions you are exploring along with consideration of the researchers' ontology and epistemology, and how it influences researcher's choices about which questions to ask, what method of data collection to use, and so on. Due to the contextualised situation of our professional learning, that is, four teachers who are committed to educational equity, we feel that it is necessary to share something of our personal contexts. Donna is an experienced high school teacher and is currently working in a public low socio-economic girls' school in Western Sydney, where the majority of the students are from language backgrounds other than English. Donna is originally from New Zealand and has always been drawn to the Maori culture. She describes her background as working class and since becoming a teacher has chosen to work in communities experiencing social disadvantage. Aidan is a primary school teacher at the beginning of his career. He currently works in a public primary school in a low socio-economic suburb in Western Sydney. Aidan's parents came to Australia as refugees from Vietnam and he describes growing up in a working class family but attending Catholic schools with mainly middle class children and limited diversity. Aidan always wanted to do something in society for social justice and since becoming a teacher he has chosen to work in schools in low socio-economic communities. Divna is an experienced high school teacher who is currently working in a senior school in a low socio-economic suburb of Western Sydney. The majority of the students are refugees, with many being mature age students. Divna's family were migrants to Australia and she describes experiencing feeling like an outsider throughout her schooling, as well as, her determination to succeed. Nicola is an experienced teacher, having worked in both primary and high schools in both the public and private sectors, who is currently working at a university in equity and widening participation. Originally from the UK where she grew up in a working class family, Nicola attended a state secondary grammar school having 'passed' the 11+ which she realises now provided her with the educational opportunity to go on to higher education, to the disappointment of her family who would have preferred that she gained employment immediately after school.

Emotions, teacher identity and professional learning

According to Burke et al. (2017), challenging everyday taken-for-granted assumptions and unrecognised historical habits is key to achieving more equitable education systems. The aim of this 'inclusive education professional learning' was to create a generative space for us as 'practitioner-researchers' to critically question and explore the effects of deficit capability discourses and the politics of misrecognition of who is 'capable' in the context of our classroom practices, being attentive to the symbolic and emotional level of identity formation and experience. This is of particular importance in the context of current dominant neoliberal educational agendas, which fail to acknowledge critical historical, social, economic and contextual factors related to educational inequity and which construct students from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular ways (Burke et al., 2017).

As an initial step in the research process, we each shared something of our own identities and histories, and the knowledge, experience and questions that we were bringing with us, to socially locate ourselves within the research project, as well as to support our practices of reflexivity,

which we hoped would position us in the wider social relations of power and inequality so that we could effectively engage in critical interrogation (Miller, 1995). We noted that we all referred to becoming a teacher because we wanted to 'make a difference' in children's lives and were driven by social justice reasons. For instance, Donna commented, "I have always been drawn to working in schools and communities which are experiencing disadvantage to be able to work with students who may need that bit extra from a teacher". Aidan stated "I received a high ATAR score…and everyone wanted me to study law but I had always wanted to teach for social justice reasons and this was my goal, there was a sense of not doing as well as I could have by choosing education" which demonstrates how strong his motivation to teach was and at the same time the regard for teaching as a low status profession.

We arrived at our first group session, having acquainted ourselves with the pre-reading, warmly welcomed each other, and began to chat comfortably about the day ahead, that is, until we 'officially' started the professional learning, at which point there was a palpable emotion of discomfort and nervousness. On reflection, it became clear that there were two challenges, firstly, our changed roles to 'practitioner-researchers' and, secondly, Nicola's role as initiator of the professional learning sessions. The emotions we experienced were both illuminating and unsettling, and required further attention. They appeared to be related to our notion of teacher identity, of being a practitioner, as well as contributing to a change and the formation of new identities as 'practitioner-researchers'. Valuing the emotional aspects often overlooked in the process of teacher professional learning was an important premise of the research so we agreed to work with our emotions to challenge hegemonic discourses in education (Burke et al., 2017).

As the project initiator, before Nicola even got to the first session with her colleagues she had experienced some self-doubt and anxiety. On reflection, she realised that she was nervous to ask her colleagues if they would join her in the project because she did not see herself as a 'practitioner-researcher' or as someone who was 'positioned' to initiate such a project. As teachers, our identities are shaped by historically and socially constituted discourses that locate us in a subordinate position in relation to outside 'experts' (researchers, consultants and academics) whose knowledge is privileged because this type of professional learning is valued by school authorities and universities to improve teachers' practices (Mockler, 2011; 2013). This lack of recognition of teachers' contextualised knowledge and experience, Nicola realised, had diminished her own teacher identity to 'practitioner' only, rather than as an education professional who has valid knowledge and expertise. Donna's initial reaction to Nicola's invitation, "I want to support you in this project but I am not sure what I will contribute", demonstrates the power of dominant neoliberal discourses and expectations as they permeate society's thinking and become 'truths'. Donna has a wealth of experience and success in teaching students in communities experiencing disadvantage and yet was doubtful of her worth in being part of a research 'inclusive education' professional learning project.

We four colleagues around the table at that first session brought with us many years of teaching and education experience and yet not one of us felt comfortable when we began, even though we had all just been happily chatting about our days. The conversation felt unnatural and stilted, with questions being asked (mostly by Nicola) and tentatively answered rather than the hoped-for co-theorisation and interrogation of notions of 'capability' and 'misrecognition'. Nicola did not expect this from this group of usually confident teachers, herself included. The cause of this unease was the struggle to change our perceptions of teacher identity to fit with our new roles as 'practitioner-researchers' and then to relate to each other as knowledge generators without feeling like imposters. The idea that we as teachers could legitimately engage in co-theorisation and co-construct our own learning, without an 'expert', was a challenge. Adopting pedagogical

methodological processes assisted us in problematising our relationship with professional knowledge and expertise, and therefore challenge power relations in research and pedagogy. In our sessions, one of the ways we navigated through this unease was by authentically valuing each other's contributions of their contextual practitioner knowledge and experience. Our intrinsic motivation to learn from each other's concerns, challenges and successes in our daily real-life teaching situations enabled us to push through the discomfort.

Pedagogical methodology (Burke et al., 2017) allows us to think about power explicitly and reflexively and to understand that we are all complicit in complex relations of power. Power is always involved in pedagogical relations, so it is important to recognise this and to think through it with the aim of creating more equitable practices (Burke et al., 2017; Foucault, [1979] 2000). This goal was a conversation focus for us to think about questions of difference, power and access to education in relation to our classroom practices. However, during the first session Nicola became aware of the power dynamics within the group, because she was seen as, and felt that she should be, the 'facilitator' who was leading and therefore unintentionally exerting her power through the formulation of questions that she regarded as important rather than the four of us relating to one another equally. Slowly, over time this changed and by the third session more equal positive power dynamics were emerging in the group. This was apparent in the way each member of the group was keen to reframe ideas and share thoughts from the previous two weeks of teaching and drive the conversation. Confidence was also demonstrated by Donna taking the initiative to write down key 'quotes' and 'ideas' during the sessions and then distribute them to the group to reflect on afterwards. Through the exposure of the complex relations of power at play with each other, the need to consider and engage in questions about the relations of power within our teaching practices became apparent.

That Nicola's colleagues arrived tired and somewhat stressed to the first session after a day's teaching, was not surprising as teachers are increasingly time poor with often overwhelming pressures on them in our regulatory and measurement oriented performance culture (Bennett & Burke, 2017; Connell, 2013). Furthermore, all three work in schools in low socio-economic areas and the demands on improving 'student outcomes' related to standardised testing, often with limited resources, can be exhausting. Aware of the lived reality of time constraints and emotional exhaustion Nicola felt she could only ask them to participate in three professional learning sessions over two months as she did not want to burden them further. However, by the third session, their commitment and enthusiasm was clear, with Aidan, for example, sharing that he was "tired, so much going on at school but happy to be here". Freire (1972) refers to the humanising and recuperative value of reflexive dialogue and praxis and this was something that we experienced as a group; the value in taking time to come together and engage in this process. Creation of time and space to participate in ongoing professional learning in the complex structure of schools, with all the time pressures and focus on attainment targets, can be a hard thing to do. This brought to light the question of what is deemed as a legitimate use of time for teachers. Lesson planning, assessment development and marking are all viewed as legitimate uses of time, however, time spent by teachers for knowledge generation and development of their craft appears to be valued less (Bennett & Burke, 2017). This problem also requires interrogation of how we felt about this use of our time and whether it impacted on our commitment to and the effectiveness of the professional learning. On reflection, Nicola realised she had conflicting emotions, deeply believing in the importance of exploring this professional learning process but at the same time feeling guilty about asking her colleagues for some of their precious time.

A key theme that was central in our conversations was care. In our conversations, it became clear that we all believed 'caring' was necessary in our work and an integral part of our identities as teachers. It was what motivated us to continue teaching even in difficult and often overwhelming circumstances. Caring was evident in the way we spoke about our students. For example, Divna stated: "some of the students in my classroom have seen and experienced so many troubling things, that to only focus on the content of the curriculum would be immoral… and hinder their learning" which demonstrates how she sees caring as essential to her job and also as part of her nature.

"Emotions are at the heart of teaching" (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835) but when our conversation focused on the increased bureaucracy and intensification of work it became clear that there was a feeling of this undermining teachers' emotional commitment, as Donna described, "there is a not enough time to get to know students so it is difficult to know what their needs are and how to support them". Aidan described how he had attended an awards event for recent graduate teachers, where the older teachers expressed that they "felt sorry for the younger teachers entering the profession now as it was becoming so hard to classroom teach with all the pressure on teachers to perform". With the focus on standards, testing and 'teacher quality' most discussions on teacher professionalism emphasise the cognitive aspect of these experiences, with little emphasis put on our emotions in professional identity. Even though, as teachers, we consistently draw on our emotions to inform our 'rational' decision-making and despite, as many would agree, that the influence the emotional has on the cognitive cannot be separated in our 'professional identities' (Leitch & Day, 2001). Both Aidan and Donna spoke of the emotional side of teaching: "the relationships with students is what it is about" (Donna) and "if this was not part of the teaching then it would be less effective" (Aidan). The emotions that we as teachers bring to the classroom have an effect on our students and it is important to acknowledge the transformative power of empathy, sensitivity and care, and that teaching involves more than just instructional behaviour (Beckett, 2014). However, as Hargreaves (2000) argues, the capacity for teachers to use their emotions depends not just on their individual emotional competence, but also on what is expected of teachers within the school structure and its demands. As we discovered, our dialogue sessions were full of feelings and care: "connecting with and encouraging my students…seeing them as a whole person is integral to my effectiveness as a teacher and also to the positive climate in the room" (Aidan), and yet the neoliberal dominant notion of the 'competent teacher' is one of rational, instrumental teaching, with the role of emotion undervalued. Our inner personal tensions between the personal and the professional, the emotional and the cognitive, also surfaced in our dialogues (Shapiro, 2010): "sometimes it can feel like you are trying so hard to do everything, encourage and nurture each student and not focus on the test too much…but then you have to get through the curriculum" (Nicola).

Neoliberal ideology of individualism, who is seen to be 'capable' and marketisation of education was another focus in our dialogue sessions. Donna expressed concern at how the new narrative around Australia's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) for Year 9 students was a deficit one: "to judge the 'ability' of students unfairly by indicating to them that it will determine if they can gain an ATAR [Australian Tertiary Admission Rank] or not". However, she realised that she could present an alternative narrative so that her students understood that it was an indication of where they were right now and that they had two more years to learn the necessary skills: "it appears to be deliberately framed to put off students like mine to go on to Uni…they may not have the skills yet but [they] certainly have the capability to learn them if given the chance". Aidan was pleased that his new principal was "fading out the 'enrichment' classes so that there would be a mix of students who can learn from each other." Concerns over perceptions of poor students achieving less good test results and consequently

being perceived as less 'capable' were expressed by all of us: "rich kids and poor kids no longer mixing…there is a form of segregation happening which is not being spoken about" (Donna).

The use of pedagogical methodology allowed us the space and opportunity to share honestly our complex emotional responses to issues such as standardised testing and the marketisation of education. As well as allowing us to think about and articulate the disconnect we sometimes feel between our sense of identity as teachers who 'care' for students and who have social justice beliefs, and neoliberal ideology which currently frames our working lives. Even though we only had time to scratch the surface of our emotional identities, the experience provided a glimpse of how shared expression of such identities could be important to our wellbeing and our ongoing formation of professional identity.

The highly contextualised nature of our professional learning enabled us to draw on our lived experience as teachers. The concepts we explored were informed by our individual local contexts and our experiences of real challenges in our classrooms, and through our dialogue and reflection we aimed to generate knowledge that was potentially useful in our practice. The time and space allowed us to respectfully express frustration and other feelings without fear of being seen as 'not professional', but rather, as being human. Our goal was to create a generative space for praxis and by the end of the third session, even though we still had a lot on our 'to-do lists' for the next day's teaching, we were in no hurry to leave, with the conversation flowing for much longer than the scheduled time. From this experience Nicola glimpsed the possibility of a professional learning process for teachers that could be nurturing and driven by intrinsic motivation to 'make a difference' through allowing them to feel respected and valued, by recognising them as having knowledge and expertise in teaching. By focusing on ourselves and attempting to examine our entrenched assumptions, beliefs and values around notions of 'capability' and our own experiences of 'misrecognition' we hoped to gain further understanding of ourselves and our practices, and ultimately discover more about how we as teachers might have a positive effect on educational equity from the ground up. However, we clearly did not have enough time together to deeply examine the latter which points to the need for this process of professional learning to be ongoing. For us, our main learning was about the process itself and the emotions we experienced in the development of a nurturing and respectful space for praxis and resistance to neoliberal education agendas and discourses.

Conclusion

Our approach to 'inclusive education professional learning' has the potential to positively impact on students' access to learning, as well as having a positive impact on teachers' wellbeing. The aim of this approach is to provide teachers with the tools and the right to 'care' for students which can ultimately improve students' engagement as learners and may result in participation in further education. Possible ways for schools to facilitate this approach may include starting with small groups of teachers coming together to explore a similar process, as being mindful of developing the complexity of this approach is essential, as is paying attention to how external factors impact on each person, as well as recognition of differences across the group and within each person. Engaging in the pedagogical methodological process (Burke et al., 2017) paying particular attention to the role emotions play in teachers' personal professional learning, relations of power and drawing on Freirean notions of praxis, can be necessarily challenging initially for teachers, as it was for us. Throughout the development of this professional learning there was support from two academic researchers, both of whom are committed to educational equity and to 'practitioner research', and this was vital for support to learn and understand the processes. Consequently, it could be beneficial for schools to also engage in this way in the beginning. Support from the school is crucial, to encourage teachers to explore this professional learning

approach and also through the prioritisation of time and space as part of teachers' professional development and workload. Valuing teachers and their pedagogical development in this way may open up the possibility of being a 'professional teacher' who is simultaneously aligned with social justice values and ethics of care, within the current constraints, to draw out the very best in students.

Acknowledgements

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