# Chapter 3
# "Classroom-Ready Teachers"


## Gaps, Silences and Contradictions in the Australian Report into Teacher Education

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**Abstract** Internationally, there has been considerable political activity around the question of how to better prepare quality teachers and make training institutions more accountable. In Australia, the 2014 report *Action now: classroom ready teachers* illustrates many of the underlying assumptions, perceived problems and potential solutions driving this agenda. This report, similar to reports in other countries, reinforces the public perception that the "quality" of teachers is deteriorating and the only solution is to intensify accountability regimes through increased levels of control. To this end, the Australian federal government committed $16.9 million to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership to ensure that "teachers are better trained". This involves a greater focus on accountability, accreditation, regulation, selection, assessment, content and evidence about "what works". This chapter critically reflects on the Australian *Action now: classroom ready teachers* report as a case study of policy rhetoric and policy reality. Drawing on the tradition of critical policy analysis, the chapter sets out to examine (i) the broader social context in which this reform initiative is located, (ii) the key normative values and assumptions underpinning the report, (iii) gaps, silences and contradictions in policy discourses, and (iv) alternative conceptions of teacher education grounded in a more relational and intellectually engaged response.

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## 3.1 Introduction

Internationally, there has been considerable political activity around the question of how to better prepare quality teachers and make teacher training institutions more accountable. Reports such as the *Carter review of initial teacher training (ITT)* (Carter 2015) in England, the *Teacher prep review: a review of the nation's teacher preparation programs* (Greenberg et al. 2013) in the United States and *Action now: classroom ready teachers* (TEMAG 2014) in Australia provide some clues into the underlying assumptions, perceived problems and potential solutions driving this agenda. Each of these reports, in its own way, reinforces the public perception that the "quality" of teachers is deteriorating and the only solution is to ratchet up accountability regimes through increased levels of control. This chapter critically examines a recent report released in Australia to gain a better understanding of the policy rhetoric and policy reality facing teacher education today.

In December 2014 the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) submitted its report *Action now: classroom ready teachers* (hereafter *Action now*) to the federal Minister of Education at the time, Christopher Pyne. Professor Greg Craven, TEMAG Chair and Vice Chancellor at the Australian Catholic University, wrote to the minister declaring that "Teachers matter". He went on to say that teachers "deserve the very best preparation so that they can be successful from their first day in the classroom. Strengthening initial teacher education is critical to ensure that the quality of Australian teaching is world class" (TEMAG 2014, p. v).

At one level, it is hard to disagree with Craven's sentiment; who would not want the very best teachers for their children? The desirability of preparing good teachers is, therefore, not the issue here; it is a given. Instead, we want to start from a different place by arguing that policy discourses contained in educational reports such as *Action now* are neither neutral nor innocent but reflect a particular vision, conception and practice of teaching. Our intention is to critically reflect on the bigger question of what it means to teach in neo-liberal and neoconservative times (Giroux 2004), how this translates into a narrowly conceived and instrumentalist understanding of the "good teacher", and how these constructions of teachers' work are legitimated, disseminated and governed. Importantly, we want to advance a new set of possibilities based on a more relational and intellectually grounded conception of teaching. To this end, the chapter is organised around a number of key themes. First, we provide an overview of the main messages and recommendations contained in the *Action now* report. Second, we identify some key features of critical policy analysis and why it matters in these uncertain times. Third, we examine some major gaps, silences and contradictions in the report. Finally, we open up some new lines of inquiry as we endeavour to reimagine what it means to teach, ethically, politically and intellectually. But first, we want to say something about our theoretical and methodological orientation in this analysis.

## 3.2 Theoretical and Methodological Orientation

In this section we elaborate on the major theoretical tenets of critical policy analysis to help us make sense of the *Action now* report. We shall briefly describe what it means to engage in critical policy analysis and why it is important at this time.

"The meaning of policy is frequently either taken for granted and/or seen as an attempt to 'solve a problem'" (Maguire et al. 2015, p. 485). We argue that this normative view of policy is problematic because it ignores the messiness and complexity of how policies are enacted in context. Adopting a critical perspective allows policy to be understood in more nuanced ways. It allows policy to be "understood as complex, inherently political, and infused with values rather than as a linear process that parallels a rational model of decision making" (Winton and Tuters 2015, p. 123). Also it allows for policy to be understood as "both product and process" which is "ongoing and dynamic" (Taylor et al. 1997, p. 23). That is:

> Policy is much more than a specific policy document or text. Rather, policy is both process and product … policy involves the production of the text, the text itself, ongoing modifications to the text and processes of implementation into practice … we see policy as being more complex, interactive and multi-layered. (Taylor et al. 1997, pp. 24–25)

One of the main goals of critical policy analysis "is to shed light on how everyday policies, structures, and processes perpetuate and reproduce systems of domination and oppression" (Young and Diem 2014, p. 1065). Critical policy studies pay close attention to the policy context, that is, the "complex systems and environments in which policy is made and implemented" (Diem et al. 2014, p. 1073), and provide a "contextualized understanding of their research findings, reflecting the complexity of the policies, people, schools, and communities they impact" (p. 1082). Additionally, critical policy studies investigate policy constructions. They examine the construction of a specific policy by "'unpacking the assumptions,' exploring the foundational ideas 'underpinning the policy,' or 'unpacking the sense making' of policy discourse" (Diem et al. 2014, p. 1077). In this analysis, the silences are explored by attending to "what the policy says and doesn't say, looking at how problems and solutions are defined and not defined" (Diem et al. 2014, p. 1077). Critical policy analysis is particularly important because, as Codd (1988) explains:

> Policy documents can be said to constitute the official discourse of the state (Codd, 1988). Thus policies produced by and for the state are obvious instances in which language serves a political purpose, constructing particular meanings and signs that work to mask social conflict and foster commitment to the notion of universal public interest. In this way, policy documents produce real social effects through the production and maintenance of consent. (p. 237)

Diem et al. (2014) argue that the emergence of critical policy analysis is both "a response to conditions in education and signal[s] an important shift in the field" (p. 1069). They assert that critical approaches to policy analysis:

1. involve an interrogation of the policy process, the use of policy symbols and rhetorical devices as well as the delineation of the differences between policy rhetoric and policy reality;

2. examine the roots and development of policy, including how policies emerge, what problems they are intended to solve, and how they reinforce dominant culture;
3. uncover elements of social stratification, the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge in policy creation and implementation, and the creation of winners and losers;
4. explore the broader and deeper effects of policy work, such as the institutionalization and internalization of dominant culture; and
5. promote agency, resistance, advocacy, and praxis. (p. 1083)

Concerns have been raised that teachers have been written out of the policy process by a range of interest groups and need to be reinserted back into the policy process (Gale and Densmore 2003, pp. 47–51). Critical policy analysis "emphasises the importance of examining policy within its historical, social, economic, cultural, and political contexts" (Winton and Tuters 2015, p. 123).

In Australia, the policy context is complex. There are two main levels of government responsible for schooling: federal and state/territory governments. The state/territory governments have constitutional responsibility for education, and thus they have primary responsibility for its regulation and funding. However, the federal government imposes national policies and a regulatory regime that often ties federal funding to performance outcomes. The *Action now* report is a federal "mechanism" aimed at influencing education in the states and territories. In this chapter, we provide a critical policy analysis of the *Action now* report.

## 3.3 The Four C's: Concern, Competence, Compliance and Conformity

In this section we argue that the *Action now* report is preoccupied with the four C's: concern, competence, compliance and conformity. This should hardly be surprising given the political and media controversy surrounding teacher quality at the time (see Mockler, this volume). Significant column space was handed over to conservative commentators who effectively shaped what Berliner and Biddle (1995) describe as a "manufactured crisis" based on a set of neo-liberal and neoconservative views about standards, teacher quality, teacher training and back-to-basics teaching methods. Ball (2006) describes such attacks as "discourses of derision" or the deliberate attempt to portray "an imagery of crisis and chaos" (p. 28) in order to reassert control over education and return to traditional teaching methods. Typically such criticisms are focused around three themes: falling academic standards, particularly in literacy and numeracy; left-wing teachers and academics influenced by the ideas of socialism, feminism, sustainability and egalitarianism; and poor behaviour and discipline (pp. 28–29).

We argue that these debates are a part of the wider "culture wars" initiated by the former Prime Minister John Howard (and his successor Tony Abbott) who wanted a return to more traditional teaching methods focused on the heritage of western civil-

isation and the study of the three R's. For conservative media commentators such as Donnelly (2004) this means:

- adopting a strong, discipline-based approach to school subjects (especially maths and science);
- enforcing system accountability and explicit rewards and sanctions (identify underperforming schools and reward successful teachers);
- defining clear educational standards (not outcomes, as is the case in Australia) linked to textbooks, teacher training and classroom resources;
- having greater time on task in the classroom and an emphasis on formal teaching;
- having regular testing and high-risk examinations; and
- providing a differentiated curriculum and a range of school pathways (recognising that students have different abilities, interests and post-school destinations). (p. 179)

The aim was to remove the influence of the so-called *soft left*, which Howard warned still held sway in educational and cultural life (Shanahan 2006, p. 4). In this climate, progressive educators (and ideas) were blamed for everything that was wrong with education and society in general. In the words of Welch (1996), it was "a moral-political campaign to wrest control of society from supporters of tolerance, difference and democratic self-expression, and return to those who hanker for a more monolithic, certain and authoritarian world" (p. 101).

Our argument is that the *Action now* report can only be properly comprehended in the context of these wider ideological struggles. Let us elaborate on this argument a little further, by first summarising the major concerns of the report and then explaining why competence, compliance and conformity seem to flow so easily. At the outset, the *Action now* report acknowledges the "significant public concern over the quality of teacher education in Australia", a situation "intensified by both media comment and political intervention" (TEMAG 2014, p. viii). Following extensive consultation across the education community, the report identified seven key concerns (findings), among them:

1. National standards are weakly applied. The assumption is that if the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures were more rigorously applied and implemented teaching quality would improve.
2. Australians are not confident about the suitability of entrants to initial teacher education including academic and personal characteristics. The response is to increase academic entry scores (ATAR) and mandate a compulsory literacy and numeracy test to restore confidence.
3. There is evidence that initial teacher education programs are not equipping graduates with appropriate content knowledge, evidence-based teaching strategies and skills required to meet different student learning needs. Thus, greater emphasis should be given to content- ("subject") based knowledge and skills training, especially in the field of STEM.

4. Teacher education providers are insufficiently integrated with schools and systems especially regarding school experience and the integration of theory and practice. The solution is to give greater weight to school-based practice at the expense of philosophical, sociological, aesthetic and critical inquiry.
5. Teacher education providers are not adequately applying (professional) standards when assessing the "classroom readiness" of teacher candidates. To address this problem the report supports heightened levels of quality assurance, regulation and accreditation processes.
6. Beginning teachers are not receiving sufficient professional support as they transition into the workplace. The report urges employers to take a more proactive approach to the induction and retention of graduate teachers.
7. There are gaps in crucial information, including workforce data related to the effectiveness of initial teacher education and students entering the profession. In other words, more data is required to evaluate whether training providers are meeting employers' needs and expectations (TEMAG 2014, pp. viii–ix).

In light of these concerns, the report proceeds to identify a number of regulatory actions to address the problem of teacher quality, among them:

1. *A strengthened national quality assurance process*: That will "rigorously" assess the quality of graduates based on "solid research" and "ongoing monitoring and examination of the impact of programs". Programs that fail to reach these goals "should not continue to operate" – the report states. Quality is best achieved, it argues, by having "a strengthened accreditation process" ideally administered by "a national initial teacher education regulator" (TEMAG 2014, p. x).
2. *Sophisticated and transparent selection for entry to teaching*: The report acknowledges "a unanimous view" on the necessity of having the "best people" in teacher education. This requires "a blend of sophisticated approaches to select entrants that have both the academic skills – including literacy and numeracy skills – and the desirable personal attributes for teaching". (p. x)
3. *Integration of theory and practice*: Pre-service teachers must be given opportunities to integrate theory and practice and in the process develop "a thorough knowledge of the content they will go on to teach". (p. x)
4. *Robust assurance of classroom readiness*: The report endeavours to instil public confidence by ensuring that all graduates "have been rigorously assessed and found to be ready for the classroom". (p. xi)
5. *National research and capability*: Finally, the report highlights the necessity to create national leadership and capability to "drive strong, evidence-based practice" combined with "a strengthened teacher registration system". (p. xi)

We contend that these kinds of regulatory mechanisms reveal a fundamental distrust of teachers and the professions more broadly (Connell 2009, p. 222). Lynch et al. (2015) put this issue into context when they argue that the new managerial and neoliberal project has led to "market-led models of control and regulation as the new prototype for work organisations" (p. 4). In the process, it has effectively "redefined

what counts as knowledge, who are the bearers of such knowledge and who is empowered to act – all within a legitimate framework of public choice and market accountability" (p. 4; see also Smyth et al. 2000).

The upshot is that new managerialism has effectively reconstituted the nature of teaching through a range of disciplining techniques, such as intensification, performativity, accountability, casualisation, deskilling and de-professionalisation (Gleeson and Husbands 2001; Smyth 2001; Gewirtz et al. 2009; Clarke et al. 2000). Furthermore, it has diminished the relational and ethical dimensions of teaching especially as it relates to the complex lives of students (e.g., poverty, health and well-being, mental illness, disengagement, alienation, drug and alcohol abuse, family violence and unemployment). Against this backdrop, politicians have shown a greater willingness to blame the victim, hence the focus on "fixing" individual deficits rather than locating the problem in the context of historical, institutional and structural arrangements (Mills 1971; Schwalbe 1998). As a consequence, individual teachers are held accountable for things over which they have little or no control. Put simply, we argue that teaching cannot be divorced from the wider social context in which it is located.

Whilst these muscular forms of accountability might have broad popular appeal, there are two major limitations as we see it. First, there is an assumption that top-down educational reforms actually work. As Cochran-Smith and her colleagues (Cochran-Smith et al. 2016) explain in the American context, there is "thin evidence to support the claims proponents make about how the assumed policy mechanisms will actually operate to improve programs" (p. 3). In other words, there is no attempt to explain the theory of change behind the report or how its recommendations will actually meet its stated goals. Cochran-Smith et al. (2016) point to the irony of policies which call for teacher education programs and institutions to make decisions based on evidence, even though the policies themselves are not evidence-based (p. 3). We are in agreement with Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2016) argument that there needs to be

> a conceptual shift away from teacher education *accountability* that is primarily bureaucratic or market-based and toward teacher education *responsibility* that is primarily professional and that acknowledges the shared responsibility of teacher education programs, schools, and policymakers to prepare and support teachers. (p. 5)

In other words, it would be helpful to have a clearly articulated understanding both conceptually and practically of the change process itself. It seems to us that without some explanation of how change happens, or not, there will be a mismatch between the stated policy goals (rhetoric) and implementation and outcomes (reality). We need look no further than the concerns surrounding the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE). Again, there is no evidence to indicate that simplistic standardised tests of this kind will lead to improved teacher quality in literacy and numeracy. In fact, some would argue that there is in fact no "general literacy crisis" based on the evidence (Welch 1996, pp. 84–90). Furthermore, it provides no basis on which to help teachers build the sophisticated knowledge and skills required for teaching in an increasingly complex, diverse and rapidly changing world.

Second, there is a default view that "good teachers" are those who best comply with "organizational requirements" which are couched in the language of standards and corporate managerialism (Connell 2009, p. 219). Therefore, it is hardly surprising to find words like "effectiveness", "improvement", "quality assurance", "evidence", "capabilities", "stakeholders", "outcomes", "achievement", "best practice" and "benchmarking" scattered throughout the report, hardly words associated with the everyday vernacular of classroom teachers. Here, we are in agreement with Connell (2009) when she argues that corporate language provides a "powerful rhetorical effect" in shaping the notion of the "good teacher" – an "entrepreneurial self" moulded on "specific, auditable competencies and performances" (p. 220). As a consequence, the report falls back on a low-level "teacher competency model" linked to the emergence of "a market-oriented political and cultural order" (p. 217). In this context, the notion of the "good teacher" is reconstituted within a set of neoliberalising discourses divorced from the broader social context and a diminished vision of what it means to teach.

In contrast, we advocate an orientation to educational reform that avoids the pitfalls of what Daniels (1995) describes as "centralized, top-down, Nation at Risk, policing-orientated, rap-their-knuckles" approaches (p. 18). Like Daniels, we are committed to a "teacher-driven, grassroots, bottom-up, basically democratic movement that says that what we do in schools doesn't work. We've got to change what we teach and the way we teach it" (p. 18). As Shor (1999) argues, such approaches "represent [a] different politics, different models for teaching and learning, and finally different visions of the people and society we should build through education" (p. vii). We will expand on this alternative vision of teaching in the final part of the chapter.

## 3.4 Gaps, Silences and Contradictions

In the context of these introductory remarks, we want to identify some fundamental gaps, silences and contradictions in the *Action now* report. It is our contention that if we are serious about raising the standard of teaching then we need to challenge the dominant discourses represented in the report and, at the same time, generate some alternative possibilities. In pursuing this task, we have organised this section around six key questions (or provocations) to help us reframe existing conversations in a more critical manner, namely:

- What is happening to teachers' work?
- What is wrong with standards?
- How do we account for complexity?
- What happened to the relational?
- What and whose evidence counts?
- What does it mean to teach?

We believe each of these questions can help us to rethink the issue of teaching quality and how we might better understand and improve practice.

### 3.4.1 What Is Happening to Teachers' Work?

In the previous section we argued that an understanding of what is happening to teachers' work cannot be divorced from the broader neo-liberal and new managerial project. Pasi Sahlberg (2011) uses the term Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM) to describe an unofficial exchange of global educational policies and practices based on a particular set of assumptions about how to improve education systems (p. 99). He argues a new educational orthodoxy has been promoted and widely disseminated through "the strategies and interests of international development agencies, bilateral donors, and private consultants through their interventions in national educational reforms and policy-making processes" (p. 99). In this environment, educational reform imitates management and administration models based on the operational logic of private corporations (p. 103). There are two underlying assumptions driving these GERM reform efforts: first, "external performance standards, describing what teachers should teach and students should do and learn, lead to better learning for all"; and second, "competition between school, teachers, and students is the most productive way to raise the quality of education" (pp. 104–105).

Sahlberg (2011) argues that GERM has had significant consequences for teachers' work and students' learning, for example, standardising teaching and learning, the focus on literacy and numeracy, teaching prescribed curriculum, borrowing market-oriented reform ideas and test-based accountability. In contrast, the successful Finnish model, he argues, places greater emphasis on customising teaching and learning, focusing on creative learning, encouraging risk taking, learning from the past and owning innovations, and sharing responsibility and trust (p. 103).

Therefore, it is indeed surprising that Australia continues to pursue neo-liberal and managerial policy initiatives:

- That require teachers to work within more rigidly defined policy frameworks and guidelines, of one kind or another;
- That place greater emphasis on determining the worth of teaching in terms of measurable outcomes;
- That supposedly make teachers more accountable by linking outcomes to the actions and activities of individual teachers, classrooms, and schools;
- That move teachers and schools in the direction of processes that are more appropriate to those of the corporate and industrial sector – performance appraisal, curriculum audits, quality assurance, and the like; and
- That preach the virtues of education and schooling being no different to any other commodity – to be measured and calibrated according to quality standards; packaged and delivered to targeted audiences; and haggled over in the artificially constructed user-pays marketplace of education. (Smyth and Shacklock 1998, p. 23)

We need look no further than the proliferation of testing and accountability regimes at global and national levels to appreciate the damaging impact on teachers' work (Lingard et al. 2013). Driving this policy obsession is the assumption that high-stakes standardised testing will "drive up standards and enhance the quality of a nation's human capital and thus their international economic competitiveness" (Lingard et al. 2013, p. 540). As Lingard et al. (2013) explain it, "we have entered

the era of 'big data' where computer capacity and the 'datafication' of the world … has particular policy effects in terms of mobilizing biopower and driving neoliberal forms of governance" or what they term "global panopticism" (p. 542). We share their concerns about these developments: first, there is no "horizontal accountability of schools to their communities or communities to their schools" (p. 544); second, the "involvement (both actual and potential) … of private interests, edu-businesses and philanthropic organisations" creates a potential "democratic deficit" (p. 545); and finally, testing "decontextualizes schools, denying the impact of structural inequality (both within and between nations) and lays all responsibility for performance at the feet of teachers and individual schools" (p. 546). Yet, despite all the rhetoric, "little evidence exists that there's any educational substance behind the accountability and testing movement" (Stack 1999, p. 155). In reality, what we are witnessing is the subordination of teachers' work to the political, economic and ideological interests of politicians, educational bureaucrats and business elites.

### *3.4.2 What Is Wrong with Standards?*

The debate over standards in teacher education has been a twin-edged sword. Kincheloe (2001b) contends that, on the one hand, it has offered hope to many educators and policymakers wanting to improve the quality of teaching. On the other hand, however, the quality of the debate itself has been disappointing (p. 1). We share Kincheloe's (2001b) concern especially as it relates to the failure to problematise the notion of standards beyond a narrowly conceived and technicist interpretation of teaching. In other words, teacher education is too often focused on practical matters related to classroom survival, transmission of knowledge and classroom management, thus "leaving the scholarly role of the teacher unaddressed" (p. 52).

Herein lies a major contradiction of the *Action now* report. Whilst it advocates improving the standard of pre-service teachers, it assumes that the existing standards document actually fosters the qualities that characterise "the academic/practical/cognitive skills of a rigorously educated person in the twenty-first century" (Kincheloe 2001b, p. 2). The *Action now* report assumes that the "rigorous" implementation and auditing of the national standards will provide a panacea that will improve teacher quality. There is a leap of faith here that a list of standards organised under the broad headings of "Professional Knowledge", "Professional Practice" and "Professional Engagement" will enhance the quality of teaching (AITSL 2011). In doing so, the report portrays a sense of common purpose, agreement and accomplishment about what is required to enhance the quality of teachers. No doubt, the attributes identified in these standards are important and even necessary; however, they are insufficient (Down 2014).

Returning to Kincheloe's (2001b) argument for a moment, he says that the existing standards have two major flaws: first, they fail to deal with the context of complexity and, second, they do not articulate "a compelling vision of the purposes of education" (p. 11). What is required, he argues, is the fostering of a "rigorous set of scholarly abilities" whereby teachers

> not only possess knowledge but also know where it came from, the conditions of its production, the ways it can be used to bring desired states into being, the problems its unexamined use may create, and alternative information that may exist about similar topics produced by differing logics of inquiry. (p. 39)

In short, if we want to raise academic standards for teachers, then we must move beyond "the methods fetish" (Bartolome 1994) to envisage a more scholarly conception and practice of teaching that asks questions like why teach, what to teach, who to teach, when to teach, where to teach and so on (Kincheloe 2001b, p. 60).

Pursuing this critique a little further, Weil (2001) argues that top-down "standards serve as a straightjacket" because "they impose teaching as an act of functional, instrumental control – of technological device – not an act of compassion, caring and love" (p. 519). He goes on to argue that standards

> surreptitiously beguile students, teachers, and the community into believing that there is no political agenda, no advocacy of cultural norms, no prevalence of hierarchical classifying and sorting, that standards are a neutral, generic conception and operation applicable equally in the interests of everyone. (p. 518)

Connell (2009) is also circumspect about the usefulness of the standards document with its list of "dot points" that have "no connection with each other" or any "systematic view of Education as a field of knowledge" (p. 218). Connell (2009) believes the standards document is "very traditional", serving to reinforce the "background knowledge, pedagogical skills, organisational know-how, ideology and social conformity" of schooling since the nineteenth century (p. 219). In other words, standards are primarily concerned with "how-to-ism" (Brosio 1994, p. 323) or "means–end thinking" (Phelan 2009, p. 106). Thus, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers document (AITSL 2011) focuses on a range of knowledge, skills and dispositions geared to:

- Understanding subjects, curriculum content and teaching strategies;
- Designing lessons to meet the requirements of curriculum, assessment and reporting;
- Interpreting student assessment data;
- Creating rapport and managing student behaviour;
- Demonstrating knowledge of legislative requirements; and
- Providing clear direction to students.

Whilst useful at one level, these kinds of standards fail to address a range of fundamental questions around the nature, purpose and processes of education. As we have already mentioned, perhaps the most serious shortcoming is the manner in which they strip away the contextual and intellectual foundations of teaching (Kincheloe et al. 2000). Phelan (2009) explains the problem with reductionist views of teaching in the following way:

> There is no deliberation about educational purposes, no consideration of authority in teaching, no apparent concern for the manner in which schools shape and are shaped by social inequities, no reference to the complex responsibility of the teacher and teacher educator towards the life of children and for the continuance of the world (Phelan and Sumison 2008). When did (teacher) education become so small (Smits 2008)? (p. 107)

The consequence is that "commonsensical ideas" about teaching and learning are reinforced and certain pedagogical knowledge privileged (e.g., psychology, measurement and management) over social justice (Kumashiro 2004, p. 6). Ball (1989) puts it succinctly when he states that "pragmatism and technologies of control replace ideological dispute" (p. 143).

### *3.4.3 How Do We Account for Complexity?*

Underpinning the *Action now* report is a simplistic and naïve view that quality teaching can be broken down into a series of discrete components, standardised for easier management and delivery, and measured through predefined forms of assessment or "management pedagogies" (Giroux 1988, p. 124). From this perspective, the "preferred" teacher is, in the words of Smyth and Shacklock (1998), "one who conforms to the new marketised, customer-orientated teacher able to demonstrate government policy through the satisfaction of pre-determined criterial indicators of performance" (p. 8). Revisiting the formative writing of Waller (1932) and Lortie (2002) on these matters, we are quickly reminded of the complexity of teaching. As Lortie (2002) says, teachers face "endemic uncertainties" (p. x) in their daily work; hence reducing teaching to what is easily identifiable, calculable and measurable is an impossible task. Whilst the *Action now* report recommends a much stricter adherence to national standards, the daily realities for teachers are far less predictable and difficult to specify. Connell (1989) pursues this line of argument further when she argues that "teaching is a labour process without an object" because "the minds of the kids, or their capacity to learn … cannot be specified in any but vague and metaphorical ways" (pp. 123–124). In other words, teachers' work is never complete, like producing a thing or a product, because "there is no logical limit to the expansion of an individual teachers' work" (p. 125). Hatton (1994) put it well in her book *Understanding teaching* when she said:

> Some take the view that teaching should be simplistically presented for beginning teachers, and that its complexities, dilemmas and contradictions should remain unaddressed or even hidden until beginning teachers are "ready" to address them (that is, when teachers have a few years' teaching experience and have put their survival concerns to rest). We challenge this view. We think it both demeaning and fundamentally wrong. For one thing, it undersells teaching as a form of work, which, if done well, is intellectually challenging and much more than mere mastery of technique. (p. xvi)

As a result, Hatton (1994) argues, beginning teachers often see their pre-service programs as irrelevant and lacking in credibility, for two main reasons:

> First, because the codified, simplistic version of teaching presented to them in preservice preparation is far removed from the complex reality they encounter when they enter schools. Second, because they are not given opportunities to develop the characteristics that they actually require for the complex work of teaching. These characteristics include enjoyment of intellectual struggle; critical reflection on policy, practice, curricula and the like; the formulation of adequate, justifiable educational goals; and the capacity to choose strategies appropriate for achieving their goals. (p. xvi)

The point is that teaching cannot be reduced to management and technique alone because the work is far too complex and nuanced for that. Furthermore, it is intensely relational work, something that seems self-evident to most but increasingly absent in official documents and pronouncements.

### *3.4.4 What Happened to the Relational?*

In addressing this question, we endeavour to reassert the deeply relational and emotional dimensions of teaching. Whilst Standard 1 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers identifies the importance of "knowing students and how they learn", it is primarily confined to an instrumentalist view of relationships, one based on an exchange value whereby teachers need to have some understanding of developmental psychology and cultural diversity in order to engage students in the mastery of subject content (AITSL 2011). In contrast, Connell (1993) helps us to develop a much richer understanding of the relational when she says:

> Being a teacher is not just a matter of having a body of knowledge and a capacity to control a classroom. That could be done by a computer with a cattle-prod. Just as important, being a teacher means being able to establish human relations with the people being taught. Learning is a full-blooded, human social process, and so is teaching. Teaching involves emotions as much as it involves pure reasoning.
>
> The emotional dimension of teaching has not been much researched, but in my view it is extremely important. Teachers establish relations with students through their emotions, through sympathy, interest, surprise, boredom, sense of humour, sometimes anger or annoyance. School teaching, indeed, is one of the most emotionally demanding jobs. (p. 63)

Expanding on this idea, Connell (1997) explains:

> Through educational relationships … new capacities for practice come into existence. They cover the full range of types of social action: productive capacities used in economic life; symbolic capacities, used in making culture; capacities for collective decision-making, used in politics; and capacities for emotional response, used in personal life. (p. 4)

These qualities are even more acute when dealing with marginalised students and those deemed to be least advantaged in schools and society. Consider for a moment how good teachers "regularly perform astonishing (and unheralded) feats of human relations, overcoming age, class and ethnic barriers, breaking through resentment, suspicions and fears, to establish workable educational relationships" (Connell 1993, p. 63).

So how might we begin to rethink the relational dimension of teaching in more helpful ways? Smyth, Down and McInerney (2010) provide a useful starting point when they identify four key defining features of the "relational school":

- De-institutionalisation of relationships (Osterman 2000) – which means removing the petty and impersonal bureaucratic rules and regulations that insulate schools from students and communities;

- Fostering of relational power (Raider-Roth 2005; Warren 2005) – whereby people work together to get things done collectively so no one gets left behind;
- Building of relational trust (Bryk and Schneider 2002) – in the form of social exchanges based on trust, care and respect and personal regard for others; and
- Creation of capabilities (Sen 1992) – to assist students to identify the kind of lives they wish to lead and to provide them with the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their goals (pp. 74–75).

By way of summary, the *Action now* report glosses over the intensely relational dimensions of teaching. The consequence is that we end up with a very thin version of teaching (e.g., standardisation, testing, accountability, auditing, transparency, registration and performativity) that serves to "screen out the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual human beings" (Greene 1995, p. 11). As a remedy, we seek to advance a much deeper understanding of the relational and intellectual dimensions of good teaching.

### *3.4.5 What and Whose Evidence Counts?*

The *Action now* report puts considerable emphasis on the importance of developing "robust evidence" of "classroom readiness" in order to meet the requirements of "provisional registration" (TEMAG 2014, p. 38). It states that there must be "a clear demonstration of evidence of course outcomes and, in turn, student outcomes in the classroom" (p. ix). Furthermore, it recommends the establishment of a national research base on the effectiveness of Australian programs with a focus on "longitudinal analyses of the effectiveness of initial teacher education programs; pre-service teacher selection; pathways through teacher education; graduate standards and teacher effectiveness in early career; and subject matter and pedagogical knowledge" (p. 48). The question then becomes what and whose evidence counts?

Take, for instance, the dominant narrative in the media about the "poor" quality of teacher candidates entering university. This increasingly derogatory and demeaning public discourse (Graham 2015) is based on a set of assumptions about the declining quality of students entering pre-service teacher education programs and graduating with low levels of literacy and numeracy. This was the basis for the TEMAG inquiry in the first instance. Ironically, Gore et al. (2016) contend that these very discourses contribute to an image problem that deters the "best and brightest" (p. 528). Furthermore, in response to the argument that Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) entry scores are declining, they conclude that "there is no evidence that the quality of students in the top 30%, … is changing from year to year". On the contrary, they argue, "ATAR has been mis-used to strengthen critiques of the quality of entrants to teacher education and teachers in general" (p. 532). Their study of the career aspirations of 6492 Australian school students in years 3–12 challenges "the contemporary policy view that teaching is no longer attracting 'bright' or academically capable students. Indeed, 31% of those interested in teaching were in the highest achievement quartile" (p. 541).

Whilst *Action now* draws attention to the importance of research, it provides little clarity about what this means and for whom. There is brief mention of the "teacher-as-researcher" approach favoured in Finland and the "creative-critical culture" of Singapore (TEMAG 2014, p. 19). Both approaches are steeped in a culture of professional learning, self-reflection and teacher autonomy. However, there is a danger, intentionally or not, that "robust evidence" really means positivist, multivariate quantitative research on school and teacher "effectiveness" (Angus 1993; Thrupp 1999). This kind of research treats teachers and students as variables (objects) to be correlated against outcomes, as measured on standardised test scores. It assumes a rational–empirical approach that requires the direct application of knowledge based on "what works" according to statistically significant correlations devoid of social context (Smyth et al. 2009).

We can begin to see how this plays out through the positioning of John Hattie's meta-analysis of over 800 studies on "what works". Teachers can now purchase "bundles" of his books based on the "science" of "visible learning" abstracted through statistical analysis. Of course this kind of research is highly problematic, as we have indicated, but it has powerful and seductive effects on policymakers, systems, school leaders and teachers, all wanting "quick fixes" to some persistent and protracted problems in education. Snook et al. (2009) provide a useful set of warnings about the ways in which Hattie's research is being adopted:

- Despite his own frequent warnings, politicians may use his work to justify policies which he does not endorse and his research does not sanction;
- Teachers and teacher educators might try to use the findings in a simplistic way and not, as Hattie wants, as a source for 'hypotheses for intelligent problem solving';
- The quantitative research on 'school effects' might be presented in isolation from their historical, cultural and social contexts, and their interaction with home and community backgrounds; and
- In concentrating on measurable school effects there may be insufficient discussion about the aims of education and the purposes of schooling without which the studies have little point. (pp. 104–105)

Hattie (2008) himself acknowledges the limitations of his analyses in the following way:

> [This] is not a book about what cannot be influenced in schools – thus critical discussions about class, poverty, resources in families, health in families, and nutrition are not included but this is NOT because they are unimportant, indeed they may be more important than many of the issues discussed in this book. It is just that I have not included these topics in my orbit. (pp. x–xi)

Given these concerns, especially the manner in which social context has been erased from official educational conversations, there is a need to foster teachers who have a critical sensibility about such matters. In an era of "re-emergent scientism" (Denzin et al. 2006), we believe teachers require an understanding of what constitutes legitimate educational research and what methods are most relevant to their everyday needs (Mills and Goos 2017). Garman (1995) argues that novice researchers need to be aware not only of their own "dysfunctional stereotypes of research" but also "the logic of justification" for doing research and critiquing the research of

others (p. 8). By this she means teachers should be taught the scholarly traits of philosophic inquiry to help them understand the nature of epistemology (how is truth defined?), ontology (what is the nature of social and educational reality?) and axiology (what values are embedded in the approach?) (p. 8). In short, we need to develop "teachers as researchers" (Kincheloe 2003), capable of investigating their daily practices in scholarly and socially critical ways (Smyth 1987, 1992, 2001; Kincheloe 2011).

### *3.4.6 What Does It Mean to Teach?*

The final provocation relates to the question of what it means to teach. Because the *Action now* report operates in a vacuum around this fundamental question, it falls back on a compliance model linked to a set of technical standards divorced from a broader vision of the purposes of teaching. Without such a conception, it is difficult to imagine what kind of teachers we want to produce, what kind of abilities they should have or what kind of society we want to build (e.g., Counts 1978). In short, we want to advance the conversation about what it means to teach (and be educated) – ethically, politically and intellectually – in these uncertain times.

In pursuing this task, we find the ideas of Thomas and Schubert (2001) helpful (see also Down 2014). Commenting on the American equivalent of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, known as the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium of the Council of Chief State School Officers (INTASC), Thomas and Schubert (2001) argue that the kind of teacher identity provided in certification standards is limited and needs to be expanded in at least three key directions. First, teachers should be "*engaged in philosophic inquiry*", that is, "investigating the value assumptions of their students, their colleagues, and their own metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological convictions" (original emphasis, p. 234). Second, teachers need to develop as "*democratic connoisseur[s]*" or "critical interpreters of existent curriculums and creators of new curriculums, novel forms of instruction, and appropriate methods of assessment" (original emphasis, p. 235). Third, teachers should see themselves as "*progressive activist[s]*" committed to "democratic practice understood as … public advocacy for social policies that attempt to redress injustice and public criticisms of state actions that oppress or institutionalize inequality" (original emphasis, p. 235).

Freire's (1998) seminal work further illuminates what it means to teach in critical democratic ways:

> to know how to teach is to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge. When I enter a classroom I should be someone who is open to new ideas, open to questions, and open to the curiosities of the student as well as their inhibitions. In other words, I ought to be aware of being a critical and inquiring subject in regard to the task entrusted to me, the task of teaching and not that of transferring knowledge. (p. 49)

Ayers (2004) in his book *Teaching towards freedom: moral commitment and ethical action in the classroom* alerts us to the importance of teachers "figur[ing] out what

they are teaching *for*, and what they are teaching *against*" (p. 18). According to Ayers, this means "teaching against oppression and subjugation … exploitation, unfairness, and unkindness" and for "freedom, for enlightenment and awareness, wide awakeness, protection of the weak, cooperation, generosity, compassion, and love" (p. 18). Such language is rare in official policy discourses; hence the notion of teaching quality is constricted through an emphasis on technique and "a conservative survivalist mentality among novice teachers" (Bullough and Gitlin 1991, p. 38). What we have endeavoured to offer is an alternative vision of "why teaching matters" (Connell 2009, p. 225) based on "a more dynamic, vital understanding of the educator's craft" (Thomas and Schubert 2001, p. 235).

## 3.5 Towards a Socially Critical Teacher Education

In this final part we want to scaffold an alternative conception of teacher education that is more attuned to the kinds of socially critical principles and values outlined so far. Again, Connell (2009) provides some important clues when she identifies four key issues relevant to developing "good teachers". First, teaching needs to be seen as a form of labour, especially the emotional, relational and collective nature of teachers' work (p. 220). As well, there is a need to locate an understanding of teachers' work in the context of what Braverman (1998) describes as the "degradation of labour", whereby there is an increasing separation of conception from execution, that is, the de-professionalisation and deskilling of teachers' work. Second, the occupational dynamics of teaching under neo-liberal ideology are based on a mistrust of teachers. Connell (2009) argues that the standards document is designed to codify teachers' work and teacher education "in such a way as to make them auditable and allow control at a distance" (p. 222). In this context, we need to cultivate teachers who have "The capacity to talk back to management, to dissent, or to follow independent judgement" so they can "pursue the interests of the pupils they actually have in front of them" (p. 222). Third, the "competencies"-based model views teachers as technicians/civil servants rather than "scholar-teachers" (p. 224). Like Connell, we believe the idea of "teachers as intellectuals" (Giroux 1988) should be the cornerstone of teacher education programs because it provides the kind of rigour required of teachers in these complex times. Lastly, Connell (2009) says the process of education itself needs to be seen as more than simply social reproduction: transmitting culture, producing a workforce or handing on traditions. A more dynamic response lies in seeing education as "a process of forming culture" and "the creation of capacities for practice" (p. 225). In the Freire (1998) sense, it is about helping teachers and students to become more fully human.

Turning to Giroux (1988), we gain some clarity about the idea of "teachers as intellectuals". He writes:

> teachers as intellectuals will need to reconsider and, possibly, transform the fundamental nature of the conditions under which they work. That is, teachers must be able to shape the ways in which time, space, activity, and knowledge organize everyday life in schools. More

> specifically, in order to function as intellectuals, teachers must create the ideology and structural conditions necessary for them to write, research, and work with each other in producing curricula and sharing power … As intellectuals, they will combine reflection and action in the interest of empowering students with the skills and knowledge needed to address injustices and to be critical actors committed to developing a world free of oppression and exploitation. (p. xxxiv)

At the core of this vision, teachers become what Kincheloe (2001a) describes as "knowledge workers" (as opposed to technicians/civil servants) who "research, interpret, expose embedded values and political interest, and produce their own knowledge" (p. 241). These teacher scholars, according to Kincheloe (2001b):

- take into account the democratic, moral, ethical and cognitive context;
- push students to understand where content came from, the means by which it was produced, and how it was validated as knowledge worthy of inclusion in the curriculum;
- induce students to use these contextual understandings to reflect, research, and evaluate information presented to them;
- cultivate skills that can be used after the confrontation with content to enable them to learn new content in novel situations; and
- prepare students to produce new content in relation to the context in which they are operating. (p. 22)

Here we can begin to see how teachers can "take charge of constructing their own pedagogies and educational philosophies" (Kincheloe 2001b, p. 66). These new "standards of complexity", as Kincheloe (2001b) describes them, put a new inflection on the debate about quality teachers and the notion of "classroom readiness". He explains:

1. Teachers possess an expert knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences, understanding the historical development of the disciplines and the various schools of thought within them.
2. Teachers learn to promote the welfare of their students. They are attuned to students' physical and emotional well-being and the contexts that exert an impact on them.
3. Teachers appreciate the complexity of the ways students learn and develop.
4. Teachers become knowledge workers capable of a variety of research methods depending on context.
5. Teachers study the community surrounding the school drawing on community expertise.
6. Teachers are experts in pedagogical methods and strategies for teaching and classroom management.
7. Teachers achieve profound expertise in the contextualizing disciplines of education as they learn about the historical, social, cultural, political, economic, psychological and philosophical contexts that frame education.
8. Teachers become scholars of education in a democratic society, exploring the ways that an unequal distribution of power and resources undermines the performance of students. (pp. 66–67)

Whilst some of these are familiar in the existing Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (e.g., 2, 3 and 6 in particular), we can see how the remainder of these features expand our understanding of the intellectual foundations of teaching (e.g., 1, 4 and 7) as well as the relationship between power, knowledge and society (e.g., 8). These standards of complexity are far more ambitious and rigorous than what *Action now* is proposing. Also relevant here is the extent to which Finland, which is

held up as the exemplar of high standards for teachers and students alike, has produced a society in which "Fairness, honesty, and social justice are deeply rooted in the Finnish way of life … people have a shared sense of responsibility" (Sahlberg 2011, p. 10). It seems to us that debates about quality teaching must be located in the context of these broader structural and institutional arrangements. In short, quality teaching is highly contextual work requiring teacher-scholars nurtured in "standards of complexity" and capable of articulating a clear conception and practice of what it means to teach morally, ethically and politically.

## 3.6 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have presented a critical policy analysis of a key Australian government education report *Action now: classroom ready teachers* (TEMAG 2014) to illustrate the ways in which such reports naïvely attempt to attend to a perceived policy problem. The perceived policy problem is the declining quality of teacher education. Despite this concern being unfounded, it is shared in other countries including England (Carter 2015) and the USA (Greenberg et al. 2013). We have argued that:

- *Action now* is preoccupied with accountability, accreditation, regulation, selection, assessment, content and evidence about "what works".
- The policy rhetoric and policy reality are disparate.
- Teachers' work is being politicised in ways that threaten their ability to teach well.
- The imposition of teacher standards has led to the de-professionalisation of teachers, as they are forced to comply to narrow technologies of reductionist policy products.
- The complexity of schools and the nature of teachers' work are simplified beyond recognition. In doing so, the deeply relational and emotional dimensions of teaching are largely forgotten and therefore devalued.
- The pressure to develop "robust evidence" in all aspects of teacher education is laudable but the policy rhetoric suggests a narrow view of research. It misunderstands the need to develop "teachers as researchers" who are capable of investigating their work in scholarly and critical ways.
- *Action now* reflects a narrow view of what it means to teach.

Finally, we have presented an alternative conception of teacher education that reflects a set of socially critical values. At the heart of this conception is the understanding of the teacher as an intellectual. We argue for the need to move beyond controlling teachers' work using policy mechanisms that are regulatory in their intent.

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