

TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: LOOSING IT AND REGAINING IT

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ABSTRACT

The paper maintains that the current era, marked by a new global economy transforming economic and social development, has created the need for a reorganization of teachers' representation. This paper discusses a key development in teacher organization, namely the emergence of Education International as a global hub for teacher unionism from across the world. This unique organization, formulated in response to the emergence of global economies and supra-national figures, represents teachers' response to globalised institutions and has instigated projects, such as the Professional Code of Ethics, which aim to create a sense of professional identity and unity amongst teachers. The organization presents the political voice of teachers as a global collective that seeks to embed teachers' interests in education reform and in the public debates concerning the direction of educational change in the era of globalization. The paper concludes by outlining an ongoing issue that jeopardizes the collective voice of teachers and stresses how this needs to be further addressed in the ethical frameworks of what it means to be a teacher in the 21st century.

Keywords: *teaching profession; ethics; unionism; and social movements*

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of teachers' practice and professionalism has occurred through a negotiation of shared interests between demands of the Nation-State, civil society, and the teaching profession (Lawn, 1987). However, the advent of globalisation presented significant shifts in educational reorganisation and subsequent teacher reforms. In the era of globalisation, part of the reform movement has focused on quality education for all students, and most reform is framed in terms of better outcomes for students. Strategies stressing achieving better student outcomes required that teachers' work become more strongly aligned with practices focused on standardizing classroom practice, and implementing regimes of administration and regulatory accountability practices. These efforts attempted to generate the quality teacher and reproduce a set of professional practices thought to be more effective and efficient in achieving desired student outcomes. An additional demand placed upon teachers was their subscription to ongoing learning designed to tailor their professional development according to the needs of students and their schools, perhaps at the expense of their own career plans and interests.

GLOBAL RESPONSE TO TEACHERS' REFORM

Teachers were a passive recipient of policy reshaping their practice and a marginalized stakeholder in educational reforms, considering the supra-national organisations directing educational change and influencing local education systems. However, this is not the case. A compensatory consequence of globalisation, the influence of supra-national educational stakeholders and subsequent educational reforms, has been the emergence of Education International. This organisation came together in 1995 as a global affiliation of teachers' unions and federations from around the world. Currently, the organisation represents over 300 teachers' unions from across the globe. The organisation presents the collective, political voice of teachers as a social movement organisation that seeks to represent teachers and education reform in the public and social politics of globalisation and educational reforms (Education International, 2002).

This paper discusses the role of Education International in constructing the Professional Code of Ethics. By articulating an ethical component to teachers' identity,

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Education International presented teachers with a political strategy to forge their collective interests in a changing education and social context. The focus of this paper, outlining key policy development instigated by Education International, intends to showcase the capacity for dynamic teacher response to globalisation and illustrate the underpinning political strategy involved in constructing a teachers' code of ethics that maintains core beliefs about education and teaching.

EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Education International, as the teachers' global representative body, aims to become a catalyst in global social policy in order to articulate and pursue the interests of teachers at the macro-level of policy construction.

Every two years, Education International holds a World Congress, which gathers teachers and their representatives from across the globe. The Congress is a week-long meeting in which teachers participate in discussion and workshops, elect representatives, and respond to current issues. It is a forum for teachers to unite and help strategise professional responses to education, teaching, and social issues. Third World Congress, held in Jomtien (Thailand) in July 2001, addressed the theme of education in the global economy and invited teachers and their union representatives to share their ideas and opinions on a range of professional issues. The current paper refers to information from this Congress to discuss a key initiative and outcome of the Third World Congress, the Teachers' Code of Ethics.

TEACHER ETHICS

This paper discusses the Professional Code of Ethics to show that constructing and articulating an ethical component to teachers' identity presented teachers with a political strategy to articulate their interests in a changing education and social context, and in doing so, make progress towards reclaiming their authority in remaking their profession. Rather than using the language of policy infused with neo-liberal reconstruction of the social-economic context, Education International, through the construction

of an ethical basis for teaching, provided a basis for teacher solidarity in the way that teachers could respond to globalised policy and help negotiate their professional identities as a global epistemic community.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Education International sought to extend the capacity of teachers' representation in global policy, focusing on key beliefs that underpinned teachers' unity. Maintaining quality public education, and making this ideal a keystone in any democratic society, is an example of a key belief underpinning Education International's vision for educational reforms.

Teachers and trade unions need to work together to promote an ideological framework in school and society as well. Teachers must play a political role in society.

Education should be free, compulsory and based on equality. Tolerance and equality are key principles to shape human values and shape human beings for social life.

Teachers are arbiters of change, have clear roles and responsibility, fight to achieve economic levels and conditions. Colleagues have to fight for conditions, to shift focus of demands to human aspects of globalisation and highlight the educational role of teachers.

There is a need to stop private schools and to mobilize teachers' unions to strongly object to the privatization of education.

What emerge from such quotations are demands for greater teacher control in how the profession develops and reframes itself. The Code of Professional Ethics addresses these concerns from teachers representing both developing and developed nations.

A THEORETICAL BASIS FOR CODE OF ETHICS

Teaching does make moral demands on the teacher, specifically evident in teachers' relationships with a number of stakeholders. Perhaps the ethical component of teachers' work is most evident in teachers' responsibility to ensure the safety of their students, inclusive of both physical and emotional safety. The central thesis about the ethical claims of teaching concern the causal relationship between the

moral claims of teachers and the influences on their students. For Sockett, the concept of professional virtue underpins the development of the profession. If taken further, the virtue extends into teachers' dealings with their communities, the demands for accountability, the knowledge base for teaching, and finally, teachers' ideals about the value of education. However, rather than putting the onus on individual teachers to use an ethical basis to inform their practice, ethics can form the basis of collective values and behaviours. According to Abbott (1983), the five basic properties of professional ethics include universal distribution, enforceable visibility, allowance for individuality, collegial obligations, and alignment with recognized status. Abbott also adds that both intra- and extra-professional status need to be taken into account when forging professional ethics. These properties present the basis for a collective agreement about teachers' ethical obligations. Rather than promoting ethical teaching as a personal obligation and preference, ethical deliberations, taking into account the types of properties suggested by Abbott, become part of the negotiations in defining the profession.

Considering the potential for disunity, when considering the vast differences in teachers' conditions, preferences, and ethical interpretations that may occur, considering the differing context of education across the globe, a unified response from the profession is timely. Abbott is suggesting a systematic approach to articulating the common ground, which can be seen as a strategy for universalizing professional understandings of ethics in teaching.

A PRACTICAL STRATEGY FOR CODE OF ETHICS

A concerted effort to reclaim professional authority and autonomy is pursued by Education International through the Professional Code of Ethics. The code is specifically designed to clarify and identify the teaching profession across a range of social and economic contexts. According to Education International, the Code of Ethics is a tool to assist teachers and education personnel when questions of professional behavior and ethics arise. The discussion of ethical questions be on-going among educators

since it is too late to start the debate when a problem surfaces. No code can cover every eventuality and this one is no different. It is however intended to be of assistance to educators addressing relations with the different stakeholders in education (Extract from Agenda 11 Draft International Code of Ethics, Section I, DOC: E11). (EducationInternational, 2002.)

The Professional Code of Ethics makes universal claims insofar as they construct a set of uniform guidelines for teachers that articulate what it means to be a teacher in the current context. In making these claims, attention is given both to external demands, for example, the demands of different stakeholders, and to internal demands, such as the need for ongoing conversations about what it means to be a teacher. The ethical guidelines aim to unpack the notion of ethical behaviour and move towards greater transparency in making visible professional obligations.

The teaching profession may benefit greatly from a discussion about the core values of the profession. Such raising of consciousness about the norms and ethics of the profession may contribute to increasing job satisfaction among teachers and education personnel, to enhancing their status and self-esteem, and to increasing respect for the profession in society (EducationInternational, 2004).

The Code of Ethics outlines six key commitments: commitment to the profession, commitment to students, commitment to colleagues, commitment to management personnel, commitment to parents, and finally, the community's commitment to its teachers. The teacher is represented as a principled figure, entrusted with moral authority, able to make sense of change, and in doing so, can help students to make sense of change. The Code of Ethics stresses the public duties and moral commitment of teachers as public employees entrusted by society. This trust requires teachers to adhere to a moral code of conduct where true professionalism is guided by high ethical standards. Finally, the Code addresses teachers' social agency and political commitment. Thus, there are explicit clauses requiring teachers to combat racism and discrimination. The ethical guidelines are firmly aligned to International

Labour Organization (ILO, 1996) principles outlining working conditions that include core values such as job satisfaction and unity through the increased esteem of the profession (Education International, 2002). Britzman (2000) encapsulates this participation by stating that, "If teacher education is to join the world, be affected by its participation in world making, and question the 'goodness' of its own passions, we must rethink not only past practices and what goes under the name of professionalism, but also the very imagination it will take to exceed compliance, fear controversy, and 'unclaimed' experiences"

The articulation of a Code of Ethics to universalize and articulate the basic premise of teachers' identity and practice shows that there is a strategic role for Education International to organize the reconstruction of professional ethics and take leadership in framing how teachers can reclaim control of their professional evolution. Education International has the capacity to universalize professional understandings and help forge solidarity amongst disparate teachers' groups.

INTRA-PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

While the universality of the Code of Ethics seeks to present a united front in terms of what it means to be a teacher, there are outstanding intra-professional issues that also need further debate within the profession. As intimated earlier, Abbott (1983) constituted professionalism as having both internal and external dimensions. The previous discussion has outlined the role for Education International in constructing an ethical framework through which the profession can be identified by other stakeholders. However, the internal dimensions of professional ethics also need further attention. If solidarity is defined as a shared culture, as "a set of shared premises and practices"

There is an outstanding issue that is integral to the teaching profession and one that is crucial to creating global solidarity. Teachers at the Education International Third World Congress identified gender as a critical area of concern relevant to educating in the global economy. Gender issues were raised not only about the way girls' and boys' education is

differentiated in many countries, but also with regards to the feminization of the teaching profession and the effect on work and practices in the global age. The next section discusses how issues of gender impinge on solidarity and teachers' capacity to stand united in their response to globalisation and education reforms. While professional solidarity synthesizes relations among the teaching fraternity around the world, social change and educational change are dependent on collective action and the shared premises upon which action is based.

One way to fight against loss of liberty and equality . . . is to create and re-create particular cultural entities . . . that would be social not individual, that would be particularisms whose object would be the restoration of the universal reality of liberty and equality (Wallerstein, 1991, p. 224).

While the Code of Ethics represents a step forward for teacher solidarity, there are internal divisions among teachers. Wallerstein (1991) suggests that cultural practices and the shared premises of the cultural attributes of these practices are often shared subconsciously between classes and thus elude discussion. The experiences of teachers at the Education International Third World Congress reveal that gender issues pose a threat to solidarity in teacher relations. The disparate experiences of male and female teachers in many countries necessitate a review of the shared premises of solidarity in order to clarify and make certain a global solidarity.

The feminisation of the teaching force is akin to the "stereotyping of the profession as doing reproductive work associated with women," said teachers from the Asia Pacific Region. Teachers from the Philippines elaborated:

The overriding negative is the stereotyping of the profession as a nurturing/caring profession which leads to lower salary and lower income. The way that gender equates to lower income and status needs to be redressed. The social status of women and girls must be improved. There is a call for gender sensitive education; strengthening of women's committees and participation in all levels of decision making and planning (Education

International Third World Congress, Philippines teachers' union).

Stereotyping the profession as doing reproductive work, focused on a caring and nurturing role, is detrimental to all teachers. In this situation, teachers are not teaching experts of disciplinary authorities, but instead become care-givers, which impacts on their status and has further implications for working conditions and wages. For example, teachers from Ecuador explained how the salaries of teachers have dropped, as has their social standing. They stated that more and more teachers are using teaching as a part-time job because of its poor security and wages; as a result, women teachers use teaching to supplement other work and mother duties. The result is an increase in job-sharing, where three teachers may share two jobs. The net effect on the profession is negative in that it diminishes teaching as well paid and rewarding with prospects for promotion and security. These effects influence both men and women staying on in teaching, as well as diminishing the attractiveness of the profession for future teachers.

CONCLUSION

The construction of a Professional Code of Ethics is a policy movement fuelling solidarity towards greater integration and the interdependency of teachers worldwide. It answers the challenge for teachers' unions to move forward and outward into global and local communities in search of the common good that addresses social and education needs for all. By articulating who teachers are in this global age and what they stand for, teachers are strengthening their ability to make a more significant contribution to education reform.

The professional guidelines exemplify the professionalism, honour, and highest social commitment demanded of teachers by the public and responds to the decline of public confidence in teachers and their professional judgments by making policy about what a teacher is, and can do, in the global age. In other words, the Code of Ethics forms the beginnings of defining teachers' identity, according to teachers.

The Code of Ethics therefore needs to be constructed as a powerful statement about

teacher identity that addresses issues of gender and representation that confront the profession. By reaching out to global organisations that have used teacher ethics as a way to unite the profession at the global level, local organisations can align themselves to powerful coalitions that give greater capacity for teachers to empower their own profession and be a force in determining what it means to be a teacher in the new century.

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