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## **Teacher Professional Learning in a Neoliberal Age: Audit, Professionalism and Identity**

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*Abstract: This paper examines the current shape of teacher professional learning, or in-service teacher education, in Australia. Increasingly, teacher professional learning is positioned as both a sure-fire solution to some of the intransigent educational problems of our time, as well as a policy problem in and of itself. In this paper I explore some of the dominant discourses surrounding teacher learning, such as those related to professional standards, teacher professionalism and teacher quality, which regard teacher learning predominantly as about skill acquisition and competency development. I argue that the civil society aspirations of the Melbourne Declaration will better be met by conceptualising teacher professional learning as 'identity work'. The paper concludes with some questions that might be used to guide thinking about teacher learning and development consistent with these aspirations.*

This paper explores the landscape of teacher professional learning, or in-service teacher education, in contemporary Australia. It takes as its starting point the notion that teacher professional learning is currently constituted as both a policy problem and a policy solution, and argues that a tension exists at both ends between generative visions of teacher professional learning and technical-rational, auditable notions of 'professional development', both of which are simultaneously in play. It posits that the lens of teacher quality which is generally in use in discussions of teacher learning is less helpful in realising the civil society aspirations embedded in the Melbourne Declaration's educational goals for young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) than the lens of teacher identity, and suggests some guidelines that might advance generative teacher professional learning consistent with these goals.

The paper is presented in three parts. In the first I explore the current constitution of teacher professional learning as both policy problem and policy solution, examining some current Australian conceptualisations of teacher professional learning as represented in education policy and reflected in three key and dominant educational discourses. In the second, I explore the concept of teacher professional learning as 'identity work', drawing on a three year study of teacher professional identity. In the final section, I suggest some approaches to teacher professional learning that might embrace its complexity and support both the profession and Australian society in realising the goals of the Melbourne declaration.

To begin, a note about teacher professional learning and teacher professional development and the difference between the two. While the 'learning' variant was first coined in the 1990s to distinguish more active forms of professional learning for teachers from the more passive implications of 'professional development' (Lieberman, 1995), in recent years the terms have become more conflated and used interchangeably. Indeed professional learning has become something of an educational buzzword in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: highlighting the propensity of neoliberalism to co-opt and commandeer both language and ideas, many 'professional

development' providers and organisations re-badged their professional development programs as 'professional learning' programs some years back while arguably changing little about the way that programs are conceptualised or delivered. Examples of this might include the NSW Department of Education and Communities Training and Development Directorate becoming the 'Professional Learning Directorate', while the 'Professional Development' arm of the NSW Association of Independent Schools now delivers "professional learning courses" rather than the "professional development courses" of the past.

Professional learning constitutes the processes that teachers engage in when they expand, refine and change their practice. 'One shot', 'spray-on' (Mockler, 2005) or 'drive by' (Senge, et al., 2000) professional development experiences *may lead* to professional learning, but on their own do not equate with it, regardless of what providers of 'professional learning courses' may argue. For the purpose of this paper, given the interchangeable use of the two terms by key shapers and providers of professional learning/development, claims in relation to both will be examined.

### **Teacher Professional Learning: Both Problem and Solution**

In the parlance of contemporary Australian education policy, teacher professional learning and development, sometimes referred to as 'teacher training', is constituted as a policy problem (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Typically this manifests in claims of teacher quality or lack thereof, wherein a response from the state in the form of regulation and standardisation is required. The recently launched National Plan for School Improvement (NPSI) positions its 'teacher performance and training' initiative as "mak[ing] sure the best and brightest people are running Australian schools and teaching in classrooms" (Australian Government, 2013), and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and accompanying Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework are positioned as the key technologies through which this goal is to be realised. At the same time, however, teacher professional learning is constituted as a policy solution, for in this environment where the doctrine of 'teacher centrality' (Connell, 2009; Larsen, 2010) reigns, teacher professional learning and development become critical to addressing the 'crisis' of teacher quality (Mockler, 2013): our only hope for realising the goal of creating 'great schools' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008; Gillard, 2012). Creating 'good' and effective teacher professional learning, then, is both a policy problem in and of itself, as well as a solution to the problem of 'bad' or ineffective teachers. The shape of teacher professional learning as policy problem and policy solution is best understood, however, through examining the three linked discourses of teacher quality, teacher standards and accountability, and teacher professionalism as they are currently playing out in the Australian context.

### **The 'Teacher Quality' Agenda and Professional Learning**

Peter Taubman (2009), argues that the 'teacher quality' agenda is a key tenet of what he views as the transformation of education at the hands of neoliberal ideology, involving, among other phenomena,

...the rhetoric of blame and fear and the promulgation of heroic narratives of exemplary teachers, which, coupled with the wide-spread use of tests, render teachers and teacher educators susceptible to the language of policy and the lure of business practices and make possible

teachers' psychic investment in various aspects of the transformation (p.12-13).

This has involved the development of professional standards for teachers and the use of these standards to attempt to 'raise the quality' of members of the teaching profession. As Judyth Sachs and I have argued recently, regulatory and measurement-oriented performance cultures, often operationalized in the application of professional teaching standards, have had a damaging effect on teacher autonomy and professional identity (2012). In England, the United States and Australia, these standards have formed the basis for accreditation processes with the dual purposes of providing a level of 'quality assurance' and positioning teaching in some way alongside those 'real' professions such as medicine and law. The tangible connection of teacher quality to standardised testing through, for example, the introduction of performance pay based on test results in some educational jurisdictions (Apple, 2011), has further cemented this relationship, bringing teachers and governments into a dangerous deal that risks sacrificing good student learning to expediently improved test scores. In Australia, where the *Australian Education Act* (2013) enshrines the intention to be 'Top 5 by 2025' (on international standardised tests) in legislation, linked to the provision of 'great teachers', this connection is further amplified.

Within the teacher quality agenda, we have seen a shift in the past decade from a discourse focused on *teaching* quality to one focused on *teacher* quality (Mockler, 2011a). The shift is a subtle but important one. Embedded in a focus on teaching quality is a desire to support and foster teacher professional learning, to encourage pedagogical and curricular innovation and risk taking and to collaboratively determine and pursue good teaching practice. Conversely, embedded in the ensuing focus on *teacher* quality is a desire to narrowly measure and quantify teachers' work (usually represented simply in test scores), to standardise practice and attribute blame to teachers where their students fail to 'measure up'. The significance of sound and effective professional learning is largely absent from this discourse, despite reminders that countries such as Finland, where results on standardised international tests are seen as enviable, have generally low levels of surveillance of teachers and high budgets earmarked for teacher professional learning (Sahlberg, 2007, 2009, 2011). Furthermore, this conceptualisation of *teacher* quality feeds into notions of "good teaching as embodied rather than practised" (Gore, Ladwig, & King, 2004, p. 5), linking back into the "heroic narratives of exemplary teachers" named by Taubman (2009), positioning the core of teaching as about teachers themselves rather than the practices they engage in in the course of their work.

Visions of actual quality in education rely on an understanding that as a human and messy business one size never fits all, and this works at cross purposes with the neoliberal desire to catalogue and standardise practice. As Raewyn Connell reminds us:

Education involves encounter between persons, and that encounter involves care. Learning from a computer is not education; the machine does not care. Learning from a person behaving like a machine is not education; that person's capacity for care is being suppressed. It is care that is the basis of the creativity in teaching, at all levels from Kindergarten to PhD supervision, as the teacher's practice evolves in response to the learner's development and needs. Encounter between persons implies people capable of encounter; that is, people with significant autonomy (Connell, 2013, p. 104).

Just as the teacher quality agenda has narrowed the definition of good teaching practice, so too has it narrowed the definition of productive professional development and learning, through the link between standards, accountability and teacher professional development.

### Teacher Professional Development as a Product of Standards and Accountability

The growth of teacher professional standards and associated registration and accreditation processes for teachers over the past two decades has come with an attendant focus on teacher professional learning and development as a key means through which professional standards are maintained. In the Australian context, recent moves toward a nationally consistent teacher registration approach (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2013) have seen the implementation of the model previously in use in New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory, where teachers are required to participate in 100 hours of “professional development activities” per five year period in order to maintain their registration as teachers.

The linking of professional development and learning with professional teaching standards that emphasise technical and instrumentalist approaches to teaching, gives rise to what Mayer, Luke and Luke have called “the generic teacher, branded as a corporate entity and defined in terms of generic competences, skills, interchangeable parts in a global education system with uniform practices including testing, mandated textbooks, scripted teaching, school-based management, marketisation and economic management issues” (2008, p. 81). This, in turn, works to reinforce these ideas about standardisation of practice, drawing members of the profession into compliance along the way. As Taubman writes, “...performance standards transform individuals into self-monitoring and monitored selves, who are urged or feel compelled to embrace constant self-improvement in their practice, which is aligned with standards that strip the individual of any autobiographical idiosyncrasy...[they] allow work to be broken down into behaviours that can easily be transported across boundaries, and reproduced regardless of the location, school, classroom or students” (2009, p. 117). Professional learning shaped in the interests of such standards is necessarily defined as narrow and quantifiable in its scope, usually focusing on the acquisition of knowledge and skills that will support teachers to demonstrate their competence in the standards.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, in the *Australian Charter for the Professional Development of Teachers and School Leaders*, characterises effective professional learning in the following way:

Professional learning is the formal or informal learning experiences undertaken by teachers and school leaders that improve their individual professional practice, and a school’s collective effectiveness, as measured by improved student learning, engagement with learning and wellbeing. At its most effective, professional learning develops individual and collective capacity across the teaching profession to address current and future challenges (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012a, p. 2).

It continues to describe the ‘characteristics of effective professional learning thus:

Although teachers and leaders will engage in a range of professional learning activities for different purposes, overall the research is clear that the size effects of some types of professional learning on practice and outcomes are much greater than others. In an OECD survey, teachers from around the world report that individual and collaborative research, qualification programs and informal dialogue have•the greatest impacts on their practice. Attendance at conferences and seminars and one-off visits to other schools are reported to have less impact. This is confirmed

by research on the size effects of different types of professional learning on student outcomes, which suggests that observation, practicing new approaches and feedback are more effective methods than discussion, lectures and field trips to other schools.

Research also sheds light on the specific characteristics of high quality professional learning. Professional learning will be most effective when it is relevant, collaborative and future focused, and when it supports teachers to reflect on, question and consciously improve their practice. These characteristics of effective professional learning should be considered when designing, selecting, reflecting on or evaluating professional learning (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012a, p. 4).

These statements are so broad as to be difficult to take issue within and of themselves. Despite the reliance on a single OECD survey, notwithstanding the wealth of international and Australian research undertaken on teacher professional learning from different perspectives and utilising different methodologies over the years, the emphasis on inquiry-based professional learning and de-emphasis of 'one shot' conferences and seminars sits comfortably with many of the broader research findings. There are, however, a number of inherent contradictions both within these statements (for example, note that "informal dialogue" is seen to have great impact while "discussion" is seen to be less effective) and between these broad statements and expectations of teachers preparing for registration. The constitution of 'professional learning' as the outcome of 'professional development activities' measured in hours of participation appears to lean toward those activities whose hours can be easily documented and demonstrated as 'evidence'. In NSW, where, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), over 30% of Australia's 290900 teachers are employed, the NSW Institute of Teachers breaks this requirement into 50 hours of 'Institute registered PD' and 50 hours of 'Teacher identified PD and/or Institute registered PD'. Institute registered professional development constitutes 'courses and programs' run by 'endorsed professional development providers', while teacher identified professional development "may involve experiences similar to those in Institute Registered Continuing Professional Development, but these activities have not been registered through the Institute" (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2012, p. 4). While other forms of professional development, including professional reading, observations and research, are included in the list of available teacher identified professional development activities, the Institute's understanding of what constitutes professional development is strongly skewed toward activities 'provided' by a facilitator:

To give teachers, schools and providers some flexibility, [teacher identified] continuing professional development can be offered by either endorsed providers or other providers who have not been endorsed by the Institute (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2012, p. 4).

The orientation, then, is toward the development of knowledge and skills (narrowly defined, as represented in the standards), linked to the attainment of the national professional standards for teachers, largely provided by external organisations or individuals, and measured in hours.

This view of teacher professional development as a means to demonstrating professional standards is consistent with that taken by the Productivity Commission in its schools workforce research report of 2012, which argued for the linking of professional development to teacher performance appraisal (Productivity Commission, 2012, p. 119). For the Productivity Commission, teacher professional development is defined as "structured training – commonly

termed professional development or professional learning” (p.154). This sentiment, that professional learning should be linked to performance appraisal, in turn links with the newly developed *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012b), which, drawing on an ‘evidence base’ (p.9) skewed toward the work of consultancy firms and neoliberal think-tanks such as the OECD and the Grattan Institute, mandates teacher performance appraisal, with professional learning positioned as a means to achieving performance goals.

These ideas about professional learning resonate with Taubman’s cautionary words:

Salesmen, merchants, financiers, and accountants foisted on education a view that monetary investment (public expenditures) in a service (teaching) must be justified by the success of the product (student performance on exams) and that product viability needs to be measured against standards set by the market, otherwise how would we know our investment was worth it? (Taubman, 2009, p.17).

Taubman’s perspective reminds us of the need for vigilance and a recasting of the discourse surrounding teacher professional learning in a different direction.

### **Teacher Professional Learning and ‘The Professional Teacher’**

The conceptualisation of teacher professional learning and development as something to be ‘attained’, measured in hours and recorded for the purposes of compliance and the collection of ‘evidence’ of worthiness against a set of standards is located within a particular understanding of teachers and their work. Sachs (2001, 2003) identifies two dominant discourses of teacher professionalism which at the time she contended were informing different approaches to educational policy and practice, namely managerial and democratic discourses. She argued that these two variants of teacher professionalism were responsible for a significant disconnect between employing authorities and professional associations. Day and Sachs (2004) use the following table to highlight the differences between these two conceptualisations, while recognising that in reality they represent more a continuum than a dichotomy:

| <i>Managerial Professionalism</i> | <i>Democratic Professionalism</i>        |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| System driven/ends                | Profession driven/ends                   |
| External regulation               | Professional regulation                  |
| Drives reform agenda              | Complements & moves beyond reform agenda |
| Political ends                    | Professional development                 |
| Competitive and market driven     | Collegial and profession driven          |
| Control/compliance                | Activism                                 |

**Table 1: Adapted from Day & Sachs, 2004, p.7**

Managerial discourses, Sachs argues, are embedded in New Public Management approaches to education, and indeed directly inform regimes of teacher standards and accountability as they are currently articulated and implemented in much of the western world. Managerial teacher professionalism encourages the emergence of:

...a professional who clearly meets corporate goals, set elsewhere, manages a range of students well and documents their achievements and problems for public accountability purposes. The criteria of the successful professional in this corporate model is of one who works efficiently and effectively in meeting the standardised criteria set for the accomplishment of both students and teachers, as well as contributing to the school's formal accountability processes (Brennan, 1996, p. 22).

Democratic professionalism relies heavily on the development and exercise of teacher professional judgement, and, as Preston suggests (1992), this in turn suggests a certain level of professional autonomy: privileging the nuance of judgement over the 'one-size-fits-all' approach of standardisation requires a level of trust to be placed in teachers that they will act ethically, in the best interests of their students and their society. Interestingly, Lawrence Stenhouse, in providing a rationale for teacher research and inquiry as forms of teacher development, conceived of the link between professional judgement and autonomy in the following manner:

The essence of emancipation, as I conceive it, is the intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy which we recognise when we eschew paternalism and the rule of authority and hold ourselves obliged to appeal to judgement. Emancipation rests not merely on the right of a person to exercise intellectual, moral and spiritual judgement, but upon the passionate belief that the virtue of humanity is diminished in man when judgement is overruled by authority (Stenhouse, 1983, p. 163).

While Sachs's initial discussion of managerial and democratic discourses was borne of a concern for the growth of managerial discourses in education in the late 1990s/early 2000s, the chasm between the two has widened in the past decade as an 'age of compliance' (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009) has taken hold. Where once education and managerialism were 'uncomfortable bedfellows', the proliferation of standards and other accountability mechanisms, located largely within common sense understandings of education (Tuinamwana, 2011), that prize 'quality' and 'excellence' and look to quarantine and domesticate professional practice, has seen managerial discourses in education grow to an unprecedented level.

Importantly, while the notion of accountability is central to managerial teacher professionalism, as demonstrated in the discussion of current standards and their implications for professional learning above, accountability itself is not foreign to democratic conceptualisations of teacher professionalism. The key perhaps lies in the approach taken to 'accountability', with



those that sit comfortably with democratic conceptualisations of schooling reaching toward what Onora O'Neill referred to in her BBC Reith Lectures, as "intelligent accountability":

Perhaps the present revolution in accountability will make us all trustworthier. Perhaps we shall be trusted once again. But I think that this is a vain hope - not because accountability is undesirable or unnecessary, but because currently fashionable methods of accountability damage rather than repair trust. If we want greater accountability without damaging professional performance we need intelligent accountability...Intelligent accountability, I suspect, requires more attention to good governance and fewer fantasies about total control (O'Neill, 2002, pp. 57-58).

While models of teacher professional learning and development that emerge from current regimes of standards and 'fashionable methods of accountability' might be seen as technologies that also damage rather than repair trust in the profession, models of teacher professional learning and development that seek to build democratic professionalism and teacher professional judgement through a more intelligent view of accountability might more readily be considered 'identity work'.

### **Understanding Teacher Professional Learning as "Identity Work"**

Teacher professional learning at its best is not merely about the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but the formation and mediation of teacher professional identity. Elsewhere (Mockler, 2011b) I have argued that teacher professional learning has the capacity to constitute one element of 'identity work' for teachers, lying at the intersection of professional context and personal experience and requiring both professional and personal relevance to lead to changes in practice. Furthermore, as an element of 'identity work', professional learning is one means through which teachers come to develop and articulate what Connolly and Clandinin have termed their "stories to live by" (Connolly & Clandinin, 1999).

In a recent three year study of the formation and mediation of teacher professional identity amongst secondary school teachers in Australia (Mockler, 2011a), a range of "identity anchors" were identified through the interplay between the domains of professional context, personal experience and external political environment. Examples of identity anchors identified as in use by participants in the study included subject area or discipline, welfare/pastoral care, learning, literacy, equity, leadership and 'eldership'. Identity anchors were described as:

"essentially provid[ing] a connection point for teachers between the work they do and their purpose in that work – they join the essential identity question "who am I (in this context)?" to the broader question of purpose: "why am I here?" and hold potential in terms of moving teachers beyond the claim of 'moral purpose' to an articulation of how that moral purpose links with [key] elements of teachers' work" (Mockler, 2011a, p. 135).

Professional learning both holds the potential to provide a catalyst for the emergence of identity anchors and is integral to this process of identity articulation. In short, when professional learning is viewed through the lens of professional identity, it becomes about 'formation', the ongoing 'becoming' of teachers, and thus necessarily transcends the technical-rational conceptualisations of teachers' lives and work embedded in the teacher quality agenda and embodied in standards regimes.

Furthermore, Wenger reminds us that learning is always social, and always about identity and ‘becoming’: the creation of “personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5) is one of the four elements of his social theory of learning that underpins the notion of “communities of practice” that has become fashionably popular in educational circles of late. The incongruence between approaches to teacher professional learning as ‘development’ activities focused narrowly on knowledge and skill acquisition and predominantly external to teachers’ communities and the capacity of schools to function as communities of practice highlights the disconnect at work in dominant conceptualisations of teacher professional learning, and the need to further orient these toward the role of professional learning and development with regard to identity formation.

### **Enacting Teacher Professional Learning as ‘Identity Work’**

In a significant article calling for the transformation of conceptions of teacher professional learning published over 15 years ago, Ann Lieberman made the following observations:

- Teachers' professional development has been limited by lack of knowledge about how teachers learn.
- Teachers' definitions of the problems of practice have often been ignored.
- The agenda for reform involves teachers in practices that have not been part of the accepted view of teachers' professional learning.
- Teaching has been described as a set of technical skills, leaving little room for invention and the building of craft knowledge.
- Professional development opportunities have often ignored the critical importance of the context within which teachers work.
- Strategies for change have often not considered the importance of support mechanisms and the necessity of learning over time.
- Time and the necessary mechanisms for inventing, as well as consuming, new knowledge have often been absent from schools.
- The move from "direct teaching" to facilitating "in-school learning" is connected to longer-term strategies aimed not only at changing teaching practice, but at changing the school culture as well.
- Networks, collaboratives, and partnerships provide teachers with professional learning communities that support changes in teaching practices (Lieberman, 1995, p. 595).

Lieberman called for a ‘breaking of the mold’, a reorientation away from one shot applications aimed at narrow knowledge interests toward more contextualised, continuous approaches that take place within learning communities of different configurations, emphasising the social dimension of professional learning. Lieberman’s is not a lone voice but is rather representative of a tradition of research on generative teacher professional learning that is consistent in the criticism of traditional professional development as ineffective in supporting pedagogical or any other kind of educational reform (see, for example, Borko, 2004; Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Little, 1993, 2006). The breadth and depth of this research, coupled with policy moves in the opposite direction, over the past 20 years, points to the intransigence of the problem of teacher professional learning.

Teaching standards as they exist, with their attendant conceptualisations of professional learning, treat teacher professional learning as a simple problem: the common sense solution, therefore, is to mandate hours and activities, map the content and demonstrate the meeting of legislative requirements, not concerning oneself too much about whether practice and conditions for learning for young people actually change. Standards thus provide a simple answer to what is, in fact, a very complex question. Addressing the issue in any real way requires a commitment to asking questions and engaging in authentic conversation about the what, the how and the why of teacher professional learning, a commitment that recognises that there are no effective 'quick fixes' able to be 'scaled up' on a profession-wide basis.

The questions below might pose a way of thinking about and evaluating teacher professional learning as identity formation: a 'litmus test' of sorts for teacher professional development experiences, and a way of opening up the conversation about professional learning between practitioners and policy makers.

'What'

- How far is the professional learning sustained to build real and deep professional knowledge?
- How far does it seek to deepen and strengthen practice?
- How far does it understand professional knowledge as nuanced and mediated by professional judgement?
- How far does it seek to build teachers' capacities to engage in authentic professional discourse about their practice?

'How'

- How far does the professional learning experience itself integrate and model 'good' pedagogical practice?
- How far do teachers have a capacity to make key decisions about their learning and follow through on these decisions?
- How far is the learning collaborative and does it build on teachers' capacities to learn together?
- How far are teachers engaged in the learning such that it is sustained and meaningful?

'Why'

- How far does this learning build on what teachers already know?
- How far is this learning mediated by teachers' professional contexts?
- How far is it connected into the key concerns, issues and problems of teachers' practice, and differentiated according to these?
- How far does it acknowledge all teachers' capacities to learn, regardless of experience and career stage?
- How far does it value, give life to and build on teachers' own individual and collective 'stories to live by'?

Questions related to the 'what' of professional learning seek to open discussion around the problematic and multi-dimensional nature of professional knowledge, the links between knowledge and practice, and the building of professional judgement and confidence in that judgement. Those related to the 'how' of professional learning focus on the social and individual dimensions of learning, including teachers' agency in learning, and the integration of learning with professional practice over time. Questions regarding the 'why' of professional learning relate to the significance of professional learning in the context of teachers' individual and collective histories and practice, the need for learning to grow out of and in turn build upon teachers' emerging professional identities. All questions assume the importance of teacher professional learning being tailored and differentiated to teachers' knowledge, capacities, stage

and experience, as well as emerging from their natural and local concerns and curiosities about their work.

While the types of teacher professional learning prioritised and suggested as most effective by AITSL in the *Australian Charter for Professional Development of Teachers* (as discussed in the section above) would generally be judged well against these questions, one shot professional learning courses, that can most readily be used to satisfy time requirements and easily ‘tick off’ standards would generally be judged fairly harshly, decontextualised and ‘delivered’ as they tend to be. The enabling conditions for professional learning that functions as ‘identity work’ might include the extension of trust and broadening of notions of teacher accountability beyond the narrow confines of the standards, and the explicit valuing of such work within the current environment. Expecting teachers to step away from the time honoured tradition of externally ‘delivered’ and ‘attended’ professional development while the systemic subtext still indicates that it is more highly valued than the alternative is unrealistic. Even with the best intentions embedded in the Charter and Performance and Development Framework, while these are operationalised in ways that send a contrary message to teachers, it is unlikely that these intentions will be realised.

Achieving the ambitious goals for Australian education established in the *Melbourne Declaration* will rely on an agile teaching profession with a strong sense of purpose and a confidence in their own judgement and agency. Approaches to teacher professional learning that draw on an impoverished view of teachers and their work will not get us there. Authentic and generative teacher professional learning grows out of an understanding that good professional learning supports the formation of robust teacher identities, supporting teachers to develop their skills and capacities in relation to their contexts rather than to create ‘carbon copies’ of ‘best practice’ exemplars. This alternative lens for understanding teacher professional learning may perhaps be our best chance of creating the education system to which we aspire.

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