

Political Theater in Russia and the United States: A Novel Analytical Lens for Teacher Education Reform in Comparative and International Education

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Introduction

In many countries around the world, reformers seek to increase the quality of K-12 education by making teacher education more practice-oriented, school-based, and market-driven. Globally, performance assessments for teachers and teacher candidates, teacher accountability policies, as well as diversification of routes into teaching are promoted as a means of improving K-12 students' academic achievement (Paine, Blömeke, and Aydarova 2016; Paine, Aydarova and Syahril 2017; Goodwin 2020). While reform processes associated with these agendas vary across contexts, there are certain similarities that remain consistent: university-based teacher education is often undermined and teacher educators' contributions to reform processes are minimized. There have been several attempts to explore these changes through the lenses of proletarianization of teacher education (Ellis and McNicholl 2015), marginalization of education as a discipline (Furlong 2013), and deprofessionalization of the teaching profession (Evetts 2008). Yet what has received less attention is the connection between teacher education reforms, participation of external actors in reform processes, and a broader political project of a conservative cultural change (Apple 2012).

At the same time, research in comparative and international education (CIE) has largely followed rationalist frames, rarely departing from (post)positivist assumptions of linearity, causality, and visibility of observable effects. While critical perspectives on policy processes and educational practices have received some attention, such studies have often remained on the periphery of CIE scholarship. This omission is rather unfortunate, given the fact that rapid social transformations observed around the world require a more complex and nuanced approach to analyzing social realities.

This chapter addresses these gaps and omissions by offering the conceptual framework of political theater as a new lens for demystifying policy processes as well as for problematizing some of the claims and assumptions of globally circulated

teacher education reforms. Applied to the analysis of recent teacher education policy changes in Russia and the United States, this framework demonstrates the theatricality of policy transformations and connects those processes with the broader trends of reinscribing social inequality through educational reforms. In what follows, I first describe the theoretical framework of political theater and methodological approach of anthropology of policy. I then apply this framework to the analysis of teacher education reforms in the United States and Russia by exploring which policy actors have become influential in the last decade, what globally circulated scripts have been used to inform policy discourses, how international assessments have been used as props in constructing crisis narratives, how timelines of policy development have been used to create the illusion of democratic deliberation, and finally how policy masks have obscured actual agendas introduced by the reforms.

Political Theater as a Theoretical Framework

The interdisciplinary framework of political theater has been developed through several studies of teacher education reforms in Russia and the United States. Rooted in the theories of political spectacle in political science (Edelman 1988), theatrical frames in sociology (Goffman 1959, 1974), as well as political theater in performance studies (Willett 1964; Conquergood and Johnson 2013), this framework sheds light on the theatricality of policy processes and their connections to broader patterns of social reproduction (Aydarova 2019).

In particular, the framework of political theater captures how reformers create imaginary worlds on stage to convince the public of the need for reform and how they draw on various dramaturgical techniques to convince the audience that only their technical solutions will address intractable social problems. Their constructions of problems and technical solutions, however, represent fabrications (Edelman 1988) that distract observers from the ways in which these reforms maintain unequal and unjust educational systems instead of disrupting them. As Giridharadas (2019) explains:

In an age defined by a chasm between those who have power and those who don't, elites have spread the idea that people must be helped, but only in market-friendly ways that do not upset fundamental power equations ... The broad fidelity to this law helps make sense of what we observe all around: the powerful fighting to "change the world" in ways that essentially keep it the same, and "giving back" in ways that sustain an indefensible distribution of influence, resources, and tools.

(pp. 8–9)

The framework of political theater examines elements of policy-making processes and policy actors' strategies through the lens of dramaturgical techniques (Figure 3.1). In this paper I will focus on four aspects of theater—scripts, props, production sequence, and masks—to demystify policy-making processes that underlie teacher education reforms in the United States and in Russia. More specifically, I explore how global scripts inform policy changes, how international assessments work as props to

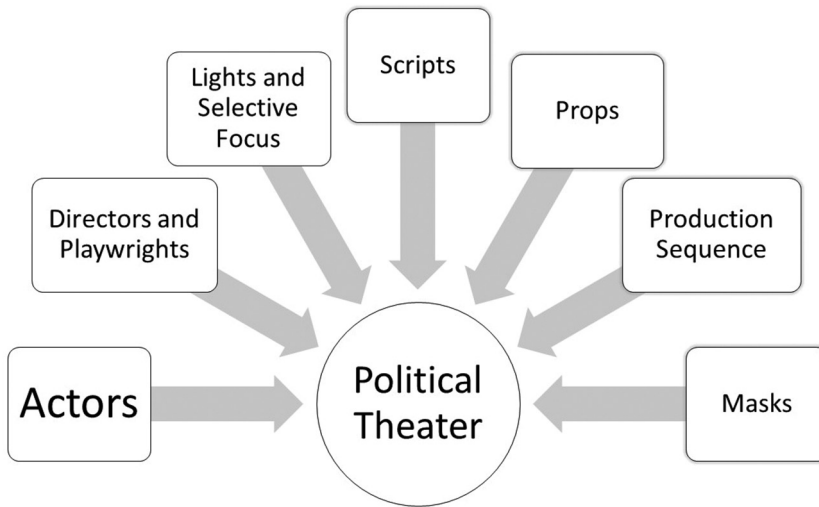


Figure 3.1 The framework of political theatre.

manufacture crises in teacher education, how different policy-making timelines shatter assumptions about who is responsible for reform proposals, and how the use of masks obscures intentions of teacher education reforms. Engaging with teacher education reforms as theater offers “potential emancipatory paths out of the deadlock of global neoliberal transformations in education” (Aydarova 2019: xxii).

Anthropology of Policy as a Methodological Approach

This research is situated within anthropology of policy (Shore, Wright and Però 2011). It combines studying up (Nader 1974) and studying through (Wedel et al. 2005) teacher education policies as they are conceptualized and directed by various policy actors in Russia and the United States. Anthropology of policy attends to the messy and contingent nature of policies that work as instruments of governing and power. Moving away from the realist rationalist frames, this tradition treats policy as “contested narratives which define the problems of the present in such a way as to either condemn or condone the past, and project only one viable pathway to its resolution” (Shore, Wright and Però 2011: 13). Anthropology of policy recognizes that even if site research may not be accessible, rich insights into policy processes can be gained through various texts and artifacts that capture different aspects of policy activities.

The analysis presented here is based on ethnographic and textual data collected over the last ten years. Multi-sited critical ethnographies of teacher education reforms in the Russian Federation (Aydarova 2019, 2021a, 2022) and in the United States (Aydarova 2020b, 2021b) shed light on the processes of restructuring teacher preparation based on global scripts. For example, the works of Michael Barber first

for McKinsey and Company and later for Pearson fostered a global conversation on outcomes, data, and accountability in teacher preparation. Priorities identified in those texts informed policy scripts, research reports, grant program announcements, as well as policy makers' presentations in both the United States and Russia. As I analyzed those policy artifacts and interviewed policy actors about their reform priorities, I traced connections between various policy processes and identified commonalities in how teacher education reforms were orchestrated across different contexts. My positionality as an academic external to policy communities that I studied and committed to issues of equity and justice shaped the study design and interpretation of the data (Aydarova 2017, 2020b).

Russia and the United States: Policy Contexts

Russia and the United States represent two distinct contexts. In Russia, most policy changes are centralized at the level of the federal Ministry of Education that sets standards for teacher education programs, evaluates curriculum documents created at the institutional level, conducts monitoring of higher education institutions at large (which in the past resulted in the closure of a number of pedagogical universities that prepared teachers [Aydarova 2021a]), and oversees the agencies that grant accreditation to higher education institutions. In the United States, teacher education policies are often diffused, with most policy decisions made at the state level. The federal government plays largely a monitoring role, requiring states to submit reports on the quality of their teacher preparation programs based on Title II of the *Higher Education Act of 1998*. Program accreditation is carried out by independent professional organizations, such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) and the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP).

While these distinctions reflect how the systems are organized, there is a similarity between Russia and the United States in terms of their orientations toward international influences. American exceptionalism often operates as a driver that reduces transfers of educational policies to “silent reform” (Anderson-Levitt 2021) or to localized mutations that erase the onto-epistemological assumptions behind the borrowed practices (Rappleye and Komatsu 2017). Russia, similarly, has long had a history of an ambivalent relationship with the West that has morphed in the last decade into discursive animosity toward global models or international influences on education (Aydarova 2015a, 2015b, 2019).

Political Theater of Teacher Education Reforms 2010–2020

Actors and Policies

In both Russia and the United States, many policy initiatives are influenced by actors outside of communities traditionally believed to be involved in policymaking. The wave of modernization reforms that reshaped educational systems in Russia was generated

by a network of experts outside of the Ministry of Education who garnered significant influence by moving through positions in international organizations, government posts, as well as academic jobs (Aydarova 2019). Affiliated mostly with an economics university, reformers relied on the scripts available to them through their participation in transnational policy networks to generate a reform that echoed many of the globally circulated ideologies.

In the United States experts who have a significant impact on teacher education reforms similarly straddle the divides between the nonprofit, for-profit, and state sectors (Aydarova 2020b). One of the actors whose policy influence has grown over time, for example, is Dr. Ed Crowe. In the 1990s, Dr. Crowe served in the federal department of education overseeing Title 2 reporting for teacher education programs. He was a Senior Advisor for the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, supporting alternative routes into the teaching profession. In the 2010s, his reports for the Center for American Progress instigated conversations about outcomes-based accountability for teacher education at the federal level. He moved on to create two private companies involved in teacher education reforms: Teacher Preparation Analytics provided research and technical support to states and institutions seeking to overhaul how they prepare teachers, whereas Teacher Preparation Inspectorate-US provides evaluations of teacher preparation program performance for state approval or accreditation purposes. Kate Walsh of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) has influenced teacher education reforms through consulting and evaluation reports her nonprofit organization provides. James Cibulka—a former education dean and former president of the main accrediting body for teacher preparation—remained connected to the reformers' networks through his service on NCTQ's board of directors. Benjamin Riley moved from the New Schools Venture Fund to a nonprofit Deans for Impact to steer reform efforts by enlisting deans of colleges of education as partners in technocratic transformations of teacher education. Experts like these have regular access to legislators and policy makers through policy events organized by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)—a nonprofit organization that works with state authorities on educational issues, or by ExcellInEd—a reform-oriented think tank started by the former governor of Florida Jeb Bush.

Transnational Policy Scripts

This chapter explores different policies operating in these contexts. In Russia, the *Concept of Support for the Development of Pedagogical Education*, informally known as the *Concept of Teacher Education Modernization*, became an influential reform even though it was never signed into law. Developed in 2012–2013 and implemented over the span of the next five years, this policy comprised many elements of political theater. In the US case, however, there have been several initiatives that sought to dramatically reorient teacher education. Among them was the introduction of new outcomes-based accreditation standards that came from the merger of two accrediting agencies (the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE] and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council [TEAC]) into a new one (the Council for the

Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP]) as well as a failed attempt to introduce federal regulations for teacher preparation. Even though these policy initiatives have some elements that are unique for each context, there is a significant overlap in the agendas they pursue (Figure 3.2).

What these policies have in common is that they are driven by a claim that “the quality of an educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” from the report by Sir Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed (2007) *How the World’s Best Performing Systems Come Out on Top* published by McKinsey & Company. Russian teacher education reforms were conceptualized and implemented under significant influence from this report. Michael Barber himself visited policy-making hubs in Russia and consulted with the reformers while they were working on their proposals. In the United States the Secretary of Education during the Obama era, Arne Duncan, was also influenced by this work. In his remarks at Teachers College, Columbia University in 2009, he pointed out: “It’s no surprise that studies repeatedly document that the single biggest influence on student academic growth is the quality of the teacher standing in front of the classroom. Not socioeconomic status, not family background, but the quality of the teacher in front of that class” (Duncan 2009: n.p.). One of the ways in which this claim about the centrality of “teacher quality” influenced teacher education policy both in Russia and the United States was through the push for selectivity. Barber and Mourshed’s (2007) report praised successful educational systems for “making entry to teacher training highly selective” (p. 19) and argued that making teaching a selective profession with higher standards for entry improved students’ classroom performance. This argument shaped how teacher education reforms became conceptualized in both contexts.

In Russia, one of the key reformers who designed the reform coined the phrase “double-negative selection” to describe the crisis of the “worst of the worst” (Aydarova 2019)

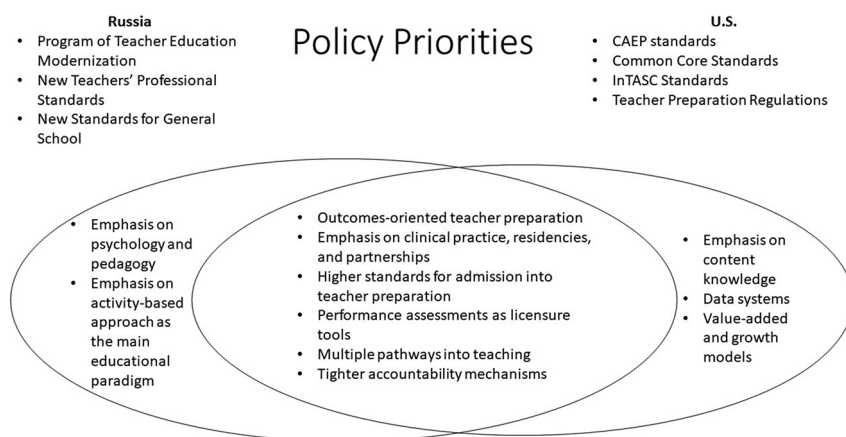


Figure 3.2 Overlap in the agendas of policy initiatives.

entering first teacher education institutions, then the teaching profession. The claim was that teacher education universities admitted students with low scores on high school graduation tests and then graduates with the lowest grades entered teaching. The concept that reformers designed called for setting a high bar for entry into teacher preparation to ensure that only “the best” students could become teachers. Hidden beneath this call was an effort to decrease funding allocated to teacher education from the federal government. If only the “best” with “top scores” were admitted into teacher education programs, the number of teacher candidates would drastically decrease thus allowing the state to save money on teacher preparation (Aydarova 2019).

In the United States Barber and Mourshed’s (2007) report aligned with the discourses of selectivity originally promoted by conservative think tanks, such as the Fordham Foundation and the Hoover Institution. These organizations long advocated for the deregulation of the teaching profession and used the calls to select “the best and the brightest” for teaching to support the spread of Teach for America. The underlying assumption of this argument was that any smart person could become a good teacher, regardless of the prior training they received. Subsequently, the National Council on Teacher Quality argued that only applicants who scored well on standardized assessments, such as American College Testing (ACT) or Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), should be allowed to enter teacher preparation programs. The McKinsey report (2010) *Closing the Talent Gap*—informed by “McKinsey’s work with school systems in over 50 countries” (p. 5)—advocated for encouraging the top-third of candidates based on “a combination of SAT, ACT, and GPA scores” (p. 10) to be selected for teaching. These proposals for benchmarks and percentiles informed CAEP’s accreditation standards, which in a marked departure from previous standards began to evaluate teacher education programs based on their candidates’ scores on standardized assessments.

The introduction of selectivity discourses in both Russia and the United States were met with tremendous opposition from the teacher education community. Russian teacher educators lamented the fact that the negative labels used to construct crisis around teacher preparation was likely to deter talented students from pursuing teaching as a career (Aydarova 2016). American teacher educators, on the other hand, expressed concerns that using standardized assessments as a sole marker of candidates’ quality could further decrease diversity among teacher candidates (Beare et al. 2019). In both cases, however, their voices were drowned out by reformers’ claims that the importance of candidates’ high scores on standardized tests is a matter of consensus in the research community.

Viewed through the lens of political theater, these transformations are important not only because they appear to be based on similar policy scripts but also because they point to a reframing of the teacher’s role in the society. By focusing on the cognitive attributes of teachers as measured by their performance on standardized assessments, reformers in both countries depoliticized teachers’ work and decreased their role to molding students into predetermined social roles (Aydarova 2021b, 2022). Social Darwinist notions of selecting “the best and the brightest” into teaching in order to increase K-12 students’ standardized assessment scores divert educators’ and the public’s attention away from social problems that contribute to disparities

in educational achievement among different social groups in the first place. Thus, teachers are not expected to prepare students who will transform the world but to adapt students to the unjust world and accept their position in the social hierarchy (Aydarova 2019, 2022).

International Assessments as Props

In framing discussions about the need for dramatic change, reformers in both Russia and the United States evoked their students' performance on international assessments. References to international assessments, however, largely served the function of theatrical props. Even though both countries have relatively good results on Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)—assessments that evaluate the learning of the actual curriculum, only poor PISA results were used to construct a crisis around public schooling and the teaching profession. References to both countries' low performance on PISA were used to forge a narrative of low-quality education and low-quality educators. Those problems could only be addressed through the introduction of new K-12 standards and new standards for teachers.

In Russia, early references to international assessments were oblique and used to frame the problem of low quality of K-12 education. For example, the Federal Program of Educational Development (Government of the Russian Federation 2011) stated that “the results of research studies (including international comparative studies) reveal problems in the quality of general and informal education” (p. 5). At the same time, reformers who orchestrated the modernization of teacher education acknowledged that neither the public nor state officials cared about Russian students' performance on international assessments. They nevertheless managed to strategically use those references to mobilize support for their reforms.

In the United States, American students' performance on international assessments was similarly emphasized only by those who advocated for large-scale educational reforms. For example, in the United States, Obama-era proposals for reforming teacher preparation called for changes:

[E]ducators know that their students are confronting unprecedented challenges and heightened competition in an increasingly knowledge-based, global job market. At the same time, on international assessments of student achievement, U.S. performance has been mediocre. According to the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), an instrument comparing the performance of 15-year-olds in 34 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries, American students rank 14th in reading, 17th in science, and 25th in math.

(USDE 2013: 1)

This construction of crisis is accompanied by claims that performance on international assessments demonstrates low quality of education in K-12 schools. To ensure students'

“competitiveness in the knowledge economy,” new school standards were introduced in both countries. In Russia, working groups comprising many academics in reformers’ networks created new school standards that were introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2011 (Aydarova 2021a). In the United States Common Core Standards were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the nonprofit reform organization Achieve, with considerable support from the Gates Foundation (Owens 2015; Schneider 2015).

Yet, the introduction of new standards came to be seen as an insufficient measure for improving K-12 students’ academic performance—reformers soon stated that teachers are not prepared to teach according to these new standards. In Russia, the focus shifted to creating new standards for the teaching profession issued in 2013 and then initiating a reform of teacher education in 2014. In the United States efforts to reform the teaching profession to align it with the Common Core standards were supported by the adoption of Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards:

Model Core Teaching Standards ... outline what teachers should know and be able to do to ensure every PK-12 student reaches the goal of being ready to enter college or the workforce in today’s world. This “common core” outlines the principles and foundations of teaching practice that cut across all subject areas and grade levels and that all teachers share.

(CCSSO 2013: 3)

InTASC standards informed the framing of CAEP’s accreditation standards as well as teacher evaluation systems at the state level. The wave of teacher effectiveness reforms that sought to hold teachers accountable for their students’ academic performance solidified the use of InTASC standards in teacher evaluation across the United States. Observation rubrics of classroom teaching tied to overall teacher evaluation systems were based on InTASC standards in many states.

In these constructions of crisis, globally circulated texts continued to play a major role. On the subject of international assessments, for example, Mourshed, Chijoke and Barber (2010) suggested that reformers should use crisis moments around international assessments to introduce reform. While the public in general both in Russia and in the United States remained fairly indifferent toward results on international assessments, reformers continued to emphasize the importance of what international assessments revealed in order to advance their reform agendas.

Timelines

An important element in theater is production sequence—or the order of events leading up to the theatrical performance. Production sequence starts with the analysis of the script, moves through initial readings of the script and preliminary rehearsals, leads up to dress rehearsals, and results in the first performance of the play onstage for an audience. The concept of production sequence serves as a useful foundation for

analyzing timelines of policy formation. It can reveal ways in which different actors are led to believe that they are contributing to policy formation when in fact they might not be.

In the Russian case, the policy of teacher education modernization was allegedly developed by a group of twenty-five experts that the Ministry of Education brought together as a working group in February 2013. But these experts only met three times at national conferences focused on economic or social development. The format of the sessions followed the standard format of conference presentations with questions and answers. In other words, those were not meetings where participants worked on developing policy drafts or responded to suggestions for policy proposals. When I interviewed some of the members of the working group in the fall of 2013 and spring 2014, it became clear that they were not fully aware of what the policy actually proposed. However, during my interviews with the reformers, I learned that they began developing the script for this policy in October 2012—months before the Ministry issued the decree to bring together the large working group. By the time the Ministry of Education created the working group, the draft of the policy was already prepared.

This policy was presented as a product of a wide-scale dialogue but on closer look it turned out to be an illusion. According to the official sources, the policy text emerged “out of consultation with a wide variety of about 3000 stakeholders.” Based on official accounts, the consultations happened during roundtables at four national conferences. Yet, these conferences focused on social and economic development; they were not educational conferences that teacher educators and educational researchers traditionally attended. Roundtables were standard conference sessions where audience members could only listen and ask questions. After these conferences, the policy underwent only minimal changes. This means that official sources touted consultations at national conferences as spaces of dialogue for different stakeholders, when in reality dialogue was largely impossible. Even though different stakeholders thought they could still influence the direction in which this policy would go, the measures proposed by the policy remained consistent until its final release. In other words, events presented to the public as spaces of dialogue for shaping, developing, and creating a policy ended up being spaces of dress rehearsals for the final release of the policy in October 2013.

A similar production sequence can be observed in the United States. In 2012 the Department of Education formed the Teacher Preparation Programs Negotiating Committee, which included representatives from universities, a national teachers’ union, the president of CAEP, as well as nonprofit organizations, such as Teach for America and the Education Trust. The committee met three times between January and April 2012. As a result of the committee’s work, a draft text of regulations emerged. The committee could not fully agree on the regulations and was disbanded. The draft in a modified form reappeared again in 2014 and moved to public comment and eventual ratification by the Department of Education (DOE). This publicly constructed timeline, however, obscured ways in which these regulations were informed by other policy actors. In 2010 when Ed Crowe presented his proposal for outcomes-based teacher preparation accountability for the Center for American Progress, DOE staff were in the audience and engaged in a conversation about the measures he proposed (Aydarova, in progress). In 2011, DOE staff reached out to

the Education Sector policy analysts asking them to put together a proposal for what teacher preparation accountability should look like. *A Measured Approach to Improving Teacher Preparation* that Education Sector (2011) issued in response to this request introduced the focus on using outcomes data to close underperforming programs, aligning the production of new teachers with the state's labor market needs, and eliminating TEACH Grants awarded to teacher candidates who commit to working with students in historically underserved communities. The final regulations released in the fall of 2014 incorporated these ideas to varying degrees, but the influences of these organizations remained palpable. The regulations focused on holding teacher education programs accountable for outcomes—how K-12 students of their graduates perform on standardized assessments. Based on these measures, low-performing or at-risk programs were supposed to lose financial support from the federal government, such as TEACH Grants, and eventually close down.

Similar to the Russian case, public discussion of the regulations resembled an illusion of dialogue. The regulations proposal was posted on the portal of the federal government and was open for discussion for about three months. During that time, over 4500 comments were submitted in response to the proposal. Even though some comments expressed support for the new measures, the overwhelming majority of them were vehemently opposed to the new regulations. These comments came from teacher educators, teacher education students, teachers, and administrators. In their comments, responders argued that such measures would penalize programs that focus on sending their graduates to struggling schools and that these regulations would undermine the programs' focus on issues of equity, diversity, and social justice. Responses came not only from individuals who were posting responses on the federal portal, but also from a variety of organizations through open letters and statements. The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education submitted comments on behalf of 800 programs (AACTE 2015). Other organizations also expressed opposition to the new regulations. For example, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities raised concerns over the economic impact of these regulations. According to their comments, the cost of rolling out evaluation systems needed for this accountability reform would far exceed 100 million dollars, which is at least two times higher than the Department of Education's estimate of 42 million over ten years.

After the comment period was over, there was hope that the proposed legislation would be rescinded. Yet in October of 2016, the federal government announced that the new federal regulations would go into effect. The document announcing this shift was over 600 pages long. While it engaged with many of the comments that were submitted for review and suggested that some of them were indeed used to alter final regulations, it often repudiated them and moved forward with the same measures that were originally proposed. The comment period created the illusion of dialogue, but substantively the script stayed the same. The federal government created the illusion of dialogue by suggesting that the educational community was participating in forming a policy, when in reality they were invited to see dress rehearsals for the final release of the policy. What precluded teacher preparation regulations from going into effect were not the voices of the professional community, but the change in presidential administration.

Masks

Masks in theater raise the question of where the boundaries between reality and fiction lie. This perspective is important for considering how masks are deployed in policy-making processes. In particular, analysis of the discrepancies between the stated promises of the policy and its obscured agendas can help elucidate its potential consequences.

In Russia, teacher education modernization policy was officially titled *the Concept of Support for the Development of Teacher Education in the Russian Federation*. The language deployed in the title sends a promise that teacher education programs will receive support from the state for their further development. Educators assumed that this support would take the form of extra funding for their programs, additional resources for capacity building, or positive publicity to improve their standing in the higher education community and in the society at large. Yet reformers who introduced this policy indicated that it was intended to create “a radical change” or “deep-rooted reform” (Aydarova 2019), completely transforming how teacher education is conceptualized. In particular, they focused on its role in breaking up the monopoly of pedagogical universities in teacher preparation. In interviews, they discussed how funding formulas for teacher education institutions should be changed, so that state provision for their operations would decrease.

The policy, on the other hand, created opportunities for alternative providers to enter the market. Apart from the measures that clearly set out to break these institutions down, reformers also spoke in ways that delegitimized the knowledge and the scholarship produced in education, referring to the research produced by the field as useless and calling pedagogy “snot in sugar” (Aydarova 2019). At the same time, however, reform measures included outcomes-based assessments—the introduction of a professional competence-based test that teacher candidates would have to pass in order to receive a teaching license. Traditional forms of assessment required that teacher candidates demonstrate the knowledge they acquired by studying academic disciplines; new assessment tools sought to elucidate teacher candidates’ professional competencies and their ability to solve practical problems (Margolis et al. 2018).

When the *Concept* was implemented as a reform initiative, about twenty-five institutions were included in the experiment that was supposed to develop new models of teacher preparation. While many among them were institutions that traditionally prepared teachers, there were also those that were never involved in this process, such as the National University of Science and Technology, known under the Russian acronym “MISIS.” Similar to many other higher education institutions in the Russian Federation that offer narrow specializations, MISIS serves the metallurgical industry preparing specialists for the fields of metal extraction and melting materials. Such an institution might provide strong preparation for STEM fields, but is unlikely to provide a teacher with strong pedagogical preparation beyond subject area knowledge.

Beyond including nontraditional institutions in teacher preparation, reformers also facilitated the creation of *Teacher for Russia* (New Teacher, n.d.)—an offshoot

of Teach for America and Teach for All in the Russian Federation. Similar to its US counterpart, *Teacher for Russia* markets itself as an organization for graduates from elite colleges who can allegedly “change the society in which they live” by working at a school for two years. This service is presented on the organization’s website as a response to the imperative to provide “professional teachers” to ensure “quality education for every child in the country.” There is little evidence to support the claim that TFA in the United States or globally improves the quality of education but much has been written to show how it deprofessionalizes teaching (Kumashiro 2010 and Labaree 2010). These changes were introduced under the mask of increasing quality of education and providing support for teacher education to obscure the agenda of defunding teacher education and deprofessionalizing teaching.

In the US context there has been much policy activity surrounding teacher education in the last twelve years. This policy activity involved reports that shamed teacher education for being an “industry of mediocrity” (Greenberg, McKee and Walsh 2013: 1) and provided guidance for how new policies should be conceptualized. As a corollary to these accusations, new routes into teaching emerged. Independent programs, such as the Relay Graduate School of Education, the Sposato Graduate School of Education, as well as the High Tech High Graduate School of Education—not affiliated with any universities but rather with charter school networks—have entered the market. They claim that they provide high quality professional training because K-12 students’ test scores improve when their graduates teach them. Along similar lines, through the advocacy of venture philanthropies such as the New Schools Venture Fund, one-year academies focused on preparing teachers to raise students’ scores on standardized tests emerged. TEACH-NOW—a fully online for-profit program that recently rebranded itself as Moreland University—offers abbreviated degrees that lead to a license or a credential for teaching in the United States or abroad (Carney 2021).

The growing influence of these independent programs has been in large part facilitated by CAEP. When CAEP as a sole accreditor of teacher education was formed in 2013, it picked up the agenda of philanthropic (such as the *Measures of Effective Teaching Project* run by the Gates Foundation) and nonprofit organizations (Greenberg, McKee and Walsh 2013), and shifted evaluation processes toward outcomes measures. For example, CAEP Standard 4 focused on evaluating teacher education programs based on their impact, using program graduates, value-added or growth scores. This measure was based primarily on K-12 students’ performance on standardized tests.

While CAEP standards sought to make high-quality education accessible for all children by increasing the quality of teacher education programs, these promises masked other agendas that the standards pursued. Unlike previous standards that focused on academic units, CAEP standards evaluated “Educator Preparation Providers,” which included traditional university-based programs, alternative providers, independent graduate schools, and online programs described above. By focusing on “Educator Preparation Providers,” the standards normalized the diversification of routes into

the teaching profession and guaranteed market expansion for non-university teacher education providers. As the first CAEP president explained:

A shift to a focus on measuring outcomes will open the licensure process to high-quality alternative pathways into teaching and encourage innovation among higher education providers who wish to compete on cost and quality rather than on traditional curriculum and seat-time requirements.

(Chard and Cibulka 2013: 55)

So, even though the overt agenda of the new standards was to improve the quality of K-12 education, their covert purpose became privatization and deprofessionalization of teacher education.

Conclusion

Positioned at the intersections of comparative education research and teacher education studies, this chapter applied the framework of political theater to the analysis of US and Russian teacher education reforms. Despite the differences in policy contexts and historical trajectories, in both countries teacher education policy evolved in similar ways. Drawing on globally circulated policy scripts of the McKinsey reports, both Russia and the United States pursued measures of increasing selectivity in teacher education programs. In both cases, students' performance on international assessments was used as theatrical props to manufacture crisis and paved the way for the introduction of new school standards and new standards for the teaching profession. Discrepancies between official and unofficial policy conceptualization timelines revealed that many of the reform measures were developed prior to the establishment of working groups that included representatives of teacher education programs. Finally, the focus on teacher quality in both sets of reforms obscured ways in which these policies facilitated diversification of routes into the teaching profession and the deprofessionalization of the teaching force.

This chapter contributes to CIE research by offering a new theoretical approach and expanding onto-epistemological assumptions of policy analysis. In particular, the framework of political theater disrupts assumptions about the rationality and linearity of policy processes taken for granted in the field of comparative education. On the one hand, concepts of scripts, props, production sequence, and masks illuminate how what reformers present to the public might not reflect their actual agendas. On the other hand, shaping public perceptions in ways that distract attention away from issues of social inequality and injustice allows reformers to introduce measures that largely maintain the status quo and increase inequities in educational systems. Diversification of routes into teaching, for instance, brings no meaningful improvement in student achievement but leaves intact a system of schooling that offers qualitatively different educational experiences for children from different socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. This way reformers' promise of greater quality conceals the maintenance of the educational and social status quo. The significance of this

chapter lies in offering a new lens to examine global teacher education reforms and to problematize how the alleged pursuit of quality education often results in reinscribing social inequality around the world.

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