



## An interactive profession

IF WE'RE REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT PERFORMANCE-BASED PAY FOR TEACHERS WE NEED TO RECOGNISE THAT TEACHING DEPENDS ON MUCH MORE THAN CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGICAL SKILL, AS DAVID LOADER EXPLAINS.

THERE'S BEEN PLENTY OF POLITICAL and media interest recently in performance-based pay for teachers, and in teacher evaluation in general. Unasked in most of this, however, is a fundamental question: what do we most value professionally in teachers or, better, what should we most value? It's hard to be prescriptive about the most important teacher qualities since these vary according to the age of the students to be taught, and the type and difficulty of the curriculum to be delivered. I do think, however, that some generalisations can be made.

Teaching is not simply about using pedagogical skills to deliver an explicit curriculum; it depends on a much broader range of skills than this.

All learning takes place within a social and political context. Teachers therefore need to have a deep understanding of the student's community and assist the student to manage effectively within this. But they need more than this, as teaching is a social process. Teachers, regardless of the ages of their students, need to focus on students' social development and on the creation of a supportive, caring, learning community in the school. So for any teacher to be successful, he or she also needs to be knowledgeable and skilled in the interpersonal domain.

Interpersonal skills are critical if teachers are to relate well to students but also to peers, parents and administrators. Moreover teachers need to be able to work as part of a team with a shared set of values, and so need to be willing to face up to professional differences and have the capacity to deal

with these differences productively through open, honest dialogue.

Of course, teachers' knowledge of the curriculum and pedagogical skills cannot be ignored. After all, learning is about knowledge creation and so we expect teachers to have a good grasp of curriculum content and a strong theoretical understanding about how learning fits into a bigger picture, because curriculum does not exist in a vacuum. Any curriculum needs to be interpreted by teachers within the local setting, taking into account the values and expectations of the community, students and their families, and then needs to be taught using existing school facilities and resources. Teaching, in other words, requires recontextualisation. It depends on teachers making important connections between theoretical knowledge and the practical and local, which requires teachers to be thinkers, not just technicians.

Fundamentally this means that teachers need to be good learners themselves. They need to be able to investigate, experiment, consult and evaluate – and teachers can't properly do this unless they have autonomy, so teachers need structures and cultures that provide and support this autonomy.

Teacher autonomy is, however, a necessary but not sufficient condition for the professional success of a teacher. Individual teachers cannot function exclusively behind the closed doors of their classroom, working according to their personal value system. They need the insights of and evaluation by other professionals who will engage with

and even challenge their values and beliefs. Teachers not only have a responsibility to be personally reflective about their role but also to be supportive and constructively critical of their peers. Effective teachers are ones who enjoy and benefit from an open and honest relationship with a critical friend, mentor or trusted colleague. Michael Fullan, in fact, argues that teaching needs to operate on the basis of an interactive professionalism in which teachers work in small groups, interact frequently in the course of planning and preparation, are keen to test new ideas, attempt to jointly solve problems and are happy to assess the effectiveness of their work. But the dialogue shouldn't stop there. Teachers need feedback from others besides their critical friend or mentor. Student and parent feedback is also essential, as is feedback from the school, community and government.

Teaching is about collaborative relationships between local teachers, students, parents, administrators, curriculum developers, teachers elsewhere and researchers. It's more an intellectual activity than a technical one, and it's primarily a social activity not a lone endeavour.

In our discussions regarding professional evaluation and recognition of excellence, then, we need to consider how we assess teachers as collaborators, learners and thinkers, as well as their pedagogical skills and subject knowledge. **T**

### REFERENCES

Fullan, M. (1991). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. London: Cassell.

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