**A New Normal for Collaborative Research between Teacher Organizations and the Academy -
An Education Futures Partnership Research Proposal**

Overview

In a recent presentation to Educational International, "Reimagining the futures of assessment with teacher professional autonomy", Sam Sellar invited teacher organizations to take up the leadership challenge "*how is the future of education being imagined and constructed, by whom and for what purposes?*" [1]

While *the future* continues to be mobilized by policy actors to advance a number of policy trajectories, certainly assessment and measuring what matters has emerged as a "wicked problem" [2] characterized by a lack of consensus about what ought to count as learning, set against the backdrop of changes introduced by the digitization of assessment. [3] These changes and a constellation of related issues amplified by the pandemic finds us at a critical juncture. Rather than simply waiting out the current global crisis and a return to some semblance of order and familiar sites of policy contestation, there is a strategic opportunity for the profession globally to reimagine and enact new ways to engage with policy development and policy actors in relation to assessment and the meanings of accountability.

Outline

Following from the Manchester meeting last November, and significant work in the interim to adjust to the impact of the pandemic, we are developing a research programme that addresses the question: *What would the local and global futures of education look like if teachers and their organizations were leading innovation in assessment practices, processes and policies?*

Our plan is to develop research methodologies and tools that will enable teacher organizations and researchers in different contexts to conduct case studies of the impact of digital assessments on teachers work in local contexts. We also recognize that, in many contexts, the digitalisation of assessment may not be a major problem and that teachers and students may instead be struggling instead with lack of access to critical digital infrastructures. Our research programme will take account of the different

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[1] https://www.worldsofeducation.org/en/woe_homepage/woe_detail/17011/%E2%80%9Creimagining-the-futures-of-assessment-with-teacher-professional-autonomy%E2%80%9D-by-sam-sellar. This presentation was framed around a UNESCO commissioned background paper Couture, J-C, Grøttvik, R. & Sellar, S. (2020). *A profession learning to become: the promise of collaboration between teacher organizations and academia*.

[2] Yong Zhao, Michael Wehmeyer, James Basham & David Hansen. 2019. Tackling the Wicked Problem of Measuring What Matters: Framing the Questions. CNU Review of Education. Vol. 2(3) 262–278.

[3] It is important to recognize that the digitization of assessment is one element of a broader set of issues related to the impact of emerging technologies on teachers' work outlined in the recent study commissioned by Education International, *Teaching with Tech: the role of education unions in shaping the future*, undertaken by Christina J. Colclough (September 2020).

challenges in different contexts, enabling the findings to speak back to a tech-driven imaginary of online, digitalised education as the optimal future for all.

Each case study will aim to reflect the situational complexity [4] that shapes the challenges and opportunities for teachers, supported by their organizations and researchers as they engage with local manifestations of the wicked problem of *who should count what and for whom.* The case studies will represent a range of the challenges and opportunities that reflect the interests and commitments of the participating teachers and researchers. While it is anticipated that critical global influences such as technological innovation (i.e. computer adaptive testing, the digitization of large-scale assessment) will inform the participants' lines of inquiry, the project will remain committed to the design principles of "future- generating research...not to illuminate what is, but to create what is to become." [5]

Using a common research framework (to be developed by the EFP) for supporting the engagement of teachers, their organizations and researchers, the study will aim to contribute new knowledge about how teacher unions can engage with the academic community to ensure that professional understanding shapes knowledge production and governance in education. [6]

Much work remains to be done to develop our plan. However, the aim of our proposal is to co-produce the research programme which will frame the case studies, and to develop research tools to support researchers who would like to contribute to this work. The design work that we undertake can then be offered to others as a resource for conducting local research findings that can be synthesised to generate a powerful perspective on this issue across contexts and with broad relevance. We would welcome the opportunity to share some initial thinking about the research design and to develop it further in consultation with EFP members.

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[4] Design of the cases studies will be informed by Stake, Robert E. Multiple Case Study Analysis. New York: The Guilford Press, 2006 and Creswell, J. W. (2007) Qualitative Enquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

[5] Gergen, K. J. 2015. From mirroring to world-making: Research as future forming. Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 287–310 (p. 294).

[6] This question was at the core of the paper refereed to earlier in the presentation by Sam Sellar, *A profession learning to become: the promise of collaboration between teacher organizations and academia*.