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Globalisation, Neoliberalism and Teacher Education

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It has always struck me there is a profound set of paradoxes at play in the contemporary education world, found, for instance in the doublespeak in the policy landscape regarding teachers and their role in shaping the minds and futures of the next generation. The double speak, of course is that it is pointed out by academics (McBeath, 2012), governments, well as the OECD (2005), consultancy firms like McKinsey & Co., (cf. Mourshed et al., 2010) and philanthropic organisations promoting teacher policy (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011), that it is teachers and their professional learning and development, as well as conditions of work, who are presented as making the difference to being a top performing education system and nation, and able to generate step changes in learner attainment.

Yet listen hard enough and there is another message that trills out when it comes to teacher policies, whether it be teacher education, teacher's employment conditions, teacher promotion, or teacher professional development. The ideational underpinnings of all of these different aspects of teachers' education and work conditions all tend in the same direction; such as eschewing the value of any kind of pedagogical knowledge and claim to expertise; viewing teachers as opportunistic whose professional judgements need to be questioned; valuing (military) experience in disciplining others is a desirable criterion as a basis for being an effective teacher; and constructing teachers as inclined towards laziness, which in turn is best managed through the proper calibration of incentives, such as short term contracts.

Now the paradox in this double speak is that, on the one hand, it is the teacher, as educator and professional, who is seen as an important engine for the realisation of the new knowledge economy and a key person able to make a difference to learners' capabilities as ideas generators for the new economy (OECD, 2005). Yet, on the other hand, this very same teacher is placed in an education policy space over-flowing with a very different message at its heart; that teachers are to be closely monitored, made accountable, encouraged to be risk averse, and whose deep pedagogical and disciplinary knowledges are to be discouraged (Bruns et al., 2011).

Where does this deeply contradictory view of teachers come from, and how does it shape teacher education? In the rest of my reflection on the matter, I want to suggest that this schizophrenic position has its roots in

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neoliberalism as an ideology and a now deeply embedded political project shaping societies around the world. Neoliberalism of course does not come in one form; like all ideologies, there are different versions, emerging out of specific political, spatial and temporally-located projects.

One version can be found in the Chicago School's Hayekian-informed position; one that gained power in the 1980s as the solution to the 1970's economic crisis and has come to dominate policy agendas in many parts of the world (Peck, 2013). Hayek of course was highly suspicious of the state, and in his and his followers' eyes, the state's tendencies toward monopoly was also a tendency toward fascism and socialism. Teachers, as employees of the state, were thus conceived of as potential front-line workers for the state in promoting this agenda. One means of unpicking the state's monopoly hold on education, and the hearts and minds of its citizens, was by giving sovereignty back where liberals believed it belonged; to sovereign actors (in this case parents, students) whose relations to the providers of education (including teacher education) would now be managed through the market. Given in Hayek's view that markets don't have politics, this then avoids the capturing of education for political purposes.

A somewhat different version, also visible in education policy landscapes more generally and in teacher education specifically, emerges out of neoliberal's social ontology; that of homo-economicus. Essentially this means that, fundamentally, humans are economic calculating individuals. When this kind of social ontology meets particular kinds of economic theory, such as Principal-Agent Theory developed by the Nobel award winners Holmström and Milgrom (1990), proposed as a new theory of contract. In this view, either side to the contract is likely to act in opportunistic ways in relation the other party to the contract (such as hiding aspects of their performance, and so on). Systems of auditing, and aggressive approaches to workers, including teachers as professionals, emerged.

For teachers, this 'low trust' set of social understandings and relations now built into contracts between teachers and the state and its teachers, has resulted in the negation of professionalism and responsibility, and the imposition of accountability, audit, and cultures of shame and blame. Of course the losers here are not just teachers, now caught in rounds of public vilifications by an eager press, but learners. Teachers at their best have always given more to their communities than their contracted hours. So when neoliberalism's regime of accountability replaces responsibility as the moral compass for teachers in their work, it is not just a particularly poor substitute, but an imposter. Yet this milieu has not yet run its course. Instead it has been globalised, seeping out into more and more aspects of the teaching profession in many parts of the world. Its more pernicious forms are also found in the radical reorganising of teacher education.

Not trusting the state but the market, and discounting the value of professional knowledge in favour of the disciplining tools neoliberalism has borrowed from neoclassical economics, has had a dramatic effect on teacher education. This includes those forms the ideologues prefer: for-profit provision from on-line providers; franchises, like Teach for America (Laczko-Kerr and Berliner, 2002), and all of the national manifestations (India, China, Brazil, UK) that go with it; low-fee schooling in developing countries where teachers' professional education is regarded as a un-necessary.

Neoliberalism and its globalisation has a great deal to answer for. Yet in saying this I am fully aware of the fact that neoliberalism is not an actor in its own right. Political projects, like neoliberalism and globalisation, need actors, and these actors have their own agendas – whether as disciplining agents of teacher's expertise, as rent seekers, or as profit-makers. And if we wonder why it is that we are heading in a direction unlikely to deliver knowledgeable societies and their new economies, perhaps we need to ask about double-speak and paradoxes, and point, not at teachers and their teacher education programmes, but at the ideologues who really DO have politics and the power to shape the worlds of others. This set of politics, when it comes to teachers, their education, and their purposes, are not just wrong, but wrong headed. It really is time that we challenged the premises of neoliberalism and to with within a different paradigm for social development; one that is able to educate the next generation sufficiently well to enable them to create a more socially-just and generous future

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About

Susan L. Robertson is Professor of Sociology of Education, in the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. She has a long standing interest in teachers work. More broadly she has written on globalisation, education policy, social justice and governance. Susan is founding co-editor of the journal, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*. She has also published widely; her most recent books include *Public Private Partnerships in Education*, and *Global Regionalisms and Higher Education*.