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This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in *Religion and Worldviews in Education: The New Watershed* 21 July 2023, available online: <http://www.routledge.com/9781003265696>

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AUTHOR	Auli Toom, Jukka Husu
TITLE	Academic and Moral Obligations in Teachers' Work and Teacher Education
YEAR	2023
VERSION	Author's accepted manuscript
CITATION	Auli Toom and Jukka Husu, Academic and Moral Obligations in Teachers' Work and Teacher Education. In Liam Gearon, Arniika Kuusisto, Saila Poulter, Auli Toom and Martin Ubani (Eds.), <i>Religion and Worldviews in Education: The New Watershed</i> . London: Routledge, 2023. <a href="https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003265696">https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003265696</a>
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# **Academic and moral obligations in teacher's work and teacher education**

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## **Abstract**

In this chapter, the academic and practical core of teacher's work and its current challenges, as well as academic and moral capabilities needed in the profession, are elaborated. The chapter reflects on the importance of cultivating teachers' essential capabilities both during pre- and in-service teacher education, since they are at the core of teacher's work on educating pupils with a variety of worldviews. Despite the centrality of moral capabilities in the teacher profession, they often remain implicit and unplanned in the curricula and practices of teacher education. There exists a need to elaborate academic and moral aspects of education and teaching in pre- and in-service teacher education and enhance teachers' understanding about their central position in them. Supporting future teacher learning calls for more coherent approach in terms of academic and moral capabilities in pre- and in-service teacher education as well as recognition of local schools and communities.

## **Introduction**

Teacher's work is a demanding "thinking practice" (cf. Lampert, 1998), and teachers need a variety of academic and moral capabilities for completing their work. Teachers are key persons to support pupil learning and enhancing the developments and innovations in schools (Toom et al., 2017). They are also in a central position to build the ethos of school and support the construction of pupils' worldviews. Increasing diversity among pupils as well as development and changes in schools put teachers to new situations and challenge teachers in a variety of ways. While teachers experience the societal changes in the daily life of their classrooms, they are also the ones who educate and socialize new generations to the society.

Teachers' capabilities and quality in general are essential factors, and many things and developments in classrooms and school communities depend on teachers. Teachers need a variety of academic capabilities, but equally importantly, they also need strong moral foundations/qualities in their work as teacher's work is fundamentally moral by nature. This

is related both to educating pupils together in classroom and making a variety of pedagogical decisions continuously (cf. Shavelson, 1973; Tiilikainen et al., 2019), but it is also related to educating pupils sensitively and considering their and their families' worldviews. These conditions set high demands for pre- and in-service teacher education and for teachers' personal and role requirements throughout their careers.

The quality of pre- and in-service teacher education for cultivating teachers' academic and moral capabilities is of great importance. The academic teacher education – at its' best – provides foundational expertise for teacher's work. In addition, teachers' continuous professional learning supported by various induction and mentoring programs is fundamental for this learning process (Mena & Clarke, 2022).

### **The core characteristics of teacher's work**

Teaching is usually considered as demanding practical and academic work, which is executed in multiple and demanding social contexts, collaborations and interactions with pupils, colleagues, parents, and many extended stakeholders (Lampert, 1998; Toom, 2017). While teacher's work includes systematic and wide-ranging anticipation of school education and curriculum, it also contains in specific planning and preparation of classroom instruction and interaction with pupils. In line with this simultaneous two-fold task, teachers support learning and growth of individual pupils, and do this collectively with the pupil groups. The general aim of basic education is to educate capable and responsible human beings and citizens through educative everyday life in schools (see e.g. Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014). In addition, the aim is to support the development of pupils' diverse worldviews in concert with the education provided by parents and guardians at home.

Teacher's work is constant problem solving and decision making in versatile and continuously changing interactive situations (Shavelson, 1973; Tiilikainen, Toom, Lepola & Husu, 2019). The best interest of pupils, their characteristics, and worldviews both individually and collectively largely influence on teachers' considerations and decision-making. The key duties in teacher's work are educational and curriculum work as well as pedagogical innovations and school development in multi-professional collaboration with colleagues (Leana, 2011; Pyhältö et al., 2014; Toom et al, 2017), parents and guardians as well as external stakeholders. Teachers' sensitivity and understanding of pupils and their versatile backgrounds is essential.

Changes in the society and school influence significantly on teachers' work and demand them to change. Teacher's professional responsibilities are high and demanding, but teacher's work is also relatively autonomous depending on the context (Day, 2022). It presupposes ethical code of conduct and professional integrity (Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Kuusisto, 2022) in classroom interaction and school community as well as in the societal context. Working in the midst of constant changes, incompleteness, and uncertainties of educational and instructional work is the bottom line of teaching profession.

Current research has identified several essential aspects in teachers' work and schools, which reflect changes towards increasing diversity. Questions related to changes in instructional and learning environments, especially curriculum making and implementation (Pyhältö et al., 2014), learning-focused and engaging pedagogical practices, pupils' diversity understood broadly (Dervin, Paavola & Talib, 2013), increasing special educational needs among pupils, concerns related to pupils' learning outcomes as well as academic and social engagement, well-being (Pyhältö et al., xxxx; Salmela-Aro,) and marginalisation. While the topics reflect the broader societal changes and fractures, they are met and realised by teachers' professional action in their everyday life in schools.

Pupils from varied backgrounds are increasingly heterogeneous and with characteristics (some reference from the book here). Diversity in schools is both richness and challenge, and it clearly assumes a variety of new practices in schools both in teaching and learning and leadership (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2015). Along with the increased globalisation, the position of diverse minority groups in education and schools is extremely current. It is essential to consider and care these groups systematically and be deeply aware of the intersectionalities related to these issues to avoid weakening minority groups' possibilities and futures (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Madden, 2015; PIONEERED 2021-24).

Research emphasises the importance of centrality of pupils' learning and participation in instruction as well as teachers' central role in supporting and facilitating pupils' learning. This is also reflected in the basic education curricula worldwide. In addition to pupil learning of domain and subject specific skills, pupil learning of generic skills and supporting their learning is highlighted. Learning of these skills including e.g. critical thinking, self- and co-regulation, collaboration, and understanding various perspectives and opinions (Griffin et al., 2012; P21 Skills, 2013; Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014; Muukkonen et al.,

2019). It is essential that all pedagogical activities are organised from the viewpoint of pupils' learning and keeping in mind support for learning, pupils' participation and agency. It has been found that teachers' versatile support is related to pupils' increased goal-orientedness, efficacy as a pupil and capabilities for self-regulation (e.g. Toom & Pyhältö, 2013). Learning-focused teaching and assessment methods have been found to be related to pupils' meaningful learning, agency (Rajala, 2016), and engagement as well as quality of learning in general. Pupils perceive enactment and participation in learning and pedagogical practices highly relevant in their everyday schoolwork.

### **Teacher's professional capabilities: Academic and moral capabilities at the focus**

In line with the characteristics of teacher's work and its' current questions and challenges, it is important to consider the capabilities teachers should have for their challenging and demanding work. There exist various theorizations and empirical studies on teacher capabilities and characteristics from different viewpoints and levels (cf. Toom, 2017). There does not exist any single coherent research-based structure or conception of teacher's core capabilities, although it is possible to identify such aspects that are common in several studies. Some researchers consider teacher's capabilities broadly from the wholeness of teacher's work, and others focus on teacher capabilities especially on classroom interaction and pupil learning. Some emphasise cognitive aspects and knowledge, whereas others emphasise skills and competencies. Teacher capabilities are often considered as individual characteristics, although collective expertise is perceived highly essential and has been found as an essential resource for teacher's work (Leana, 2011; Vangrieken et al., 2015), which could be utilized extensively in a variety of ways (e.g. TALIS, 2018; UNESCO, 2021).

Teacher's professional capabilities are understood as integrative and consisting of knowledge, skills and dispositions to act (Westera, 2001; Blömeke, Gustafsson & Shavelson, 2015). Pantic and Wubbels (2010) perceive that teacher's professional competence includes four aspects: values and education; understanding of educational system and developing it; content knowledge, pedagogy and curriculum; and self-evaluation and professional development. Baumert and Kunter (2006) perceive that teacher's professional capabilities cover four dimensions: professional beliefs, values, personal theories, normative preferences and goals; declarative and procedural knowledge covering content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge; motivational orientations; and metacognitive skills and

professional self-regulation. Shulman (1987) defines seven aspects of teacher's practical knowledge: knowledge of goals and values in education and their historical roots; knowledge of context of teaching (pupils, educational institution, community, society); knowledge of curriculum; knowledge of pupils and their characteristics; content knowledge; general pedagogical knowledge (covering broad principles of teaching and classroom management strategies); and pedagogical content knowledge meaning crucial amalgam between content and pedagogy. The core of teacher's professional capabilities has also been perceived consisting of expertise in learning and instruction, interaction, well-being and school development (Soini et al., 2014). These aspects are essential in teacher's professional contexts: in classroom interaction and in professional community. With this expertise, teachers can guide and support pupils' learning and growth in pedagogically reasonable ways, develop in the profession individually and together with others, launch pedagogical innovations and promote school development as well as enhance pupils', colleagues' and own well-being.

Many theoretisations and empirical studies on teacher's key capabilities identify moral dimensions of teaching, professional ethics, and values as essential aspect in teacher's work. More specifically, this means having clear ethical principles in profession, being aware of moral issues in teaching, having skills to handle them and being capable to act in various situations in practice. This means taking best possible care of pupils and their growth both socially as group and as individuals (Tirri & Husu, 2002). This also covers the aspect of worldviews among pupils, and how they are handled respectfully as part of learning and teaching in school (some reference from the book here).

It is important to elaborate teacher's professional capabilities to be learnt during teacher education and in the profession, but it is also important to consider how teachers learn and develop their expertise when progressing from novice to expert teachers. There exists extensive research on the development of teacher's expertise in various phases of the career, comparisons of early career teachers' and expert teachers' classroom behavior as well as teacher expertise in relation to experts in other professions (Berliner, 1994; Huberman, 1993). Currently, the challenges and workload experienced by the early career teachers especially in the classroom interaction and teacher's work as a whole. Early career teachers perceive needing versatile social support for the development of their expertise and various practical challenges of their work (Meristo, 2015; Heikonen et al., 2016). Early career teachers perceive it challenging to act in crisis situations, pupils' multiprofessional care, differentiation of instruction,

administrative work, pupil assessment, assessment of pupils' learning capabilities, and collaboration with parents (Heikonen et al., 2016). Teacher capabilities can also be considered from the viewpoint of adaptive and routine expertise. *Routine experts* manage a spectrum of core capabilities which they develop throughout their career. *Adaptive experts* tend to change their core capabilities and broaden and structure their expertise continuously. Routine expertise means that a teacher maintains core capabilities throughout the career, whereas adaptive expertise emphasises continuous learning, innovativeness, and professional agency. (van Tartwijk et al., 2017.)

### **Teacher education for the diverse schools and various worldviews**

From the viewpoint of teacher's work and capabilities and required expertise, it is natural to consider, what kind of pre- and in-service teacher education should be, where it should be organised, and how it should be organised pedagogically to enable and support learning of professional capabilities as well as acting in teacher's work in increasingly diverse contexts. There does not exist only one right, reasonable and justified way to organise teacher education (Zeichner, 1983), but it is essential that it is pedagogically aligned with the broad organizing theme and goals set for teacher education program. Both in pre- and in-service teacher education, it is important to focus supporting professional agency for teacher learning that allows teachers to act in the profession throughout the career (Toom et al., 2021) – it is not possible to organize teacher education linked to current professional challenges, structures of educational system or characteristics and details of the current national core curriculum for basic education (cf. Pantic & Wubbels, 2010; Barnett, 1994; Korthagen, 2004). In organization and development of teacher education, it is essential to understand what teacher learning and learning of essential teacher capabilities are as processes (cf. mm. Ball & Forzani, 2009) and keep them in focus.

Rapidly and quickly changing societies as broad contexts for schools challenge teachers' expertise in the profession. Versatile and increasingly complex working environment assumes strengthening teacher's professional agency (Clandinin & Husu, 2017; Toom et al., 2017) both during in-service teacher education (Edwards, 2017) and throughout teacher career (Belfi et al., 2015; Biesta & Teddlor, 2007). There is evidence that teacher's professional agency promotes pupils' psycho-social well-being and educational equity and equality experienced in school (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Florian & Spratt, 2013). This same applies with the student

teachers: supportive and respectful learning environment in teacher education is associated with capabilities for reflection and creating collaborative learning environment (Soini et al., 2015), responsibility and understanding of equity and equality (Chubbuck & Zemblyas, 2016; Flessner & Payne, 2017; Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017).

Increasing diversity in society and schools highlights the ethical-moral aspects and instruction and their changing requirements in various situations. It is an essential societal and educational task of teacher education to strengthen those teacher capabilities that diverse, plural and equal society assumes from teachers (Avalos & Rasquin, 2017; Bruno-Jofre & Johnston, 2014; Paine et al., 2016; 2017; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; McNamara & McNicholl, 2016; Pioneered 2021-24). Researchers often use the concept *moral work of teaching* (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013) when describing these issues intertwined closely to teacher profession (Day, 2021). The theme is not new (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Sanger, 2017), but cultivating it intentionally and systematically as a genuine element of teacher profession in pre-service teacher education is surprisingly rare. Broad goals and aims set for institutional education and schooling (Cook-Sather & Baker-Doyle, 2017) call for explicating ethical-moral questions and challenges to a more central position both in pre-service teacher education (Boylan, 2017; Cook, 2017; Thornberg, 2017) and in various forms of in-service teacher education (Oberle et al., 2016). Noticing diverse pupils means also taking care of them: caring education and instruction (Noddings, 2005, 2010) considers possibilities for promoting solicitude and well-being comprehensively both during pre-service teacher education (Kim & Schallert, 2011) and in schools (Eldor & Shoshani, 2016; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Schussler & Collins, 2006; Smith & Lopez, 2016). Increasing requirements and demands towards teacher profession are clearly emerging in pre- and in-service teacher education (Boylan & Woolsey, 2015; Clandinin & Husu, 2017; Kelchtermans & Deketelaere, 2016).

The pressure that changes in the schools and their surroundings set for teacher education is especially realised in the contexts, curricular structures, goals, contents and pedagogies of teacher education. Solutions concerning the contexts are two-way (Labaree, 1997; Moon, 2016; Payne & Zeichner, 2017): weakening the structures and characteristics of academic teacher education has led to the situation in which teacher education takes place in real school contexts. On the other hand, another paradigm aims at developing collaboration between academic teacher education and schools considering their specific characteristics. Grossman et al. (2016) point out that most of the teacher education still takes place in university context or is led by

universities, although there exist several variations of teacher education internationally. The empirical evidence related to teacher education also supports the academic teacher education (Gatti & Catalano, 2015; Zeichner, 2016). The pressure for the development of teacher education taking place in university are continuously growing (Ellis & McNicholl, 2015; Gatti, 2016; Paine et al., 2017; Zygmunt & Clark, 2016). The reasons behind these developments vary, but growing societal heterogeneity, diversity, and segregation drive changes in teacher education. The possibilities for promoting societal and collective equity and equality in schools and their practices (Thompson, 2013; see also PIONEERED 2021-24) and strengthening these capabilities and practices already in teacher education (Zeichner et al., 2015, 2016; Ellis & McGuire, 2017; Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016; Grudnoff et al., 2016). It is noteworthy that there are ambitions for the development of teacher education to respond regional needs in collaboration with families and local contexts and surroundings (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Payne & Zeichner, 2017). The varying practices of pre- and in-service teacher education (Deed, 2017; Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017; Liu et al., 2016; Sherin & van Es, 2012) open opportunities for teacher education in terms of societal equity and equality. Diverse learners and their families also challenge the composition of teacher communities in schools: how do we take care of sufficient diversity among teachers and how teacher selection (Klassen et al., 2017; Mitchell & Carrigan Wooten, 2017) and recruitment of teacher educators (Payne & Zeichner, 2017) support these aims.

### **Continuum from pre-service to in-service teacher education and support for capabilities in teacher profession**

There does not exist only one right way to organise pre- or -in-service teacher education (Payne & Zeichner, 2017; Zeichner, 1983), but it is essential that it is systematic and coherent and serves teachers' learning needs. It is fundamental to support such teacher learning that provides capabilities for teacher profession throughout the career. It is not reasonable to organise teacher education only from the perspective of current professional challenges, educational system structures or basic education curricula (cf. Pantic & Wubbels, 2010; Barnett, 1994; Korthagen, 2004).

When developing pre- and in-service teacher education, it is essential to understand, what teacher learning is about (cf. Ball & Forzani, 2009) and how the process is about (Toom, 2017). Even more challenging question is, which capabilities to focus during pre-service

teacher education, and which capabilities teachers can – and is reasonable to learn – only learn after some years of teaching (Husu & Clandinin, 2017). This may especially be the case related to moral aspects of teaching and understanding thoroughly the worldviews dimensions intertwined in teachers' work. This essentially raises the question about learning *academic, moral, practical, and situational* capabilities in in-service teacher education (cf. Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Ellis & McNicholl, 2015; Gatti, 2016; Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017; Kumashiro, 2010). This challenges answering the questions concerning how the needs for in-service teacher education are defined, how they are targeted and in which career phases they take place. It is also essential to consider, what kind of roles various institutions and communities have in in-service teacher education.

*Academic teacher education institutions in university* have an essential and justified responsibility in producing, modifying, and delivering *academic* knowledge for teacher education. Pupils' personal needs in terms of their growth, development and worldviews in different times change in accordance with the changes and developments in the surrounding society. Also the learning environments, methods and facilities change. All changes are reflected to teacher capabilities, but also to collective capabilities of schools. It is of vital importance that teacher education institutions are anchored in research and utilise it in a variety of ways in education they provide.

*Schools' practical* expertise have a central role in pre-service teacher education and could have even a more central role in in-service education. Schools have a lots of such potential that is not at all utilised in pre- and in-service teacher education. At their best, schools do impressive and significant innovative pedagogical development, model teacher collaboration, build networked expert communities, support teachers' and principals' informal learning, do curriculum work, and create learning materials. This versatile expertise and capacity could be utilised more extensively.

In addition to academic teacher education institutions and schools, many *local communities, organisations, and NGOs* have a growing role and responsibility in pre-and in-service teacher education (cf. Darling-Hammond, 2006; Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016). The established dichotomous division between academic and theoretical and practical elements of teaching is not enough as such, but growing diversity in instruction and

schools call for broadening the approaches and perspectives. Teacher learning takes place in various communities and networks in a variety of ways, and they are significant resources for pre- and in-service teacher education. Both pre- and in-service teacher education should be more tightly connected to surrounding communities. Urban metropolitan areas differ from smaller cities and towns, and this is essential to consider in teacher education. The spectrum of social, cultural and economic aspects increases all the time, and grasping this local diversity is an essential challenge for truly timely pre- and in-service teacher education (cf. Moon, 2016; Seidl & Friend, 2002).

When academic teacher education institutions, schools as practical actors, and versatile communities with networked, collective and contextual expertise share the joint goal of educating teachers, they can build meaningful education and support for teachers that none of them could do alone. They all have such expertise and resources that are relevant in teacher education. This kind of model of teacher education challenges all actors to consider, how teachers could be supported in a best possible way.

## **Discussion**

Changed understanding of pupils' learning goals in basic education, increasingly diverse pupil groups, and learning-focused instruction challenge teachers and teacher education (cf. Husu & Toom, 2016). Due to these changes and requirements, pre- and in-service teacher education, its' relevance, and continuums need to be reconsidered. Also, the responsible actors related to teacher education could be reconsidered. Academic teacher education institutions, schools and surrounding communities can together contribute much more than any of them alone. New teacher education models and support could tackle and prevent the challenges that current models and practices have faced.

Teacher learning takes place in institutional teacher education, and informally in teacher's work, interactions, and networks (cf. Vermunt & Endedijk, 2011; Heikkinen et al., 2015). When transitioning from pre-service teacher education emphasising reflective and critical approach to collaborative learning at workplace, teachers can experience the difference quite radical. Teachers can also experience that through informal learning, they learn a variety of aspects of teachers work that their education did not provide (Heikkinen et al., 2015; cf. Hiebert et al., 2007). New teachers' transitioning to working life is a critical

phase, and teachers face extensively the demands of their work. Support and mentoring are essential, and lack of it can cause serious challenges for early career teachers (cf. Heikkinen et al., 2015; Heikonen et al., 2016). Early career teachers' support systems are of vital importance (vrt. Eisenschmidt, 2006; Meristo, 2015;).

Teachers need support for their learning and development throughout their career, and these needs vary in the different career phases. For these reasons, it is necessary to organise in-service education and support as genuine part of teacher's work. Teachers should have possibilities to steer their own professional development together with their peers and principals in the school community where they work. This could promote teachers' meaningful learning and receiving such social support that truly have impact on teacher's work in classroom and professional community (cf. Ilomäki et al., 2017) and further to pupils' learning and development. Peers are important resources for teacher learning, and teachers benefit from each others significantly (cf. Leana, 2011; Vangrieken et al., 2015). Within these perspectives, there are a lot of possibilities in building meaningful and relevant education and support for teacher learning and development.

## **Funding**

This article has been prepared in association with the Pioneered project, which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101004392.

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