

Dedication

For those who teach, for those who learn and for those who research teaching and learning, and for all who strive through teaching, learning and research to empower all of us and thereby to make this world a better place for all.

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Chapter 1: Empowering Educators: Promoting Enabling

Teaching and Learning in Research and Practice *Kevin*

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Abstract

Teachers and teaching lie at the heart of effective, sustainable and transformative education. Yet teachers across the globe are increasingly experiencing pressure and perhaps feel under siege as the demands on their work increase without a corresponding growth in the resources and support available to them. There is accordingly an urgent need to empower educators so that they can in turn continue to empower their students to face the uncertainties of the 21st century.

The authors of this chapter places this dual focus on empowering educators in a broader perspective by distilling key findings from contemporary scholarship about teachers and teaching. These findings are linked in turn with the rationale for this book and with the foci of the subsequent chapters in the book.

Introduction

An abiding ambivalence attends the work and identities of contemporary educators. On the one hand, few informed and well-disposed commentators would doubt the importance of teaching and its transformative potential, encapsulated in representations of the teaching profession both in films (Ellsmore, 2005) and in novels (Carr, 1984). On the other hand, teachers are seen as increasingly pressured and under threat, including through (albeit often

reluctant) complicity with high stakes standardised testing (Au, 2011), responding to individual accountability and school league tables (Perryman, Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2011), engaging with school leaders who have varying degrees of competency (Tschannen-Moran, 2014) and sometimes experiencing feelings of not belonging at school and of emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

All of this accentuates both the urgency of, and the value in, analysing the broader contexts framing the work and identities of contemporary educators and also of articulating the principles and strategies that can facilitate more positive and productive outcomes for teachers as these contribute directly to their empowerment. Doing so is important in its own right for members of a crucial yet often undervalued profession, and can also strengthen educators' capacities to empower their students, thereby enacting the parallel meaning of empowering educators that is the core theoretical underpinning of this book.

The authors of this chapter take up this dual focus on empowering educators (as simultaneously increasing the resources and support available to teachers and assisting them to work with their students even more effectively) through a carefully targeted distillation of key findings from contemporary scholarship about teachers and teaching. This scholarship traverses the formally constituted sectors in which educators work (preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary) as well as the informal spaces (coaching and youth work) that many of them occupy to build collegiality and to nourish their spirits to enable them to fulfil the competing expectations held for their work by governments, communities and employers. On the basis of this scholarship, the authors evince grounds for cautious optimism in the crucial project of empowering educators, provided that the agency and responsibility of individual teachers are not overwhelmed by wider structural forces and contradictory pressures.

The chapter is divided into the following two sections:

- Current scholarship regarding empowering educators and their students

- The book's rationale, structure and contributions to extending current understandings of empowering educators.

Current Scholarship Regarding Empowering Educators and Their Students

A considerable body of research attends the work and identities of contemporary teachers. Such identities have been conceptualised in terms of concepts like dialogical self (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), politicised professionalism (Mockler, 2011), teachers' voice (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010), multiple notions of agency (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011), occupational and organisational professionalism (Löfgren, in press) and the utility of metaphor in helping teachers to articulate specific professional identities (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011), with such professional identities being composed of job satisfaction, self-efficacy, occupational commitment and change to motivation (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2011). Despite their diversity, these theoretical perspectives derive from researchers' shared assumptions regarding the complexity, materiality and situatedness of the terrains in which educators work and in which they seek to enhance their students' life chances.

These same characteristics are evident in the diverse ways that contemporary educators understand their students' worlds. For instance, proponents of the notion of funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) eschew deficit views of their students' knowledge and instead strive to incorporate those students' often rich extracurricular lives into formal learning experiences. Similarly, empowering educators take seriously the proposition of the differentiated classroom (Tomlinson, 2014), whereby everyone involved in the educational partnership, including learners, teachers, families and community members, has a significant responsibility for the multifaceted support needed to facilitate long-term

learning outcomes. Moreover, culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) is predicated on students' multiple and often inequitably constructed and positioned sociocultural backgrounds exercising a profound influence on their learning opportunities that empowering educators must work hard to maximise.

Likewise, many educators and education researchers reinforce the value of highly diverse pedagogical approaches, whose mobilisation reflects teachers' capacities to empower their students and subsequently enhance their own sense of empowerment as capable and effective educators. These approaches include the design of emergent learning tasks (Kawka, Larkin, & Danaher, 2011, 2012), using Learning Circles to maximise students' social integration and support between their home lives and their studies (Noble & Henderson, 2008, 2011), developing authentic linguistic spaces when engaged in language teaching and learning (Hatoss, van Rensburg, & Starks, 2011) and generating and sustaining productive student teams in online learning environments (Brodie, 2011). It is important that the diversity of pedagogical approaches used by educators matches the diversity and aspirations of their students.

More broadly, the importance of this double diversity, and its accompanying complexity, were synthesised in Hattie's (2009) distillation of the ongoing interdependence of teaching and learning for educators and students:

...the art of teaching reaches its epitome of success after the lesson has been structured, after the content has been delivered, and after the classroom has been organized. The art of teaching, and its major successes, relate to 'what happens next' – the manner in which the teacher reacts to how the student interprets, accommodates, rejects, and/or reinvents the content and skills, how the student relates and applies the content to other tasks, and how the student reacts in light of success and failure apropos the content and methods that the teacher has taught. Learning is spontaneous, individualistic, and often

earned through effort. It is a timeworn, slow and gradual, fits-and-starts kind of process, which can have a flow of its own, but requires passion, patience, and attention to detail (from the teacher and student). (pp. 1-2)

Against the backdrop of this enduringly significant interplay between teachers and students, the work and identities of contemporary educators need to be understood as constrained, and yet also enabled, by the respective contexts in which they enacted their responsibilities. Widely ranging themes have emerged as influencing teachers' subjectivities. For instance, the long running Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives and Effectiveness (VITAE) research project highlighted the emotional dimension of teaching and its impact on teachers' uncertain professional identities in the United Kingdom (Day, 2011). Those identities have also been situated in the deeply ingrained conflict between schools as instruments of neoliberalism and as sites of alternative ways of facilitating learning (Wrigley, Lingard, & Thomson, 2012). On the one hand, this conflict can be viewed as placing an additional and heavy burden on already overstretched teachers; on the other hand, it can be understood as a crucial element of the terrains of their professional work. As one illustration of such a conflict and its attendant complexities, school self-evaluation in a sample of schools in the English Midlands was found to be linked inextricably with deeper themes of 'issues of compliance and resistance, teacher motivation and behaviours, understandings of professionalism and leadership, school ethos, job satisfaction, and the use and interpretation of school level data in relation to school self evaluation' (Hall & Noyes, 2009, p. 311).

One particular subset of the literature concerning contemporary educators and the dual project of empowering them and helping them to empower their students is focused on the highly differentiated and often contentious situation of teachers working with learners who are variously constructed as 'marginalised' (see also Danaher, Cook, Danaher, Coombes, & Danaher, 2013). This situation was explored in a special theme issue (Anteliz, Coombes, &

Danaher, 2006a) of the academic journal *Teaching and Teacher Education* that investigated the impact on educators of teaching such students, and whether and how doing so might construct those educators as ‘marginalised pedagogues’ (Anteliz, Coombes, & Danaher, 2006a):

Given that ‘difference’ often shades into ‘deficit’ and ‘discrimination’, it is necessary to consider the extent to which educators teaching these learners see themselves as ‘marginalised’ – and/or perhaps as ‘privileged’ to be working with these learners, as ‘innovators’ because they are away from the surveillance directed at ‘mainstream’ education and so on. (Anteliz, Coombes, & Danaher, 2006b, p. 754)

The special journal theme issue investigated this proposition of ‘marginalised pedagogues’ in relation to seven groups of students and their respective teachers: non-traditional pre-undergraduate university students in Australia (Coombes & Danaher, 2006); low income and immigrant families in Japan (Gordon, 2006); the children of nomadic pastoralists in Nigeria (Umar, 2006); travelling fairground families in Italy (Gobbo, 2006); cultural minorities in the United States (Rodriguez, 2006); inner city youth in the United States (Brunetti, 2006); and sexual minority university students and teachers in Canada (Grace, 2006). Responding to these articles, Currie (2006) encapsulated helpfully their broader significance for understanding the intentions and the effects of empowering educators and for promoting enabling teaching and learning in research and practice:

This special theme issue is a jigsaw of issues, but with common elements. All the articles are eloquent in their descriptions of marginalisation, and the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that educators are kept to the margins because of their ‘otherness’ or the ‘otherness’ of those whom they teach....While educators are replicating their lives in the school system, we need to ensure that the pool of educators gives the widest possible expression of experience and identity to those who come to learn. Learning is our core

purpose and that is what makes us human – the promise of education must include every learner and every educator, and we must continue to find ways to position them at the centre of the learning agenda, the curriculum, the life and soul of our school[s], colleges and universities. (p. 837)

One theoretical and methodological benefit of exploring this emphasis on the dis/connections between teachers' identities and their work in teaching variously marginalised students is that doing so helps to explicate what is otherwise likely to remain implicit and invisible; thus the political dimension of this book is a clear focus on empowering educators as a parallel and double-sided process. From one perspective, empowering educators by providing appropriate resources and support for them to be able to enact their professional responsibilities derives from the recognition that their roles are complex and significant and that the maximum positive impact of those roles depends on such provision. For instance, this applies to particular groups of educators, such as beginning teachers (Hudson, 2012), teachers experiencing a high degree of school reform (Brezicha, Gergmark, & Mitra, in press), teachers striving to include students with special educational needs in their classes (Wilson, 2014), teachers seeking to develop more creative approaches to curriculum design (Huizinga, Handelzalts, Nieveen, & Voogt, 2014) and teachers working to implement more innovative assessment practices (Gardner, Harlen, Hayward, & Stobart, 2011). Strategies that have been posited as helping to facilitate the empowerment of educators include critical reflection and journal writing (Msila, 2013), participating in specialised professional development courses (Lee, 2011) and being involved in school-level decision-making with principals (Ellis, 2012). These examples and strategies constitute only a few of the markers of the widely divergent terrains on which contemporary educators conduct their crucial enterprise, yet they also represent some of the depth and range of areas of activity requiring appropriate resources and support if such educators are to be truly

empowered. There is indisputably a political dimension of deciding which of these multiple and simultaneous needs should be addressed by whom, and in which order of priorities.

From another perspective, there is also a political dimension of teachers working hard to empower their students. This political element can include: providing the strongest possible support to assist learners in maximising their employment prospects and life chances; engaging with the marginalised status of some students; or adopting an avowedly political approach to the teaching profession by lobbying for its enhanced professional status. Specific instances of the wider political dimension of educators empowering their students include teachers: taking on community responsibilities in assisting their students to combat HIV/AIDS in Nigeria (*Dlamini, Okoro, Ekhosuehi, Esiet, Lowik, & Metcalfe, 2012*); *developing targeted support for students with mental health needs (Johnson, Eva, Johnson, & Walker, 2011)*; *mobilising high status, institutional agents who are able to support low status and working class minority youth (Stanton-Salazar, 2011)*; and *building on the affordances of specific technologies to provide more personalised learning experiences for their students (Huang, Liang, Su, & Chen, 2012)*.

More broadly, this political dimension of teachers' work and identities, both in being empowered to conduct their professional responsibilities and in using their empowerment to help in empowering their students, highlights the indispensable interplay between the public and the private elements of empowering educators' subjectivities (see also Harreveld & Danaher, 2004). The scholarship analysed in this section of the chapter has traversed the formally constituted sectors in which educators work and it has also illuminated at least some of the informal spaces that many educators use as a means of building collegiality and of nourishing their spirits. Such collegiality and nourishment are crucial if teachers are to be enabled to fulfil as many as possible of the increasingly wide range of expectations held of them by governments, employers, communities and other stakeholders.

Furthermore, based on this analysis of the relevant literature, we feel some degree of cautious optimism with regard to the vital enterprise of empowering educators. This optimism is derived partly from the examples outlined above, but primarily from those provided in the subsequent book chapters, of teachers receiving appropriately targeted support and also of those same teachers striving to support an increasingly diverse student population. However, the following chapters also constitute a cautionary tale for educators, education policy-makers and education researchers alike: this parallel and double-sided empowerment of and by educators is neither automatic nor straightforward, and it can all too easily be overshadowed and subsumed by wider structural forces and contradictory pressures.

Conclusion: The Book's Rationale, Structure and Contributions to Knowledge

This book, *Empowering Educators: Proven Principles and Successful Strategies*, began as one of several research publications arising from the continuing series of Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher Group research symposia conducted at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. More specifically, Chapter 2 by Brad McLennan and Karen Peel, and Chapter 9 by Henriette van Rensburg and Betty Adcock, began life at the Group's 7th symposium at the Toowoomba campus of the university on 19 May 2011. Chapter 4 by Jennifer McIntyre, and Chapter 5 by Yvonne Salton, were first presented at the Group's 9th symposium at the university's Toowoomba campus on 20 April 2012. Chapter 8 by Mitchell Hewitt and Ken Edwards commenced at the Group's 10th symposium at the university's Springfield campus on 24 October 2012. Subsequently the editors invited colleagues from outside Australia to contribute their experiences and insights, which resulted in Chapter 3 by June A. Gordon, Chapter 6 by Deborah A. Day and Ann Vibert, and Chapter 7 by Jeanne Keay and Christine Lloyd. This mixture of national and international, and more and less

experienced, researchers working in a range of formal and informal teaching contexts provides a powerful prism through which to view the notion of empowerment.

The book's rationale has been to articulate and illustrate the parallel and double-sided components of empowering educators: simultaneously emphasising the importance of teachers being appropriately resourced and supported, and highlighting the diverse and multiple ways in which those same teachers can work effectively to equip their students with the capacities for transformed lives. This has already been demonstrated in this chapter to be a challenging and complex, yet also a potentially game changing and sustaining, project.

The book's structure is encapsulated in the sequence of the subsequent book chapters, each of which underwent a rigorous process of double-blind peer review by national and international academics in the fields of teaching and learning research. In Chapter 2, Brad McLennan and Karen Peel introduce and explain what they have termed *The Code of Learning*, an evidence-derived and inquiry-based pedagogical model designed to promote autonomy supportive learning environments that enhance learners' self-determination in Australia. June A. Gordon uses Chapter 3 to explore two pre-service teacher education courses at the University of California, Santa Cruz in the United States that generate transformative learning outcomes through the careful study of immigrant experiences. Contemporary research findings about neuroscience and the functionings of the human brain are distilled by Jennifer McIntyre in Chapter 4 to posit some possibilities for successful teaching and learning strategies in Australian classrooms. In Chapter 5, Yvonne Salton investigates some of the contemporary constraints on educators being empowered, and on empowering their students, via a critique of the homogenising impact of increasingly standardised Australian curricula. Concerns about standardisation also underpin Chapter 6 by Deborah A. Day and Ann Vibert, who draw on two Canadian research projects to argue for collaborative relationships as lying at the heart of feasible alternatives to such

standardisation. Jeanne Keay and Christine Lloyd present in Chapter 7 their seven-stage model of teachers' professional learning in the United Kingdom as an effective means of empowering educators and hence their students. In Chapter 8, Mitchell Hewitt and Ken Edwards synthesise several years of continuing research into tennis coaches' self-identified teaching styles in Australia to analyse why sometimes coaches (and by implications teachers) fail to use fully the comprehensive range of teaching strategies available to them. Finally, Henriette van Rensburg and Betty Adcock use Chapter 9 to explain how electronic puzzles in an online learning environment were successful in empowering a group of Sudanese women refugees in Australia.

When considered collectively, the 9 chapters in this book contribute to extending existing understandings of empowering educators beyond these studies of specific instances of such empowerment in Australia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. In particular, the distinctive conceptual and methodological resources employed in the chapters, and also the diverse range of teaching and learning contexts discussed, place in broader perspective the highly varied, yet in certain respects also the consistent, ways in which the work and identities of individual educators and their students are played out against a backdrop of deeper sociocultural forces and educational possibilities. Empowering educators emerges from the analyses portrayed in this book as a complex, crucial and ever more urgent enterprise, initially in terms of supporting educators and subsequently in relation to their supporting their students to create new and transformative futures.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the presenters and the audience members at the research symposia of the University of Southern Queensland Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher Group at which some of the chapters in this book experienced their genesis. Ms Jodie Gunders has

been an unfailingly diplomatic and effective project manager for this chapter and for the book as a whole. We also thank the national and international reviewers of the book chapters; their feedback and guidance have considerably strengthened this body of work.

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