

Nurturing Minds, Shaping Futures: A Reflective Journey of 32 Years as a Teacher Educator

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Abstract : The maxim "an unexamined life is not worth living," attributed to Socrates, prompts a contemplative reflection spanning over 32 years as a teacher educator in the Republic of Ireland. Taking time to contemplate the changes that have occurred and the current landscape provides valuable insights into the dynamic terrain of teacher preparation. The reflective journey traverses the impacts of global and societal shifts, responding to challenges, embracing advancements, and navigating the delicate balance between responsiveness to the world and the active shaping of it. The transformative events of the COVID-19 pandemic spotlighted the indispensable role of teachers in Ireland, reinforcing the critical nature of education for the well-being of pupils. Research solidifies the understanding that teachers matter and so it is worth exploring the pivotal role of the teacher educator. This reflective piece examines the changes in teacher education and explores the juxtapositions that have emerged in response to three decades of profound change. The attractiveness of teaching as a career is juxtaposed against the reality of the demands of the job, with conditions for public servants in Ireland undergoing a shift. High-level strategic discussions about increasing teacher numbers now contrast with a previous oversupply. The delicate balance between the imperative to increase enrolment (getting "bums on seats") and the gatekeeper role of teacher educators is explored, raising questions about maintaining high standards amid changing student profiles. Another poignant dichotomy involves the high demand for teachers versus the hurdles candidates face in becoming teachers. The rising cost and duration of teacher education courses raise concerns about attracting quality candidates. The perceived attractiveness of teaching as a career contends with the reality of increased demands on educators. One notable juxtaposition centres around the rapid evolution of Irish initial teacher education versus the potential risk of change overload. The Teaching Council of Ireland has spearheaded considerable changes, raising questions about the timing and evaluation of these changes. This reflection contemplates the vision of a professional teaching council versus its evolving reality and the challenges posed by the value placed on school placement in teacher preparation. The juxtapositions extend to the classroom, where theory may not seamlessly align with the lived experience. Inconsistencies between college expectations and the classroom reality prompt reflection on the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. Addressing the changing demographic landscape of society and schools, there is a persistent incongruity between the diversity of Irish society and the profile of second-level teachers. As education undergoes a digital revolution, the enduring philosophies of education confront technological advances. This reflection highlights the tension between established practices and contemporary demands, acknowledging the irreplaceable value of face-to-face interaction while integrating technology into teacher training programs. In conclusion, this reflective journey encapsulates the intricate web of juxtapositions in Irish Initial Teacher Education. It emphasises the enduring commitment to fostering education, recognising the profound influence educators wield, and acknowledging the challenges and gratifications inherent in shaping the minds and futures of generations to come.

Keywords : Irish post primary teaching, juxtapositions, reflection, teacher education

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