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Background

The Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) is an initiative spearheaded by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The MTL heralds a new era in government engagement with teachers' professional development, and situates Government at the heart of the design of professional development and the construct of early professional identity. In 2001 the Strategy for Professional Development (DfEE 2001) was launched with an emphasis upon performance, school improvement and a staged approach to Continuing Professional Development (CPD). This was further developed by the Secretary of State Ruth Kelly in her letter to the TDA of 2005, in which she expressed a wish to effect The New Professionalism by structuring teachers' CPD and thereby signalling the utilisation of CPD as a central factor in the reform agenda (Bryan, 2007). Traditionally, Masters level professional development has been developed around an emancipatory philosophy. The MTL, however, has an inbuilt teleological presupposition: it is designed to further the New Professionalism agenda by offering Government approved forms of knowledge to early career and newly appointed professionals.

Arguably, the relationship between knowledge and Masters level study will be changed by the MTL. Lyotard argued in *The Post Modern Condition* that the question 'is it true?' is no longer asked, but rather, the question frequently asked is "what use is it?" (1984, p.175). This can be seen to be the case with the MTL: 'knowledge' assumes a new mantle, a different emphasis, away from an association with explorations of 'truth' and towards an association with 'usefulness'. It becomes, therefore, a commodity: "useful knowledge in this sense is that which improves the performance of the system" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 175). The relationship between knowledge, truth and usefulness can be seen most starkly in the permitted structure of the modules. At Phase 3, where traditional Masters programmes retain a dissertation, this is no longer the case. The traditional dissertation has been, until now, the expression of emancipatory education and academic freedom. Set against this is the model of knowledge for utilitarian outcomes and its use to the state. The denial of the legitimacy of the dissertation is indicative of the way in which the MTL is asserting its own legitimacy as a discourse of usefulness and power, and asserting itself as the prime producer of professional knowledge.

Research Questions

This research considers the way in which 'useful' professional knowledge is being packaged and legitimised. The texts currently being developed, established and articulated in relation to the MTL are oppositional in that they are seeking to do something new and very different - the MTL is being marketed as the MBA for teachers. In this way, traditional Masters level work acts as a site for the construction of difference. The hegemonic discourse emerging through MTL policy texts legitimises this form of knowledge as a tool in the reform agenda: MTL is both Masters degree and policy initiative. The aim of the MTL is to raise pupil standards through Masters study, the content of which will be determined within a performance management context. As such, teacher performance, pupil performance and Masters study become interwoven. Early career teachers and newly appointed Heads of Department will construct their professional practice and identity within a centralised professional development offer. As such it is arguable that a performative culture is developing in the Masters arena.

Research questions

1. What forms of knowledge are being legitimised within the MTL?
2. In what way do traditional Masters degrees in education act as a site for the construction of difference?

3. In what ways are MTL participants constructing, embodying and performing their professional role?
4. Is there a performative culture developing around the MTL?

Methods

Research methods include:

policy analysis

semi-structured interviews with 20 participant NQTs from 9 HEIs

Literature mapping:

The MTL narrative is one of usefulness and efficiency in relation to the system: "The task of education is to operate in the most efficient ways to provide individuals with the learning they require to optimise their contribution to the social system" (Lyotard, 1984, p.175). Lyotard's work on knowledge as commodity and Pring's work on the nature of knowledge and usefulness to the state is helpful in understanding this emerging performative context. J.L.Austen (1956) introduced the concept of performativity, which has been further developed by Judith Butler in relation to language, performance and political effect. The MTL is constructed as a means by which participants will achieve multiple indicators of success (performance targets, threshold, OfSTED inspections, pupil attainment), and these performances represent a teacher's worth within the given 'field of judgement' (Ball, 2001).

Frame

This research analyses knowledge, the nature of knowledge and knowledge as commodity within a newly emerging performative context. The research considers the impact of this on the evolving professional identity of the early career professional. As such the theoretical frame includes the professionalism, professionality and professionalization of the NQT.

Research findings

This research maps an emerging landscape of Masters provision and analyses the new ways in which knowledge is legitimised by Government. It explores the policy trajectory of MTL and focuses upon text production and the consequences of such packaging of knowledge within the context of New Professionalism.