

# Climate justice and teacher professional learning... we owe it to our young people

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I am writing this editorial as the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP26, comes to nearby Glasgow. This might seem like a strange place to start an editorial for *Professional Development in Education*, but the sense of possibility associated with COP26 has been heavy in the air for some time as we ‘locals’ have watched preparations unfold. It is forcing us to think about big questions such as ‘what’s it all about?’ As an educator, I’m thinking ‘what does this mean for education’, and as a researcher interested in teacher professional learning, I’m thinking, how can we use the impetus from COP26 to make a positive difference to the professional learning agenda?

The links between the climate crisis and education are clear, and are evident in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>), where not only is education necessary to help fulfil all 17 goals, but Goal 4 – ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ – addresses the link between education and sustainability in an explicit way. This suggests a two-prong set of responsibilities for educators: 1) A responsibility to teach with sustainability in mind in terms of both curriculum content and in modelling ways of living sustainably; and 2) to ensure that education is inclusive and accessible across the learning life course. While we might naturally focus on this in terms of the education of school-age children and young people, PDiE forces the gaze on how these issues pertain to educators. Nicol et al. (2019) ask this question in relation to how initial teacher education programmes might support new teachers to think about ‘super-wicked problems’ including climate change, concluding that a key starting point is students’ and their lecturers’ ethic of care for themselves and each other. They suggest a need for ITE programmes to ‘nurture the deep experiential engagement required to translate care for self and others into practices that have caring for the planet at their heart’ (p. 27). The logical extension here is to question the extent to which post-qualification professional learning does likewise, and the extent to which it can therefore help us with the collaborative endeavour encapsulated in the UN Sustainable Development Goals?

The professional learning implications arising from the wide-ranging COP26 discussions lead us yet again to the age-old challenge of educators translating personal and professional beliefs about teaching for justice and democracy into actual practice (Adams, 2021), focusing in on questions of impact of professional learning. McChesney and Aldridge (2021, p. 835) capture this when they say that ‘A range of possible factors may ‘get in the way’ such that even well-designed professional development (that is, professional development

that reflects literature-based design recommendations) does not always lead to the desired teaching and learning gains'. It is this search for the 'Holy Grail' that continues my fascination with professional learning, exploring the infinite possibilities for a better world where education can truly support the fulfilment of bigger global aspirations such as climate justice. These are big aims, unsolvable by one person or country alone, but in curating lots of smaller bits of knowledge, and looking at them as a whole, we can make incremental steps towards these big aims. In this sense it always gives me great pleasure curating an issue for *Professional Development in Education*, knowing that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

This issue opens with Helma De Keijzer, Gaby Jabos and Wiel Veugelers' piece entitled *Teachers' moral learning in professional learning groups*, focusing on teaching as a moral endeavour. It takes us further by developing a framework for teachers' moral learning based on a review of literature, exploring stages of development, and acknowledging the challenges inherent in expanding, amending or even changing one's frame of reference in light of new understanding. It seems highly apt for the personal and professional work that educators face in dealing with the challenges of pursuing climate justice.

Stephanie Craig, Sean Smith and Bruce Frey then share their work on teacher professional development to support a 'universal design for learning' approach. They report on a quasi-experimental study exploring the effects of professional development designed to support teachers' implementation of UDL. The professional development they focus on is a week-long 'summer institute', which they argue is based on key conditions for 'effective' professional learning as identified in the literature. Their ultimate test of the efficacy of this model – its impact on future classroom practice – aligns well with earlier discussion in this editorial about the alignment of beliefs and aspirations with actual impact on practice.

In the next article, Lian Huang, Nicholas Sun-Keung Pang and Ya-Ting Huang move us from thinking about off-site professional learning for individual classroom practice to collaborative professional learning designed to enhance whole-school practice. Their article, entitled *Building school capacity for teacher learning in China*, is a qualitative study set in six schools in Shanghai where the authors identify six strategies operating at both organisational and teacher levels across the sample schools. While there is important generic learning arising from this work, it also points to the importance of attending to local/national contextual factors in supporting school-wide professional learning – a constant challenge for all educators in balancing local and global imperatives.

We then move to Norway, where Anne Mette Færøyvik Karlsen progresses our understanding of lesson study in her article *Investigating teacher learning in lesson study: the important link between reported observations and change of plans*. She focuses explicitly on the observation element of the process and how teachers use learning derived from post-observation discussions, revealing a nuanced appreciation of the challenges of embedding such a process for long term professional learning gains. Importantly, in relation to the professional learning aims associated with climate justice and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Karlsen points to the potential of such collaborative professional learning to 'increase teachers' active positions towards the world' (p. ??).

Next, Yuen Sze Michelle Tan and Joshua Johnstone Amiel share their exploration of teachers learning to apply neuroscience in the classroom, in a small case-study set in British Columbia, Canada. This is a fascinating exploration of teachers' use of neuroscience theory to inform their lesson planning and delivery. It acknowledges that the power of neuromyths exists at a much wider societal level, thereby pointing to the power of accepted 'wisdom' to shape our professional as well as our personal understandings of the world. Tan and Amiel's experiences also provide stimulus for thinking about how teachers can engage with the vast amount of scientific research on climate change and climate justice, and highlights the need for critical, informed approaches to using theory to inform practice in our classrooms.

The next article moves away from a singular contextual setting to explore professional development across five 'PISA achiever countries'. Here, Funda Eda Tinga, Sümeyra Eryigit, Fatma Ay Yalçın and Eyza Tantekin Erden seek specifically to identify lessons that might be drawn on in their own national context in Turkey. The article provides a really useful overview of the comparative research process they adopted, and raises important questions about how comparative research might be used to inform development of professional learning policy and practice without viewing it in an uncritical 'what works' way.

Catriona Oates and Christine Bignell then shift our focus to issues of partnership working between schools and universities involved in teacher education. Their article, *School and university in partnership: a shared enquiry into teachers' collaborative practices*, sheds light on the sometimes hidden tensions which underpin partnership in terms of different stakeholders with different perspectives having their voices heard to different extents. Oates and Bignell examine macro, meso and micro level considerations, reporting on a study in one school in Scotland where they foreground the teachers' experiences (rather than the university partners' experiences). They conclude by calling for greater reciprocity in the relationship between school and university staff, pointing to the need for continued interrogation in this area.

We then move to New Zealand, with Joanna Lim, Letitia Fickel and Janinka Greenwood's article *Mapping the landscape of professional inquiry as a form of teacher learning in New Zealand: a narrative inquiry into one teacher's experience*. Here they both map the terrain by outlining the development of inquiry as teacher professional learning in New Zealand more generally, and then use a narrative lens to explore one teacher's experiences of engaging in professional inquiry. This lens reveals a tension between externally imposed expectations of professional inquiry and the teacher's own professional learning needs and aspirations. They conclude that enabling teachers to explore these external motivations, and to understand them better, might 'galvanise teachers into adopting a more active role in their learning' (p. ??).

*What matters in learning communities for inclusive education: a cross-case analysis* is the title of Elizabeth Walton, Suzanne Carrington, Beth Saggars, Chris Edwards and Wacango Kiimani's article. They acknowledge that striving for truly inclusive education is a global agenda – as evident in the UN Sustainable Development Goals – and also a challenging one. The research takes the form of a multi-case study set in schools in Australia and in South Africa, and employs a complexity theory framework which positions professional learning as

a complex process rather than as an event. This work addresses head-on the challenge of trying to generalise whilst also attending to contextual differences, and in so doing identifies three factors that they claim are necessary, although not wholly sufficient, for effective professional learning communities to make a difference to teachers' understandings of inclusive education.

Avishay Zilka, Yael Grinshtain and Ronit Bogler's article explores an aspect commonly explored in relation to children and young people's learning, but less often in relation to teacher learning – the issue of fixed or growth mindsets. Their qualitative study examines the fourteen Israeli teachers' perceptions of their own mindsets in relation to their engagement with professional learning. Their findings open up fascinating debates around the ways in which recalcitrant internal factors, such as previous life experiences and values, can impact on the extent to which external contextual factors influence teachers' engagement with professional learning. The article reminds us of the wider challenges of ensuring that professional learning opportunities do actually result in positive changes in practice.

This issue closes with an article by Nicole Mockler – *Teacher professional learning under audit: reconfiguring practice in an age of standards*. This article speaks to the theme of this editorial in exposing the extent to which the globally dominant neoliberal ideology, with its concomitant audit culture, serves to shape, and at times, limit what can be done in the name of professional learning and development. It has particular resonance for the debate about how we mobilise globally to ensure that educator professional learning is enabling of the goals of climate justice. It speaks to the very core of issues of power, control and hegemony, using an analysis of the relationship between professional standards, professional development and teacher professionalism in New South Wales, Australia. Mockler concludes that 'practices of resistance in schools require their own particular practice architectures, along with a sense of courage on the part of leaders, and school cultures that privilege and value risk-taking and trust.'

Taking the articles in this issue as a whole, I return to the theme of the link between climate justice and professional learning. It seems fitting to close with Mockler's call for greater risk-taking and trust – something that we have seen in abundance from the very many hugely passionate and articulate young activists holding COP26 to account. Let's be inspired by our young people, and as educators, ensure that we take seriously the impact of our own professional learning in playing a part in working towards climate justice.

### References:

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