Chapter 15 Unpacking the Experiences of a Teacher as a Professional Through the Framework of Capability Approach



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Introduction

The chapter presents the portrayal of a teacher's life in order to understand the reality of the contexts in which he or she lives and functions. Sen's (1999) Capability approach is used as a framework to understand and produce conceptualizations of professional capabilities of teachers. Case studies of two temporary teachers of the University of Delhi are presented to understand the vulnerabilities that restrict the professional capabilities. The chapter shows that the growing casualization of teachers may restrict the professional capabilities of teachers so far as the future of higher education in India is concerned.

The Capability Approach (CA), developed by Amartya Sen, came as an intellectual response to the traditional utilitarian approaches that were made to measure well-being, as it critiqued the 'information bases' on which they depended. The most significant of these is the criticism of utility as a measure of well-being. Sen points out that functioning is a more rational measure of well-being than utility – which is the value of desired objects (Sen 1999). The core concepts that constitute Amartya Sen's Capability Approach are functionings and capabilities. Functionings can be understood as a state of 'being and doing'. For example, being well educated or being healthy can be understood as functionings. But this should be differentiated from the commodities that are employed to attain these functionings, for example – a student belonging to a Tribal community, utilizing the provision of reservation in education institutions and moving ahead in life is different from mere consciousness that one has reservations. On the other hand, capabilities can be understood as the culmination or a set of various valuable functionings that the individual has access to. This access also reflects the freedom that the individual has to choose from different functionings. This simply implies that an individual has the freedom to choose the kind of life he or she wants to live from all the given options that are presented and made available. The capability approach fundamentally looks at 'the freedom people have to live the type of life they wish through the freedom to pursue the things (the beings and doings that Sen calls functionings) that they have reason to value' (Buckler 2014). A person's capability can be evaluated in four distinctive 'concepts of advantage': (i) well-being freedom (the opportunity to achieve well-being); (ii) well-being achievement (the realization of well-being); (iii) agency freedom (the opportunity to pursue the goals one values) and (iv) agency achievement (the realization of these goals) (Sen 2009). Buckler in her study on lives of teachers looks at the extent to which women teachers in rural schools in Sub-Saharan Africa are able to pursue and achieve valued aspects of teaching (Buckler 2014).

It has been indicated that there are certain factors that enhance or obstruct capabilities, mainly the personal factors that include intelligence, physical ability and skill sets; environmental factors such as infrastructure, geographical location and logistics, and more importantly, the social factors that include social norms, gender relations, roles and identities (Robeyns 2005 in Tao 2015). The capability approach offers a new way to look at well-being of teachers' by understanding their wellbeing as a product of enhanced or constrained opportunities. The literature suggests that teachers rarely get the opportunity to actively participate in policy changes; there is no sense of ownership associated as well (Harley et al. 2000; Barrett 2005; UNESCO 2014 in Buckler 2014). In the developing countries, teacher policies are highly centralized with no reference to the real challenges the teachers encounter in classroom (Lewin 2002; Bonnet and Pontefract 2008; Buckler 2011 in Buckler 2014). Giroux asserts that we must look at teachers as transformative intellectuals who need to develop a discourse that unites the language of critique with the language of possibility so that social change follows (Giroux 1988). The teacher education programmes pose systematic constraints and therefore disempower teachers as a community further leading to deterioration of the education system. Batra points out how the National Curriculum Framework 2005 in India envisions classrooms as inclusive spaces but does not provide the teachers the agency that they should rightfully have in order to fulfil the aims of the National Curriculum framework. The proactive engagement required on the part of the teacher with processes of curriculum redesign will only translate into practice when he/she has the voice and agency to accomplish the same (Batra 2005).

There are studies that point towards the criticality in understanding the role and identity of a teacher as a professional (Kale 1970; Sriprakash 2012). A teacher comes with his/her experience and immersion of his/her content domain, a certain cultural and educational background, personal viewpoint about teaching and learning, and at the same time an experience of dealing with students who come with different needs and socio-cultural backgrounds. All these are quite important in shaping the classroom environment and his/her pedagogic decisions. As a researcher, interested in concerns of teachers, the aim is to understand and be able to articulate what constitutes the teacher as a professional and what influences shape his/her identity. Even from this abridged sample of data (interview conducted), it is possible to see how physical, environmental and social factors limit professional capability

for a teacher. The semi-structured interview helped get insights into the cultural context of life of the individual through an engaged, exploration of beliefs, values and forces underpinning socially patterned behaviour (Forsey 2008 in Buckler 2014).

Methodology

The chapter adopts a narrative inquiry approach to understand the factors that influence an individual's educational journey and experience working as a teacher in a university. The narrative inquiry research design enabled an exploratory research, as it has not been studied widely in the Indian context. The research paradigm used is 'Interpretivist' within which the research strategy would be of phenomenology – 'concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved as they interpret their own reality' (Kruger and Welman 2000). The method used is semi-structured interviews with the teachers as they narrate their experiences working as a professional. The participants in the research were selected purposively. I chose to interview only ad hoc teachers or guest teachers. An ad hoc teacher is hired to engage a class or classes on a temporary basis like a substitute teacher. However, the ad hoc teacher's contract will end as soon as a permanent vacancy gets filled. The context of this ad hoc recruitment in the University of Delhi has grabbed attention in the past years as in most colleges, the ad hoc faculty are running the show (Sharma and Dhingra 2018).

All the individuals contacted did not agree to participate in the study as they felt their position in a temporary job is already vulnerable. They did not feel comfortable to share their experiences and this is itself an indication of the political scenario that the university is engulfed in. Naina and Hema agreed to participate in the study as they recognized the need to bring out this narrative so that the exploitation of individuals at the hands of the university is highlighted. The transcripts of the interviews were used for drawing out themes from the data. The analysis identified patterns in the two narratives, which were further interpreted in the context of capabilities of teachers. The two participants, both female around the same age, were working in the same college in different departments at the University of Delhi.

Details of the Interview with the Teachers

1. Teacher's Name: Naina, Age: 25 years

Highest Level of Education: MPhil in Sociology, Delhi School of Economics. Position: Guest Faculty, Department of Elementary Education, University of Delhi.

Naina graduated as Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed) in 2014. Four years later after pursuing her Masters and MPhil in Sociology at Delhi School of Economics, she is back as a guest faculty teaching the B.El.Ed course at her own college. Guest faculty is a part-time faculty, organized or called by the institution to teach a particular subject for a particular semester and are paid for every session they teach a fixed amount. In the University of Delhi, the amount has been fixed as Rs. 1000 for one class. Prior to this, Naina worked as a guest faculty at another college at the University of Delhi where she taught the B.A. programme students at the Department of Sociology for one semester. As a guest faculty, she describes that the expectation is to teach 25 classes per month. For Rs. 1000 per class, a guest teacher is expected to earn Rs. 25,000 per month at the most. If they take more than 25 sessions, they are not paid for the same. She spends 6 h on an average as a faculty, most days the lectures get extended and she ends up spending 8 h. When probed further, she explained that sometimes she is given substitute classes in case permanent faculty is on leave, sometimes engaging with students during tutorials, the assigned course work does not necessarily get finished in 25 sessions so one ends up taking more sessions to ensure that students do not face any issue. She also accounts for the fact that it takes almost 3 h for her to travel to and fro from college to her place.

She described the course she taught, Sociological Research, as 'obscure'. It was out of context for the learners, the readings were fairly complex and the students were highly disinterested in the course. The challenges were many starting with the stigma attached to the B.A. programme, its relative position in the college among other courses like B.Com (Hons.) or Economics (Hons.), which were considered as job-getter courses. The B.A. programme did not have a faculty of their own; there were faculty from different disciplines who are invited to teach in the programme. As a faculty, she felt that the infrastructural support was missing from the department and the college to facilitate teaching-learning. The major challenges faced were due to students' attitudes, Naina looked for all the possible solutions in her capacity which included seeking support from senior faculty, attempts at building rapport with the students by going out of her way to find points for shared interest. She however felt all her efforts were in vain as the students did not take her seriously. They could look through the power dynamics between the guest faculty and permanent faculty members. Since the nature of employment of the guest faculty is temporary, the hierarchy between the guest and the permanent faculty is visible to the students. Students took liberty of complaining against the guest or ad hoc faculty, as they are considered 'easy targets' or vulnerable as opposed to the permanent faculty who they fear complaining against. Naina found that the department had no comradeship within. Permanent faculty did see all the struggles and challenges that the guest or ad hoc faculty member faces but they never showed any sign of empathy. The strict hierarchy between teachers reflects strongly in everyday activities and therefore negatively affects the teaching-learning experiences. Naina in her own words describes her state of mind as filled with frustration, anxiety over uncertain future of the job. The fact that she makes only rupees 25,000 as she chose to teach and therefore could not access her Junior Research Fellowship that would have amounted more is also a concern for her. She chose to teach over going directly for her doctoral studies as she always aspired to talk and learn from young students. Therefore, the opportunity cost of teaching is higher, as she could have earned more

by pursuing doctorate as she had the research fellowship award. The job, however, has bought in more insecurity over the past months for her.

I invest so much time preparing lectures but never really become a part of college or lives of students. Being an Ad-hoc is exploitative in nature.

Naina explains how her experiences have been drastically different working in two different colleges and different departments. She felt that as she graduated from the same course and college 4 years ago, there is a sense of belonging and the colleagues are more cooperative in her present job. The colleagues in fact were her teachers once and therefore a rapport has been built. She teaches a course on caste, class, family and kinship in India that she finds exciting. The fact that the department gave space to organize movie screenings, documentaries and events to facilitate the classroom discussions enabled her as a teacher. The major challenges she has faced in terms of classroom were reaching out to one of the Korean students and since the B.El.Ed course is bilingual, it becomes all the more challenging. Naina narrated the conflict she faces between the ideology of institute about discipline and her personal ideology over attendance. For instance, she feels that no student be forced to come to the classroom, no strict attendance should be followed. But the institute's ideology is different and therefore she is bound to follow the mandate.

As a guest faculty, she is at a high risk of job insecurity. She does not know her immediate future once the course finishes. Also, even if she takes more number of sessions than 25 in a month, she will still be paid the consolidated amount of 25 thousand rupees. There is also a dilemma that guest teachers face: whether they are part of the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) or not. She feels at a loss by not being a member of DUTA. About the timings of her class given, she feels that in the timing of 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm, the students are exhausted and sleepy and therefore it is a challenge for her to devise new pedagogic means (like storytelling, debates) to ensure students' interest and participation in the classroom. This flexibility to design the curriculum and pedagogy is enabling and the department's ideology is supportive of the same.

About the Process of Recruitment as a Guest or Ad Hoc Faculty

The interview process for selection for the job of a guest or an ad hoc is described as a disturbing experience. The fact that people who once taught you are your competition and that bothers Naina. Individuals who were once her teachers compete for the same job and that for her is an intimidating experience.

Being a Guest Faculty is ephemeral and therefore tends to be a demotivating experience

Also, people who have power abuse it when they are the interviewees. Legitimate questions are not asked. For instance, I was asked, "How can you teach college students as B.El.Ed is for school education?" Even after finishing my MPhil studies, I am asked this (Naina on the interview process)

2. Teacher's Name: Hema Sharma, Age: 27 years Highest Level of Education: Pursuing MPhil in English, University of Delhi. Position: Ad hoc Faculty, Department of English, University of Delhi.

Hema was hired as a guest faculty initially and later recruited as an ad hoc. She describes the process of recruitment as taxing, uncertain and systemically problematic. The ad hoc faculty is underpaid and overworked. The system of hiring ad hoc staff in DU, which has been going on for over 10 years, has now become a problem for the teachers as no permanent hiring had happened in the university until recently. There are some faculty members who have been working on an ad hoc basis for the last 15 years. The primary problem with being an ad hoc faculty member is that there is no job guarantee as the official term for an ad hoc employee is only four months. The permanent faculty gets the privilege of study leave, but the ad hoc faculty do not get such support. Hema is pursuing her MPhil along side and does not get the space and time to engage in her research work. Every semester, she gets different course to teach and therefore that takes a lot of time in preparation. She understood that her choice to pursue studies along side teaching would be a difficult one, but she did not anticipate structural challenges that came her way. For instance, the senior faculty expects ad hoc faculty to participate in the DUTA (Delhi University Teachers Association) strikes. But the administration of the college they teach in, instruct them otherwise; thus, the ad hoc faculty gets caught in between. There is no sense of job security. There is pressure (manipulation and bullying) to accomplish things as per the higher authorities. Administration poses challenges (represents college principals directions). The contract signed by the ad hoc faculty states, 'you can be terminated at any point, a proper reason may not be given'. The position therefore remains vulnerable at all times. Nevertheless, Hema described her teaching experience as an enjoyable one. The curriculum is provided to the faculty, but there is freedom to devise one's own pedagogy. She has been able to develop a rapport with some of her students and that gives her an immense sense of satisfaction despite several challenges that come her way everyday.

Analysing the Teacher as a Professional through the Lens of Capability Approach

The functioning of a guest faculty, ad hoc and permanent faculty are similar; however, the capabilities vary as we will discuss in this section. Both the participants blame the government's failure to get a secure job as the vacancies are not filled and so many well-qualified teachers are without a job. It suits educational administration. They are able to command teachers. 'The ad hoc teachers work on a paltry salary without any job guarantee. Worse still, they do not enjoy the perks that permanent staff are entitled to, maternity leave, medical leave, earned leave and provident fund. They only get one sanctioned leave per month. It is a continuous practice in the University of Delhi where the administration replaces one ad hoc teacher with

another, which is against University Grants Commission's rules. Also, a lot of favouritism works. If you are a favourite of the head of department who is on the selection panel, you will get another extension, if you are not you might have to look for a job in some other college' (Sharma and Dhingra 2018). Both the participants call the ad hoc arrangement unfair and exploitative. The services of ad hoc teachers can be terminated without notice and both the teachers I spoke to did not

want to be identified as they feared they would be removed from their job.

'As an ad hoc, I am supposed to work twice as hard as permanent teachers, carry forward the course from where they have left, make sure I am on good terms with the college principal and the teacher in charge. I have to be at every invigilation and answer sheet checking duty I am assigned so that I am not debarred from my job. To appease my principal and colleagues, I have to teach longer hours, do clerical work assigned to teachers and make the semester timetable. Even then, I can be removed from my position after four months if the college deems fit',

The participants while introducing themselves focused on the colleges they graduated from, their present job as an ad hoc or a guest faculty at the University of Delhi. They began on a positive note about their studies and how they have aspired for this profession. As they talk about their previous studies pursuing Bachelors, Masters and MPhil, they term those experiences as memorable ones, learning in a flexible and open environment. The fact that teachers are expected to know the 'craft of teaching', classroom management, 'a bag of tricks to keep students' attention focused on teacher', to impart knowledge and maintain discipline was something that the participants in the present study did not resonate with (Kumar 2005). In fact, their own experiences pursuing studies in the disciplines of Sociology from Delhi School of Economics and English Literature from Faculty of English, University of Delhi, were different. Their ideology on discipline and pedagogy were different than the conventional ideas a teacher is associated with. Naina, for instance, revealed that she disagrees with the notion that she should see herself as a moral example, responsible for 'affective, social and spiritual development' for students (Carr 2003). She believed in facilitating learning in manner that evokes critical thinking, probes students to decide for themselves rather than following their teachers by putting them on a pedestal of a 'guru'.

Apart from the routine work, there are other things that ad hoc faculty is supposed to do like assist in the administrative work, maintain records of students, check answer sheets, design timetables, some of which is synonymous to the role of a teacher during British rule (Kumar 2005). Low salary and low status in society makes teaching a weak profession in comparison to its counterparts like medicine and law which can be seen in the similar domain of key public services. Teachers receive little support in terms of developing professionally as the participants mentioned they do not get space and time to engage in research (Carr 2003). Here, the access to professional support is hindered and therefore the capability is restricted for the teachers. Another problem that teachers face is lack of autonomy and power to decide on the content, curriculum, pedagogy, syllabus and textbooks. Naina does not face this issue, as she believes that the department is flexible and provides the space to the teachers to choose the content for the courses and pedagogy. However, Hema shares that the nature of discipline is such for English literature that the readings have been fixed as a tradition, the flexibility is in implementation. There is scope for the faculty to go beyond the conventional ways of teaching and innovate their pedagogy within the overarching curriculum guidelines. Ginsburg et al. (1988) assert that the rigid standardization by the state makes the teacher a bureaucratic employee who cannot exercise any rights. The bureaucracy in turn is destructive for education, as over time, the teachers lose the enthusiasm to even bring about any change. If they never get the agency to deviate, they would ultimately get 'burnt out' in the system (Kale 1970). There is no space for grievance redress as well if there arises a situation of conflict between the administration and the teacher.

Both the participants construct a conundrum for themselves. On the one hand, they wish to provide their students the space to question, challenge the authority and develop critical thinking. On the other hand, however, when the students go ahead and complaint freely about the ad hoc teachers and that puts their career at risk, they feel highly vulnerable. They elaborate that since the students see through the hierarchy existing between permanent faculty and ad hoc faculty, they know that they can provide informal or formal feedback about the ad hoc faculty. They in fact know their feedback can determine whether the faculty will continue over the next semester or not. Also, the manner in which the permanent faculty treats the ad hoc teachers in front of the students, the students end up not fearing and not respecting the ad hoc faculty in most cases. The fact that students question and challenge the ad hoc faculty more is something that seems unfair (Kale 1970). Further, both the participants refer to teaching both as a livelihood and passion for them is worth exploration. Teaching has been seen 'as a livelihood, a means for social mobility' since the colonial rule in India (Sriprakash 2012). Also, in the study done by Ginsburg et al. (1988) on teachers, they found many respondents saying, that teaching is a livelihood for people and thus qualifies to be a profession. Of course, it does not end there and has a moral basis to it, it becomes a noble profession as it has inherent 'life enhancing benefits' attached to it and therefore the duties of a teacher extend beyond the obvious obligations he/she has (Carr 2003).

It is crucial to look at the vulnerabilities both the participants as temporary faculty face within the university. They can be described as 'meek dictator', without the job security a fear of an uncertain future haunts them from time to time, trying to meet the expectations and in turn trying to be a figure of authority for students (Kumar 2005). Their future hopes to get a permanent job in the university as that is considered a coveted position as it offers security, higher salary is only fair (Sriprakash 2012). The narratives of the participants blame the systematic flawed recruitment procedures that the university follows. This throws light upon how bureaucratization of education system has made teaching as a profession suffer (Carr 2003). As individuals who have excelled as students at their institutions and cleared the National Eligibility Test to become Assistant Professor, they hope to deserve more than what they are subjected to presently. They do not feel respected amongst their colleagues and students and that leads to a strong sense of negativity. The lack of support to work in an enabling environment leads to further restrictions in one's agency and achievement of functionings.

A study by Tao points towards how teachers assert that 'the functioning "being able to take care of family" entails the physical act of caring, such as preparing food, as well as the symbolic act of providing, such as paying for private school and clothing. When asked about constraints on their ability to care and provide for family, teachers remarked that a low salary and high number of working hours was the greatest impediment to both' (Tao 2015). This is similar to the perspective held by the teachers in the present chapter. They feel they are not able to contribute to the family income, as their salary simply meets their own daily expenses. They are overworked and are not able to 'take care of their family' in terms of household chores. Naina does mention how this arrangement is fine until she gets married. After marriage, her responsibilities towards home might increase and being an ad hoc will not help her. She comments on how the society is patriarchal and even though her parents are supportive and she can engage in her other pursuits presently, this might change after marriage for her. Reflecting on the experiences of both the participants, one can argue for the pursuit of well-being being important and how a teacher who achieves personal well-being is more likely to be able to enhance the well-being of his/her pupils. In the flow chart given below from a study by Tao (2015), it has been described through a flowchart how a valued functioning may encounter enabling and constraining factors and how does that lead to impact the behaviour of the teachers (Fig. 15.1).

Discussion

Higher education is intended to serve as a means of socialization as well as social mobility. In the development discourse, education is seen as serving the societal needs of cohesion, intellectual engagement, and social progress. It helps weave together members of a society with similar values and community norms. It is needless to say that teachers have an indispensable role to play in determining the quality of higher education we provide our students with. Buckler (2014), through her study looked at the lives of teachers; to what extent are women teachers in rural schools able to pursue and achieve valued aspects of teaching. The narratives of teachers in the present chapter highlight the pursuit of their professional capabilities that they themselves have reason to value.

Naina and Hema in the present study certainly provide a glimpse into the more nuanced and reflective province they have envisioned for their students through their own valued professional capabilities. For instance, they reflect on how their experiences as temporary faculty affect the teaching-learning process and their relationship with their students. The fact that Naina and Hema feel they are overworked and underpaid poses obstructions to their functionings. As individuals who have pursued MPhil studies and are driven towards doctoral research in the near future, they value engaging in research and participating in conferences and seminars. However, they both feel that their job poses everyday constraints that devoid them of such opportunities. The university has positions of Assistant Professor, Associate

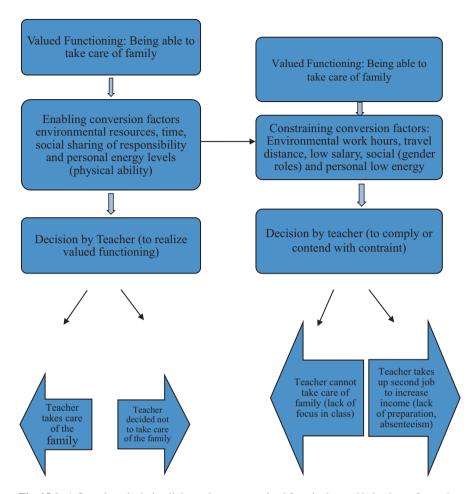


Fig. 15.1 A flow chart depicting linkages between a valued functioning and behaviour of a teacher (Tao 2015)

Professor and Professor within each department to indicate seniority in terms of experience. However, when they create temporary teaching positions like ad hoc and guest faculty, the university creates systematic scope for exploitation. Based on the experiences of both the participants, we figure that the guest teacher is placed in a further difficult position than the ad hoc teacher as they are paid lesser salaries. They are not paid for work like checking answer sheets or other administrative work that might come their way. Lack of access to professional support, inability to establish contact with permanent faculty members; have led to capability deprivation for the teachers. It is interesting that Naina has worked in two different colleges within the same university and feels that her experiences have been starkly different in terms of the approach of the college principal, administration and the department's ideology. In the former college, the lack of say in deciding the curriculum, content

and textbooks restricted the agency and achievement of functionings. However, working as a guest faculty at the latter college, she received opportunity to design, innovate and organize workshops, seminars, and movie screenings; and most importantly decide on readings for the course and pedagogy. The ability to design curriculum, pedagogy and make decisions about the everyday teaching-learning process are things that she values being a teacher.

The major challenges that an ad hoc or guest teacher faces include the issue of job security; they can be terminated without giving any reasons on a day's notice. It has also been reported that an ad hoc is given, at least, one day's break in their teaching term every 4 months, so that they cannot claim seniority as the years pass (called as a break in service) (Joshi 2016). This is not just the loss of valuable teaching experience but also more immediately the loss of about 7000 rupees which adds to the financial burden for the teachers. Another crucial insight that has been shared is the fact that the ad hoc teachers are never a part of workload distribution meetings even if they are being retained in the next semester. They are generally given the leftover courses (not chosen by the permanent faculty) to teach irrespective of whether they will have the expertise or inclination to teach that particular course. It is established based on the experiences of ad hoc teachers that they can be replaced on the basis of formal and informal student feedback. Naina and Hema shared how there seems to be always a threat that based on informal student feedback they can lose their job. However, no amount of negative feedback for the permanent faculty can affect them. Thus, this threat leads to capability deprivation as a sense of security with regards to the job is lacking despite having the credentials required to succeed at the job. The fact that a teacher is deprived of opportunities through the universal, top-down regulations whether it relates to his/her own career progression or access to professional support. It was revealed through the interviews that the teachers feel constrained by demonstrating accountability standards that are set with no agency of their own.

The studies of teachers across the world, especially in the context of developing countries, indicate that teachers rarely feel actively involved in policy changes, nor do they feel a sense of ownership of them (Harley et al. 2000; Barrett 2005; UNESCO 2014 in Buckler 2014). Teacher policies reportedly continue to be designed by elites in urban, centralized contexts, draw predominantly on statistical analyses and often have little resonance with what is going on in classrooms (Lewin 2002; Bonnet and Pontefract 2008; Buckler 2011 in Buckler 2014). Teachers as an organized group should be able to stand up for the capabilities that they value and enable a robust public debate about them in their own right, rather than within the parameters defined by the policy-makers. It is said, 'professional teachers must be capable of profound reflection on practice, competent to enter into a dialogue of the practice they know and the theory or literature they read' (Sockett in Khora 2011). The values that the teachers hold and their pursuit of these values needs to be researched upon widely so as to gain insights about the role of teachers in improving the quality of teachers (Buckler 2014). Higher Education must aim towards designing professional development and support for teachers that is guided by teaching values and reducing constraints. The values and constraints are likely to vary over context and time, however, it is crucial to account for them when envisaging a future of higher education with an enabling framework for teachers to be able to be and do what they value as a community.

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