**Review of Sai Loo (2022) *Teacher Educators in Vocational and Further Education.* Cham: Springer. 151pp.**

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The professional formation of teachers is routinely central to education reform, as governments seek to bring teachers into line with their visions of the future. The expertise of teacher educators is therefore regularly confronted with imperatives to take new teachers in untested and often perilous directions. In vocational and further education, such tensions can arise when VET is central to policy agendas, as in the present late-COVID period; or, as Scott, Wilde and Bennett remind us in this volume, when its ‘dangerous and high-maintenance spaces’ (Atkinson, Parker and Morales 2017) are abandoned to market forces. This collection of eight contributions (one by the editor, who adds introduction and conclusions) on challenges facing teacher educators, is unquestionably well-timed, reflecting struggles over the future of VET.

Such a collection has to deal both with the specifics and tensions of teaching teachers and with the wider contextual issues of policy and society that frame these practices. In a book with four chapters on English further education and four concerning Denmark, India, New Zealand, and South Africa, the latter provide most contextual detail but all draw attention to tensions that are recognisable internationally. None describes a passive acquiescence in the face of narrowing conceptualisations of education, mounting performative demands or diminished resources: most describe projects designed to provide stronger foundations to new teachers’ working lives.

Perhaps the most ambitious project is described by Papier in a contribution from the global South, based on her centre’s response to South Africa’s 2013 *Policy on Professional Qualifications for Lecturers in TVET.* Their development of a postgraduate diploma in TVET (PGDip TVET) at the University of the Western Cape was not only designed to develop the expert teachers of policy aims: it sought to ‘create a foundation... that could evolve into practitioner-based research for contributing to the local knowledge base on TVET teaching and learning’. Progressing to masters and doctoral study, these students were envisaged as contributing to a future cadre of TVET scholars and researchers: it appears that their task would include developing a corpus of vocational pedagogy research, working with rudimentary understandings from the work of Lucas and Shulman. Papier describes the challenges entailed, drawing extensively on students’ accounts and describing the project as enabling ‘a glimmer of light to shine through a tiny crack in the door.’ Yet the limits of its success should be measured against the scale of its ambition and the difficulties of its national context.

Other international contributors describe initiatives in teacher education often in conflict with policy and institutional interests. Duch and Nielsen, reporting a series of the research studies expected of teacher educators in Denmark, describe tensions flowing from policy, regulation and the expectations of vocational schools. In the most practice-focused chapter, Hannan discusses Culturally Responsive Teaching Practice in New Zealand. Pilz, Schlöglmann and Gengaiah place Indian teacher education in the context of India's ‘high demand for skilled workers’ especially in advanced technical fields, due to its rising economy and population. Yet a shortage of VET teachers and of teacher trainers, reinforced by the low status of VET and poor rewards for instructors, is difficult to address in a variegated context with limited regulation. The chapter reports an empirical study of teacher-trainers, finding high motivation, flowing from the perceived social benefits of their work, tempered by considerations of personal and institutional standing. One of Pilz et al.’s respondents describes their status as ‘entirely different to any [other] person,’ echoing concerns of VET teachers and teacher educators around the world. The chapter concludes that ‘... in the context of the Skill India Mission, it seems to make sense to treat the teacher trainers as a supporting pillar,’ although this may be asking much of a national government heavily committed to market solutions.

The chapters from England describe contexts where market forces are explicitly countered: in Scott, Wilde and Bennett’s chapter, by positioning teacher education in opposition to neoliberalism’s diminution of teacher and teacher educator roles. The authors argue that by developing teachers’ ability to make sense of and cope with their context, ‘neoliberalist and managerialist practices … [are] contested and disrupted.’ The nurturing of beginning teachers, the authors argue, is personal, local and value-laden, entirely removed in essence from the continual monitoring and constant measuring of ‘good, best and excellent practice’ that shapes the lives of teachers in English further education. Kidd, Viswarajan, and McMahon reflect on their own experiences, and those of their student teachers, drawing on Sennett’s work and especially his account of craft, as more patient and reflective approaches to developing teachers’ identities. The possibilities of autonomy, contestation and resistance are well-worn themes of education literature, and teacher education is no less suggestive of such possibilities. Yet their long-term viability as isolated responses to policy reforms is uncertain. Duckett’s perspective is broader, embracing the range of teaching reforms across all sectors since 2010 before developing his vision of pedagogy and mentoring for further education teachers. This represents a more far-reaching challenge, if less attainable than partial acts of resistance in an age of largely bipartisan education policy.

Loo’s own contribution to the eight core chapters revisits an earlier UK-based study to explore the relationship between its participants’ initial disciplines, pathways to becoming teachers and current roles. Such a study has interest in a landscape that many educators enter by accident and travel in unexpected directions but the variables lack clear definition: disciplines are grouped on the lines of higher education studies, dictionary definitions of ‘intent’ produce a typology of ‘intended,’ ‘unintended’ and ‘miscellaneous’ journeys to job titles which provide little clarity. As the chapter concludes, these ‘potentially fertile’ aspects of teacher educators’ lives ‘offer a starting basis for other researchers.’

In such a varied text, the editor has an opportunity to bring together the valued observations of its authors with a cogent analysis of its themes. This does not emerge from the introductory chapter, which describes the Call for Papers, ‘porous’ English further education and then summarises the systems discussed in the international chapters and the chapter content. Loo notes that ‘one cannot have contributions made to order,’ although there would be merit in setting out their major themes at the outset, or critically summarising at the end. In the closing chapter, Loo lists other texts on teacher educators; describes the content of the central chapters and maps them against other works and the themes in his Call for Papers. Finally, Loo identifies areas not included in this text, such as professional recognition, professional development for existing teacher educators; routes into teacher education and support structures.

These are important practical questions that deserve to be addressed; other urgent questions also face teacher education. As deregulated, work-based routes begin to displace educationally richer programme in many countries, spaces for contestation and critique remain but access is restricted. Currently school teacher education in English universities is seen as facing an existential threat; in many ways further education in England has already travelled that road, with barely a quarter of institutions offering teacher education for the sector. These changes mirror upheavals in what are increasingly polarised VET systems around the world, where the commodified lists of competences to which Scott, Wilde and Bennett refer, and the generic curricula Duckett describes, are joined by knowledge-based curricula that are only available to some; where the learner-centred pedagogies that accompanied the expansion of education and training during years of mass youth unemployment give way to ‘instructor-led’ methods, for some; and where the rise in ‘diversity’ of provision introduces new inequalities paralleling those in the wider world. Teacher education finds itself at the heart of this turmoil and needs the support of engaged and critical research.

**References**

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