Taking Teachers Out of the Equation: Constructions of Teachers in Education Policy Documents Over a Ten-year Period

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Abstract

Education policy documents recently have placed great emphasis on teacher quality in the belief that 'education of the highest quality requires teachers of the highest quality' (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000). This paper traces the discourses on teachers constructed in policy documents in order to establish what is meant by 'teachers of the highest quality'. It employs Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate the discursive construction of teachers' professional identities in three policy documents released over the last decade. This analysis finds that, despite recognition being given to the importance of teachers in all three documents, teachers' professional autonomy is effectively curtailed as they are increasingly being 'taken out of the equation' in education policy decision-making. The paper concludes with suggestions for ways in which teachers may challenge these constructions and work to reconstruct teachers as active voices in the policy-making process.

Introduction

Education has not been immune to the meta-discourse on 'quality' that has crossed many domains of public policy (Vidovich & Porter 1999). The last twenty years have seen a plethora of education policies and documents that have placed great emphasis on quality. Such policies and documents include among others: *Strengthening Australia's Schools* (Dawkins 1988), *Teacher Quality: an issues paper* (Schools Council 1989), *Quality of Teaching An Issue for All* (Dawkins 1990), *A Class Act Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession* (Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee 1998), *Teachers for the 21st Century: Making the Difference* (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000), *Quality*

Matters Revitalising teaching: Critical times, critical choices Report of the Review of Teacher Education (Ramsey 2000), and *Professional Standards for Teachers: Guidelines for Professional Practice* (Education Queensland 2003). All these documents see quality schooling as being of national economic significance and feature calls for increased performance and productivity in schools. More recent documents have focussed on improving teacher quality in the belief that 'education of the highest quality requires teachers of the highest quality' (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000). Thus, improving teacher quality is a key issue in Australian educational policy. Indeed, all education policies work, implicitly or explicitly, to construct a particular version of the 'good' teacher. Such constructions of teacher quality position teachers within the education policy-making process in particular ways. This paper traces constructions of teachers in three policy documents released in the last decade in order to investigate how they position teachers in the policy-making process. It shows that in each document, teachers, as a group, were positioned in a way that limited their participation in education policy-making processes, that is, teachers were 'taken out of the equation'[1].

The paper is based on the theoretical assumption that people, including teachers and educational policy-makers, live and act within a textually-mediated social world (Smith 1990). As Luke (2002) notes, advanced capitalist societies are characterised by new forms of social life that turn on text and discourse. Such societies are enabled by discourse saturated environments, or semiotic economies, where 'text, language and discourse have become the principal modes of social relations, civic and political life, economic behaviour and activity, where means of production and modes of information become intertwined in analytically complex ways' (Luke 2002, p. 98). Indeed, discursive effects saturate all other moments in the social process, 'internalis[ing] in some sense everything that occurs as other moments' (Harvey 1996, p. 80). Therefore, while it is important not to privilege the discursive over other moments in social life, it is necessary to recognise that an analysis of the discursive moment is essential to furthering understandings of social life. That is, an analysis of the discursive constructions of the 'good' teacher is essential to an understanding of the calls for improved teacher quality.

Such an analysis is premised on an understanding of policy as discourse, where discourses are understood to be forms of social practice 'subject to analysable rules and transformations' (Foucault 1976, p. 26) that allow or forbid the 'what of knowledge' (Merquior 1985, p. 152). Discourses constitute social realities (Fairclough 1995b, Miller & Glassner 1997) through cultural struggles over meaning. These struggles allow for the possibility of multiple and competing, or alternative, discourses. Education policy, therefore, is not monolithic (Carlson 1993) but many layered (Taylor 1997). That is, policies are constitutive of more and more overlapping

layers of discourse (Grundy 1994) carrying many unequally weighted discursive threads negotiated through struggle (Humes 1997). Official policy texts are the successful discourse in this struggle and suppress, or exclude, other, alternative discourses.

In addition, discourses constitute identities (Fairclough 1995b, Gee 1996, 1999) that position the subject in possibly contradictory ways. Such positionings may be homogenizing, representing particular groups of people in ways that privilege the voice of some groups over others. Thus, policy discourses are forms of social practice, subject to particular rules and transformations through which particular representations of truth and self are constructed within particular power relations (Allan 1998, Ball 1993, Schram 1993). Policy discourses work to define not only what can be said and thought, but also who can speak, where, when and with what authority (Ball 1993). Policy discourses on teacher quality, therefore, define both what quality teaching can and should be, as well as who can and should speak with authority on teacher quality. This paper investigates the discursive positioning of teachers in policy documents not only by tracing constructions of the 'good' teacher in educational policies but also through the analysis of the authoritative voice in the policy-making process.

CDA: a tool for policy analysis

The discursive positioning of teachers in policy documents is explored through the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA has been demonstrated to be an eminently suitable tool for critical policy analysis (Thomas 2002, 2004, in press 2005). Critical Discourse Analysis begins with a discourse related problem in social life, for example, the construction of teachers in policy documents. It seeks to 'contribute to an awareness of what is [the problem], how it has come to be and what it might become, on the basis of which people may begin to make and remake their lives' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999, p. 4). Further, as a tool for critical social science, CDA is concerned with 'the destabilisation of "authoritative" discourse' (Apple 1989, p. 131) as it investigates 'how power, identity and social relations are negotiated, are legitimated, and are contested toward political ends' (Apple 1996, p. 130). As such, CDA is a vehicle for public accountability and critique (Maclure 1994), providing a useful 'analytical and political tool for talking back to public discourse ... and [for] questioning its constructions of power and agency' (Luke 1997, p. 365).

Critical Discourse Analysis is concerned with how discourses mediate between texts and culture. It rejects the notion of rigid barriers between micro and macro methods of analysis (Fairclough 1995a, 1998). Rather, a critical discourse analyst is concerned with several levels of analysis and with the relations between these levels (Fairclough

2003). Indeed, a characteristic feature of Critical Discourse Analysis is the movement between the analyses of texts to that of broad social formations (Kamler, Comber & Cook 1997). In this way, CDA is a multidimensional method that includes one, or all, of the following: the analysis of texts by the identification of features of the text through which discourses may be traced; the analysis of discursive practices drawn on in the production and interpretation of texts and of the interrelationships between them, that is, an analysis of the interdiscursive nature of texts; and, finally, the analysis of social and cultural practices (Fairclough 1993, 1995a, 1998, 2001a). The following discussion includes all three levels of analysis. At the level of the text, various textual features, including repetition, deictic categories and presuppositions, are applied selectively in different policy texts, as not all features are relevant to the analysis of all texts (cf. Fairclough 2003, Gee 1999).

This paper outlines a critical discourse analysis of three policy texts in order to give an account of the discursive construction of teachers and its impact on teachers' authoritative voice in the policy-making process across the decade from 1992 to 2002. The three policy documents are *Shaping the Future* (Wiltshire, McMeniman & Tolhurst 1994), *Teachers for the 21st Century Making the Difference* (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000), and *Queensland the Smart State – Education and Training Reforms for the Future: A White Paper* (The State of Queensland 2002). Released either by the Commonwealth or Queensland governments, all three policies outlined significant education reforms. In addition, all three policies constructed deficit discourses on teachers, discourses that worked to marginalise teachers from policy-making processes, to 'take teachers out of the equation', at both national and state levels of education decision-making. The paper first describes the discourses on teachers constructed in each policy document. It then examines the interdiscursive connections between the policies and discusses the significance of these interconnections to the continued marginalisation of teachers from policy-making processes. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of these discourses for teacher professionalism.

The Wiltshire Report

The first policy released, and analysed in this paper, was *Shaping the Future*, often referred to as the Wiltshire Report (Wiltshire et al. 1994). The report was released as part of a review of the Queensland school curriculum, known as the Wiltshire Review, which was conducted between 1992 and 1994. Like all policy texts, the Wiltshire Report was polysemic (Ball 1993, McHoul 1984). That is, it was not restricted to a single, authoritative reading, to one true interpretation, but was open to a multitude of readings (Turner 1990). A critical discourse analysis of this report (cf. Thomas in press 2005, for a more detailed discussion of this analysis) showed how teachers were

positioned in two contradictory ways. Both positions constructed a deficit view of teachers, that is, a view of teachers as being not quite up to scratch.

On the one hand, teachers were described as responsible, competent professionals who ensured appropriate student development. The report recognised that 'teachers generally react[ed] to student needs altruistically and quietly' (Wiltshire et al. 1994, p. 197). In addition, they were seen to be key professionals with a crucial role to play in the new system proposed in the report. For example, the report stated that:

> a new curriculum for Queensland will provide the foundation for the future direction of schooling but, no matter how well developed and designed that curriculum becomes, the vital ingredient will always be the school environment and that crucial relationship between teacher and student (Wiltshire et al. 1994, p. viii).

However, although the report noted that teachers were to play a vital part in the proposed changes, this role was to be one of collaboration with other agencies, especially in professional partnerships between parents and the community at the school level. Teachers, it seemed, were not to, could not, play this key role alone.

On the other hand, the report called for increased measures of accountability of teachers and schools. These measures were deemed to be necessary because 'many general classroom teachers are not well equipped to cater for diverse student needs' (Wiltshire et al. 1994, p. 162). That is, the report constructed a deficit model of teachers and questioned their professional expertise. Teachers were criticised for failing to develop, and to articulate to the wider community, their knowledge about pedagogy, subjects, disciplines, or learning areas, and educational policy issues. Teachers' willingness to collaborate in the desired partnerships was questioned. The report warned against teachers acting adversarily rather than collaboratively (Wiltshire et al. 1994, p. 206). Indeed, teachers were depicted as arrogant and schools as 'fortresses (with the drawbridge being lowered on rare occasions to allow a decorous inspection of exhibits), or lairds' manors (in which parents occupy the downstairs and undertake menial tasks for the gentry)!' (Wiltshire et al. 1994, p. 161).

In addition, teachers' professional knowledge was devalued, while at the same time privileging the knowledge of others. For example, the report suggested that a school-based approach to curriculum development may be 'a wasteful use of resources, and *presume too much of the capacity of teachers and schools'* [emphasis added] (Wiltshire et al. 1994, p. 193). Teacher judgements were questioned further when the report justified the introduction of a standardised testing and a reporting framework. It noted that:

> a feature which could be regarded simultaneously as a strength and weakness of the Student Reporting Framework is that it relies on teacher judgment... What individual teacher assessment can not do is to rapidly provide a valid and reliable comparison of the levels of student achievement in her/his classroom with the levels of achievement at other locations throughout the state. In order for a whole system to engage in self-monitoring and accountability to the public, it is necessary to introduce a form of moderation, external assessment, or some other monitoring mechanism (Wiltshire et al. 1994, p. 105).

The new reporting framework was, therefore, a means through which teachers' work was to be regulated and accountability ensured.

Further constraints on teachers' work were created with the recommendation for the establishment of a central, intersystemic, statutory authority to be responsible for the development of a core compulsory curriculum for all levels of schooling. This curriculum authority was to centralise control of curriculum development and implementation. The recommendation for such a body created a distinction between curriculum development, which was the responsibility of the central authority, and curriculum delivery, which was the responsibility of schools. Consequently, teachers' curriculum decision-making was limited to issues of curriculum delivery only. Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) note 'when design and production separate, design becomes a means for controlling the actions of others … and there is no longer room for the "producers" to make the design "their own", to add their own accent' (p. 7). Similarly, when curriculum development is separated from curriculum delivery, the ability of teachers to make the curriculum their own is limited and the development of curriculum becomes the means of controlling their work.

Thus, teachers were positioned ambiguously by the discourse constructed in the Wiltshire Report. On the one hand, teachers were constructed as altruistic, caring professionals who were significant to the success of the proposed reforms. On the other hand, they were depicted as intransigent workers who required increased accountability measures and whose professional knowledge and expertise was questioned. This questioning resulted in a diminishing of teacher authority that resulted in their marginalisation from future decision-making on the school curriculum. Thus, while the Wiltshire Report's preferred discourse featured elements both of accountability and of support, the accountability measures, introduced through the proposed authority, were to have the most dramatic impact on teachers and schools. Ultimately, the report's preferred discourse became one of regulation and control.

Teachers for the 21st Century

The second policy document analysed in this paper, *Teachers for the 21st Century Making the Difference* (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000), was released by the Australian Commonwealth government at the end of 2000. The policy outlined a program designed to improve teacher quality and to increase the effectiveness of schools. Thus, from the beginning, the policy established teacher quality as its focus. Indeed, its introduction stated that:

> education of the highest quality is the foundation of all our futures. It is education which empowers us to rise to the challenges of social, cultural, economic and technological change that we confront today … education of the highest quality requires teachers of the highest quality (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000, p. 3).

The policy was characterised by the repetition of key passages. The presence of repetition indicates a preoccupation with some aspect of reality. It serves to set up a common sense understanding of meanings constructed in the text. Such an understanding is privileged as uncontestable, and works to establish the authoritative voice within the discourse. That is, repetition constitutes 'a particular way of dividing up some aspect of reality which is built upon a particular ideological representation of that reality' (Fairclough 2001b, p. 96). It indicates a reality that is discursively constructed. *Teachers for the 21st Century* constructs a particular discourse on teachers and schools through the repetition of the description of the program, through the repeatedly stated need to raise education standards and so improve teacher quality.

The program was described as follows:

> *Teachers for the 21st Century* will improve teacher quality and increase the number of highly effective Australian schools in order to maximise student learning outcomes. It will do so by:
>
> • lifting the quality of teaching through targeted professional development and enhancing professional standards;
>
> • developing the skills of school leaders;
>
> • supporting quality school management; and
>
> • recognising and rewarding quality schools, school leaders and teachers.

(Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000, p. 3).

This description was repeated word for word three times throughout the report: in the introduction by the then Federal Minister for Education, in the Executive Summary, and in the body of the report when outlining the central purpose of the program.

The need to enhance or raise educational standards was repeated four times in the introduction. The policy identified the primary means by which educational standards were to be raised as being working with and through the teaching profession (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000, p. 12). However, as noted above, the quality of the teaching profession was seen as being problematic. Further, the report noted that 'there has been growing concern over the status and quality of the teaching profession' (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000, p. 11). Thus, the discursive construction of Australian schools in the report defined schools as having low standards, a situation that needed to be improved. The cause of these low standards was identified as being the quality of the teaching profession.

Improving teacher quality was central to the program outlined in the report. As the first point in the program description stated, teacher quality was to be lifted through 'targeted professional development and enhancing professional standards' (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000, p. 3). Subsequently, strategies for addressing the issue of Quality Teachers included plans to 'lift the skills of practising teachers in the key priority areas' (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000, p. 5) and to provide funding for the development of professional standards and certification. While the report (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000) noted that the Government provides support 'to enhance the skills and understandings of teachers' (p. 5), it stated that more needed to be done to 'promote the value and development of teaching standards and related certification' (p. 12). Indeed the need to raise professional standards through the development of standards and certification was stated repeatedly throughout the report.

The emphasis on standards and certification points to the construction of a discourse on teacher professional standards, a discourse that positions teachers in a particular way. Sachs (2003) notes that questions about professional control and ownership are inherent in discourses on professional teaching standards in that such discourses may provide a means for either reforming the profession or for introducing regulatory frameworks that limit the professional autonomy of the teachers. She notes also that the more managerial and externally regulated the standards, the more likely standards will be a means for controlling the profession. While *Teachers for the 21st Century* did acknowledge teachers' professional responsibility and expertise, it also emphasised the Government's role in improving teacher quality as it called for

'cooperative effort from the Commonwealth Government, State and Territory government and non-government education providers, schools, principals, professional associations and parents' (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000). Thus, the discourse on standards constructed in *Teachers for the 21st Century* positioned teachers as requiring external assistance in the development of professional standards. It was a discourse that provided a means for the regulation and control of teachers.

In this way, like the Wiltshire Report, *Teachers for the 21st Century* constructed a deficit discourse on teachers. The policy used repetition to construct a discourse on Australian teachers and schools that established as 'true' the low quality of teachers and the need both to improve teacher quality and to raise professional standards. Like the Wiltshire Report, the discourse on teachers constructed in *Teachers for the 21st Century* acknowledged the importance of teachers as the means to achieve this aim. However, the policy also repeatedly categorised teachers as a group that lacked the skills and understandings demanded by the current educational context. It was the (negative) evaluation of the Government that teachers needed to lift their skills and to enhance their understandings of teaching practice. Ultimately, *Teachers for the 21st Century* constructed a discourse on teachers that positioned them as needing regulation through the introduction of standards, and that curtailed their professional autonomy in decision-making processes.

The White Paper

The third policy document analysed is *Queensland the Smart State – Education and Training Reforms for the Future: A White Paper* (The State of Queensland 2002). This policy is frequently referred to as the ETRF (Education and Training Reforms Framework) or, simply, as the White Paper. It was released at the end of 2002, a decade after the start of the curriculum review that resulted in the Wiltshire Report. The paper outlined a vision for Queensland, the Smart State, that placed education and training at its heart, and so it would seem obvious that teachers would/should play a significant role in this vision. However, the construction of teachers and the role they were to play in the reform framework was not obvious when reading the White Paper. Indeed, the White Paper was notable for the absence of teachers. Absences and omissions are significant in a critical discourse analysis of texts, including policy documents, as omissions often result in ambiguity in meaning when the presuppositions underlying the text are not made explicit, resulting in guesses and assumptions based on commonsense (Fairclough 2001b). Further, Fairclough (2003) notes that when social groups are suppressed, or backgrounded, that is, mentioned somewhere but having to be inferred in one or more places, that group is excluded from the discourse. The following analysis examines the White Paper not only for any

discussion of teachers, but also, if teachers are absent, for the group that is constructed as the authoritative voices in the policy, as active in the reform process.

The authoritative voice in this policy is identified through an analysis of the 19 actions that are the focus of the White Paper. These actions feature the repetition of the introductory stem, 'We will'. As noted earlier such repetition indicates a preoccupation with some aspect of reality. The nineteen actions, therefore constructed a particular ideological reality of education, and of the authoritative actors in the education process. The authoritative actor in the proposed framework for reform was quite clearly identified in action 18, the only action that identified to whom 'we' refers. Action 18 reads 'The Government will foster a Community Commitment to young people by building partnerships at the local level' (The State of Queensland 2002, p. 24). That is, the Government was constructed in the ETRF policy as the authoritative voice in education decision-making. While the genre of a white paper would indicate, demand perhaps, such a positioning, closer analysis of the deictic category, the first person pronoun *we*, shows how the White Paper constructed a particular discourse that excluded teachers from the policy-making processes.

This document relied heavily on the use of the deictic category, *we*. Deictic categories are the orientational, or directional, features of language which 'bring in to focus some of the practices that organize consciousness socially and coordinate the orientation of subjects' (Smith 1990, p. 56). In particular, the use of the pronouns *I, we* and *you* work to construct a particular sense of the self (Allan 1998, Clark & Holquist 1984), of groups and of community (Fairclough 2003). In addition, they work to set up a deictic order in the text that positions readers in differentiated collective categories (van Leeuwen 1996) and encourages them to identify with the interests outlined in the truth claims on offer (Allan 1998). In so doing, the text constructs a particular reality, suspending and supplanting the possibility of multiple positions. This is particularly relevant to the discursive practices of policy-makers as they create a reality through the text of the policy document, constructing a publicly mandated discourse.

Further, deictic categories denote inclusivity or exclusivity (Fairclough 2001b). That is, the construction of a particular discourse positions some social groups inside, and others outside, that discourse. In the case of the ETRF policy, the use of *we* worked in both these ways. First, the use of *we* included the reader into the deictic order of the preferred discourse. That is, the reader was included as being in agreement with the constructions of education and the need for change. This use of *we,* and the associated *our,* was apparent in the Foreword of the policy, which began as follows:

> Many of us reflect on *our* years at school as amongst the best and most important years of *our* lives. If *we* look forward *we* see a world that is rapidly changing, and *we* know that if *we* are to keep up with the pace of change *we* too must change.
>
> It is important that *we* all work together to achieve this change. The Queensland Government will work with industry and the community to ensure that future generations gain the benefits of a rewarding and fulfilling education that sets the foundations for future success [emphasis added] (The State of Queensland 2002, p. 2).

Here, the deictic order of the policy was established. The reader was included in the Government's discourse. That is, the reader was positioned as being in agreement with the Government's proposed changes, which were presented as common-sense and thus as being unable to be contested or negotiated.

The second use of the deictic categories *we* and *our* was apparent in the Executive Summary, where the second paragraph declares, 'In Queensland – the Smart State – *we* are responding to these challenges by creating one of the most flexible education and training systems in Australia to ensure that *our* young people are equipped to lead the way into the future' [emphasis added] (The State of Queensland 2002, p. 6). Later in the Executive Summary, it became clearer to whom 'we' refers. The Government was responding to these challenges as the following extract shows:

> This White Paper reaffirms *the Government's* commitment to providing the very best education possible for every young Queenslander and outlines the actions to achieve this.
>
> *We* are building an unprecedented partnership between parents, students, state schools, non-state schools, TAFE, training providers, the Queensland Studies Authority, community organisations, universities, and employers to trial and implement the package of reforms outlined in this paper [emphasis added] (The State of Queensland 2002, p. 6).

Here, *we* was used to identify a particular group, the Government, as the key participant, excluding other groups. Thus, the ETRF policy constructed a publicly mandated, or official, discourse on education and training as being in need of reform, reform that the Government had identified and was committed to provide. In this official discourse, the Government was constructed as both the authoritative voice of, and the active participant in, the educational reform process.

If the Government was constructed as the authoritative voice in this discourse, how were teachers constructed? The report's Executive Summary gave some indication announcing the building of 'an unprecedented partnership between parents, students, *state schools, non-state schools*, TAFE, training providers, the Queensland Studies Authority, community organisations, universities, and employers' [emphasis added] (The State of Queensland 2002, p. 6). The words, 'state schools, non-state schools' were significant in that teachers were not clearly identified as a group with whom the Government was building this unprecedented partnership. Parents, students, training providers, and employers were identified as key stakeholders in this reform process. At first, teachers as a group appeared to be excluded as partners in the reform process. Indeed, it was only in the final paragraph in the policy that teachers were named as a group that was part of this partnership.

> We look forward to working together in partnership with parents, *teachers*, employers and the community to achieve these goals and help all young Queenslanders reach their full potential and prepare them for lifelong learning [emphasis added] (The State of Queensland 2002, p. 25).

Thus, the discourse on education in the White Paper constructed a reality that identified education and training as needing reform. The Government was positioned as being the authoritative voice and active participant in the policy-making process. This discourse excluded teachers or, on the one occasion that they were mentioned in the nineteen actions, positioned them as passive participants in the educational reforms outlined in the policy. The discourse reflects an executive model of policy-making, where the focus is on executive decision-making, rather than on 'the talent, wisdom, skills and vision of all those who are affected by policy' (Yeatman 1998, p. 17). Such a model gives limited legitimacy to the agency of public servants or service deliverers, that is, in the case of education policy, to teachers.

The Teacher's Authoritative Voice

The above analysis of the discursive constructions of teachers across three policy documents has shown that, throughout a ten-year period, education policies constructed deficit discourses on teachers that limited their authoritative voice in policy-making processes. These discourses described teachers as having low standards and as needing improvement. Such improvement would be gained from the introduction of increased measures of accountability and regulation through standards and certification. At the beginning of the ten-year period, such a deficit discourse was tempered by the positive, but contradictory, positioning of teachers also constructed in the Wiltshire Report. Similarly, *Teachers for the 21st Century Making the Difference* also acknowledged teachers' skills and understandings but, at the same time, these

skills were more strongly questioned. Indeed, this policy contained the most explicit statement about concerns for teacher quality. The increasing dominance of these deficit discourses led, at the end of the ten years, to the almost total omission of teachers in the White Paper. In this way, the discourses constructed in all documents, positioned teachers as needing regulation and/or support, and limited their authoritative voice in education policy-making processes. That is, teachers were taken out of the education policy equation.

Similar discursive constructions of teachers are found in other work that looks at education reform. For example, Kirk & Macdonald (2001) found that, in the development of a new national curriculum for Health and Physical Education (HPE), teachers were tightly positioned as receivers and deliverers of curriculum. As a result, the teacher's authoritative voice on the curriculum was located in the local context of the implementation of reforms and teachers were limited to be co-producers of versions of schooling and curriculum. Subsequently, 'what [wa]s thinkable as HPE [and in the policies analysed above as curriculum and good teaching] ha[d] already been decided for teachers' (Kirk & Macdonald 2001, p. 563). Similarly, Weir (2003), has found, in her study of the New Basics reforms in Queensland, that while Education Queensland has opened new spaces for teachers in the Rich Tasks documents, these spaces are not boundless, providing evidence of an accountability approach to systemic reform.

However, as noted earlier, meanings and positionings constructed through discourse are the outcomes of cultural struggles. Consequently, they are often contradictory, partial, and incomplete (Fairclough 2001b, 2003, Gee 1999). For example, the analysis of the Wiltshire Report outlined above, noted that the report's discursive constructions of the good teacher were contradictory and positioned the teaching profession in at least two ways. Such contradictory discourses open spaces for contestation and for the construction of alternative discourses on teachers and teacher quality. Further, the presence of repetition in *Teachers for the 21st Century Making the Difference*, while indicating the construction of a particular discursive reality, also indicates the possibility of such a reality being contested through the construction of alternative or oppositional discourses (Fairclough 2001b). The following section discusses a possible alternative discourse that challenges the discourses on teachers and teacher quality traced in the three policy documents.

Reconstructing Teaching as an Activist Profession

An alternative discourse on teachers and teacher quality reconstructs teachers as authoritative voices in the policy-making process. It challenges the deficit discourses outlined above and questions the emphasis on standards and professional

development, pointing to limitations in its effectiveness (cf. Gerwitz 2000, Ramsey 2000, Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne 2002). Such a discourse recognises that an overemphasis on standards promotes understandings of quality teaching that contrasts with that of teachers themselves (Gerwitz 2000) and, as demonstrated in the analysis above, marginalises teachers in educational decision-making processes (Gerwitz 2000, Thomas 1999, 2002). An alternative discourse on teacher quality does not describe teachers as a group that is lacking in skills and in need of external regulation, but instead promotes the need for a strong and autonomous teaching profession. Such a profession would make explicit the norms of professional practice to which pupils are entitled, and of which the wider public has a legitimate right to be assured. It would support transparency about the social and professional expectations and obligations of teachers (Sachs 2001). A strong and autonomous teaching profession would take an active voice in debates on teacher quality and teacher professionalism (Australian College of Education 2001, Ingvarson 2001, Sachs 2001) in order to be proactive in the construction of education discourses in public debates (Hodgens, Green & Luke 1996), and so reclaim the authoritative voice in decision-making processes.

Recent work on activism (Sachs 2003, Yeatman 1998) is useful when considering ways to reconstruct teaching as an authoritative, active voice in education policy processes. Activism has been defined by Yeatman (1998) as a publicly declared 'commitment, statement of vision, declaration of values and offerings of strategic action' (p. 33) that is oriented to any aspect of the policy process. Activists engage actively and pragmatically with the policy process, taking a stand on policy issues that is consistent with such a values orientation. Similarly, Sachs (2003) notes that an activist teaching professional engages with, and responds to, issues that relate to education and schooling, reclaiming the professional agenda. Sachs further describes activist teaching professionals as being responsive and responsible, strategic and tactical, creating an environment of trust and mutual support as they engage in collective and collaborative action. The reconstruction of teaching as an activist profession requires teachers at all levels to rethink their professional identity. That is, teachers need to consider collectively how they define themselves, both in schools and in the wider community. Such a task is not easy, but it is essential if the teaching profession is to challenge the deficit discourses traced in the above analysis in order to frame future public agendas for schools and education, and so reestablish the teaching professional as a significant voice in the education policy equation.

Endnote

[1] 'Taking teachers out of the equation' was an expression used during a private telephone conversation with a senior officer with the Office of the Queensland Curriculum Council, the body that, at the time, was responsible for developing P-10 curriculum syllabuses in Queensland.

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