

Ellis, V., & McNicholl, J. (2015). *Transforming Teacher Education: Reconfiguring the Academic Work*. New York, NY & London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. Pages: 192. ISBN: 978-1472507204 (paperback)

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Transforming Teacher Education by Viv Ellis and Jane McNicholl attends to the challenges associated with the work of teacher educators in England's higher education institutions (HEIs). The book expresses the need to reimagine and restructure the English contemporary teacher education programs to support both the professional development and the identity of teacher educators. Ellis and McNicholl are former teacher educators and researchers in teacher education who consider the English socio-material context in their work with a brief glance at international models of teacher education, including the US and Finland. From a transformative perspective, their book offers an examination of teacher preparation practices in England, which may also benefit international teacher education. Rooted in the political context of the United Kingdom (UK), the book rejects the defend/reform dichotomy in education adopted by neoliberalism. Moreover, it seeks to "arrive at a pedagogical agenda for the transformation of teacher education" (p. x).

One of the main arguments that has led Ellis and McNicholl to produce this work is that although "new frames of reference and new trajectories of development became available for institutions and individuals alike, former ways of understanding the social world of teacher education remained and sometimes, unsurprisingly, clashed with the new" (pp. 4-5). With the premise that teacher education is an inseparable part of higher education, the book is an invitation for the academic work of teacher education to be reconfigured, benefiting not only teacher educators in HEIs, but also the education field as a whole. Overall, an overview of history and politics of teacher education in England with attention to policy and practices is evident throughout the book.

The opening chapter examines the history of teacher education policy in England with a description of the current status of teacher education. Drawing on examples from the international context, the chapter illuminates the means that can render teacher education programs in England more efficient. This illumination occurs by referring to Finnish and American examples of teacher education programs, and their respective policies, to expand the readers' understanding of teachers' identities and the teaching profession. By attending to the critical role played by higher education in preparing teachers for the school system, the chapter shows how policy interventions for restructuring teacher education had a negative impact on teacher educators and positioned initial teacher education (ITE) "awkwardly within higher education" (p. 13). Those interventions caused HEIs and their teacher educators to be subject to system inspection regimes and to be held accountable for delivering education reform concepts to new teachers. With such involvements, teacher preparation has become a "public policy problem" (p. 15) given the number of quality teachers required in the new economic age.

The reader can identify suggestions on how teacher education could address inequalities in the current system by producing confident and informed school-teachers. Due to these policy reforms around teacher education, the question remains: what do English HEI-based teacher educators actually do? Later, Ellis and McNicholl compare teacher education in England with

its counterparts in Finland and the USA, where teacher education is “more visibly professionalized” (p. 23) in the latter and more successfully implemented based on research-based practices and academic achievements in the former.

The second chapter explores the construction of the identity of HEI-based teacher educators, contrasting advertisements for HEI-based teacher educators’ jobs in England with a similar study conducted in Australia. Here, Ellis and McNicholl aim to analyze and understand the teacher educator category in higher education. The chapter reminds us that over the last 50 years the English education system was limiting the progress of the teaching career via its “eligibility-to-work” criteria after new universities “grew out of specialist training colleges” (p. 37). Further, Ellis and McNicholl explicate the way ITE programs were originally developed and structured before and after the 1950s, and how English HEIs perceive the teacher educator today. In this regard, the chapter offers its reader a reflection on teacher education discourses around the construction of the category of teacher educator and how this category of academic workers is constituted and influenced by socio-cultural beliefs.

Ellis and McNicholl claim here that “teacher educators were categorized around contradiction between research productivity and professional credibility” (p. 52), meaning that there are important differences between the English universities concerning how far HEI-based teacher educators should be engaged in research and teaching practices. Having said that, disparities in values for teaching and learning do exist between HEIs on the one hand and among departments within each institution on the other. However, quality assurance frameworks in England have similar expectations in regards to research and professional work at HEIs. The chapter shows how teacher educators’ academic work is vague in England and how this work has been oriented towards institutional marketization, leading eventually to a recategorization of the types of activities that HEI-based teacher educators engage with or perform. The authors argue that teacher education is a “semi-academic work” (p. 57) and in need of reconstruction among universities in England and perhaps in other countries with similar contexts.

In chapter three, the reader is offered a review of the literature on teacher education with a focus on the division of labour in schools and universities, raising questions about the historical work of teacher educators. The chapter brings the concept of “academic capitalism” (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997) to illuminate how market-driven competitions between institutions affect the academic work of teacher educators in HEIs. It is worth noting that as a result of the introduction of market capitalism in HEIs, the chapter shows how teacher educators are devalued and exposed to “proletarianization”, turning them “into flexible population[s] of workers, responsive to market pressures and deprived of the capacity to appropriate surplus value from their labour” (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997, p. 60). In contrast, work that is valued is the one that “produces publications, grant income, endowments and so on” (Ellis & McNicholl, 2015, p. 69). In another vein, Ellis and McNicholl elaborate on the importance of maintaining relationships between HEI-based, school-based teacher educators (mentors), and student teachers as an important factor that comes “under the broad leading of partnership” (p. 79) between schools and HEIs.

The reader can recognize that ITE partnership between the English schools and HEIs is not clear given that schools were not involved in planning and decision-making. However, HEIs were compelled to consider schools as an important factor in such partnerships. This lack of involvement of schools has placed more responsibilities on HEIs for outcomes and quality assurance, imposing more pressure on HEI-based teacher educators’ work. As important stakeholders in the partnership programs, mentors are brought forward in this chapter to examine some of their work experiences. The dual role of the mentors is critical as they are responsible for being simultaneously supportive assessors and judges of student teachers’ competency. A

shared responsibility between school-based and HEI-based teacher educators for student teachers' assessment seems to be a key feature for a successful partnership implementation. Nevertheless, Ellis and McNicholl believe that a difference in power position between HEI-based teacher educators and mentors may prevent honesty in dialogues. Finally, the chapter addresses how the "devaluation of teaching" (p. 70) is being explicit in the academic field today. More emphasis on research activities and publications is being sought by HEIs to secure more funds and a better ranking by governmental organizations, such as the research assessment exercise (RAE) and research excellence framework (REF). Such practices have left HEI-based teacher educators with academic and professional challenges expecting them to be "highly flexible, responsive to demand and adaptive to new situations" (p. 82).

Chapter four offers the narratives of four HEI-based teacher educators in England. These educators who were on "standard academic contracts in English HEIs" (p. 84), have been involved in teaching and research as per job requirements and have served as research participants in an earlier work for the books authors. With the claim that these four stories were not merely ethnographic, but rather "some engagement with ethnographic practice" (p. 86), Ellis and McNicholl addressed the lived experiences of those educators to understand the working conditions that have shaped their professional practices. What strikes the reader in these narratives is the misplacement of teacher educators in their respective teacher education programs. As an example, Daisy, who is a teacher educator, notes that although she did not earn a master's degree, she teaches "master's level continuing professional development (CPD) courses for local teachers" (p. 91). This example reflects an ambiguity of the academic work of teacher educators. Such ambiguity allows the reader of the book to understand how the aims of education have shifted to align with accountability measures and quality assurance criteria set by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in England.

Chapter five delves into reflective practice, linking the outcomes of the narratives from chapter four with the first three chapters concerning partnerships, and the working conditions of teacher educators. This contrast helps the reader to better conceptualize the field of teacher education. The chapter recalls the notion of "academic capitalism" to reemphasize the extent to which current working conditions in academia are not affecting teacher educators per se but the entire education system. That is, proletarianization is becoming more and more engrained in the minds of academic workers, keeping schools and HEIs under "inspection regimes". Moreover, Ellis and McNicholl claim that teacher educators' work "is unacknowledged and devalued" (p. 108) lacking a clear and transparent description.

Working constraints, including the absence of flexible work schedules, unlike professors in other disciplines, impacts the way society perceives HEI-based teacher educators. Perhaps, the reader can ask, why not give teacher educators more time and space so they can engage in research, and research-informed practices, benefiting both school teachers and student teachers? And why not to restructure their work in ways that reshape their daily working routine too? The chapter expands this discussion by interrogating the position of education as a discipline in higher education, noting that education "was inevitably selective in what counted as a discipline" (p. 113) and discussing how the education field has developed its core work from other disciplinary fields. Concluding the chapter, the authors note that English teacher educators are left out of any contributions to decision-making concerning teaching pedagogy facing further struggle and marginalization. Here, the reader would assume that "the future direction of higher education in England as elsewhere continues to be uncertain" (p. 120) so more research is required. Having said that, the next chapter offers the reader a new vision of teacher education in HEIs that hopes to transform the current professional description of teacher educators.

The closing chapter uses a *mélange* of studies and concepts driven from sociology,

sociocultural theory, teacher education, pedagogy, and knowledge development theories to suggest new ways of preparing teachers. The authors adopt a perspective that considers the rational shifts in responsibilities and social relations in teacher education rather than market-based perspectives. This chapter examines the social organization of teacher educators' work through the lens of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). With this theory, Ellis and McNicholl adopt a neo-materialist approach to offer recommendations to reposition and restructure the professional identity of the HEI-based teacher educators in England. Here, Ellis and McNicholl remind us that misrecognition of teacher educators' profession does exist after HEIs have been disengaged from decision-making at the institutional level. This misrecognition suggests that HEI-based teacher educators should be granted academic freedom and autonomy in curriculum design and delivery. An autonomy that still can be "exercised within a framework of scholarly as well as public responsibilities" (p. 127).

The chapter also discusses the concept of "distributed knowledge" (p. 131). This concept is used to express the multiple forms of knowledge forms including policy, professional, critical, and public knowledge shared by actors in the teacher education profession. In this regard, the authors claim that policy and professional knowledge of teacher education need to inform each other if to promote teaching at the society level. The rationale for this requirement is that the division between theory (learning in HEIs) and practice (teaching at schools) has limited "the full and rich appropriation of research-informed ideas in the practical work of teaching" (p. 143). Later on, Ellis and McNicholl rely on Vygotsky's concept of intellectual interdependence. For them, this concept should be integrated into the teaching profession as it allows the teacher to think and create as an independent intellectual and draw on shared thoughts, ideas, and knowledge. Overall, the chapter is an expression of Ellis and McNicholl's hope for a more productive collaboration between HEIs and school-based teacher educators. A collaboration with goals that are not narrowed to "political accountability" (p. 140) but expanded to express democracy in the wider society.

Conclusion

Researchers of teacher education and policy studies will find interesting reflections offered by the authors concerning how teacher educators' work is taken for granted and the struggle they face. While the book does not generalize the status of all teacher educators, it offers its readers lived and practical experiences of those involved in the field. The arguments contribute to a new thinking of how to position teacher education in educational institutions. Overall, the book is an eye opener on how political structures can influence the field of teacher education and to what extent collaborative work among all stakeholders can be a promising step towards more meaningful and productive teacher education. Ellis and McNicholl's work has provided a new landscape for the possibilities of transforming teacher education at a time when teacher quality is a concern of national and international education policies.

References

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