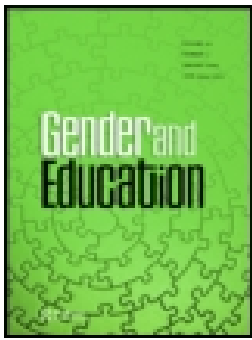


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The gendered construction of teachers' identities and practices: feminist critical discourse analysis of policy texts in Ireland

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ABSTRACT

While gender and education studies abound, there are fewer studies examining how the gendered construction of teachers' identities and practices are enabled, and constrained, in policy and research. Here, I conduct a *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* of this gendered construction in four policy texts in teacher education in Ireland, set within a neoliberal imaginary playing-out across OECD countries, and in mainstream research of teacher effectiveness. The analysis uses a metaphor of confinement to trouble the problem, and to generate wider representations and emancipatory possibilities. The findings reveal how this reform ensemble in Ireland acts more often than not in sync with a global education reform movement in gender-blind ways to constrain, if not actively confine (mostly women) teachers' voices and agency, often in assumed, theory-weak and patriarchal ways. The study foregrounds the gendered politics of teacher education within a pressing need for egalitarian rather than conservative gender discourses.

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Introduction

Teaching is regarded, and by implication teachers' identities and practices in Europe and elsewhere, in reports from global policy influencers, such as the *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD), as a feminized profession of mostly women teachers often using deficit discourses (OECD 2005; Moreau 2019, 2020). *Great Teachers*, a publication of the World Bank, identifies teachers' gender and social class origins as major obstacles to improving student achievement in Latin America and the Caribbean; teachers described as 'predominantly female, older, poor, and characterised by low achievement and limited aspirations' (Bruns and Luque 2014, 7). *Education at a Glance* (OECD 2021) shows that 'on average across OECD countries, 70% of teachers are women in all levels of education combined' (398). However, women teachers' numerical dominance fails to translate into improved status as teachers have come increasingly

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under low-trust audit regimes of regulation by those in a gendered hierarchy with the power to control this field of professional judgment (Connell 1990, 2009, 2021; Mockler 2022; Tronto 2013).

In this article, I argue that this failure in the improvement in teachers' status is in part, if not fully, explained by the privileging of a new hegemonic masculinities in teachers' identities and work practices for a self-directed and unattached view of the ideal student tied to entrepreneurship and new quality management (Connell 1990, 2009, 2021; Lynch 2007; Moreau 2019, 2020). Drudy (2008) shows how the introduction of performance management systems in teacher education 'represents a move toward the masculinization of teaching as both an activity and an organisational structure' (314), and a move away from flexible student-centred pedagogies.

While gender and education studies abound in the literature, fewer studies examine how gender is enabled, and how it is constrained, in the discursive construction of teachers' identities and work practices in policy texts, and in mainstream evidence-based research. Here, I examine the gendered construction of teacher's identities and practices through a critical feminist scrutiny of four policy texts in Ireland, playing out with and against a globalizing educational reform movement, underpinned by evidence-based research and policy making in teacher effectiveness (Fuller and Stevenson 2019; Hattie 2012; Muijs and Reynolds 2018; Ng, Stull and Martinez 2019). My understanding here of teachers' work practices are twofold – first, the practice of teaching itself and second, teachers' continuing professional development and learning (Mooney Simmie 2021a, 2021b).

While the study troubles the question of the gendered construction of teachers' identities and practices in the policy texts of just one country, the problem has a global reach, and theorizations used here will be useful for others grappling with similar issues. I selected a *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* of four policy texts in teacher education in Ireland as the most suitable methodology (Teaching Council 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020). *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* reads texts in ways that go beyond thematic analysis to an 'analysis of the dialectical relationships between semiosis (including language) and other elements of social practices' (Fairclough 2005, 123), such as cultural values, consciousness, social relations, identities, power, ideology, productive activity, and means of production. Feminist critical discourse analysis foregrounds gendered constructions through scrutiny of the text, the policy (political) context, how policy is legitimated, evidentiary and accountability warrants, and whose interests are served (Lazar 2007). Fairclough (2005) asserts that while some ways of making meaning are 'dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse, others are marginal, or oppositional, or "alternative"' (124).

The *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* undertaken in this study, therefore, aims to trouble the problem of the gendered construction of teachers' identities and practices in Ireland, and to generate wider egalitarian and emancipatory possibilities. The study theorizes gender in productive rather than re/productive ways for education and teaching, understood as emancipatory practices where the necessary struggle of problematizing, critique and agency go beyond some cruel optimism, and include affordances for transformative possibility (Davies, 2003; Mockler 2022).

So, what is happening in contemporary teacher education that might generate cause for concern in relation to the gendered construction of teachers' identities and practices? Sant (2019) shows that former ideals of liberal education were rapidly replaced in this century by neoliberal and elite (neoconservative) discourses working to (re)make power

relations in policy and society. Teacher education in Ireland and elsewhere is increasingly positioned using deficit frameworks that are hierarchical and managerial, and seek to conserve order and obedience while generating skills and knowledge for the labour market (Mooney Simmie and Edling 2019). Giroux (2013) asserts that teachers often find themselves within a totalizing ‘insistence that all aspects of social life can be determined, shaped and weighted through market-driven measures’ (2). Few would argue against the place of evidence in professional practices. However, Davies (2003) posits that another reading of evidence-based practices can be discursively produced ‘if we understand evidence-based practice as a product of new managerialism and as no more than a means to implementing managerialist agendas’ (98).

My reflexive positioning is located in academic scholarship and advocacy for an emancipatory worldview, where gender is no longer an issue; where women play an equal role in teaching and elsewhere as public intellectuals, inquirers and cultural critics. A worldview that works toward (re)imagining and securing egalitarian gender relations in teacher education for a just global world (Mooney Simmie 2021a, 2021b). A world where teachers’ work practices are understood as complex, ethical, embodied, gendered, untidy, intellectual and decidedly not neutral (*ethico-political*) endeavours (Mooney Simmie 2021a, 2021b; Mooney Simmie and Moles 2020; Mooney Simmie, Moles and O’Grady 2019).

In this way, I assert that teachers bring their person, their gendered and sexed bodies, minds, hearts, and souls to teaching as a relational practice-in-motion, while grappling with theory and praxis to claim agency as cultural critics, and as public intellectuals, rather than as functionaries and technicians (Ball 1995; hooks 2000). Giroux (2013) argues that teachers work in ways that ‘embody and express struggles over what forms of authority, types of knowledge, forms of moral regulation, and versions of the past and future should be legitimated and transmitted to students’ (6).

I outline the structure of the article as follows. First, I consider theoretical perspectives drawn from a critical feminist literature that serve to widen representations of the gendered construction of teachers’ identities and practices (Connell 1990, 1990, 2021; hooks 1994, 2000; Lynch and Crean 2019; Moreau 2019, 2020; Tronto 2013; Warin and Adriany 2017). Second, I interrogate literature from the OECD and mainstream research in teacher effectiveness as the globalizing policy backdrop to the study conducted here (Hattie 2012; Muijs and Reynolds 2018; OECD 2005, 2021). Third, I explain the methodology of *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* and how this was used to scrutinize the gendered construction of teachers’ identities and practices through discursive analyses of policy texts, contexts, power, positioning, legitimation, evidentiary warrants, accountability warrants, presence and absence (Fairclough 2005; Lazar 2007; MacLure 2003). Fourth, I then use these concepts and ideas for a feminist critical discourse analysis of four policy texts in teacher education in Ireland (Teaching Council 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020). Finally, I discuss the findings and their implications, and identify new ways to theorize the gendered construction of teachers’ identities and practices in productive and egalitarian ways rather than in re/productive and conservative ways.

Critical feminist perspectives in teacher education

Critical and feminist research has done much to widen the subjectivities, identities and representation of work practices for women and men, while asserting that the personal

and the particular is political, and that care relations in education and teaching have a rightful place as important public goods (Lynch 2007; Lynch and Crean 2019).

Freire (2018/1971) understood the importance of an activist imaginary in the politics of education that was directed towards emancipation and agentic (transformative) possibility rather than neutralization and domestication. Warin and Adriany (2017) in their theorization of the gendered construction of *Early Childhood Education and Care*, show how gender can become constrained within conservative gender relations and enabled within egalitarian gender relations. They assert that egalitarian gender relations require teachers' acquisition of a gendered consciousness, staff modelling of alternative forms of masculinities and femininities, the valuing of a mixed gender workforce, and the enactment of gender flexible pedagogies. Their insights are central to this study and reveal a number of productive ways to trouble the gendered construction of teacher education.

The understanding here is that identities are not fixed and stable but are multiple, evolving, fractured, contradictory and crosscut by gender and other intersectionalities such as social class, sexuality, race, disability, ethnicity and religion (Butler 2004). hooks (1994, 2000) showed that not all women are equal when it comes to social standing, and any universal notion of women quickly unravels given that women experience intersections differently in the lived reality of their lives. While this complicates the construction of gender, it does not remove the problem of women's sub-ordinated positioning in society and in the field of education (Connell 2021; Tronto 2013).

Mainstream understandings of teachers' identities and practices often equate with self-preservation, and can be 'blind to the importance of other-centred work arising from our interdependences and dependencies as affective relational beings' (Lynch 2007, 550). The adoption of a neoliberal imaginary (re)constitutes teachers' identities and practices as new quality managerial performances of number, evidence and masculinities, with 'erasure of the gendered, classed, and raced nature of the labour of educating' (Moreau 2019, 826) where policy is more often 'informed by gender-blind approaches or deficit or essentialist views of women and minority ethnic teachers' (5). Mockler (2011) warns of the inherent dangers in 'privileging the technical-rational over the "human" in conceiving of teachers' work and identity' (518).

Patriarchy embedded in procedure

Over a 30-year timeline, there has been a steady adoption of a neoliberal imaginary in relation to the interplay between gender and education. Connell (1990, 2009, 2021) traces this rather limited imaginary over that timeline, and shows how a state-centred system of patriarchy operates in a multiplicity of ways, not only through structures, materialities and symbolism, but also through preoccupation with management, rules, responsibilities and regulations. Connell (1990) showed that

patriarchy is embedded in procedure, in the state's way of functioning. This perception is extremely important. It allows us to acknowledge the patriarchal character of the state without falling into a conspiracy theory ... it locates sexual politics in the realm of social action, where it belongs, avoiding the speculative reductionism that would explain state action as an emanation of the inner nature of males. Finally, it opens up the question of the state apparatuses. (517)

In a more recent study, Macer and Chadderton (2020) opened this crucial question of the state apparatuses in the normalization of an assumed and conservative gender discourse. They examined the patriarchy involved, and the subtle invidious ways it acted to constrain and often to deny when military wives sought to access higher education in Australia. They drew from Althusser's (1971) analysis showing how state apparatuses function in the education system, in two parts that act separately, but more often than not in sync: the ideological state apparatuses (e.g. education, media, religion, culture, politics) and the repressive state apparatuses (e.g. government, law, police, prisons).

Moreover, within a fast-encroaching neoliberal imaginary, the relational care work of teaching is highly problematic, precisely because it is worth(less) than the time and attention of policymakers within a conservative gendered positioning. Lynch and Crean (2019) reveal how care work is perceived as

cheap in the patriarchal capitalist calculus ... defined as worthless, part of nature rather than society. This was achieved through the equation of care labor with femininity and womanhood. As women were exploitative things, then by default their caring 'nature' was exploitable. (2)

Lynch (2007) shows that a distinguishing feature of the 'codes of glamourized, high-status masculinity is that they are definitely not other-centred' (564). In sharp contrast, a discourse of hegemonic masculinities is individualistic, competitive, managerialist, calculative, 'aggressive, unattached and designed to out-compete others' (564), and 'inversely related to the doing of love, care and solidarity' (564).

Several studies show how a state-centred patriarchy currently plays out in reforms, and in a variety of ways, along the lines of new quality management co-joined with evidence-based practices. Davies (2003) asserts that evidence-based practices often work in insidious ways to suppress and silence other ways of knowing, and to support a hegemony of new managerialism. Osgood (2006) shows how reforms in the UK in early childhood education, eschew feminine values of ethics and care and suppress teachers' (mostly women) voices and agency while putting teachers' bodies and souls to work for primacy of the markets. Teachers (mostly women) in Chile are (re)positioned as self-sacrificing practitioners whose identities and practices have become recast as performing a (religious) educator's vocation (Núñez 2018). Santoro (2017) compares the suppression of teachers' agency by reform efforts in the US to Cassandra's moral madness: the ancient Greek goddess who went mad because no one would listen to her warnings because she was a woman.

The metaphor of confinement

The critical feminist theorizations discussed above offer a timely challenge as policymakers' contemporary concern for gender equity in neoliberal/elite times 'often appear (s) driven by instrumental motives, such as the desire to use (the) teaching body/ies as a quick fix to the problem faced by students' (Moreau 2019, 4). Within a technical rational approach, gender becomes (re)cast as neutral and no longer embedded in state apparatuses, power and ideology, and therefore subjected to 'processes of objectification, commodification, naturalisation, and individualisation, which construct these as attributes or forms of capital wielding benefits for those who hold them' (4).

In this article, I use the concept of confinement as a metaphor, to signify separate and yet interrelated meanings. On one hand, 'confinement' as used in everyday language to describe women's assumed (restricted) condition during months of pregnancy, confined to the private domestic orbit/sphere. On the other, 'confinement' in the sense of teachers' positioning as working inside the private sphere of a hierarchical and patriarchal (school) institution, increasingly cast out and set adrift from the wider socio-political world.

This metaphor of confinement comes into play wherever teachers are required/mandated to 'dance-in-step-together' (see *note on Riverdance*¹) to a reform 'tune' of externally provided criteria and professional standards by state apparatuses. A reform ensemble that requires teachers to showcase desired and predictable outcomes, and to adhere to a patriarchal, managerial calculus of procedures, codes, regulations and statutory obligations (Connell 1990, 2009, 2021; Lynch 2007; Moreau 2020; Ng, Stull and Martinez 2019). Power in this deeply uneven field of judgment rests with people 'saying' what needs to be 'done', often-privileged others in powerful positions (e.g. politicians, OECD experts, corporate lobbyists, bishops, state inspectors and positivist researchers). The task of (mostly women) teachers then becomes about holding the affective structures of schooling in place, tending to the relational needs of young people for which there is non-recognition, while delivering measurable outcomes for a gender-blind performativity (Moreau 2019, 2020). Tronto (2013) asserts that this ruling class, positioned by the ideological apparatuses as (expert) knowers exert 'privileged irresponsibility' – granted spaces to 'say' what needs to be done while requiring someone else (e.g. a woman teacher) to enact reforms and deliver the outcomes. Latimer and Ogza (2011, 10) cited in Moreau (2019) claim we are 'witnessing a remaking of hegemonic masculinity as flexible, entrepreneurial management, sharply contrasted with emotional, intuitive and apparently inefficient feminized performances of teaching' (20).

Globalizing policy backdrop to the study

There is a strong globalizing policy backdrop to any reform ensemble taking shape in teacher education in Ireland. An examination of this literature, from the perspective of OECD reports and mainstream research in teacher effectiveness, shows how teachers' identities and practices are entangled within a new audit culture (Mockler, 2022). In the mid-1990s, the public sector, including education, was rapidly reconfigured using evidence-based policy making, a construct coming from medicine (Gulbenkian Commission, 1996). The crucial question here is how this evidence-based policymaking continues today to play out in OECD reports and in mainstream research studies.

OECD soft sculpts new teachers

The OECD, as a global policy influencer, remade the gendered construction of the teacher and their practices according to a neoliberal imaginary starting in 2005, and this trend continues unabated to date (Ainley and Carstens 2018; OECD 2005, 2021).

The first major international study of teacher policy undertaken by the OECD, between 2002 and 2004 was published as *Teachers Matter* (OECD 2005). *Teachers Matter* remade teachers' identities and work practices in the direction of a gender-blind, market-led discourse of new quality management. The OECD foresaw a rare opportunity with the

upcoming retirement of a majority of teachers, employed in the 1960s and 1970s, to (re)configure a new typology of teacher education. The new teacher was to be 'excited by' research, drawing from research and using evidence-based approaches. Teachers were (re)positioned inside an actuarial framework with affordances to show evidence of excelling at every turn (Connell 2009; Mockler 2022). This remaking of the teacher was in sharp contrast with any feminized construction, and was firmly in the direction of a new hegemonic masculinity as flexible, entrepreneurialism (Moreau 2019).

A *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS), started in 2013, showed that teachers' practices were (re)configured within an instrumental rationality (Ainley and Carstens 2018). The survey confined teachers and their practices inside the private orbit/sphere of their institutions without any requirement to critically read and trouble the wider world (Giroux 2013, Lynch 2007; Mockler 2011). The OECD *Global In-Sights* video analysis of teaching in 700 classrooms in eight countries, claiming to seek deep learning about teaching, reduces teachers' identities and practices to just three dimensions: quality instruction, support and behaviour management (OECD 2021).

Gendered positioning of the teacher in mainstream research

The research literature on teacher education is vast and extends from pre-service to in-career education. Here, I selected for scrutiny studies in the field of teacher effectiveness.

Since the start of the century, large-scale, quantitative studies provided by educational psychologists, such as Hattie (2012) and others, fulfilled policymakers' restlessness with former weak, feminized notions of teaching and teachers' judgment. These large-scale evidence-based syntheses and meta-analyses provided politicians with the certainty, clarity and closure they wanted to instil public confidence, as they drove reforms that exerted tighter and harder disciplinary powers over teachers' identities and practices (Mockler 2011, 2022). A conservative gendered construction of teacher's identities and practices was (re)made using processes of constant comparison with a universal gender-neutral pedagogy of adaptive expertise ('what works best'), for an *a priori* determination of 'best practices', and measurement of effect sizes (Hattie 2012). William (2016) describes teachers' practices as charting a bespoke risk-managed course for each student using the phallogocentric image of airline pilots landing an aeroplane in the right airport, in the right runway, and at the right time. Within this mainstream research, teachers' identities are (re)configured as fixed and singular, and teachers' practices are understood as evidence-based practices encompassing aspects such as (scientific) planning, diagnostics and self-evaluation (Hattie 2012; Muijs and Reynolds 2018; William 2016).

However, Rømer (2019) and others argue that this 'what works best' approach reduces the complexity of education to a theory of evaluation, and elides many relevant, competing, and untidy constructs such as *Bildung*, public interest values, human becoming, democracy, gender and intersectionality. Concepts that are concerned with shared humanity, and the responsibility embedded in education to uphold democracy.

The scrutiny of literature conducted here reveals that from 2005 to date, globalizing imperatives found in OECD reports and in large-scale research syntheses (re)position the teacher as a creative entrepreneur constantly engaging in make-overs to release creative, social and cultural capital for the exchange value of 'what works best' and 'what counts' (Mooney Simmie and Moles 2020; Ng, Stull and Martinez 2019). This managerialist

and evidence-based approach eschews what can be considered as feminine or weaker ways of knowing, and instead turns the teacher's gaze toward fulfilling externally provided criteria for strong, silver-bullet technical rational solutions to the problem of educating young people in a highly complex and uncertain twenty-first century world.

Methodology

The research design for the study used a *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* of four policy texts in Ireland to examine the gendered construction of teachers' identities and practices, within a globalizing policy imperative playing out as a new audit culture in teacher education (Bensimon and Marshall 2003; Fuller and Stevenson 2019; Lazar 2007, Mockler, 2022). Discourse analyses are concerned with revealing entanglements and hidden assumptions in the ways power and ideology play out in text and talk, in policies and empirical studies (MacLure 2003). Discursive practices are about revealing what is 'sayable' and (politically) legitimated, and what is 'unsayable', constrained, confined, forgotten, silenced and/or suppressed. While critical analysis is concerned to reveal the political, feminist analysis foregrounds gender in addition to power and ideology.

Lazar (2007) asserts that *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* works to 'show the complex and subtle ways in which taken-for-granted social assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, perpetuated, negotiated and challenged' (1). Studies that are not simply about textual deconstruction for its own sake, but are more about the actual material and phenomenological consequences for women and men in particular workforces and societies. The central concern of such an analysis then is 'with critiquing discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order: this is, relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women as a social group' (5).

In the study reported here, the key questions pertain to the gendered construction of teachers' identities and practices in policy texts in Ireland in the contemporary political moment: 'whose interests are served by the representational practices, and whose are suppressed?' (140). The policy processes in teacher education in Ireland were not perceived as taking place in a vacuum, but were considered to be influenced by globalizing policy imperatives and, at the same time shaped by cultural, symbolic, gendered and localized contexts (Lazar 2007; Fuller and Stevenson 2019).

The discourse analysis worked with and against the grain of policy texts to avoid taking an essentialist/dualistic stance while making the case for foregrounding gender in productive rather than re/productive ways in the gendered politics of teacher education. MacLure's (2003, p. 69) guidance on how to take a text apart was used to conduct the discursive analysis for each of the policy texts in turn. The close reading of each text aimed to reveal the (political) legitimation for each reform in the context of the time; the hidden assumptions underpinning each text; evidentiary and accountability claims made; the particular interests served, and the expert knowers called upon.

The study scrutinized how and in what ways the policy texts were concerned with the representations of gender; with gender consciousness and with either eliciting egalitarian gender relations or with the re-making of a conservative (gender-neutral) order. These are timely questions in teacher education given that gender is more often conservative,

subtle, insidious and neutralized, while ‘gender relations and identities in representations and interactions are institutionally embedded and framed’ (Lazar 2007, 141).

Findings

Here, I present the findings from the discursive analysis of four policy texts driving the reform ensemble in teacher education in Ireland (Teaching Council 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020). While reforms in Ireland take place within the rapidly globalizing influences discussed in the literature above, that is not to suggest that national policies are carbon-copies of global frameworks. Similarly, national policies cannot be made equal to practice, and discursive spaces always exist for the crucial work of interpretation, recontextualization and transformative possibility. However, advocacy for reforms in teacher education in Ireland, in the media, and elsewhere, increasingly rely on advice from external sources, OECD experts and others exerting *privileged irresponsibility* (Tronto 2013; Ireland’s Education Yearbook 2019; The Irish Times 2021).

In 2011, public policies in Ireland, including policies in education, were all quickly reconfigured following an international financial bailout program. A neoliberal assault on teachers’ practices ensued in the direction of intensive workloads, increased years to qualify, loss of many middle management incentives, and reduction in pay scales for new entrants. The reform ensemble was legitimated by state apparatuses working in synch, including the media, corporate sector, and the churches. For example, the Catholic bishops as patrons of the vast majority of primary and secondary schools work in social partnership with others, such as teachers’ unions and parent/guardians’ associations. While every actor is included in this assemblage, not every actor has equal status.

The four policy texts under discursive scrutiny here are from the Teaching Council (Teaching Council 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020), the statutory body charged with regulation of the teaching workforce. While the Teaching Council often presents itself as a flat structure, it is legally tied to the Minister for Education and Skills in a governance assemblage of policymakers, expert knowers, state inspectors, and registered teachers.

Cosán turns teacher’s gaze toward lifelong learning

The first policy under scrutiny is a Teaching Council text *Cosán*², detailing a reform for in-career teacher learning (Teaching Council 2017). For the most part, and especially in the first twenty pages of the document, a soft discourse, commensurate with Catholic social teaching, is in evidence. Teacher learning is presented as a teacher-led collaborative journey of reflective practice rather than a destination of ‘elusive perfection’ (20), with its emphasis on creativity and community. Teachers are described as moral and caring persons – not unsimilar to Núñez’s (2018) study of teachers as self-sacrificing practitioners in Chile – and as instructional managers within the confines of an atheoretical and apolitical practice, in the private orbit of a collaborative institution (12). Teacher learning is considered to need a rich menu of activities – mentoring, communities of practice, observations – both formal and informal; taking place in school and externally; including personal and professional development for lifelong learning; requiring reflection and inquiry, and drawing from research and researching practices.

However, taking the text further apart reveals an underlying neoliberal language, especially on pages 22 and 23 when the text describes how this soft discourse of teacher learning will be realized through a narrow accountability warrant of standards, quality assurance processes, and later through statutory regulation. While claiming to resist a 'one-size fits all' approach to teacher autonomy, a neoliberal vocabulary features throughout the text with words and phrases such as choice, flexibility, quality assurance, standards, codes, best practices, evidence, learners' needs and learning outcomes. Teachers' identities and practices reflect the development of a new professional class; teachers doing things to themselves to deconstruct and reconstruct their identities in line with policy reforms and career ambitions, and 'simultaneously enabling the needs of the students, the school and the system to be met' (7). Teaching is considered a 'complex craft' (2) that appears to require neither critical mediation with the wider world nor with troubling the construct of gender (Warin and Adriany 2017).

Overall, Cosán appears as a gender-blind policy text, with no explicit gendered construction of teachers' identities and practices. Closer scrutiny of the underpinning presences and absences reveal something of a conservative construction. The image on the front cover of the text shows three women engaging in conversation at a computer screen. The policy text asserts that former evaluation practices were weak, and unsatisfactory, as they merely sought to report 'participant enjoyment of the activity or reaction to the experience' (23). Instead, the Council promises strong quality assurance processes for managing and monitoring teacher effectiveness, where 'the design allows for best practices to be modelled' (23), within a 'clearly stated conceptual framework' (23). The gendered construction of teachers' identities and practices in Cosán is shown to be supportive of conservative gender relations, underpinned by a neoliberal language, and supported by evidentiary and accountability warrants coming from positivistic research studies and externally provided criteria (Hattie, 2012; William, 2016).

Féilte texts showcasing teachers in a marketplace

A discourse of celebration underpins scrutiny of two Teaching Council reports *Féilte*³, detailing annual, national, showcasing events, started in 2013, and continuing to date, for teachers to display practitioner-based research studies to peers and the public (Teaching Council 2018, 2019). *Féilte* (*Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence*), was conceived by the Teaching Council as an appropriate way to celebrate teachers' identities and practices (Teaching Council 2018, 2). The Teaching Council Director compares the staging of this event by the Council to a birthday celebration:

Féilte will offer a canvas on which teachers can paint the story of teaching. It will offer a learning space for all to explore, discuss and celebrate the work of teachers. We treat our birthdays as a day to set aside any concerns we may have, and celebrate our achievements. (2)

Féilte provides new opportunities for teachers in Ireland to socialize into the profession, to feel valued and recognized in a public way, and to become aware of what other teachers are doing. However, a different reading of *Féilte* shows how it (re)positions teachers inside a marketplace of constant comparison with peers using a language of celebration, choice, adaptation and excellence: 'if we can examine what is working in some schools, and apply that learning to other schools, we will bridge the gap between the two

sides' (Teaching Council 2018, 2). For this reason, Féilte more strongly resembles a public relations event rather than a substantive space for co-inquiry, sharing of studies and debate, if not critical debates for problematizing issues and generating transformative possibilities (Mockler 2022).

Féilte (2018, 2019) texts make no mention of gender and appear gender-blind in their construction of teachers' identities and practices. Moreover, a strong conservative gender discourse is in evidence when one interrogates who is given voice each year among the invited keynote speakers by the Teaching Council. All invited keynote speakers to date, with the exception of one woman, have been prominent men in Irish public life, mostly from outside the field of education. Keynote speakers include prominent broadcasters in Irish television, national sports coaches and managers, in addition to Ministers for Education and Skills, Presidents of Ireland, one international positivistic researcher, and one speaker from a voluntary disability service. Althusser's notion of state apparatuses working separately (cited in Macer and Chadderton 2020), while more often than not in synch, is strongly in evidence here, as an ideological governance form embedded in a gender-blind rationality, and conservative patriarchy.

Céim introduces a professional standards framework

The final discursive analysis is of the most recent Teaching Council policy text *Céim*⁴, detailing new professional standards for *Initial Teacher Education* (ITE), to be provided by nineteen Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Ireland (Teaching Council 2020).

The Céim policy text is the first professional standards framework in ITE in Ireland, introduced in October 2020, within six months from the start of the coronavirus lockdown. There can be few arguments against national efforts to uplift standards in the teaching profession, but they need to be tempered in policy statements with understandings that any move toward standards, can rapidly fall into an audit culture of standardization that damages the teaching profession (Mockler 2022). A close reading of the policy text *Céim* reveals some tempering of the globalizing discourse of evidence-based practices. Catholic social teaching is in evidence throughout, with its emphasis on the construction of teachers as creative, reflective and obedient members of communities of learning. A safe (risk-managed) language assures a normative consensus, securing the characteristic spirit and ethos of the schools, and leaving nothing to chance. Throughout the text, there is an explicit statement about teaching as a holistic, reflective, and relational practice. Teaching is considered more as an evidence-informed practice, rather than explicitly an evidence-based practice. Personal development and teacher reflection underpin this policy text more than a market-led language of self-evaluation.

However, despite this tempering of neoliberal language, the standards framework imposes an outside-in view of teacher professionalism, with graduate teachers expected to adopt externally provided criteria, norms, values, attitudes, skills and knowledge. Céim standards aim to socialize pre-service teachers as 'quality teachers' inside a new creative professional class of 'responsible, trustworthy, and reflective practitioners' for what is a new institutional professionalism (Teaching Council 2020, 12). An essentialist/dualistic framing is in evidence, with the policy requiring the setting out of predetermined

outcomes and procedures as ‘standards of teaching, knowledge, understanding, skill, and competence, together with the values, attitudes, and professional dispositions, which are central to the practice of teaching’ (20).

Céim policy mandates that all ITE programmes meeting the approval of the Teaching Council need to be underpinned by a well-defined conceptual framework: ‘Programmes of ITE shall be supported by a clearly defined conceptual framework. They shall be underpinned by clearly-defined aims which are closely aligned with the programme’s conceptual framework, and are reflected in specific learning outcomes’ (9).

There is only one mention of ‘gender’, described as ‘gender equality’ within a core element of *Global Citizenship Education* (GCED). GCED aims to provide student teachers with the ‘knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including ... human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence’ (4). However, GCED appears to (re)configure citizenship away from any socio-political notion of an activist imaginary needed for problematizing controversial ethical, and socio-scientific issues. Instead, GCED appears directed towards socialization into the existing order (Mooney Simmie and Edling 2019) where global citizenship is repositioned as a moral (apolitical) value proclaiming to be ‘rooted in the principle of care for others’ (9) rather than engaging in any necessary ethical-political struggle of transformative education and activism for a just global world for all.

Discussion

The critical feminist perspectives in this study, alongside the metaphor of confinement, provided a powerful explanatory framework for troubling gender, and widening representations beyond essentialist/dualistic notions of gender-blind teacher education (Connell 1990, 2009, 2021; Davies 2003; Drudy 2008; Lynch 2007; Moreau 2019, 2020). The theoretical perspectives revealed how gender can be systemically enabled and constrained, and often confined within conservative gender relations, hidden assumptions and taken-for-granted (political) legitimations and normalizations operating through state apparatuses, procedures, structures, laws and beyond. They showed just how a particular social structuring may become hegemonic: ‘part of the legitimizing common sense which sustains relations of domination’ (Fairclough 2005, 124). The explanatory framework showed how a gender-blind patriarchal calculus for teaching and teacher learning can act as a rather limited performativity in the policy direction of hegemonic masculinities (Davies 2003; Lynch and Crean 2019, 2).

Findings, from a literature review of the globalizing policy backdrop, revealed through scrutiny of OECD reports (OECD 2005, 2021) and mainstream studies in teacher effectiveness, a rhetoric of teacher improvement for a twenty-first century privileging of evidence-based practices and new managerialism (Hattie 2012; Mockler 2011, 2022; Mooney Simmie 2021a, 2021b; Muijs and Reynolds 2018; Ng, Stull and Martinez 2019). The new ideal teacher appears to be remade as an actuarial entrepreneurial teacher, constantly reworking ‘self’ in line with system needs. Several studies show how gender-blind practices enable conservative gender relations with their reliance on an audit culture of repressive state apparatuses (laws, standards), and market-led discourses of new quality management (Drudy 2008; Giroux 2013; Lynch 2007; Macer and Chadderton 2020; Mockler 2022; Osgood 2006; Santoro 2017).

The gendered construction of teachers' identities and practices revealed in the discursive policy analysis, albeit limited to four policy texts in teacher education in one country, Ireland, was found to strongly reflect conservative gender relations (Teaching Council 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020). A gender-blind communitarian orientation was found in each of the four policy texts. The guest appearances of prominent (mostly men) keynote speakers at *Féilte* festivals allowed a glimpse into theory-weak patriarchal relations that obfuscate the public relations spectacle underway in (re)positioning (mostly women) teachers as units of social and cultural capital (Teaching Council 2018, 2019). A strong enmeshment with a globalizing neoliberal narrative was in evidence, and found in evidentiary warrants drawing exclusively from positivistic studies and accountability warrants tied to externally provided criteria and norms (Teaching Council, 2020).

Overall, the metaphor of confinement was revealed in the remaking of (mostly women) teachers' identities and their practices as tightly constrained, if not fully confined, to conservative and (re)productive gender relations operating within the private orbit/sphere of the institution/organization. There was no mention in any of the policy texts for teachers to trouble gender in any desired direction, either reflexively, in relation to self and work practices or in critical mediation with the wider world. There was no suggestion or requirement for teachers to productively enable egalitarian gender relations, to engage with gender consciousness, to enact gender flexible pedagogies or to deploy alternative masculinities and femininities in their classrooms and schools (Moreau 2019; Osgood 2006; Warin and Adriany 2017).

The (mostly women) teachers, envisioned in the Irish policy texts were positioned as compliant learners who assume moral responsibility for whatever is required. Picking up the pieces in school life and (re)working herself/himself on a continuing basis, as required by a hierarchy of expert (external) knowers, in line with Tronto's (2013) notion of *privileged irresponsibility*. Overall, the analysis revealed the metaphor of confinement playing out in teacher education in Ireland as a 'Riverdance' (see note 1) of patriarchal gender-blind codes and standards securing the re-making of conservative gender relations for a new hegemonic masculinities. In all texts, gender equity appeared largely forgotten, and silenced, if not suppressed and no longer 'sayable' (Mockler 2011, 2022; Moreau 2019).

Conclusions

Lazar (2007) asserts that *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* can reveal the complex and subtle ways in which assumptions, and dominant mainstream hegemonic power relations, are discursively produced, perpetuated, negotiated, and challenged. Findings from this limited study, clearly show that the gendered construction of (mostly women) teachers' identities and their practices is far from being a neutral endeavour, and is deeply enmeshed with state apparatuses, new institutional systems of organization (new quality management), hierarchical power, and gendered relations.

The study provides an original perspective into some worrying trends taking place in teacher education in Ireland and elsewhere in relation to the gendered construction of teacher's identities and practices in contemporary times. Given the current interest in overriding neoliberal individualism and institutionalism, an alternative theorization of teachers' identities and practices is provided that (re)positions the gendered politics of teacher

education as an egalitarian and emancipatory praxis (Mockler 2011, 2022; Moreau 2019, 2020). Practices understood as highly complex, gendered, non-linear and untidy rather than deficit essentialist dualities in relation to knowledge/ways of knowing, masculinity/femininity, performativity/performances and self-directed/other-directed.

The study has immediate implications for all teachers, and for the teaching workforce. There are epistemic, social and political consequences for (mostly women) teachers, positioned as craft workers with adaptive expertise who are obliged to work with peers and others to solve problems, but never to problem pose; never to trouble gender, and never to engage seriously with egalitarian gender relations. The study contributes to new knowledge in relation to the gendered nature of the labour of educating, and opens a new debate in the gendered politics of teacher education, within a pressing need to foreground the troubling of gender in teacher education policy and practices in productive egalitarian ways, rather than in re/productive conservative ways. Given that an order of discourse is not a closed and rigid system, the conservative gendered framing revealed here may not translate to similar gendered interactions in policy talk, and in contemporary practices. This, therefore, becomes a hypothesis worthy of further research and consideration.

Notes

1. *Riverdance* is the name given to an internationally renowned troupe of Irish step dancers who generate a spectacular performance – a large number of dancers, dancing traditional tunes individually, while together in rhythm.
2. *Cosán* is the Irish word for pathway selected by the Teaching Council in Ireland to represent teacher learning as a journey rather than a destination.
3. *Féilte* is an abbreviation for a *Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence*, related to the Irish word *Féile* for celebration, selected by the Director of the Teaching Council in Ireland, as an appropriate forum to celebrate teachers, and the work they do with peers and the public.
4. *Céim* is the Irish word for the conferring of an award.

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