

Early Career Teachers in Australia: A Critical Policy Historiography

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Abstract:

Amid the growing 'teacher quality' discourse, early career teachers have increasingly been positioned as problematic in Australian education policy discourses over the past decade. This paper uses a critical policy historiography approach to compare representations of early career teachers in two key education policy documents, from the late 1990s and mid-2010s. Starting with the Government response to *A Class Act: Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession* (1998) and moving to the Government response to *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* (2015), it explores changing representations in the context of broader shifts in education policy related to teachers' work over this timeframe. It argues that the early career teacher 'problem' is articulated in very different ways in these two timeframes, explores the antecedents of key tenets of the current policy settlement, and, using the theory of practice architectures, considers the implications of these for the preconditions that shape and frame teachers' work.

Introduction

Early career teachers and teacher education students have increasingly been positioned as problematic in Australian education policy discourses over the past decade. Entry criteria for initial teacher education courses, the scope and efficacy of teacher education and early career teachers' skills and capabilities have been rendered both symptoms and consequences of the 'problem'. Meanwhile, a range of 'solutions', from literacy and numeracy testing for pre-service teachers to the establishment and application of teaching standards, to large-scale 'overhauls' of teacher education curriculum, have been applied in the name of 'improving quality'.

This paper uses a critical policy historiography approach (Gale 2001) to explore the emergence of the early career teacher 'problem'. Policy historiography, disposed as it is to providing an overall account of temporary policy settlements, will be utilised to contrast the current 'policy settlement' in relation to early career teachers and teacher education with that of the late 1990s. It aims to problematize both the positioning of early career teachers as troublesome as well as the limited and constrained solutions constituted as available, and explores the two policy settlements in terms of the 'practice architectures' (Kemmis and Grootenboer 2008) they each suggest. The theory of practice architectures, which will be introduced fully at a later point, is useful here for understanding the role the two policy settlements play in enabling and constraining practice, and thus for thinking through the implications of policy for teachers' work. Using two key policy documents as source material, one from 1998 and the other from 2015, the paper aims to chart and compare the constitution of the policy problem and the solutions posed over these two timeframes, recognising, in the words of Carol Bacchi, that "'problems' are 'created' or 'given shape' in the very policy proposals that

are offered as ‘responses’” (Bacchi 2000, 48). It aims to address the following guiding questions:

- How are early career teachers positioned in education policy discourse?
- What ‘solutions’ are proffered to the ‘problems’ associated with early career teachers?
- How (and why) has the constitution of both ‘problem’ and ‘solution’ shifted and changed over the past two decades?

The paper is structured in three parts. The first section contains a brief outline of the background and approach taken in the study. The second offers a reading of the policy documents used in the analysis, starting with the 2015 offering and then taking a ‘rear vision’ approach to the 1998 text, looking not only at the constitution of problem and solution in this text but also at where we might see the origins of current concerns. In the final section, I explore the shifts and implications of these in terms of the ‘practice architectures’ that frame early career teachers’ (and consequently, teacher educators’) practice.

Background and Approach

As noted by Loudon (2008), the quality and effectiveness of teacher education in Australia has been a key concern of successive governments, leading to 101 government reviews and inquiries held variously at state and federal levels in the period from 1979 to 2006. This period has seen the development of teacher accreditation bodies, professional teaching standards and a growing range of accountability mechanisms for both teachers and teacher educators, often in response to the recommendations of said reviews. Ladwig and Gore have observed that in many of these strategies “we see a local version of the now internationally ubiquitous idea that putting words on paper and establishing bureaucratic mechanisms to deliver the meaning of those words will yield improvements” (2009, 725).

Beyond the establishment of these bureaucratic accountability mechanisms, however, it could be said that little has changed. The difficulty of attracting and retaining teachers, of providing early career teachers with effective pathways for induction and socialisation into the profession, of re-casting teaching as an attractive option for outstanding secondary school and undergraduate degree graduates remain. Similarly, the challenges of providing initial teacher education that graduates feel adequately prepares them for life in the classroom are issues that remain prominent in both public and policy discourses around teacher education and ‘teacher quality’. This has been the case up to and including the recent Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) review of teacher education (Craven et al. 2015), which forms one focus of this paper.

Salient background to this study is a note on the growing complexities of Australian federalism over this period, and the implications for teacher education. While the Australian states and territories hold constitutional responsibility for the delivery of school education, and thus the employment of teachers, over the past two decades, we have experienced a significant “‘rescaling’ of schooling policies to the national level”

(Savage and Lingard Forthcoming, 2, see also Savage 2016). This has been largely consistent with globalised policy agendas around, for example, standardised testing, national curriculum and teacher standards, and driven by successive federal governments of both conservative and more liberal persuasions. The federal Government holds direct responsibility for higher education, and thus teacher education, accounting for much of the focus on teacher education in the aforementioned reviews. The establishment of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), the national body with responsibility for both the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the accreditation standards for initial teacher education programs, in 2010, forms part of the backdrop to the current discussion. Savage and Lingard (Forthcoming, 5) have recently argued that:

The creation of AITSL as a *federally-owned organisation*, paired with federal funding incentives for states and territories to adopt national reforms, helped establish the federal government as the major driving force behind the establishment of national teaching standards, and in ways that had significant impacts upon teacher education in the following years.

This paper reports on part of a larger study undertaken in 2015 that charted policy and media representations of the early career teacher ‘problem’ in Australia over the period 1998 to 2015. A subsequent paper (Mockler 2017, Forthcoming) explores media narratives during these two timeframes, raising questions about media framing of early career teachers. The analysis used in the study makes use of Gale’s notion of ‘critical policy historiography’, first enunciated in this journal in 2001. Gale notes that ...policy historiography asks three broad questions: (1) what were the ‘public issues’ and ‘private troubles’ within a particular policy domain during some previous period and how were they addressed?; (2) what are they now?; and (3) what is the nature of the change from the first to the second? Critical policy historiography adds to these a further two: (4) what are the complexities in these coherent accounts of policy?; and (5) what do these reveal about who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by these arrangements? (2001, 385).

Policy historiography, which focuses on providing an overall account of ‘temporary policy settlements’ (Gale 2001, 391) was regarded as a fitting way to approach the current analysis because of the desire to search in this study for earlier iterations of concepts and ideas central to the current ‘policy settlement’ in relation to early career teachers and teacher education. I draw here on Jane Kenway’s notion of ‘policy as settlement’, wherein she argues that “policy represents the temporary settlements between diverse, competing and unequal forces within civil society, within the state itself, and between associated discursive regimes” (Kenway 1990, 59). I recognise that the documents upon which this analysis is based do not embody the two policy settlements in their entirety; they are, rather, an important but necessarily partial representation of the settlements, derived from this struggle, and representative of the government’s response to this ongoing struggle.

Furthermore, and beyond the overall account that I seek to develop in this paper, is an intention to explore the ways in which particular policy settlements shape what Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) have termed the ‘practice architectures’ that in turn shape and frame teachers’ practices. Practice architectures are understood as the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political preconditions that shape practice, and of these, Kemmis and Grootenboer write:

[Practices] are...shaped and prefigured intersubjectively by arrangements that exist in, or are brought to, particular sites of practice. In other words, practices are

shaped and prefigured by arrangements “that exist beyond each person as an individual agent or actor” (2008, 37).

Through this critical policy analysis, and specifically in attending to the fifth question highlighted by Gale, namely ‘what do these reveal about who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by these arrangements?’, I explore the implications of these two policy settlements in terms of the cultural-discursive, material-economic and socio-political preconditions they suggest, arguing that far from being incidental to teachers’ work, the conditions under which their initial teacher education takes place has significant power to both open up and close down possibilities for practice as early career teachers.

Sources

The Federal Government responses to two significant inquiries provide the source material or empirical base upon which this analysis is focused. Given my particular desire to focus in the first instance on the present day and the environment within which early career teachers’ practice is currently enacted, the response to the recent Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) review was chosen as a particular focus. For purposes of comparison, the government response to the report of a Senate Inquiry conducted in 1998 and known as *A Class Act* was chosen. With the proliferation noted above of government inquiries, there were many possibilities for comparison. After consideration, the response to *A Class Act* was chosen due to:

- (a) the inquiry’s scope and scale, and because it was the last general review in this area undertaken at a federal level with a publicly available report and government response;
- (b) its explicit focus on early career teachers, teacher education candidates and teacher education itself;
- (c) the length of time that has elapsed since the review, which provided good scope for a temporal comparison; and
- (d) both reviews being conducted under Coalition (conservative) Governments, where similar policy directions might be expected.

It is important to note that in both cases the Government’s response to the report was the primary source chosen for analysis: it is in the Government’s statement of response that we find the kernel of the policy settlement rather than in the report itself, and this is particularly so in relation to these two reviews. While *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* was constructed by the members of the TEMAG, appointed by the Minister for Education, *A Class Act* was the result of an inquiry conducted by the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment. At the time, this committee was chaired by an Opposition senator with only three of the nine seats on the committee held by Government senators. A ‘minority report’ was provided by the Government senators (appended to the Committee report), and the recommendations from this minority report resonate more strongly with the Government’s response than do those from the committee report itself.

The terms of reference for the 1998 Senate Inquiry were as follows: describe community attitudes towards teachers and the ways in which schools operate; examine the expectations of teachers regarding their careers and identify those issues which bear most significantly upon job satisfaction, stress and their ability to carry out their work efficiently and effectively; develop a national profile of Australia's teachers according

to age, gender, qualifications, experience, salary levels and career history; assess the levels of supply and demand which should guide the workforce planning for teachers in the context of demographic and other changes affecting schools into the next century; examine the tertiary entrance levels of teacher trainees and the research literature on the quality of Australian teacher education programs, and identify those features which bear significantly upon the quality of classroom practice; describe best practice in the induction of newly-trained teachers into schools, and identify any significant shortcomings in induction or on-going professional development which require urgent attention (Commonwealth of Australia 1998, vi-vii).

Under the terms of reference for the 2014 TEMAG review, the committee was charged with providing advice to the Minister “on how teacher education programmes could be improved to better prepare new teachers with the practical skills needed for the classroom” (Craven et al. 2015, 57). The group was asked to use “an evidence based approach” to “identify common components regarded as world’s best practice in teacher education”, particularly in relation to pedagogical approaches, subject content and professional experience; to “consider the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, as potential mechanisms to give effect to its recommendations for improvement to teacher education, as appropriate”; and to “identify priorities for actions to improve teacher education and suitable implementation timeframes” (Craven et al. 2015). As part of their process, TEMAG was required to undertake public consultations with key stakeholders and invite written submissions from the public.

The scope of these terms of reference are clearly quite different, reflecting, of course, the purpose and particular focus of the reviews themselves. *A Class Act* resulted from a broad-scale review of the status of the teaching profession, while *Action Now* from a review of teacher education. While neither of these reviews focused solely on early career teachers, in both sets of terms of reference, recommendations and responses we find many references to beginning teachers, their experiences of teacher education and their experience on entering the profession. Furthermore, embedded in the explicit focus of each of the reports we find a particular perspective on what the government of the day identified as the primary ‘problem’ associated with teaching and education, constructed as a starting point for the review. In this we see a shift from the late 1990s, where the primary problem was identified as the status and consequently attractiveness of teaching as a profession, to the mid 2010s, where the problem is identified as initial teacher education. This fundamental shift frames the positioning of early career teachers in the policy texts to a great extent, as the discussion below will highlight.

The two policy documents were analysed using an approach that began with the research questions established at the outset of the paper, which were themselves informed by Carol Bacchi’s ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ approach (Bacchi 2009). Both texts were subjected to four ‘passes’, and a list of codes emerged iteratively over the first three of these readings and were drawn into themes. The discussion that follows reports the analysis temporally, initially providing a portrait of the 2015 policy settlement, followed by a portrait of the 1998 settlement. Finally, the two timeframes are compared in the light of the research questions and their implications for teachers’ work, using the lens of practice architectures.

Action Now: The View from 2015

The intention to conduct a national review of teacher education was initially flagged by the then Shadow Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, in February 2013, seven months prior to the election that installed the Abbott Liberal Government. In an interview on ABC Radio National, Pyne responded to a question about the first education priority for the Coalition should they take government in the following way:

... the first thing we would do is address issues of teacher quality in our universities. The first thing we could do is to make sure that the training of our teachers at university is of world standard. ... We would immediately instigate a very short term Ministerial advisory group to advise me on the best model for teaching in the world. How to bring out more practical teaching methods, based on more didactic teaching methods or more traditional methods rather than the child centred learning that has dominated the system for the last 20, 30 or 40 years, so teaching quality would be at my highest priority, followed by a robust curriculum, principal autonomy and more traditional pedagogy. So I want to make the education debate, move it on from this almost asinine debate about more money and make it about values because while money is important..., what we are teaching our children and how we are teaching them and *who is teaching them* is all much more important. (Kelly 2013, February 23)

Pyne thus identified the problematic nature of teacher education (and indeed, some of his preferred solutions) early on in the run-up to the election, and, true to his word, as Minister appointed the eight member TEMAG in February 2014. While the Terms of Reference for the review, laid out above, did not quite pre-empt the findings in the same way the Minister-to-be himself did in his damnation of ‘child centred learning’ and lauding of ‘didactic teaching methods’ and ‘traditional pedagogy’, they did indicate a strong focus on pedagogical approaches within teacher education programs, along with other elements such as subject content and professional experience. The Government response to the TEMAG report was published concurrently with the report itself, in the *Teacher Quality* section of the Department of Education and Training *Students First* website (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015b).

In the Government response to the TEMAG report, early career teachers are positioned as problematic on a number of fronts. In the first place, in both the report and the Government response document itself, teacher education is rendered a problem of crisis proportions which requires a comprehensive ‘fix’ on the part of the federal government. Beginning teachers are more or less collateral damage within this discourse – the poor quality of early career teachers is both a symptom of the poor quality of teacher education programs in Australia and a problem in itself. ‘Bad’ teachers are seen to enter the classroom unable to effectively teach and consequently contribute to the falling standards evident in Australian education. The government signals a belief that graduate teachers are generally poorly regarded by the Australian public through their call to “lift confidence in the preparation of all new teachers” (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015a, 5), such that through “swift and decisive action, the Government will seek to make a real difference to the training of our teachers and work to make sure the teaching profession *has the confidence and respect of the Australian community*” (2015a, 4, my emphasis). The policy settlement encapsulated in the government response to the TEMAG report positions early career teachers as subject to “varying levels of preparation” (4). They are

said to be lacking in basic literacy and numeracy (4-5); ‘the right’ motivations for entering the profession (5); ‘the skills they need to make a positive impact on student learning’ (5); and ‘classroom readiness’.

Despite ongoing concerns on the part of Governments about the falling quality of initial teacher education students, reflected in declining ATAR¹ cut-offs across universities, the TEMAG report did not recommend that universities raise minimum entrance scores for teacher education courses. Instead, the recommendation, accepted by the Government, was for ‘enhanced’ selection processes for prospective teacher education students to be implemented:

The Government does not propose any single approach such as an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) cut-off for entry to teaching. It is acknowledged that some states are moving to identify specific academic requirements combined with the personal qualities necessary for teaching, as part of a focus on improving selection processes. The Government supports refined selection processes for entry to teaching. To ensure all universities are adopting a more sophisticated approach to selection, the Government will instruct AITSL to develop and set clear expectations of universities in making sure that those going into teaching have the right mix of academic and personal qualities that give them the best chance of becoming effective teachers. (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015a, 6)

This ‘tightening up’ of selection processes was said to be in response to “shortcomings in the way many universities currently select future teachers”, which means that “significant time and money may therefore be invested in people who are not capable of providing the outcomes our school students deserve” (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015a, 6). While it might be construed therefore that that Government’s observation is that beginning teachers incapable of adequately supporting student learning are a consequence of these ‘shortcomings’, no evidence of this is presented either in the TEMAG report or in the government’s response. The policy solution offered, a process designed to presumably keep some prospective teachers out of teacher education, presupposes a problem that positions at least some current early career teachers as suffering from a deficit. This is also true of the Minister’s announcement, reported in *The Australian* that “It is my expectation that teacher education students will be broadly in the top 30 per cent of the population in literacy and numeracy” (Hare and Bita 2015).

A call to remedy early career teachers’ lack of specialised knowledge, again linked to their lack of capacity in the teaching of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects where they are often reported as lacking in confidence, was endorsed by the Government. The need to give “greater emphasis to core subjects of literacy and numeracy” and place “a particular focus on phonics and phonemic awareness” (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015a, 8) within teacher education also reflects the positioning of graduate teachers as potentially lacking in the requisite knowledge and understanding required to teach effectively.

Finally, graduate teachers are positioned in the Government response to the TEMAG report as lacking in ‘classroom readiness’. Indeed, the report title *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* captures the primacy of this idea in the report, and this is

strongly reflected in the Government response. It is worth noting that nowhere in either the report itself nor the government response is an attempt made to define the concept of ‘classroom readiness’. The “gap between the knowledge and skills universities are preparing their teaching graduates with and those that are needed for new teachers to thrive in the classroom” (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015a, 8) reinforces a picture of initial teacher education removed from the realities of the classroom, making use of the age-old (and perhaps dangerous) dichotomy of classroom and ‘ivory tower’.

Classroom readiness, according to the Government response to the TEMAG report “includes the ability for new teachers to effectively teach core subject areas, such as literacy, mathematics and science” (8). Along with a lack of definition of ‘classroom readiness’ is a lack of evidence in the debate that graduate teachers are in fact not ‘classroom ready’. There is also an absence of a more nuanced discussion around the relationship of induction into the teaching profession beyond initial teacher education and its relationship to ‘classroom readiness’, despite the recognition of a need for “a nationally consistent approach to the induction and support of beginning teachers to make sure they reach their full potential once they enter the profession” (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015a, 8).

Despite the claims made in the Government response in relation to “enhancing excellent teaching in Australian schools to deliver a world class education for all our students” (10), graduate teachers are positioned as both vulnerable victims of substandard and spurious teacher education programs (that is, a consequence of the ‘problem’ constituted by initial teacher education) and a problem in and of themselves, requiring the steady hand of government to ‘fix’. The graduate teachers of the future, beneficiaries of the ‘enhancements’ encompassed in the TEMAG recommendations, are implicitly contrasted with current pre-service and graduate teachers and necessarily found to be the superior and preferred versions of the species.

A Class Act: The View from 1998/9

As noted above, the Senate Inquiry that culminated in the publication of *A Class Act* was established as an inquiry into the status of the teaching profession. The inquiry was established in June 1996, three months after the election of the Howard Coalition (conservative) government, and the report was finalised in March 1998. The Government’s response was not launched with the fanfare of the response to *Action Now*, but rather recorded in Hansard as a speech given by Senator Ian Campbell in November 1999 (Commonwealth of Australia Senate 1999, 11054-11066).

The Government response to *A Class Act* is strongly imbued with the notion that states and territories need to take increasing responsibility for the funding, image and effectiveness of education and teaching within their jurisdictions. It is salient to note here that by the time of the Government response to the senate inquiry, four of seven states and territories were held by Labor Governments, including the three most populous states of New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria (the latter two states having newly elected Labor governments in 1998 and 1999 respectively). The recommendations from the inquiry largely encouraged the Federal Government to establish national structures and processes for the development of teaching standards,

registration and accreditation of teachers and accreditation of initial teacher education programs. The Government's response (and Government Senators' minority report), however, dissented from this view, agreeing largely with the suggested directions but placing the responsibility for action onto MCEETYA, the *Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs*, comprised of the Ministers responsible for education and related areas in each of the six states and two territories.

In contrast to the Government's response to the TEMAG report (and the report itself), there is an absence of a sense of 'crisis' around early career teachers and teacher education itself in the Government response to *A Class Act*. Only three of the 19 recommendations of the report relate to pre-service or early career teachers, and in each of these cases the Government response clearly and calmly refers the issues raised back to state and territory governments, at the same time raising questions about the validity and desirability of 'national consistency' in relation to teacher education and teacher accreditation.

First, in relation to a recommendation regarding national standards for accreditation of initial teacher education programs:

While the Commonwealth Government agrees that a degree of national consistency in initial teacher education is desirable, it also acknowledges the requirement for initial teacher education to *address the needs of teacher employers in the States and Territories*. (Commonwealth of Australia Senate 1999, 11056, my emphasis)

Next, in relation to a recommendation regarding the establishment of a National Teacher Education Network to model 'best practice' in the development and 'delivery' of teacher education, either by the Commonwealth Government (in the case of the committee report) or by MCEETYA (in the case of the minority report):

The Commonwealth Government agrees with the sentiment in the Government Senators' recommendation that MCEETYA is the appropriate body to consider the development and delivery of initial teacher education and notes that MCEETYA proposes to establish a Taskforce to inquire into the skills base and qualifications of teachers graduating from university education faculties to establish whether the needs of employers are being met currently and for the future. *The Commonwealth Government does not consider that encouraging MCEETYA to undertake other measures relating to teacher education would be productive*. (Commonwealth of Australia Senate 1999, 11063, my emphasis)

Finally, in relation to the proposal that a suggested structure and national guidelines for induction programs be developed, again either on a national basis or via MCEETYA:

The responsibilities and employment conditions of newly graduated teachers are a matter for teacher employers. As the States and Territories are the major employers of new teachers, the Commonwealth Minister will refer the recommendations to MCEETYA. However, the Commonwealth Government is concerned that *a single structure for induction programmes may not meet the needs of all new teachers and may restrict the flexibility of schools in addressing those needs*. (Commonwealth of Australia Senate 1999, 11064, my emphasis)

The recurring theme of the Government response to *A Class Act* is very much caution around the national regulation of teacher education and teaching practice, with the Government repeatedly warning against national consistency and, interestingly, raising questions around whether teacher registration/accreditation processes would in fact support the goal of raising the status of the teaching profession. The establishment of a code of high professional standards (as opposed to minimum requirements) is seen to be the responsibility of the profession rather than of an external regulator:

There is a difference between a system of registration of teachers, which would be a recognition that a person has met the minimum standards required for employment, and the code of high professional standards required to raise professional status which, as the report indicates, is the responsibility of the profession itself. The Government is not persuaded that the evidence provided demonstrates a connection between teacher registration and teacher professionalism. (Commonwealth of Australia Senate 1999, 11056)

Finally, the ‘classroom readiness’ that emerges as a strong theme in the response to *Action Now* is all but absent in the response to *A Class Act*. In foregrounding its discussion of induction to the profession, the authors of *A Class Act* make the following point, which remains undisputed in the Government’s response to the report:

It is generally acknowledged by all those involved – university educators, practising teachers, education departments and beginning teachers themselves – that no pre-service training can fully prepare new teachers to perform at their full capacity from their first day at work. This is not a reflection on the quality of new teachers nor on the standard of pre-service training. It is a recognition of the complexity of teaching and of the large number of variables (such as type of school, socio-economic and cultural background of students, school ‘ethos’, extent of support from colleagues and principal etc) affecting a teacher’s performance. This being the case, induction programs have a vital role in ensuring a smooth transition for beginning teachers from university trainees to competent practitioners. (Commonwealth of Australia 1998, 204, my emphasis)

We thus see, in the 1998/9 policy settlement a greater tolerance for both ambiguity and variability than can be seen in the 2015 settlement, a greater understanding of education as a complex, contextualised undertaking.

Shifting Emphases

This paper began with three inquiry questions around which the policy texts were interrogated. The analysis presented above has addressed the first and second of these, namely how early career teachers were positioned in public discourse through these texts, and what solutions were posed to the problems associated with early career teachers. In this concluding section, I offer some observations around the final question, related to how (and why) the constitution of both ‘problem’ and ‘solution’ has shifted and changed since the late 1990s, and explore the implications of this in terms of the ‘practice architectures’ represented in these policy settlements. In each case, the ‘how’ and ‘why’ are intricately and deeply interwoven, and in particular, the ‘whys’ point not only to shifts in the positioning of early career teachers in public discourse, but indeed the changing ways in which education, and particularly school education, has been positioned in public discourse over the same period of time.

In the response to *A Class Act* (and the report itself), the low morale of the teaching profession, deeply connected to the poor status of teaching, was constituted as the primary problem. Connected to this, and both symptomatic of and consequential to the problem of low status, was the problem of a pending teacher shortage. Early career teachers were largely positioned as one of a number of solutions to this problem. Other solutions included raising the salary level of beginning teachers and more experienced teachers, reshaping working conditions to avoid early career teachers being placed on short term contracts, and the introduction of other measures designed to improve the attractiveness of teaching as an option for the ‘best and brightest’. Some of the discussion centred around the possibility of lifting selection scores for prospective teacher education students, but importantly, and in stark contrast to the response to *Action Now*, the logic employed here was that a rise in the university entrance level would attract the ‘best and brightest’ to teaching through making teacher education courses appear more desirable rather than a recognition that current teacher education students and early career teachers are lacking in ability. Teacher education and teacher educators (as represented mainly by the Deans of Education) were seen as contributing to possible solutions rather than constituting a problem in themselves, and in this too we see a contrast with the response to *Action Now*.

By 2015, the wellbeing of the status of the teaching profession is taken as a ‘given’, bolstered presumably by 15 years of reform based on standards and accountability. Teacher education itself (and by association, teacher educators) is positioned as a primary problem, neither deserving of public trust nor capable of overseeing a curriculum that will ensure the quality of its graduates, particularly in relation to the essential skills of literacy and numeracy. Beginning teachers are positioned as both a by-product of the problem of teacher education and a problem in and of themselves. Policy solutions such as literacy and numeracy tests for graduate teachers speak to the lack of basic skills that recent graduates are perceived to hold and the need to ensure that these problems do not proliferate, through keeping ‘bad teachers’ out of the classroom. A revision of selection criteria for initial teacher education students – whether focused on ATAR cutoff scores or on other criteria – is now aimed at keeping inappropriate candidates out of the profession rather than raising the status of the profession itself. The possibility of raising minimum ATAR scores now constitutes a solution to a different problem to that of the late 1990s, that of inappropriate teaching candidates who systematically undermine student achievement, contributing along the way to Australia’s declining performance on international testing.

Framing and indeed underpinning these shifts over the years between 1998 and 2015 are a range of educational reforms, some of which were already gathering momentum in 1998 and some of which are more recent inventions or adoptions. While we might see their origins in the policy directions of the late 1980s (Kenway 1990, Lingard, O'Brien, and Knight 1993), the rise of cultures of audit, standardisation and accountability in Australian education has occurred slowly but deliberately over this timeframe, and indeed many of the international policy trajectories that have impacted upon and shaped Australian education in this period have emerged with practical implications for schooling only in the years post-1998.

A strong shift from a sense of state and territory responsibility for reform in 1998/99 to an equally strong sense of federal responsibility in the 2014/15 policy

settlement is evident. In exploring the two policy settlements side by side, we see the crystallisation of what Lingard (1991) termed “the new corporate federalism”, which might be seen to have begun in earnest in 1988 with the publication of *Strengthening Australia’s Schools: A Consideration of the Focus and Content of Schooling* by the Labor Minister for Education (Dawkins 1988), a manifesto calling for a national approach to schooling out of which grew initial attempts at a national curriculum, for example. While conventional wisdom holds that corporate federalism has steadily grown in relation to Australian education since the years of the Hawke Labor Government (1983-1991), and the 1998/99 settlement was not entirely devoid of this, federalism is far less strongly present in the Government response to *A Class Act* than in either *Strengthening Our Schools* or the response to *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers*. As Lingard argued in 2010, in the key developments within the national field of education over this period we see

...the emergence of a national system of schooling...as part of the reconstitution of the nation in the face of globalization and related economisation of education policy. This is the case despite Australia’s federal political structure with the States holding the ostensible Constitutional responsibility for schooling” (129).

Despite a pre-election commitment to scale back the previous Gillard/Rudd Government’s federal ‘command and control’ approach to schooling (Kenny 2013, August 5), federalism appears to be just as present in the 2015 settlement as it was under the previous Labor Government’s ‘education revolution’. Furthermore, a more coercive form of federalism (Brennan 2011, Brennan and Willis 2008) is evident in the 2015 policy settlement, reflected particularly in the expansion of the remit of AITSL embedded in the response to the TEMAG report.

Historically, between the publication of *A Class Act* and *Action Now*, the reforms recommended by the (Labor-led) Senate Inquiry of 1998, which were largely referred to the states and territories through MCEETYA by the Howard Government, were subsequently actioned with varying levels of vigour on the part of state and territory governments. By the mid 2000s, all states and territories had established teacher registration/accreditation bodies and developed professional standards linked to accreditation (Campbell and Proctor 2014). With the election of the Rudd Labor Government in 2007, many of the reforms recommended in *A Class Act* were either introduced or reconfigured on a national scale under the banner of the ‘Education Revolution’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2008), a move congruent with Brennan and Willis’ (2008) argument that a more authoritarian form of federalism was at work in Australian education policy in this period.

Underpinning the shifts in the positioning of early career teachers and teacher education are two key issues. One relates to the shifting attitude toward ‘consistency’ evident in the two policy texts. As noted above, the Government response to *A Class Act* maintains the importance of local state and territory articulations of a range of issues including teacher registration, professional standards and professional development. Indeed, a reluctance to mandate the standardization of practices on a national scale is very much a theme of this document, despite the distance already travelled toward standardisation of practice and teacher accountability in Australian education by that point. By the advent of the Government response to *Action Now*, national quality and consistency of practice was cast as a key Federal Government

responsibility (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015a, 3), with no hint of the validity or importance of ‘local tailoring’ evident in 1998/99.

Secondly, we see in the response to *Action Now* a reflection of the growth in the discourse of ‘teacher quality’ over the previous two decades. Indeed, the TEMAG review itself is conceptualized as a central tenet of the Government’s ‘teacher quality’ initiative (along with the implementation of Direct Instruction and Explicit Instruction in remote primary schools and enhancements to the Teach for Australia program). Linked to the theme of ‘consistency’ through a similar valuing of standardised practice in the search for teacher quality, this discourse draws upon what Peter Taubman has categorized as:

...the rhetoric of blame and fear and the promulgation of heroic narratives of exemplary teachers, which, coupled with the wide-spread use of tests, render teachers and teacher educators susceptible to the language of policy and the lure of business practices and make possible teachers’ psychic investment in various aspects of the transformation. (Taubman 2009, 12-13)

The discourse of teacher quality also resonates with that of ‘teacher centrality’, linked to the widespread and oft-quoted notion that “‘teacher quality’ is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement” (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2005, 26). Larsen argues that:

...both the historical and contemporary discourses of the centrality of the teacher... were preceded by a discourse of blame and derision about teachers. This blame/derision discourse arose in key periods of socio-economic, political and cultural change... Through these dual discourses (the discourse of blame/derision and the discourse of the centrality of the teacher), teachers have been constructed as being deficient and simultaneously shouldered with the responsibility of fixing societal and school problems. (Larsen 2010, 208)

Larsen’s point is that while teachers are clearly important, the discursive effects of teacher centrality can be far-reaching and damaging to teachers and education more broadly.

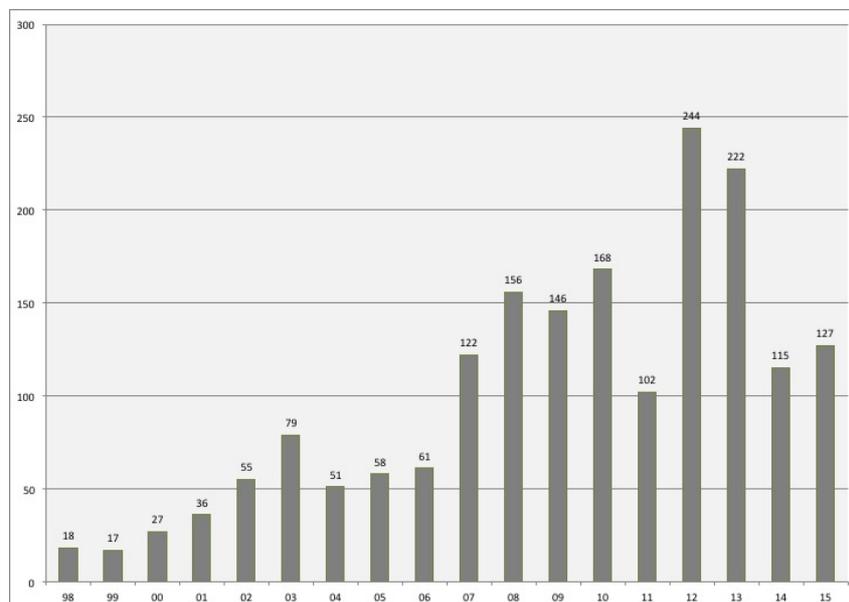


Figure 1

Although an admittedly crude measure, a Factiva search for the terms “teacher quality” and (the related but not identical) “teaching quality” in Australian national and capital city daily newspapers over the period from 1998 to 2015 is illustrative of the growth in this discourse over this timeframe, particularly since around the time of the launch of the newly elected Rudd Government’s ‘education revolution’ in 2007 (see Figure 1 above), peaking around the time of the Gillard Government’s ‘National Plan for School Improvement’ of 2012/13.

Essentially, this points to a phenomenon whereby teachers’ work and practice has increasingly been subject to public discussion and debate over this period of time, and we see this in the ongoing discussion of the quality or otherwise of in-service and graduate teachers, which was largely absent from the response to *A Class Act*.

Conclusion: Shifting Emphases, Shifting Architectures

These shifts suggest not only a shift in the way that education is ‘thought about’ in the public space, but also a shift in the way that teachers’ work is framed and supported, with attendant implications for early career teachers and the teaching profession. Resonating with Ball’s notion of first and second order policy effects (Ball 2015, 1993), the practice architectures implied and supported by these two policy settlements suggest very different preconditions of practice for teachers. In this final section I very briefly explore these implications. The theory of practice architectures holds that “people’s individual and collective participation in practices is prefigured and shaped by the practice architectures characteristic of the practice, that is the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements present in or brought to a site” (Kemmis, et. al, 2014, pp.32-33, emphasis in original). Practice architectures thus enable and constrain what Bourdieu (1990) named as the ‘logic of practice’ at work within a particular field or ‘site’. Kemmis and colleagues refer to the cultural-discursive arrangements as those that enable and/or constrain the language and discourses about practice; the material-economic arrangements as those that enable and/or constrain the particular activities inherent in practice; and social-political arrangements as those that enable and/or constrain “how people relate in a practice to other people and to non-human objects” (Mahon et al. 2017, 10). Education policy holds the capacity to impact practice architectures across all three of these domains. I recognise that the capacity for arrangements to enable and constrain practice are largely contextual and locally mitigated – my suggestion is not that all practice in all contexts is constructed identically, rather that the two policy settlements suggest a preferred set of arrangements that to a greater or lesser degree may be adopted in different educational contexts. In other words, different possibilities for practice are suggested by the two policy settlements, and embedded in these possibilities are significant implications for the teaching profession.

The varying cultural-discursive arrangements suggested by the two policy settlements have largely been the focus of this paper. Kemmis et. al. note that these cultural-discursive arrangements “constrain... what language or specialist discourse is appropriate for describing, interpreting and justifying the practice” (Kemmis et al. 2014). A significant identifiable shift in the cultural-discursive arrangements between

1998/99 and 2014/15 relates to the movement from the problem of ‘status’ (said to be attributable to complex external factors) to the problem of ‘quality’, constructed as attributable to teacher education and pre-service/early career teachers themselves. The strength of these discourses of ‘teacher quality’ holds implications not only in terms of performativity (Ball 2003), but also in terms of the discursive recasting, through the embrace of largely hollow teaching standards, of the very image of the ‘good teacher’ (Connell 2009, Moore 2004). Furthermore, the question of ‘impact’, of both early career/pre-service teachers and teacher education programs, suggests the opening of new discursive spaces and accountabilities and new opportunities for audit of teachers’ work.

The material-economic arrangements that frame practice on a national scale have been largely redrawn since 1998/99, as highlighted in the discussion above of the rise of teaching/teacher standards, and further by the introduction of national standardised testing and reporting, and the increased marketization of school education that has taken place (Connell 2013a, b). This recasting has seen both budgetary and other priorities shift, impacting on the shape of teachers’ work. Teacher professional learning and development has become increasingly tied to the agendas of standards and accountability, counted and quantified in hours and linked increasingly to improving student performance on standardised tests and other limited measures. Furthermore, the privileging of ‘traditional’ pedagogies, encapsulated in the notions of direct and explicit instruction has played a part in this reconfiguring, and will continue to do so as the recommendations from the TEMAG report are implemented through initial teacher education. The preference for “more practical teaching methods, based on more didactic teaching methods or more traditional methods rather than the child centred learning that has dominated the system for the last 20, 30 or 40 years” (Kelly 2013, February 23) strongly signals an intention in this arena that has not yet played out, and this intention will no doubt come with attendant opportunity cost related to the material-economic arrangements that impact teachers’ work.

Finally, the socio-political arrangements, the “resources that make possible the relationships between people and non-human objects that occur in the practice” (Kemmis et al. 2014, 32) suggested in the 2014/15 policy settlement are framed by notions of competition and a notable lack of trust in both people and processes previously regarded as trustworthy. The growing suspicion of pre-service and early career teachers’ motivations and capabilities for practice, and also of those of teacher educators evident in the response to *Action Now* suggest a decrease in the level of trust extended toward educators and a concomitant greater desire to constrain and standardize practice. The opening up of new accountabilities framed by a desire to ‘lock down’ practice, manifest in the privileging of explicit instruction and these “more didactic teaching methods” has implications for the quality and shape of relationships at the heart of educational practice. Here the implications might be the impoverishment of collegial and/or teacher-student relationships, through the privileging of ‘consistency’ and standardisation. Additionally, as Savage and Lingard have noted, the recent reconstitution of the AITSL Board, as of 2016 such that all 11 Directors are appointed by the Minister for Education (as opposed to 14 of 17 Directors being appointed by state and territory governments, sectors, peak bodies and unions, as was previously the case) is emblematic of an “emerging democratic deficit in national policymaking processes” (Forthcoming, p.20). Furthermore, it is representative of both the diminished

trust in the teaching profession and the shifting socio-political arrangements governing teachers' work under this new policy settlement.

Essentially, the nuances of particular policy settlements hold the capacity to shape the architectures of teachers' practices for better or worse, dependent on the multiple contexts within which their practice is enacted. Practice is always mitigated by multiple factors related to teachers themselves and the schools, sectors and systems within which it occurs, but it seems that across these three domains, the positioning of early career teachers implicit in the 2014/15 policy settlement is likely to contribute to the further entrenching of regimes of audit, standards and accountability, and the further strengthening of the national education agenda. For example, as initial teacher education providers grapple with 'evidence of impact' of their programs for the enhanced accreditation processes implemented post-TEMAG, we are already witnessing increased opportunities for and manifestations of audit, which have the capacity to shape pre-service and early career teachers' practice. What remains to be seen is how far and in what ways practice will be curtailed and diminished as a consequence of the current policy settlement and how this will play out in diverse educational contexts for teachers and students, the ultimate 'consequential stakeholders' in education policy.

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ⁱ The Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) is the score used to determine admission to higher education courses in Australia.