Teachers Learning
Professional development and education

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Edited by **Colleen McLaughlin**

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Foreword

Whatever else they may do, schools exist for the education of children and young people. In England, the aspirations for all schools are set out in Section 78 of the Education Act 2002, which states that schools should promote the 'spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society' and prepare pupils at the school for 'the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life'. This grand ambition, first expressed in 1944, remains the legislative foundation of schooling to this day. Such goals, though well supported, are very challenging, especially for the teachers and school leaders who are expected to work for their fruition in increasing diverse contexts.

It is undeniable that background factors, such as those associated with the socio-economic status of pupils, continue to have a huge influence on pupil outcomes. However, the quality of teaching can make a difference. Indeed studies in school effectiveness indicate that, since within-school variation tends to be greater than between-school variation, it is important to focus efforts on improving the quality of teaching processes rather than constantly changing the structures of schooling. Unfortunately, this is a lesson that most politicians have failed to learn, probably because it is easier to implement short-term measures with high visibility, such as creating new types of school, than it is to invest in longer-term and less visible provision for the professional development of teachers.

The importance of investing in the professional development of teachers in order to promote better learning by pupils was a hallmark of the work of the Cambridge Institute of Education from the time when Joyce Skinner became its Director in 1974. She had contributed to the 1972 James Report that asserted the importance of close partnerships between practising teachers and teacher educators. In order to foster such partnerships, Joyce Skinner served on the county's Education Committee and became academic secretary of the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET). This established a culture and tradition within the Institute that valued and

developed relationships with local authorities and schools in East Anglia and beyond. This in turn became the fertile soil in which a generation of researchers and teacher educators, working collaboratively with teachers, could innovate and grow the theory and practice of educational change. For many, within and beyond Cambridge, this is what the Cambridge Institute was notable for and became its principal and lasting legacy. When the Institute was incorporated into the University of Cambridge it formed part of the creative mix that now characterises the Faculty of Education.

The chapters in this book, written by academics and researchers associated with this tradition, provide a testament to the enduring importance of the original vision. However, they are neither backward-looking nor fixed in a particular approach. Through accounts of recent enquiries, of various kinds, they provide evidence and argument for teachers' professional learning, supported by school leadership and in collaboration with universities and others, as the key to improving what happens in classrooms for the benefit of pupils and their learning. The messages are not simple, because the goals, processes and contexts are complex. However, at a time when policy rushes to find easy solutions, to satisfy political imperatives, this book is a timely reminder that we do have good evidence and experience to share about the crucial importance and effectiveness of teachers learning. We need to pay great attention to this if we are genuinely concerned to promote the development of pupils at school and that of society.

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