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Good teachers on dangerous ground: towards a new view of teacher quality and professionalism

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Ideas about what makes a good teacher are important in thinking about educational reform, and have come into focus recently. These ideas are contested and open to change. The first part of this paper traces models of the good teacher in Australia from the colonial-era good servant, through an ideal of the autonomous scholar-teacher, to contemporary lists of teacher competencies. The second part looks more closely at the incoherent but insistent way the good teacher is now defined under neoliberal governance by teacher registration authorities. The third part of the paper makes proposals for a new understanding of good teachers: based on understanding the labour process and occupational dynamics of teaching, the intellectual structure of Education studies, and the overall logic of education itself.

Keywords: competency; initial teacher education (ITE); labour process; neoliberalism; professionalism; quality; teacher registration; teachers

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Introduction: the good teacher and the new regulation

In the last few years, school teachers and their quality have become a focus of widespread policy debate. In 2002 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) launched a big project on 'teacher policy' which eventually drew in 25 countries; the findings were published in a volume called *Teachers Matter* (OECD, 2005). Academic debate on professionalism, standards, and the impact of globalization is also international, as shown in Townsend and Bates' recent *Handbook of Teacher Education* (2007).

In Australia, the focus of this paper, all states and territories have recently become concerned with teacher accountability, as Kleinhenz and Ingvarson (2004) observe – authors who have themselves become advocates for a national system of teacher certification and evaluation. In 2003 the Australian council of state and federal Ministers of Education[1] issued a document outlining a national framework of 'professional standards' intended to govern the registration and evaluation of teachers. When the NSW Department of Education and Training held a consultation on future directions for public education, it began the discussion of educational change with a section on 'Good Teaching' (DET, 2005). The national parliament recently held an enquiry into teacher education (House of Representatives, 2007). The federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations is engaged in a new attempt to measure the teaching workforce (Owen, Kos & McKenzie, 2008). Even the Business Council, a capitalist peak body not normally suspected of

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concern for the public interest, has come out with a report on teacher quality called *Teaching Talent* (Business Council of Australia, 2008).

These debates proceed on the assumption that, as the OECD pithily put it, 'teachers matter'. The OECD report summarized the vast research on determinants of student learning by saying that, though the largest variation in outcomes is attributable to social background and student abilities, the most important influence 'potentially open to policy influence' is the teaching, especially 'teacher quality' (OECD, 2005, p. 26). (Note the assumption that social background and student abilities are *not* open to policy influence; I will return to this point.) There is a widespread consensus. Recent researchers who by no means share the OECD's technocratic outlook argue in very similar terms: 'apart from family background, it is good teachers who make the greatest difference to student outcomes from schooling' (Hayes, Mills, Christie & Lingard, 2006, p. 1).

This consensus might suggest that governments wanting to improve education would be pouring vast resources into teacher education. But that hasn't happened.

What *has* happened, in Australia as in other wealthy countries, is the construction of an imposing new apparatus of certification and regulation for teachers. Statutory institutes have been created, and given the task of defining minimum standards for entry into school teaching; and the way they do this is already impacting on university teacher education programmes. They also have the task of defining more advanced levels of teacher quality – the key point in the Business Council's agenda – and the way they do *this* is likely to be a powerful influence on schools in the next generation.

What is meant by a 'good teacher' has thus become a significant practical question. It is also important conceptually, since ideas about good teaching are embedded in the design of educational institutions, and lurk in our talk about curricula, educational technology and school reform.

The purpose of this paper is to raise questions about what a good teacher is, and how good teaching can be fostered. The paper grows out of discussions in seminars on 'The Good Teacher' held at the University of Sydney in 2008, and I have drawn on the ideas of many contributors to these discussions.

The focus is on Australia, a rich dependent country in the global periphery. Some of the details of our story are distinctive, arising from the history of settler colonialism. But the neoliberal agenda that has impacted the country so powerfully is international (Harvey, 2005; Rudd, 2009). Much in the Australian story has a wider relevance.

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Part 1: the changing idea of the good teacher

From servant to scholar-teacher

Ideas about what makes a good teacher vary over time, between cultures, and within cultures. In an admirable study called *The Good Teacher*, Moore (2004) finds three competing discourses in contemporary England: a 'competent craftsperson' model, preferred by government; a 'reflective practitioner' model, widespread in universities; and a 'charismatic' model of the teacher, circulating in popular culture, Hollywood movies, etc.

If we look beyond the English-speaking world, diversity becomes greater. Chinese Confucian tradition, for instance, defines the good teacher as a moral authority. Hence in Chinese schooling there is a strong assumption of respect on the part of the learner. On the other hand a teacher in the Chinese/Japanese Zen Buddhist tradition is not so much a moral authority as a cognitive revolutionary. In this tradition the teacher tries to provoke a breakthrough in the student's perception, and may use outrageous jokes and paradoxes to do so (Watts, 1957).

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In the Australian case, it is clear that ideas of the good teacher have shifted historically. In the period when public school systems were being created by colonial governments, pupil-teacher schemes and training schools aimed at the narrow set of pedagogical skills required for a tightly-controlled school curriculum. But they also had a strong moral agenda emphasising respectability and obedience (Hyams, 1979). This was not accidental. The new mass school systems were interventions into a turbulent colonial society, designed to achieve social control over working-class and rural youth who might easily escape it. Little value was placed on a capacity for independent thought. The good teacher at this time was, above all, an obedient servant of the authorities.

As the need to staff a secondary school system developed, a greater intellectual content was required. In the early twentieth century Teachers Colleges claimed a little independence and brought a whiff of New Education and the American psychology of learning into Australian teacher training. A strong emphasis on social conformity and rule-following remained. For instance, in *The Groundwork of Teaching* (Mackie, 1924), the textbook written by staff of the Sydney Teachers' College, there was no questioning of the State as the sole source of authority. Students were given a great deal of hard-headed advice on everyday life in schools, lesson plans, tests and administrative procedures. Yet *The Groundwork* also had an essay on 'The Vocation of the Teacher', written by a classics master, which emphasised the need for imagination and drama in teaching, and advised teachers not to stick too closely to the textbook.

All of the authors of *The Groundwork of Teaching* were men; but most of the workers they addressed were women. School teaching was a gender-divided occupation from the start, with women concentrated in classroom work with younger children, and men dominating management and secondary and higher education. As Acker (1983) observed in Britain, there was consequently a strong tendency to see women teachers in terms of family roles. For women, the idea of a good teacher was liable to be blurred with the idea of a good mother.

For the men, an ideology of professionalism made better sense. But the idea of an autonomous profession was at odds with the model of the teacher as an obedient servant of authority. In Britain, a solution evolved in forms of professionalism that provided *indirect* controls over teachers (Lawn, 1987). In Australia, the developmentalist state was stronger and the methods of control blunter: direct bureaucratic control of teaching remained in place for two-thirds of the twentieth century.

A second difficulty was that teaching lacked a unique knowledge base. This began to change as an apparently scientific tool-kit of educational measurement developed. Psychology now became the queen of sciences in teacher education. Intelligence testing was imported from Europe and the United States between the wars. The Australian Council for Educational Research was set up in the 1930s, and soon was printing large numbers of standardized tests for use in schools. Within this framework, the good teacher was an expert, who knew how to measure the capacities and achievements of the pupils and therefore direct them into the appropriate pathways.

The technical-professional model of teaching thus became linked with an ideology of educational hierarchy, of natural differences in intelligence or educability, that had socially conservative overtones. This sat awkwardly with the trend of educational reform in the following generation, which saw a postwar surge in working-class demand for education, the rapid growth of comprehensive high schools from the 1950s to the 1970s, moves towards gender equality, and the opening of universities and colleges.

Therefore the technical-professional model did not carry all before it. Teacher education was gradually moving into universities, and universities in the mid-twentieth century were

still a site of humanistic learning. This provided a basis for an idea of the good teacher who not only knew how to run a classroom but also had learned how to think for herself, apply disciplined knowledge, and act as an agent of cultural renewal. The quality of teaching and the purposes of democracy were linked by a kind of mass humanism, embedded in common-learnings curricula, and translated by a workforce of intellectually autonomous, university-educated teachers. I call this the 'scholar-teacher' model.

This model underpinned *The Foundations of Education* (Connell et al., 1962), the textbook written by staff of the University of Sydney's Department of Education at the peak of the postwar expansion. This 'blue bible' is said to have been used by almost every teacher education programme across Australia. It concludes with a chapter on 'The Teaching Profession' which offers a nice summary of the scholar-teacher ideal:

> . . . the teacher who has the potentiality for development and who is ready to meet new situations in teaching, must have studied the disciplines upon which the art of teaching is based; must have thought deeply about the aims and purposes of teaching; must have understood the processes by which knowledge and skills are acquired, appreciations developed and standards and values of conduct and character attained; must have followed the history of educational thought and learnt how men before him have faced and met the problems which teaching entails. (Connell et al., 1962, p. 295)

In other hands, the combination of humanist ideas and teaching skills generated the 'reflective practitioner' model, and initiatives for school-level democracy and teacher-developed curricula, which became powerful in the 1970s. This trend in Australia broadly corresponded with the ideas of 'critical pedagogy' and 'teachers as intellectuals' developed in North America about the same time (Giroux, 1988).

The scholar-teacher agenda for teacher education was connected with an ambitious view of Education as a field of study. Education was not simply applied know-how; it was an intellectual discipline, or coherent interdisciplinary field, in its own right. Hence, at the University of Sydney, the educationists originally insisted on having an undergraduate major within the Faculty of Arts rather than a separate professional faculty (Connell, Sherington, Fletcher, Turney & Bygott, 1995). The discipline of Education rested on certain 'foundational' areas: history of education, philosophy of education, educational psychology and sociology of education. These studies provided tools for approaching the problems that were unique to Education: curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and (arriving somewhat later) educational policy and comparative education. These two domains underpinned a third tier of focussed projects such as TESL (teaching English as a second language) and educational technology.

This model was, however, vulnerable in several ways. In the fields of knowledge considered foundational to Education, powerful critiques of disciplinary knowledge (such as postmodernist deconstruction) emerged internationally. At the same time, changes in the schools' local social environment undermined general education. Youth unemployment rose in the 1970s and remained obstinately high, challenging the belief that schooling could be trusted to deliver economic security. There was always a whiff of the missionary about the humanist agenda. Humanist learning was never easy to translate into a coherent programme for working-class children – who remained the majority of participants in public schools.

Meanwhile the steadily rising public funding of private schools (which accelerated under the Labor Party government in the 1970s and is now very high by international standards), and the quasi-privatisation of elite 'selective' state schools (which have some analogies to the US 'charter school' movement), made it easier for interest groups to use

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schools for neo-conservative religious agendas, protection of class privilege, gender segregation, and special deals for the 'gifted and talented'. A fragmentation of demands occurred, undermining the idea of a common culture and curriculum. As the important historical study by Campbell and Sherington (2006) shows, from the 1980s there has been growing division of the secondary school system, and a marked decline of political commitment to the comprehensive ideal of secondary education. The scene was set for a shift from a humanist back towards a technical vision of the good teacher.

The shift to a 'competent teacher' model

In contemporary Australian education, though there are still differing ideas of what makes a good teacher, one holds the dominant position. I call this the 'competent teacher' model because it centres on an assemblage of competencies attributed to good teachers. It is much the same idea of the teacher that Moore (2004) in England calls the 'competent craftsperson' and Weber (2007) in South Africa more critically calls the 'compliant technician'.

The idea of competencies for teachers did not spring out of thin air. It emerged in the United States in the 1960s, grew rapidly in the 1970s, and was brought to Australia (Turney, Eltis, Towler & Wright, 1985) where it intersected with a market-oriented upheaval in technical education. In the restructuring of technical and further education (TAFE) since the 1980s, distinct skills or competencies were extracted from the matrix of traditional apprenticeships, packaged and taught as separate modules. Specific, measurable outcomes, rather than broad trade-based identities, became the goal of vocational education.

The teacher-competency model thus has a context: it is connected with the growth of a market-oriented political and cultural order. This was a global process in which peripheral and dependent economies like Australia's were deeply involved. A broad shift towards neoliberal policies and assumptions – deregulation, privatisation, tax cuts, competition, public sector decline – occurred in Australian public life, spurred by anxiety about globalization as well as by the spread of economic-rationalist ideology (Pusey, 1991; Harvey, 2005).

A new kind of managerialism emerged within the institutions of business, government, and education. Field-specific expertise (e.g. from prior experience as a teacher or principal) was devalued in favour of generic managerial skills and practices, using technical measures of organizational efficiency and effectiveness. An 'audit culture' emerged. Under neoliberalism, auditing has been rapidly extended to a very wide range of issues, far beyond the monetary accounting with which it began (Power, 1997).

Two developments in the education sector in rich countries gave a sharp edge to these pressures. The first was the growing attention by policymakers to multivariate quantitative research on school and teacher 'effectiveness'. This research treats schools and teachers as bearers of variables (attitudes, qualifications, strong leadership, etc.) to be correlated with pupil outcomes, measured on standardized tests. This gave an educational interpretation to the managerialist idea – derived from the muddled discourse of 'excellence' in corporate management – that there is always a 'best practice' that can be instituted and audited from above.

The second development was neoliberal governance of teaching itself. This is different from the professional form of control-at-a-distance. Market-oriented neoliberalism is profoundly suspicious of professionalism; it regards professions as anti-competitive monopolies. Specifically, neoliberalism distrusts teachers. This has gone further in some countries than others, as Doherty and McMahon (2007) observe in a comparison of Scotland with England; but the trend is general.

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Under a neoliberal regime, educational institutions must *make themselves auditable*. The audit culture in education has included the push for national testing, for 'league tables' of schools considered as firms competing with each other, and for the creation of the teacher registration institutions which were deliberately separated from teacher education institutions. The lists of competencies for teachers these institutions produce are also lists of auditable performances.

The consequences for teacher education are potentially very large. A list of auditable competencies can become the whole rationale of a teacher education programme. There is no need, in such a model, for any conception of Education as an intellectual discipline. There is no need for cultural critique, since the market, aggregating individual choices, decides what services are wanted and what are not. There is a limited role for educational research, mainly to conduct positivist studies to discover 'best practice'.

There is still a need to teach specific curriculum areas, so subject-specific knowledge and skills are needed. Technical skills, including competence in new technologies, are required. Those are the main services that schools offer to the market and there will be a continuing demand for them. But there is no need for the competent teacher to be able to reflect on the bodies of knowledge from which the school curriculum derives. That is the business of the central authorities, which audit the outcomes of the schools' work. Teacher-generated curriculum becomes an absurdity, because it cannot be competitively assessed. In short, under the new regime of educational governance, the humanist model of the good teacher becomes an anachronism. What, exactly, replaces it? I now turn to the answer given by the teacher registration bodies themselves.

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Part 2: how the good teacher is defined in the new registration regime

The most important definitions of the good teacher current in Australian education are the Standards documents of the new registration bodies. These follow a common format, a result of the 2003 Ministerial Council agreement, though they have many variations in detail.

The Standards documents consist of lists of sentences or clauses which state something that teachers do, or should do. For instance:

> Develop a calm and approachable demeanour. (Tasmania: graduate level, B.3 indicator 4)
>
> Teachers are familiar with curriculum statements, policies, materials and programs associated with the content they teach. (Victoria: full registration level, col. 2 no. 4)
>
> Initiate or lead the implementation of policies and processes to integrate ICT into the learning environment. (NSW: professional leadership level, no. 1.4.4)

The terser documents have about 30 such statements, the more expansive about 130, at each of four career levels. The statements are classified under broad headings such as 'Professional Knowledge', 'Professional Practice' and 'Professional Engagement'; these headings vary slightly from state to state, but have much in common.

The substantive sentences have no connection with each other. They are simply dot points. You could go on adding more dot points – as some state committees obviously have – or you could subtract them, without affecting the framework. The lists do not come from any systematic view of Education as a field of knowledge.

Parallel lists of statements are offered at each of four levels, from just-graduated to 'leadership'. The statements at the top levels are on the whole vaguer than those at the

lower levels. Nevertheless the idea that teachers can be sorted into a hierarchy of professional levels is a major formal component of the notion of standards made operational by the Institutes. The stratification of the workforce that is sought by neoliberal agendas of individual competition among workers is thus built into the definition of teacher professionalism.

In content, the lists are hybrid. Let us take, as a reasonably typical example, the Victorian Institute of Teaching's (2008) *Standards for Graduating Teachers*, which consists of 48 statements listed under eight 'standards'. Taking the theme of 'Professional knowledge', we find 20 statements, of rather different types:

(a) summaries of the educational literature that trainee teachers should have studied and absorbed (e.g. 'Have a sound knowledge of current learning theories and of pedagogical models from which they draw their practice');
(b) field-specific knowledges (e.g. 'Be aware of the key concepts, structure and developments in their content areas');
(c) generalized educational approaches (e.g. 'Know how to integrate learning and student understanding across a number of content areas');
(d) specific pieces of know-how needed to operate in a school (e.g. 'Be aware of tools and practices for assessing, recording and reporting student learning progress to parents and other stakeholders'); and
(e) statements of attitudes or beliefs that teachers should hold (e.g. 'Regard all students as capable of learning and demonstrate an understanding of, and commitment to, equity in their practice').

Some sentences are hybrid within themselves. From the same list, 'Be aware of how curriculum and assessment is structured to support learning' suggests a piece of organizational know-how. But it also embeds an attitude, i.e. accepting that curriculum and assessment *are* structured to support learning. Would a student teacher who concluded that the current system of assessment actively *interferes with* learning (as it probably does, for at least half the students in our schools), meet the professional standard? I would hope so, but the Standards documents do not encourage me to believe so. The cautions, admonitions and invitations to conformity heavily outnumber the invitations to take wing.

In this respect the Standards documents are very traditional. They contain the mixture of background knowledge, pedagogical skills, organizational know-how, ideology and social conformity that has always been expected of the workforce of a mass school system, since the nineteenth century. The main rationale of these documents, thus, is an organizational requirement.

They are hybrid because school teaching itself involves a hybrid labour process. As every close-focus study of school life shows, teaching's daily reality is an improvised assemblage of a very wide range of activities. This is probably true of all professions, to some extent, but is a central fact about teaching, that has been recognized for a good while (Connell, 1985). The fact that different state committees, made up of experienced teachers and administrators, came up with different dot-point lists, *which sound equally convincing*, is itself a very good indication of the improvised multiplicity of practices involved in teaching.

In other respects, however, the Standards documents reveal something new. They include some reflective-practitioner terms, indicating the range of outlooks within the committees drawing them up. But their language is much more strongly influenced by corporate managerialism. The texts are heavy with ''challenges', 'goals', 'stakeholders',

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'partnerships', 'strategies', 'commitment', 'capacity', 'achievable', 'effective', 'flexible', and 'opportunities'.

These terms have a powerful rhetorical effect. They construct the good teacher as an entrepreneurial self, forging a path of personal advancement through the formless landscape of market society with its shadowy stakeholders and its endless challenges and opportunities. It is telling that the Victorian document from which I have been quoting frequently mentions 'profession' but never mentions 'union'.

The Standards statements include a lot of the organizational common-sense of school teaching and teacher education. They have been welcomed by some as a public definition of professionalism that displays the complex work that teachers do, and the difficulty of doing it well. Given how fiercely teachers in public schools have been abused by the political Right over the last 30 years, this is helpful. The Standards may also help protect education against abuses of the 'charismatic' image of the good teacher, where politicians in search of publicity throw untrained youngsters into very difficult teaching situations on the Hollywood principle that natural talent will triumph in the last reel.

But such benefits come at a price. The Standards framework embeds the neoliberal distrust of teachers' judgment. What teachers do is decomposed into specific, auditable competencies and performances. The framework is not only specified in managerialist language. It embeds an individualized model of the teacher that is deeply problematic for a public education system. The arbitrariness of the dot-point lists means that any attempt to enforce them, on the practice of teachers or on teacher education programmes, will mean an arbitrary narrowing of practice. This cannot be a good thing to do, when in conditions of global integration and social diversity, education needs to become culturally richer.

Part 3: towards a new understanding of good teachers

The divisiveness of the neoliberal agenda for education is clear, and many experienced educators are deeply unhappy with it. But there is not yet a substantial alternative to offer. In the complex task of defining educational futures, an important focus is to develop a better conception of 'good teachers'. In this section I offer a line of thought covering four key issues that have emerged in recent research and debate about teachers.

1. The work of teaching

Teaching is a form of labour, undertaken in specific workplaces, in certain employment relations. Teacher education *is* the making of a workforce. As Reid (2003) argues, we need an analysis of this labour process in education, if we are to get beyond the micro focus of most recent research on teaching. Indeed, I would argue that analysis of teaching as work is the most useful starting-point for any attempt to understand good teaching.

The Standards statements do recognize this dimension of teaching, when they refer to the capacities needed to operate in a school environment. But they only acknowledge the labour process in a limited way, and we need to broaden the vision. For instance, school teaching is *embodied* labour, in which the physical presence of the teacher in interaction with the student is important (Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003). Energy, movement, expression, and fatigue all matter. In one of the most striking studies ever done about teacher quality, Grace (1978) interviewed teachers in London inner-city schools nominated by their principals as 'good teachers'. He found that they were steadily burning themselves out, becoming exhausted trying to respond to the endless demands of total involvement.

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What is the use of any model of the good teacher where the good teachers self-destruct? This is a hidden risk in the current pressure on teachers (in universities too) to be entrepreneurs, endlessly rising to 'challenges', doing more with less, endlessly competing for advancement. Good teaching must be *sustainable*; and that can only be planned when we see teaching as a practicable labour process.

Further, teaching involves a great deal of emotion work (Hebson, Earnshaw & Marchington, 2007; Connell, 1985). Classroom life involves a flow of emotions, both on the part of the teachers and the pupils, ranging from simple likes and dislikes to enthusiasm, anxiety, boredom, joy, fear and hope. Any teacher has to manage this flow, and make it productive for the pupils' learning and survivable for herself or himself. Learning to do this is a large part of the proverbial 'first year out', the early stage of a teaching career.

The emotional aspect of teachers' labour process can be included in competency models – the Standards documents just discussed have occasional statements like 'Develop a calm and approachable demeanour'. But such dimensions are extremely difficult to assess, and under pressure are likely to be sidelined by other issues, especially test performance. A frightening recent study of 'capability' proceedings in English schools, concerning teachers charged with failing to perform their duties to a professionally acceptable standard (Hebson, Earnshaw & Marchington, 2007), shows the systemic risk. Emotion work was central to the professional self-image of the teachers concerned; they saw themselves as providing necessary support for the children. But to performance-oriented school principals and centralized monitoring mechanisms, these teachers were failing to teach to the test.

A study of restructuring in the same country (Stevenson, 2007) showed a re-alignment of teaching focussed on what neoliberal management regarded as the core task of teaching, i.e. the technical part. This removed or downplayed the 'pastoral' functions (English education's traditional terminology for emotion work). This may improve a school's competitive position in the league tables. It is difficult to believe it results in better education for the children.

Neoliberal personnel management strives to define the worker as an entrepreneurial individual, just as neoliberal industrial policy worldwide, in education as in other industries, tries to eliminate the collective agency of workers expressed through unions (Compton and Weiner, 2008). How much the labour process of teaching has changed recently under neoliberal pressure is open to debate. (For the spectrum of views and evidence see Mahoney, Hextall & Menter, 2004; Robertson, 2000; Sammons et al., 2007; Stoddard & Kuhn, 2008.) What is clear, however, is the agenda of individualization. Institutionally, the Standards documents define the object of registration and evaluation as an individual teacher. Commercial popular culture, similarly, defines the good teacher as a charismatic individual.

Yet even the single-teacher classroom is part of a structured institution, the school, and the teacher is part of a local staff. School and staff are parts of larger institutional systems and workforces. The familiar 'outcomes' of education are strongly defined by this structured environment, including the very measures of student performance used to assess individual teachers. Standardized tests of educational achievement are, to a striking degree, artefacts of an institutional system set up to create competition and difference.

Much of what happens in the daily life of a school involves the *joint* labour of the staff, and the staff's *collective* relationship to the *collective* presence of the students (their social class backgrounds, gender, ethnicity, regional culture, religion; and their current peer group life, hierarchies and exclusions, bullying, cooperation, and so on). Much of the learning that school pupils do results from the shared efforts of a group of staff, from

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interactive learning processes among the students, and (as the idea of the 'hidden curriculum' indicates) from the working of the institution around them.

So whether an individual teacher appears to be performing well depends a great deal on what *other* people are doing. The Standards documents, and the new generation of teacher evaluation schemes, elaborately define the 'accomplished teacher' as an individual – but say nothing about the 'accomplished department' or the 'accomplished school'. It was shown in industrial sociology, decades ago, that in the large-scale collective labour processes characteristic of the modern economy, it is impossible to measure the contribution of any *individual* worker to output. Therefore attempts to establish income differentials have become fundamentally irrational (i.e. exercises in social power, not the rational determination of value). Neoliberal teacher evaluation schemes face the same paradox, and cannot overcome it.

Recognition of the collective labour of teachers is essential for a better understanding of good teaching. It is often the group of teachers, and the institution they work in, that are effective or not effective. The task of improving teaching, accordingly, cannot be understood only as a matter of motivating or re-skilling individuals. Indeed, some of the schemes to do this (such as the Business Council's desire to cream off an elite) may be extremely damaging to the real work of schools.

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2. *The occupational dynamics of teaching*

Conceptions of professionalism have been important to teachers in the past. But the idea of teaching as a profession has always been ambivalent; it may enshrine dependence as much as autonomy. In neoliberal market society, it is ambivalent in a new way. Definitions of professionalism in the Standards documents display the complexity of teachers' work, but also enshrine the neoliberal distrust of professions. They codify teachers' work and teacher education in such a way as to make them auditable and allow control at a distance.

Therefore how teacher professionalism is defined, and by whom, is important. If teachers' occupational identity is defined from outside, by the power of the state or the pressure of the market, it is likely to be limited in important ways. The capacity to talk back to management, to dissent, or to follow independent judgment, is not likely to bulk large in such definitions of teaching. Yet this may be crucial on educational grounds, allowing teachers to pursue the interests of the pupils they actually have in front of them.

Current mainstream curriculum and assessment are largely constructed around the model of an academically engaged pupil, who will 'succeed' on the tests. Such pupils are much more common in schools serving economically and culturally privileged clienteles. Teachers engaged in the education of children from other social backgrounds and with other interests need a model of professionalism that gives them room for manoeuvre, in order to teach well.

The Apology delivered by the Prime Minister in early 2008 helps to define the point. Australia's institutional system got it appallingly wrong, for many Aboriginal children, in the past. The educational task now is not to insert Aboriginal children more insistently into an unchallenged Eurocentric system. It is to change the institutions of education to make them relevant to Aboriginal children.

The same goes for the other groups of children who are ill served by the hegemonic subject curriculum, the English-only schools, the system of competitive testing, the perverse staffing policies that concentrate experience where it is least needed, and the siphoning of public funds to subsidise privilege in private schools. We are not talking about a small group of the 'socially excluded' here, but about very large numbers of children in mainstream schools.

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Good teaching, then, is not only to a large degree collective labour, it needs also to be diverse. A well-functioning school needs a range of capabilities and performances among its teachers. Given the diversity of the pupils and their communities, a school should have among its teachers a range of ethnicities, class backgrounds, gender and sexual identities, age groups and levels of experience. Any definition of teacher quality, any system of monitoring or promotion, that tends to impose a *single* model of excellence on the teaching workforce – whatever that model may be – is likely to be damaging to the education system as a whole.

Professionalism with that scope and variety needs to be supported by a lively occupational culture among teachers. Occupational culture is not a focus of current discussions of teacher quality, but it should be. It includes the shared social identity of teachers; the informal processes by which practical know-how is passed to new teachers in on-the-job learning (a major part of teacher education, which formal teacher education can support); the occupational expertise, that is referred to in Standards statements, and on which pupils rely especially when they don't come from families with advanced education; and the meta-competencies (defined below) that allow the strategic use of specific competencies.

A lively occupational culture among teachers is not a given. It needs to be fostered, and it can be damaged. The market-based restructuring of technical and further education in the last generation has gone a long way to destroying the occupational culture of vocational and inclusive teaching in that sector, as the study by Clark (2003) shows. University teaching too has been impacted by neoliberal restructuring, with rising workloads, deteriorating staff/student ratios, more precarious employment, and increasing pressure for competitive auditable performance. Australian schools at present have not been ravaged to the same extent, but there is no reason to think they are immune. Weber's (2007) review of international research on teachers under neoliberalism suggests widespread tension and dissatisfaction. Fostering, rather than eroding, teachers' occupational culture is likely to be important for preserving the *resilience* of teachers in the face of tough teaching situations; which as Sammons et al. (2007) point out in the UK, is an important resource in disadvantaged schools.

An occupational culture grows out of a collective history, but it will not be a resource if it is stuck in the past. One of the significant ways in which the social situation of teachers changes is the range of situations in which they teach. This is illustrated by Hoadley's (2003) observations of two schools in post-Apartheid South Africa, one teaching in English and the other in Xhosa. With approximately double the class size, and one-third of the actual instruction time for any child, the latter has to use batch methods while the former can use individual pacing. Yet it is the second school that has a stronger culture of collaboration among the teachers.

The institutional context changes over time, and the formal school system occupies less of the terrain of education than in previous generations. Teaching also occurs in private vocational colleges, community and leisure organizations, industrial and commercial companies, on-line, and in a range of other settings. Doubtless most of this concerns adult learners, but even in the education of children, schools are not the only significant setting for teaching. (Consider coaching in sports, for instance – Light, 2008.)

With the continuing turnover in the school workforce, and the likely increase of part-time teaching under neoliberalism, it is increasingly likely that school teachers, or people qualified to teach in schools, will be called to teach in non-school environments. An occupational culture resilient enough to transfer between different industrial situations is therefore a social asset. We need to evolve forms of professionalism capable of doing this. The version

of professionalism embedded in Standards statements and accreditation processes, oriented as they are to school system authorities, is not suited to this kind of adaptation.

3. The intellectual structure of education

One of the virtues of the scholar-teacher model was its clear account of Education as a field of knowledge. The reflective-practitioner approach, though less interested in the overall organization of knowledge, has focussed on how occupational knowledge can be developed in teachers' practice.

The neoliberal agenda and the competent-teacher model have abandoned these problems. The 'competencies' statements produced by the Institutes reveal no underlying idea of a field of knowledge; they are dot-point lists. The audit culture in education construes teachers as technicians, enacting pre-defined 'best practice' with a pre-defined curriculum measured against external tests – a situation for which skill, but not intelligence, is required.

Why should our thinking on these problems have intellectual substance? For two connected reasons: what teachers do, and what they are. What teachers do in schools is never just conveying a set of facts to pupils. Teachers necessarily *interpret* the world for, and with, their pupils. This is obvious in early childhood education. But it is equally true in the most technical subjects in high school, where interpretation is embedded in the language, selection of objects of knowledge, and mental operations characteristic of a given subject area.

Interpreting the world for others, and doing it well, requires not just a skill set but also a knowledge of how interpretation is done, of the cultural field in which it is done, and of the other possibilities of interpretation that surround one's own.

This requirement helps to define teaching as intellectual labour and teachers as a group of intellectual workers. Not just 'knowledge workers' in a knowledge economy, but specifically *intellectual* workers. Teachers in their daily work operate with forms of understanding as well as bodies of facts, and necessarily transform the culture as they convey it to the next generation. To do this well requires endless initiative and invention – the constant improvisation revealed in studies of the teaching labour process. It also requires a depth of knowledge about the culture, and a practice of critical analysis, which only an intellectually substantial programme of teacher education will support.

Here we cannot afford to be nostalgic. What counts as intellectually substantial now is different from what it was in the days of Matthew Arnold or John Dewey, or even R. S. Peters and Paulo Freire. We live in a world that is consciously post-colonial and post-patriarchal, while old social inequalities (including those of gender, class and global location) are re-generated in new forms.

The old models of knowledge on which both the subject curriculum in high schools, and the scholar-teacher model in universities, were based, have been subjected to compelling critiques. The critiques include feminist analyses of patriarchal knowledge (Crowley and Himmelweit, 1992), and post-modern incredulity towards the 'grand narratives' of progress and enlightenment (Lyotard, 1984). As Hopenhayn (2001) points out for Latin America, the rise of neoliberalism has destroyed many of the assumptions on which the social sciences previously rested. Meanwhile new frameworks of knowledge have arisen: post-colonial theory, indigenous knowledge, and machine-based information systems. A host of problems surround them (see e.g. Odora Hoppers, 2002 on the relations between knowledge systems), but it is clear the old certainties about knowledge are gone. Educational philosophy has begun to reckon with this fundamental fact (Peters, 1995); teacher education now faces the same issue.

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A contemporary teacher education programme has to orient itself to the world its students will actually be working in. Good teacher education is intellectually exciting. It has to be, because teachers as intellectual workers are not served by a static body of knowledge. It has been increasingly recognized that teachers in schools can and should function as their own researchers. To take just one example: in relation to ICT, both hardware and software change so fast that the training given in initial teacher education will be obsolete in just a few years. Teachers need the capacity to research emerging knowledge, techniques and machinery that we cannot possibly define in advance, and apply them to the needs of student groups that we also cannot predict. Knowledge and its applications in teaching are inherently dynamic.

4. The process of education

In much of the academic thinking about education, and in most of the public debate, education is understood fundamentally as social reproduction – transmitting the culture to a new generation, producing the workforce, or handing on the traditions. In a narrower sense (compatible with the idea of reproduction), education is seen as a neutral process of instruction which is shaped and re-shaped by forces outside itself – technological change, economic development, demographic shifts, and so forth.

There is some truth in these ideas; but more fundamentally still, education is a process of *forming* a culture. Teaching is not only the training of young people in defined practices, it is about the creation of capacities for practice (Connell, 1995). Education is a process that creates social reality, necessarily producing something new. Education is part of the process that steers a society through historical time. Questions about the goals of education are questions about the direction in which we want a social order to move, given that societies cannot avoid changing. This is where questions of privilege and social justice in education arise; they are fundamental to the project, not add-ons.

This reflection opens a new approach to the question of teacher competencies. Many of the problems in the 'competent teacher' model arise because of the lack of attention to the *relations between* competencies. For instance: the question of how to help teachers shift from skill set A to skill set B, when A has become obsolete; the question of the balance between technical skills in teaching an examined syllabus, and the emotional labour involved in pastoral work with pupils; the failure to recognize conflicting definitions of competencies, and conflicts over who has the right to define them – managers, classroom teachers, children, parents, or outside authorities.

We can say, then, that some fundamental questions about teaching concern what might be called 'meta-competencies', i.e. capacities to balance, choose among and deploy specific competencies. In the light of what was said above about the labour process, meta-competencies may be collective as much as they are individual. When we speak of the need for teachers to study teaching (as, to do them justice, some of the Standards statements do), or to be reflective about their own work, we are also thinking at this level.

This brings us back to the argument about why teaching matters. At the start of this paper I quoted the OECD (2005) report on teachers that emphasised teacher quality as a determinant of pupil outcomes because social background and student abilities are not open to policy influence. This is an extraordinarily blinkered perspective. Social background and student abilities *are* open to change, and can be changed on a very large scale. It is a question of how a society's resources are deployed – what collective decisions are made about social steering. The global creation of mass literacy; the vast changes in girls' and women's education around the world in the last two generations; the reduction

of class inequalities in access to secondary schooling – these are all examples of collective decisions about the steering of a society which profoundly changed learning outcomes.

An adequate concept of good teaching, then, includes teachers' roles in the social action required to create good learning environments for children. We currently have good learning environments in many of the schools serving privileged classes in Australia, as in other wealthy countries, but not in most of the schools serving working-class communities and especially the most marginalized. This issue cannot be separated from teachers' responsibilities on the grounds of professional neutrality; it determines the everyday reality of teaching. Indeed, who better than teachers to know what is needed, to create good learning environments for children? Teachers, I would argue, have a collective responsibility here, and teacher education has a responsibility to support it.

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Conclusion: goals and voices

In this paper I have not tried to define a new model of the good teacher, but to explain why we need to think about this question, and indicate some of the major issues and research literatures that have to be taken into account. On this argument, we do not need a picture of 'the good teacher' in the singular, but pictures of good teachers in the plural, and good teaching in the collective sense. We need models of teacher education that will support creative, diverse and just teaching practices in an educational future that we can expect to look different from the educational past.

Discussion of these issues will need multiple voices. Neoliberal ideology and practice give a central place to managerial voices, often in the impersonal form of accounting practices. A lively occupational culture will support teachers' voices in educational policy-making. As Scanlon (2004) and Groundwater-Smith (2008) argue, we also need to include the pupil's voices, however tricky this is to do in practice. When children do have the opportunity, they often express different perspectives on teaching from those familiar among adults.

The presence of teacher registration bodies is now an established fact; this is not open to change in the short term. But the way these bodies work certainly is open to debate. For instance, the new practice of accrediting teacher education programs in terms of point-by-point compliance with a list of teacher competencies, of the kind discussed above, is an extremely questionable way of operationalizing teacher quality. One of the ways good teaching might be defined, with some impact, is to propose better ways that registration bodies might do their work.

The impact of teacher registration gives a certain urgency to the issues discussed in this paper. Education is, by and large, a process with long-term and indirect effects; teacher education even more so. But the effects, over time, can be vast. And we are in, possibly, a decisive moment, where the neoliberal agenda and control mechanisms have gained a grip on schooling but do not yet have complete control; and where, as we see in the global financial melt-down and the current recession, some of the inherent problems of the market agenda have come to public consciousness (Rudd, 2009). It is time for the broadest possible debate on good teaching and how it can be supported.

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Note

1. Known as MCEETYA, the ministerial council on employment, education, training and youth affairs. After the abolition of the more widely representative Schools Commission, this became the major forum for Australian educational policymaking in the last two decades.

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