

Simple solutions to complex problems: Moral panic and the fluid shift from 'Equity' to 'Quality' in Education

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ABSTRACT

Education is increasingly conceptualised by governments and policymakers in western democracies in terms of productivity and human capital, emphasising elements of individualism and competition over concerns around democracy and equity. More and more, solutions to intransigent educational problems related to equity are seen in terms of quality and accountability. This article examines the role of 'panic' and 'crisis' in the creation of this shift from discourses of equity to discourses of 'teacher quality' in education. Taking a recent Australian 'policy moment' as a case study, it highlights one manifestation of the crisis of teacher quality as represented in politicians' speeches, press releases and interviews, and media reports. It explores how educational panic is used as a tool by politicians and policy makers to manipulate and shape public opinion, such that 'quality' becomes a smoke screen that effectively obscures the issue of equity in education. It argues that in a context where neoliberal technologies of standards and accountability dominate, mediating teachers' practice and shaping teacher habitus and identity, the more likely consequence of this smoke screen is in fact the undermining of both equity and quality in education. It concludes with a call to refocus the debate around issues of substance with more generative consequences for teachers and learners.

Much research over the past two decades has been devoted to examining the shape of neoliberal approaches to education and schooling, and their consequences for teachers, students and schools (see, for example, Apple, 2006; Ball, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The proliferation of this work in recent years reflects the many and varied ways in which the 'neoliberal imaginary' (Ball, 2012; Rossiter, 2003) is seen to influence contemporary schooling and the high-stakes consequences of these impacts on students and teachers (see, for example, Taubman, 2009; Thompson & Cook, 2013).

Recently, attention has been paid to changing conceptualisations of equity in education, and in particular the re-shaping of the very notion of equity at the hands of market ideologies. Rizvi (2013) has characterised this as a shift from social democratic to market conceptualisations of equity, arguing that the shift has brought a different focus to bear, "as education is reconfigured in market terms, so too is equity concerned with student access to educational markets and their preparation to participate in economic markets" (p.275). The conflation of 'access' with 'choice' and the associated adoption of market mechanisms as supposed arbiters of equity have been the subject of substantial work in recent years (see, for example, Clarke, 2012; Windle & Stratton, 2013), with Connell (2012) arguing that "a major shift is happening between old forms of inequality based on institutional segregation and new forms of inequality based on market mechanisms" (p.681). As many have observed (e.g. Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1996; Clarke, 2012; Savage, 2011; Tomlinson, 1997; Windle, 2009), this 'new inequality' manifests in the school choice agenda through the limitations to choice brought about by

virtue of parents' own social and cultural backgrounds: while middle class parents might be seen to be 'good' at exercising choice in the matter of where their children attend school, the same cannot be said of parents from working class or non-English speaking backgrounds. As Reay and Lucey put it: "The more distant subjects are from economic necessity, the more 'choice' becomes a possibility. 'Choice' is guaranteed to those who can afford to choose" (2003, p. 138), although they do indeed temper this observation by noting that choice is not solely mitigated by economic privilege. Rather, they see cultural capital and family habitus on the one hand, and geographic space on the other, as intertwined with economic privilege to impact upon choice possibilities in education.

Furthermore, 'Third Way' approaches to social governance particularly influential in the UK and Australia in the 1990s and 2000s have positioned education "as both a market-enhancing mechanism for its capacity to build human capital and service the nation's economic interests, as well as a space through which a healthy and productive population can be nourished by the ethics of equity, justice and choice" (Savage, 2011, p. 34). The twin educational goals of 'excellence' and 'equity' long embedded in various expressions of education policy globally have increasingly been used if not interchangeably then side-by-side in recent years. Increasingly, 'excellence' is imbued with 'world class' rhetoric, a desire for schools, school systems, teachers and learners to be seen to be successful by global measures of educational 'success', while 'equity' is, as noted above, increasingly linked to choice and market mechanisms. As Savage goes on to note, "education and the market are seen as mutually complementary, and it is *through* the education market that the dual aims of excellence and equity are seen to flourish (2011, p. 34). While Savage argues that excellence and equity in education are not in their very nature opposed, his research shows that these particular expressions of 'excellence' in play, conceived of as linked to market-driven demand, increasingly marginalize the equity agenda at school level. Historically, it might be said that this is a contemporary iteration of what Ian Hunter (1994) conceptualised as competing rationales for education with origins in the mid-18th century. On the one hand, emanating from the Christian tradition, emerged a moral rationale for schooling "designed to secure the soul's salvation" (p. 58), while on the other, an economic or political rationale emerged claiming "that the state should intervene in education as a means of enhancing its collective wealth and prosperity and *thereby* the well-being of its citizens" (p.38). The 'excellence and equity' agenda represents, to some extent, a conjoining of these competing rationales.

This narrow conception of excellence and equity in education has driven educational reform in Australia for at least the past seven years. Kevin Rudd, past Labor Prime Minister of Australia, was fond of the 'engine room' metaphor on both fronts: "Education is the engine room of the economy, education is the engine room of equity" (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007), a turn of phrase he used repeatedly around the launch of the 'education revolution' and lead-up to the 2007 election (see, for example, Rudd, 2007a; Rudd, 2007b). Unaddressed within this rhetoric and indeed, within Labor's 'social capitalist' (Rudd, 2009) approach to social policy generally, is the tension between or, one might say, incompatibility of these two concepts, given the prevailing emphasis on market liberalism embedded in rhetoric around "the economy" (Quiggin, 2012).

My concern in this paper is not so much the ways in which neoliberalism has shaped

concepts of equity and quality in education themselves, but rather how problems related to educational equity are reframed as problems of 'quality' within neoliberal regimes, and the mechanisms of this reframing in the public space. As a case in point, it takes the Australian Government's response to the national Independent Review into School Funding, which came in the form of the 'National Plan for School Improvement'. The paper focuses upon the ways in which this reframing occurred, aided and abetted by a sense of moral panic around the quality of Australia's schools that had its genesis in political spin and remained unchallenged by the mainstream media as the Plan was unveiled and offered up as a solution to the inequities of the current system.

This study builds on and contributes to work in the area of the neoliberal framing of policy and practice in education. Although studies in this area have examined broad trajectories of neoliberal ideology and their impact on education, through its focus on the ways in which politicians and policymakers shape public attitudes to education through the use of 'quality' as a rhetorical and policy device, this study provides additional insight into the mechanisms by which education is framed in the public space within neoliberal regimes. The analytic focus on a case study of a single 'policy moment', wherein 42 speeches, media texts and policy documents related to a single event are analysed, enables another contribution. Although numerous studies have explored representations of education policy in the public domain, little analytic attention has been paid to the specific processes of 'framing' and the 'packages' that shape meaning and public attitudes, or to the consequences of these for education. I address this issue through a framing analysis of the texts in question, and suggest that the consequences of reframing equity in terms of quality hold dire implications for both equity *and* quality in education.

The paper is presented in three parts. After an introduction, in which I locate the research study conceptually and methodologically, the analysis of texts is presented, followed by a discussion of the use of quality, via panic, to reframe equity.

Situating the Analysis: The Politics of Panic

In 2011, Australian writer David Marr wrote *Panic*, a collection of essays in which he examined the use of moral panic by Australian politicians in the shaping of public discourse in relation to different areas of social life. On the dynamic of panic within Australian society, he wrote:

I've come to believe the fundamental contest in Australian politics is not so much between Right and Left as panic and calm... This is an issue that goes deeper than division between the parties. It's about the odd willingness of Australia's leaders to beat up on the nation's fears. They coarsen politics. They narrow our sympathies. They make careers for themselves in this peaceful and good-hearted country in states of exaggerated alarm... (Marr, 2011, p. 2)

Marr's notion of 'moral panic' resonates with Naomi Klein's (2007) concept of 'shock doctrine', in which, drawing on Milton Friedman's ideas about crisis and capitalism, she argues that the exploitation of 'shock' and 'crisis' has become over the past 30 years, the primary vehicle for government imposition of large scale and irreversible change in both policy and practical terms (p.6 ff.). Friedman's perspective is encapsulated in his 1982 preface to the reprint of *Capitalism and Freedom*:

Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable (Friedman, 1982, p. ix).

Klein works with a number of actual rather than perceived crises in recent American and global history to demonstrate ‘the shock doctrine’ in action – the practice within free-market economies of using crisis as a catalyst for a ‘clean slate’ approach to public policy: “using moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering” (p.8).

This paper explores these concepts in the context of contemporary neoliberal approaches to education policy. It builds on the work of Berliner and Biddle (1995), whose book *The manufactured crisis: Myths, fraud, and the attack on America's public schools* explored and aimed to ‘debunk’ a number of ‘manufactured crises’ in public education in the US post the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983), and subsequent work such as that of Zhao (2009) and Tienken and Orlich (2013). It takes as its starting point the idea that education is fertile ground for panic, as it provides a mass point of reference for the electorate: in the context of contemporary western societies, most voters attended school themselves and a large proportion of the population at any given time has children at school. Indeed, Callaghan (1962) reminds us in his historical work on the shaping of American education, this has long been the case: “I am convinced that very much of what has happened in American education since 1900 can be explained on the basis of the extreme vulnerability of our schoolmen (sic.) to public criticism and pressure” (p. viii). Education has the capacity to speak to the hearts and minds of the electorate, regardless of their perceptions of their own school experience, and politicians, both with and without the help of the mass media, use ‘panic’ as a key part of their contemporary political repertoire.

As Marr suggests above, the key consequence of moral panic is fear. Along with panics regarding ‘law and order’, the imminent threat of economic downturn or the ‘takeover’ of immigrants and asylum seekers, educational panic seeks to undermine social trust in one direction while at the same time drawing popular attention to what is offered as a simple, implementable and measurable solution to an intransigent social problem. In real terms, this means a focus on measurable, standardised educational practices that seeks to mitigate the fear that ‘our kids’ are somehow falling behind on either a global or a local scale.

The ‘Policy Moment’ in Context

More than a mere tool for framing discussions of education in the public space, in this paper I explore the ways in which ‘panic’ can function as a neoliberal tool in and of itself, through the examination of a single moment in recent Australian education policy. Specifically, I analyse 42 Prime Ministerial and Ministerial speeches, media releases and interviews, along with related print media articles, produced over a period of one week in September 2012. The week in question began with the announcement, in an address given by the then-Prime Minister at the National Press Club, of the ‘National Plan for School Improvement’, the long-awaited Government response to the Independent Review

of School Funding conducted by a panel chaired by David Gonski AC (henceforth referred to as the ‘Gonski Review’), the final report and recommendations of which had been handed down to the Government in November 2011 (Gonski et al., 2011).

The Rudd-Gillard Labor Government came to power in Australia in November 2007, after 11 years of Liberal (conservative) government under John Howard. The ‘Education Revolution’ was a key platform for the Labor party in the 2007 election, and post the election, the then-Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard took the role of Education Minister. In 2008 and 2009, Gillard oversaw the *Digital Education Revolution* and *Building the Education Revolution* initiatives, along with the establishment of national standardized testing in the National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) program and the associated establishment of the MySchool website, which sorts and ranks all schools in Australia on the basis of their NAPLAN results annually. Additionally, and consistent with contemporary directions in education policy in Anglophone nations, the development of a national curriculum was undertaken in this period. Laid out in a document published in 2008 entitled *Quality Education: The case for an education revolution in our schools* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008), from the outset the revolution linked the education imperative to productivity and economic prosperity, conceptualising education as a key tenet of the “productivity reform” agenda for the Council of Australian Governments (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 11ff.). The centrality of human capital theory to the Labor Government’s conceptualisation of education (Keating & Klatt, 2013) is clearly displayed in *Quality Education*. At the outset the document proclaims that “quality education is good for our economy, good for our community and good for individuals. It will help create more jobs and higher wages, and will create better opportunities for all Australians” (p.6), appealing to a particular type of Australian pragmatism that the Labor Government continued to appeal to in a range of social policy areas over the subsequent five years.

Reflective of a range of contemporary globalized education policy trajectories, the ‘Education Revolution’ is said to hinge upon the critical areas of “high quality teaching” (rendered synonymous with “teacher quality”) (p. 21ff.), equity of educational access (“ensuring all children benefit from schooling”) (p. 25ff.) and “transparency and accountability” (p. 31ff.). The document ends with an appeal to urgency and an outlining of “horrible fantasies of inexorable economic decline if the government’s policy preferences are not followed” (Clarke, 2012, p. 186), along with the catchcry, repeated with increasing fervour over the ensuing years of the aim to make “every school... a great school” (p. 36).

As part of the mandate established in *Quality Education*, in April 2010 Gillard initiated a review of funding arrangements for Australian schools with a view to developing a new funding “which is transparent, fair, financially sustainable and effective in promoting excellent educational outcomes for all Australian students” (Gonski, Boston, Greiner, Lawrence, Scales, & Tannock, 2011, p. xi). The findings and recommendations from the Gonski review were provided to the Government in November 2011 and made public in February 2012, and, as noted above, the long-awaited response was the catalyst for this particular policy moment. The terms of reference for the Gonski Review were as follows:

1. The role of funding arrangements in supporting improved educational outcomes

2. The roles of families, parents, communities and other institutions in providing or supporting educational partnerships with schools
3. The roles of the Australian and state and territory governments in providing funding for schooling
4. The baseline level and allocation of funding for schools
5. The most effective means of distributing funding for schooling
6. What forms of accountability, transparency and regulation are necessary to promote high standards of delivery and probity among schools receiving public funding, and the data required to monitor and assess these standards of delivery and educational outcomes (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010b, pp. 2-3)

The final of these terms of reference, a late addition to the scope of the review, as indicated in examination of the draft terms of reference (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010a), is qualitatively different from the preceding five, both in terms of form and scope. The terms of reference for the review itself are beyond the scope of this paper, although it is worth noting, as a precursor to the analysis, that the recommendations and findings of the review in relation to accountability, transparency and regulation are limited specifically to the meta-level of the proposed funding arrangements and do not relate to school improvement, teacher selection or teaching quality (Gonski et al., 2011, pp. xxii-xxxiii), a theme to which I shall return in the later discussion.

This particular ‘policy moment’ was chosen as a focus for two reasons. First, it represented a good example of a shift in the public debate on education from issues related to equity and school funding to those related to excellence, quality and school improvement. Second, over the ten month period in the lead up to this announcement, there had been prolonged speculation within the community about the Government’s response and the source of the \$6.5 billion it was predicted would be required to meet the recommendations of the review, and as such the announcement attracted significant coverage in a compact timeframe, both by politicians themselves and the media.

Australian politics has been particularly volatile in the short months since the completion of this study. Given recent turns of events in Australian politics, which first saw the key players and champions of the National Plan for School Improvement step aside as Prime Minister and Minister for Schools and subsequently the defeat of the Rudd-Gillard Government by the Abbott Liberal Government, this analysis might be regarded as something of an exercise in contemporary historiography.

Methodology and Approach

A total of 42 communication texts were examined, comprising speeches, media releases, interviews and newspaper articles, as represented in Table 1 below. Texts were identified using two search methods. First, using the Media Centre website for the then-Prime Minister and then-Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, all media releases, and transcripts of interviews and speeches related to the National Plan for School Improvement for the week beginning September 3, 2012 (the day of the announcement), up to and including September 9, 2012, were identified and incorporated into the analysis, comprising a total of 14 texts. 29 newspaper articles from the ten Australian national and capital city daily newspapers were identified via a search of the Factiva database using the search terms “National Plan for School Improvement”,

“teacher quality” and “teaching quality”, also using the date range of 3 to 9 September 2012 inclusive, with duplicate articles eliminated.

[INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE]

The analysis undertaken sought to examine the ways in which both key politicians and print journalists framed this particular moment in Australian education policy in their discussion and reporting, and to examine the relationships between the chosen communication texts. The three broad guiding questions of the investigation were:

- What frames are in use in these communication texts, regarding the National Plan for School Improvement, ‘equity’, ‘quality’ and education broadly?
- By whom?
- To what effect?

This approach draws on the original work of Goffman (1974) on framing theory, subsequently developed by Iyengar (1990, 1991) and Entman (1993, 2003, 2007, 2010) as a tool for analysis of communication texts. Entman explains the essence of framing as being related to what he terms ‘selection’ and ‘salience’:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993, p. 51, emphasis in the original).

A range of approaches to framing have emerged over the past decade, steeped in differing traditions (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2012). The approach taken in this analysis uses the broader, sociological notion of framing as first described by Gamson and Modigliani in 1987:

A frame is a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue. A frame generally implies a policy direction or implicit answer to what should be done about the issue. Sometimes more than one concrete policy position is consistent with a single frame. (p. 143)

In short, frames make complex issues accessible to mass audiences through appealing to existing cognitive schemas (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), and, in the context of understanding the interplay between policy and communication texts and their effects, connecting policy to life experience: “individuals bring their own life histories, social interactions and psychological predispositions to the process of constructing meaning” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 2). Furthermore, Gamson and Modigliani (1987, 1989) conceptualise frames as the central organising ideas within *packages*, comprised of both the frame itself and a set of corresponding framing and reasoning devices that work to indicate to the reader (a) what to think about the issue at hand and (b) what should be done about it: “a package offers a number of different condensing symbols that suggest the core frame and positions in shorthand, making it possible to display the package as a whole with a deft metaphor, catchphrase, or other symbolic device” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). Within Gamson’s model (Gamson & Lasch, 1983), ‘framing devices’ are conceptualized as metaphors, exemplars (eg historical examples), catchphrases, depictions and visual images; while the ‘reasoning devices’ are

defined as roots (causal analysis), consequence (effects) and appeals to principle (moral claims). Furthermore, packages can be referenced through the use of symbolic devices that invoke their central characteristics, with all packages having a *signature* – a particular set of elements that provide a shorthand for the central ideas of the package, which might be represented in a ‘signature matrix’ (1983, pp. 410-411), in research terms providing both a framework and reference point for content analysis. It is such an approach that has been taken here.

Theoretically, this work is informed by notions of discourse that understand the interplay between politics and the media as both complex and reflexive. Discourses “systematically form the objects about which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49), structuring knowledge-power relations “by the construction of “truths” about the social and natural world, truths that become the taken-for-granted definitions and categories by which governments rule and monitor their populations and by which members of communities define themselves and others” (Luke, 1995, p. 8). Specifically, I am interested here in the ways in which some of these definitions and categories have been formed and used in this particular instance – the expression of particular discourses relating to education and teacher quality as a consequence of one identified ‘policy moment’.

Analysis of Texts: Understanding the Packages and Frames

A three-level content analysis was undertaken on the communication texts. In the first place, a provisional ‘start list’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58) of ten codes was devised, and these applied to the texts using the qualitative data analysis software package TAMS Analyzer (Weinstein, 2011). Gradually, and over several iterations, the ‘start list’ was expanded, codes were added, removed, combined, re-named and broken into ‘sub-codes’ as required by the data. As three separate but overlapping frames emerged from the data, ‘packages’ were identified and codes were loosely allocated to the package that they most readily aligned with, allowing the packages to be more fully explored and drawn into a ‘signature matrix’, provided in Table 2. Interestingly, while it was initially anticipated that the concept of equity itself would strongly emerge either as a package in its own right or as a dominant contributor to one of the frames, this was not the case. What emerged instead was the picture of a shift of the framing of this reform from one strongly rooted in equity as a consequence of fairer school funding leading to better opportunities for all Australian children to one strongly rooted in ‘quality’, whereby the provision of a (narrowly-defined) ‘quality’ education system, ‘quality’ schools and ‘quality’ teachers is positioned as the key to better opportunities for ‘our kids’.

The Three Framing ‘Packages’

As noted above and represented in Table 2 below, three separate but overlapping framing packages were identified through the analysis of data, and it is to these that I now turn, discussing each sequentially. Namely, the three frames relate to ‘saving our nation’s education system’, ‘school improvement’ and ‘teacher quality’.

[INSERT TABLE 2, LANDSCAPE IF POSSIBLE, AROUND HERE]

Saving our Nation's Education System

The formal announcement of the National Plan for School Improvement (NPSI) occurred via a Prime Ministerial speech, delivered at the National Press Club before an audience comprised predominantly of members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery. The speech began in the following way:

Today, I am here to talk about our children, their education, their lives and their future. As I speak, more than three million children are at school and millions more will follow them in the years to come.
On their behalf, I call on you to join me in a national crusade to give those children a better education and a better future (Gillard, 2012g, my emphasis).

From the very outset, then, the NPSI was conceptualised as a national moral crusade, a mission to which all Australians could (and should) contribute. One day later, Gillard addressed the Annual Convention of the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, the peak body representing Australian mineral exploration and mining companies, unexpectedly spending the majority of her keynote speech on the NPSI. Alongside lighthearted justifications for this that included “You invest in mines. They [i.e. teachers] invest in minds.” (Gillard, 2012h), the Prime Minister labored the links between education and industry, imploring the mining executives present to get behind the plan:

Nothing should keep a leader, indeed a mining executive, awake at night more than improving the quality of education in this country (Gillard, 2012h)

elsewhere:

Now the mining industry knows a thing or two about lobbying. Let's say you can be influential when you get together. So use that tremendous organising power to say to the Premiers and Chief Ministers: get on board with Gillard's plan (Gillard, 2012h).

Finally, she played to concerns regarding the downward trajectory of the Australian mining boom, once again drawing links between the NPSI and industry:

There is no question about whether we have a boom. The issue is whether we make it last. My school improvement plan is a plan to make the boom last. Along with all our other work in broadband, infrastructure, clean energy, innovation, universities and skills, tax reform and deregulation. It's the sophisticated, evidence-based package that will ensure the productivity of the future (Gillard, 2012h).

While this image of the education crusade was pilloried by journalists from newspapers of all political persuasions, including assessments of the crusade as ‘Quixotic’ in the conservative press (Donnelly, 2012b) and the mocking tone of this assessment in a more liberal publication: “we are supposed to join a “national crusade” to eradicate the “moral wrong” of a denied education” (Topsfield, 2012b), it endured in media releases and interviews from both the Prime Minister and Minister for School

Education over the subsequent week. Two days later, on the 5th of September, Peter Garrett, then Minister for School Education, said in a television interview:

If we're serious about maintaining our prosperity, as this Government is and as we continue to manage the economy strongly, we need to be absolutely clear that the direct link for all of us, whether we're the mining industry or the services industry or people who are going into other kinds of vocational training, whether you're an exporter, whether you're running a business here, is to make sure that your kids are well educated in the school system and that when they finish they can contribute to national prosperity (Garrett, 2012).

Clearly, the crusade itself is a rhetorical tool with a moral connotation. Designed to evoke at least a low level moral panic – one does not embark on a ‘crusade’ if there is nothing to be ‘saved’ from imminent or encroaching danger – this frame places the metaphor of the ‘education race’ at the centre of the discussion, positioning the ‘winning’ of the race, both regionally and internationally, as the key educational issue. The problem is thus constituted as Australia’s children ‘falling behind’ their counterparts in other countries, and the consequences are seen to be dire:

To win the economic race, we must first win the education race... Our kids catching up to Shanghai’s kids (Gillard, 2012g).

I am not going to sit by as Prime Minister and watch our schools fall behind the standards of the world, which means we will be headed towards being a low-wage, low-skill economy. We need to address that for the nation (Gillard, 2012f).

While the notion of the ‘crusade’ was met somewhat cynically by the print media, the goal of ‘reaching’ the top five countries internationally on standardised testing by 2025, ‘catching up’ to our neighbours, was met with apparent universal acceptance by commentators and journalists from newspapers across the political spectrum, this message reinforced by their reproduction of the Prime Minister’s statistics about performance on international standardised tests (Grattan, 2012; Walker, 2012) and, in some cases, laments about the long time frame established in the plan for the realisation of the goal (Donnelly, 2012b; Marszalek, 2012a, 2012b; Walker, 2012).

The urgency of action was undisputed in the light of the (also undisputed) crisis of Australian education, most succinctly expressed in an editorial in the *Australian Financial Review* on September 8:

Australia should admit its education experiment is failing and urgently address it before we tie ourselves up in further argument about school funding (First decide on the best teaching tactics, 2012).

Furthermore, the appropriateness of the ‘race’ metaphor, imbued as it is with connotations of competition, and notions of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in education was not questioned or taken issue with by one journalist or commentator in the week following the announcement. With the one exception of the ‘crusade’ metaphor, both the framing and reasoning devices used in the Prime Ministers speeches of September 3 and 4, along with the accompanying press releases and media work undertaken by Gillard and Garrett over the ensuing days were essentially adopted wholesale by the mainstream media, and used to shape the reporting of the National Plan for School Improvement.

This policy moment was perhaps most notable because of the shift created from a focus on school funding to a focus on school improvement. The formula used to fund non-Government schools in Australia has long been contentious, with public school activists claiming elitist bias in the current, 'SES model' of funding, while the non-Government school sector has long feared that changes to the funding system would cause a loss of funding to some schools and school systems. Prior to the commissioning of the Gonski review, Gillard pledged that "no school would lose a dollar" (Gillard & Garrett, 2012b) as a consequence of funding reform, a commitment made to contain the dissatisfaction of both sides of the school funding debate, although in effect it did neither, instead enraging those who were hoping for a more equitable redistribution of funding while, because of the ambiguity of whether or not funding would be maintained in 'real terms', it also failed to placate the non-Government school sector.

The announcement of the Government's response to the Gonski review wrapped in the guise of the National Plan for School Improvement was, then, an attempt to shift the debate to less contentious ground, where high levels of agreement would be met in terms of the need to improve schools. In the preamble to her speech at the National Press Club, the Prime Minister posited:

It is a model that strips away all the old debates about private versus public and puts children at the centre of the funding system (Gillard, 2012g).

Gillard further represented the links between Gonski's recommendations and school improvement in this way the following day, after assuring the mining lobby that the review was "done not by an academic but by a hard-headed businessman well at home in the nation's boardrooms" (Gillard, 2012h):

But Gonski is not just a funding review. It's an historic opportunity to stop school resources being the issue and instead make school improvement the issue. By giving every school a benchmark funding allocation, the issue of resources can finally be taken off the table. Performance stays on the table. That's why I've called it a National Plan for School Improvement (Gillard, 2012h).

In requiring evidence of 'improvement' from schools and school systems in return for enhanced funding, Gillard effectively takes a hard line with schools and teachers: there are to be "no blank cheques" (Gillard, 2012c, 2012d, 2012g; Gillard & Garrett, 2012a; Great show and tell. When can we see the homework?, 2012; No blank cheques for school funding, 2012) written without assurances of measurable and documentable improvement, which constitutes evidence that 'our children' and 'our education system' are being successfully saved:

I'm not going to be giving money to states and territories unless they sign up to making sure that their schools are improving. And I mean every school having its own improvement plan, and being held to account for getting the kids a better and better education. More kids at school, more kids learning to read and write at the appropriate standard. More kids staying at school and succeeding at year 12. More information about what's going on at that school (Gillard, 2012c).

Any extra funding will be tied to introducing changes that evidence shows deliver better results (Gillard & Garrett, 2012a).

Furthermore, Gillard aimed to leave no doubt in the public mind that she will succeed in ‘improving’ schools, claiming at a number of different points to have absolute certainty about the methods to be employed, methods that exemplify ‘what works’:

I don't come here to say, "I'm going to have a go at improving schools". I'm here today saying "I know how to improve schools" (Gillard, 2012g).

And that means we're at the point ... where we don't just outline plans we think will work, we outline school improvement measures we know will work (Gillard, 2012f).

This is about improvement and this is about putting more resources into schools so that we can see higher standards. We know this works, we're not guessing, we're not making it up (Gillard, 2012a).

The previous lack of resourcing is positioned as a consequence of a lack of transparency about schooling and school performance, subsequently addressed by the current government through the development of myschool.edu.au. Increases in this transparency are seen as a key tenet of school improvement in this context:

When I first became Education Minister no one could even tell you which were the thousand worst-performing schools in the country. Now you can get that on your smartphone if you want ... and have a good look (Gillard, 2012b).

Better MySchool information to make sure no school falls behind, with more information for parents so they can see how their kids are doing, including on: teacher qualifications, specialist teachers, Year 12 attainment, the results of parent, teacher and student surveys, and how many students go on to further education or get a job when they leave school (Gillard & Garrett, 2012a).

Because of the way that we'll do the accountabilities, because of the transparency about the data that I now have, that you now have – everyone has – we're in a position to be very clear that there's not places that people can sweep under-performance under the carpet (Gillard, 2012g).

Finally, Gillard invokes the language of crisis regarding the state of literacy and numeracy in Australia's schools in order to create a mandate for her National Plan for School Improvement, building an image of the ‘deserving poor’ whose school system is failing them:

By year three, 89 per cent of children from the poorest quarter of Australian homes are reading below average.

These are not children raised in extremes of violence, neglect or disadvantage.

Just kids whose parents pack their lunch, take them to school on the way to work and expect they're being taught to read and write while they're at school. And they're not. (Gillard, 2012g),

and at other times constructing a ‘straw man’ out of the literacy and numeracy ‘crisis’ that can then be effectively sliced through:

First and foremost, we've got to have a big focus on literacy and numeracy. It's not acceptable that any child comes out of school not able to read and write. We have been focussed on that and we need to do more (Gillard, 2012c).

With the exception of accusations that the Government's announced response was ‘light on detail’ (Buckingham, 2012; Donnelly, 2012a; Great show and tell. When can we see the homework?, 2012; Topsfield, 2012a, 2012b), Gillard's approach to achieving the aims of Gonski through school improvement went virtually uncritiqued by journalists and

commentators. Jennifer Buckingham, writing in the Australian Financial Review cautioned that under the plan, schools would be subject to unprecedented federal government intervention, acerbically noting that:

Apparently, Gillard knows how to improve schools, and she will not rest until she improves yours (Buckingham, 2012).

Neither the framing devices, including the claim that every school in Australia should become a “great school” as a consequence of the plan (Gillard, 2012a), despite an ongoing desire to compare and rank schools according to their performance, nor the reasoning devices employed by the Prime Minister in her speeches and interviews were questioned by the media, with the effect once again of allowing the Government’s ‘spin’ to dictate the way in which the issue is framed and presented to the public through the print media.

Teacher Quality

The final, and most dominant, frame is that of ‘teacher quality’, at times conflated with ‘teaching quality’. This frame holds at its core the principle of ‘teacher centrality’ (Larsen, 2010), the notion that “nothing matters more to the quality of a child’s education than the quality of the teacher standing in front of the class room” (Gillard, 2012g), a principle which is troubling in policy terms because of its tendency to discount students’ context and background, simplifying the education discussion to the point where success or failure hinges on the quality of the teacher (invariably) ‘in front of’ the class.

While a number of sweeping statements, such as the one above, are made in the communication texts regarding teacher quality, there are four key elements to the teacher quality frame that serve to shape the discussion, recurring again and again in these texts in varying forms.

The first is around the standards of prospective teachers wishing to enter the teaching profession. Both Gillard and Garrett are very careful in their statements about in-service teachers, choosing to shift the emphasis onto the capacity of future teachers. When asked by radio host John Laws, apropos her general statements about teacher quality: “you talk about improving the standard of teachers. One can only assume then that they are now substandard?” (Gillard, 2012c), the Prime Minister replied:

To be frank I think we’ve got to lift standards in terms of who goes into teaching. I would like the best and brightest in our nation to aspire to go into teaching. We’ve made a start on that with a program called Teach for Australia, which does get very high-performing graduates into teaching, but we need to make a system-wide change. Our teaching workforce is literally hundreds of thousands of people. I want it to be harder to get into teaching – you’ll need to be in the top class to go into teaching... (Gillard, 2012c).

In her original speech, she made reference to the issue of the quality of incoming teacher education students in the following way:

Under our plan, you will need to be at the top of your class to get in to a university teaching course. I want our nation to resound with the voices of parents saying to their teenage children: “Hadn’t you better start hitting those books – after all you want to get into teaching” (Gillard, 2012g),

while in answering a question following the address Gillard made the following

statement:

I can't click my fingers and generate teachers that have gone into teaching with higher entry standards, a higher entry calibre and get them teaching in 9,500 schools. I can't click my fingers and do that. I can do that over a number of years. In terms of working with teachers already in service, professional development, accountability, we can do that over time. But there are hundreds of thousands of them (Gillard, 2012g).

In none of the communication texts does the Prime Minister or Minister for Schools explicitly elaborate the issue of how far current teachers need to be 'improved' and how widespread the 'problem' of 'teacher quality' is, however there are very many statements that indicate, through their spaces and silences, that teacher quality is a definite crisis to be addressed.

We've got to get about rolling out some very practical things to lift teacher standards (Gillard, 2012c).

To lift the standards of more than, you know, hundreds of thousands of teachers around the country who are in service now takes some time (Gillard, 2012a).

At a number of different points, the Prime Minister contrasts her preferred image of the teaching profession with the (unelaborated) version of current practice, with the effect of indicating to the reader that the contrast is great:

I want that teacher to be someone who loves the job, who is of the highest calibre, who got the best training and support as a new teacher, who continuously hones their skills, who is delighted to have their skills measured and areas for improvement highlighted (Gillard, 2012g).

Lifting the skills of hundreds of thousands of teachers. And then actually teaching children (Gillard, 2012g),

the implication of this latter example being, of course, that children are not currently being taught, an idea picked up elsewhere by Gillard:

What we want to do is see people who are highly proficient themselves in literacy and numeracy go into teaching. Teachers are going to go into classrooms and teach kids to read and write and do maths (Gillard, 2012e).

This link between teacher quality and the literacy and numeracy of prospective teachers (and by implication in-service teachers) is the second of the key elements, and we see this drawn a number of times across the communication texts:

To give you one example, we want the people who go into teacher (sic.) in the future to be people who are very good at literacy and numeracy. They're going to go and teach kids to read and write so we want them to be good at reading and writing and maths themselves (Gillard, 2012a).

The data upon which Gillard has based her assessment that Australia currently has a literacy and numeracy problem amongst its teaching workforce requiring a mandated improvement remains obscured in the ministerial communication texts, although this notion is picked up with alacrity (and data from an unknown and uncited source) in *The Australian*:

Across 20 years to 2003, the literacy and numeracy scores of teachers have dropped eight points nationwide (Creighton, 2012).

Appealing to the concerns of the electorate in a time where 'cyberbullying' is

regarded as a somewhat mysterious but serious threat to young people, classroom discipline is the third element, seen as an integral part of the teacher quality problem, linked to a lack of capacity to deal with bullying, both ‘old’ and ‘new’:

Our young teachers will also have the support to ensure classroom discipline, to deal with bullying and cyber bullying, to prevent one or two disruptive children ruining school for all the others in the class (Gillard, 2012g).

...now I want to do more by making sure we get the highest calibre people into teaching that they’ve got the skills they need to manage classrooms today. You don’t want one disruptive kid meaning that the whole class can’t learn, or you don’t want bullying or cyber-bullying to mean that kids are distressed and not able to participate in school and get a good education (Gillard, 2012c).

Extra training for teachers in managing disruptive behaviour and dealing with bullying, so every child in the classroom gets a chance to learn in a safe environment, and a Safe School Plan for every school to prevent bullying (Gillard & Garrett, 2012a).

The fourth and final key element to the teacher quality frame is the reduction of teaching practice to a set of technical skills in these texts, seen as measureable and assessable in the same way that students’ literacy and numeracy might be measured and assessed:

And all of our teachers will be reviewed annually in their school, a thoroughgoing assessment of their skills and where they need to improve (Gillard, 2012g).

...and for the teachers who are in service now I want us to be focussing on lifting their skills, annual assessments. We assess kids, we should assess teachers too; and always be driving them to improve the way we ask our kids to always aim for improvement (Gillard, 2012c)

The logical leap contained in the suggestion that teachers should be measured by the same (some would say largely ineffective) measures that are applied to their students stands in stark contrast to the desire to attract the “best and brightest” into the teaching profession and the claim that we need to value teachers more and accord higher status to the teaching profession. Gillard is clear about the need to raise the value with which the teaching profession is regarded – the irony of this in the light of the push for greater accountability measures and surveillance of teachers appears to escape the Prime Minister:

I think we haven’t valued our teachers the way we should. (Gillard, 2012c).

I believe we’ve got to value teachers more, and I think that there’s a series of things we need to do to show them that we value them more (Gillard, 2012e).

Changing the national conversation so that it’s one about how great it is to be a teacher, about what incredible work people in teaching are doing for the nation, about how they’re the arms and legs that are galvanising our nation in a crusade towards a goal that we all share (Gillard, 2012g).

The vision of pedagogy and classroom practice outlined by the government, however, despite the recurrent motif of the teacher “standing in front of the class” (Gillard, 2012g) does suggest an understanding that some aspects of schooling are different in the 21st century to times past:

Multi-purpose areas, teachers don’t want to teach anymore in 1950s-style classrooms – door closed, kids in rows, one teacher. The capital forces a lot of that teaching style, where what people want now is flexible spaces, get kids over here doing the work that

matters for their personalised learning, team teach – have a coach over there sitting with the young boy who’s falling behind, running his fingers over the words, spelling out the letters. The flexible capital makes that possible. Flexible capital has made possible a new approach to libraries, a new approach to digital technology. We need to improve in science – one of the areas we need to improve – and the science labs will make a difference to that. Kids don’t want to sit there with a coloured book which has got a photo of someone else doing the experiment. They want to be hands-on in a modern lab doing the experiment themselves, learning from doing it, doing all the little things we want scientists to do. Generate the hypothesis, test the hypothesis (Gillard, 2012g).

Notable in this extract is both the use of the term “flexible capital”, not generally a term in use in the context of education but with a significant business connotation, and the image of the coach “running his fingers over the words, spelling out the letters”, reminding listeners and readers that new pedagogies are still focused on going ‘back to basics’ with ‘our children’.

Most of the responses produced in the print media over the week of the NPSI announcement either benignly reinforced or explicitly congratulated the Government on their ‘teacher quality’ focus:

Teacher quality will be improved and "you will need to be at the top of your class to get into a university teaching course" Ms Gillard said (Coorey & Patty, 2012).

Gillard's plans include the sensible objectives of lifting teacher quality, including higher entry requirements for the teaching profession and more classroom experience before graduation (Walker, 2012)

there is hardly a more important priority than improving schools' performance by whatever means and that includes an unrelenting focus on teacher improvement (Walker, 2012).

In some cases, improvements to teacher quality were seen as clearly linked to economic gain:

a 10 per cent rise in teacher effectiveness would lift students to among the world's best and add \$90 billion to the economy by 2050 (Walker, 2012).

Where the Government’s position was critiqued or questioned by the print media, this critique generally related to the proposed means by which the ‘improvement’ was to be fostered rather than questioning the central premise of the ‘teacher quality’ argument itself. In the first place, any innovative approaches to teaching and learning hinted at or explicitly outlined were argued against in both editorials and opinion pieces in *The Australian*:

Far more important is the quality of teachers and the interaction they have with students. The disappointing PISA results show we should also dispense with the heavy focus on group learning in classes, favoured by university education faculties and state bureaucrats. This has meant children have not been properly taught the building blocks of learning. Group-based learning may work for the brightest children, but it fails to equip most children with the basic platform they need (First decide on the best teaching tactics, 2012).

Both in her speech and in answering questions, the Prime Minister singled out progressive educational fads such as personalised learning and open classrooms and suggested more traditional models of teaching and learning were ineffective. Wrong. The evidence is that progressive fads are counter-productive and that the best way to raise standards is to have disciplined and focused classrooms – instead of open spaces – where

teachers are in control, students are told when they have failed and the curriculum is academically based (Donnelly, 2012a).

Kevin Donnelly, long-term opponent of “progressive fads” in education, extended this argument to suggest that the key problem here lies in “teacher training institutes”:

Attempting to lift teacher quality, by mentoring beginning teachers and ensuring trainee teachers have more practical experience, will come to naught unless teacher training institutes are forced to base what they teach on evidence-based research about effective pedagogy and less on postmodern, new-age, politically correct theory (Donnelly, 2012b).

A number of journalists questioned the practicalities of the raising of university entry scores for teaching courses, as well as the likely consequences of this for the teaching profession:

However, Gillard is insisting on reforms to improve teacher quality and student performance in exchange for extra funding —areas traditionally the responsibility of the states and territories. Some of these reforms seem specious. Gillard says under the government's plan, students will need to be at the top of their class to get into teaching at university. However, university entrance rankings are based in part on demand for courses and while teaching remains a relatively low-paid, low-status profession this seems unlikely (Topsfield, 2012b).

Among contentious points is a demand for better teachers, such as through higher marks for people who want to study teaching at university (Paine, 2012).

Aside from the obvious point that those at the top of the class tend to aspire to higher paid jobs than teaching, Colebatch retorted: "Doesn't the PM know that the best teachers inspire kids to learn not because of their academic results, but because of themselves?" (Gordon, 2012).

Finally, some commentators, while accepting the framing of the teacher quality issue provided by the Government, called for the re-structuring or re-organising of the profession or schools themselves, seeing the education system through the lens of productivity:

Gillard's emotion-charged speech called for a “national crusade” to “transform lives” but papered over the more painful yet relatively costless reform that would be far likelier to improve outcomes: restructuring the teaching profession (Creighton, 2012).

The PM, along with almost everyone involved in schooling, is focused on “school improvement” and “teacher quality”. But that leaves out the vast bulk of schooling's workforce and the organisation of its work and workplace (Ashenden, 2012).

Once again, in relation to the teacher quality frame, neither the framing nor the reasoning devices employed by the Government are questioned or taken issue with by the media. Accepted is the claim, embedded in this frame, that teachers are not effective enough, not literate and numerate enough, not skilled enough. Standards clearly need to be raised – indeed, it is hard to counter such a claim – in the name of protecting our children and providing them with the education they deserve, which will in turn produce a higher level of productivity and international competitiveness for Australia, both on standardised testing and more broadly.

Reframing ‘Equity’, Reframing ‘Quality’

The shaping of the Government response to the Gonski Review in the form of a National

Plan for School Improvement worked, as I have argued through the above analysis, to reframe the national discussion around education and equity to one around the quality of teachers, schools and the education system itself. In some ways this represents a conflation of the moral and economic rationales for education discussed in the introduction to this paper, a confusion of the 'economic good' for the 'moral good', of excellence as represented in the 'quality' agenda, for equity. Evidence for this lies in the language of the crusade, of the benefits of 'quality' reforms for *all* our kids, in the enticing of mining executives to 'get on board' in the name of nation building. The premise upon which this shift was based was scarcely acknowledged, let alone critically examined or questioned, in the print media, with one lone voice providing the exception to this:

...by couching school funding reform in terms of excellence, rather than equity, even if the "legislated national goal" seems far-fetched, the federal government probably believes it is less likely to be accused of left-wing ideology (Topsfield, 2012b).

As Topsfield suggests, framing what is essentially a series of serious and protracted issues related to equity of educational funding, and consequently, opportunity, as a crisis of quality might be seen as at best a distraction from the real problems that beset our education system and at worst a duplicitous act designed to draw attention away from the need for policy responses that might be more costly and/or less politically popular. As Linda Darling-Hammond argued in a recent address on this issue in the US context at AERA 2013,

We need to stop chasing silver bullets and shibboleths if we are going to create genuine educational opportunities for all. And finally, if American education is to improve we will need to support rather than blame our teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

The issue raised by Darling-Hammond of support rather than blame for teachers, is a salient one here. For while the crises of quality embedded in these three frames relate to the education system broadly (manifest predominantly in the 'saving our nation's schools' frame), and specifically to schools (predominant in the 'school improvement' frame), the issue of 'teacher quality' is integral to each of the three 'crises' that lie at the heart of these three frames. First, as the discussion above has shown, teacher quality is constituted as a 'stand alone' crisis: one that the Government must address at every level from pre-service teachers' course entry standards to (in more general terms) the remedying of the standards of experienced in-service teachers. Second, teachers are seen to be the means by which education will be 'fixed': the success of the 'crusade' and the winning of the 'race' hinges upon what happens in classrooms, and thus this too relies on teacher quality. Third, school improvement, the quest to 'make every school a great school' has at its heart the improvement of classrooms, and once again, this can be seen to rely on 'teacher quality'. Teacher quality is thus both an independent crisis (a policy problem) and a 'front line' means by which the other two identified crises might be addressed (a policy solution).

Australia, like most countries, has a large and diverse teaching workforce. Also like many western countries, there is good evidence that we need to address a number of serious and growing inequities in education: the 'gap' between indigenous and non-indigenous children and children from higher and lower socioeconomic status backgrounds, for example, in terms of both educational opportunities and educational

successes is large, as demonstrated in successive rounds of PISA data (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2013). Teachers need to be provided with contextualised support for their work with students from diverse backgrounds, support that goes beyond the “three Rs” and recognises that literacy and numeracy are starting points, not end points in themselves, for as Alvin Toffler observed over 40 years ago, “the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn” (1970, p. 414).

More concerning than these manufactured crises of system, school and teacher quality, however, is the potential for this discourse to give rise to a reframing of quality that over time might constitute an *actual* crisis in educational terms, and it is to this reframing that, by way of conclusion, I now turn.

Reframing Quality, Reframing Schooling?

In his recent work, Ball writes of performativity as a key element of the neoliberal curriculum of reform. Building on his earlier work on education and performativity (Ball, 2003) in which he argued that neoliberal discourses hold the potential to reshape teachers’ work and indeed teachers themselves, through the ‘acts of fabrication’ required for compliance and the performative nature of those fabrications, he argues that “the neo-liberal subject is malleable rather than committed, flexible rather than principled – essentially depthless” (Ball, 2012, p. 31). If, as Ball suggests, performativity might be understood as “a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change - based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)” (2003, p. 216), then ‘audit’ might be understood as a collection of processes that feed into and support performativity in action. Shore and Wright (2000, p. 570) claim that “to be audited, an organization must actively transform itself into an auditable commodity”, and indeed the same might be said about individuals: processes of compliance lend to a re-shaping and re-forming of personal and professional identity. Power’s poignant portrait of ‘the auditee’, wrapped in the ‘melancholic embrace’ (Taubman, 2009, p. 150) of audit culture, demonstrates this, as she finds herself defeated simultaneously by both the games of audit and measurement and the self-loathing that emanates from her own participation in the games as a consequence of both self-preservation and the seduction of the games themselves (Power, 2003, pp. 199-200).

Discourses of quality are linked to audit cultures through the accountability and compliance structures that are invariably seen as the key to ‘improvement’. Teacher standards, certification, accreditation, registration and other processes of measurement are the technologies of compliance for the teaching profession, which seek to domesticate teaching practice into standardised technical skills that can be measured, assessed and reported on.

Allan Luke (1995) uses Foucault’s notion of “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1980, 1988) to suggest ways in which this plays out within communities:

Communities participate in discourse in local, often idiosyncratic ways, both resisting and becoming complicit in their own moral regulation. When and where these discourses are

internalized by the subject as her or his own constitute the moment of noncoercive discipline par excellence: Discourses about the self become "technologies of the self" (Luke, 1995, pp. 8-9).

The discourse of the crisis of quality seeks to create a shift in the logic of practice of the school, with the integration of processes of audit, accountability and 'transparency', and also to shape teacher habitus around compliance and audit technologies. This particular form of teacher habitus, which sees the standards as encapsulating and articulating what it is to be a 'good teacher' misses a level of richness and complexity, creativity and criticality that is in fact essential to good teaching (Connell, 2009, 2013). The notion of teacher centrality, which I suggested above lies at the heart of the discourse of teacher quality, "becomes internalised and structures how teachers come to view and act upon themselves as self-governing subjects" (Larsen, 2010, p. 219). Appearing "misleadingly objective and hyper-rational" (Ball, 2003, p. 217) is key to the lure of neoliberal discourses, and for many teachers the path of compliance is either strongly seductive or appears as the only alternative. As Taubman somewhat acerbically puts it:

Standards: clearly no one wants to admit to having no standards, since currently that amounts to saying one has no sense of taste, no moral compass, no ethical bearing, no goals, no principals or simply no criterion against which to measure things, others, or oneself" (Taubman 2009, p.112).

As a consequence of the reframing of 'quality' at the hands of neoliberal discourses, teacher habitus is currently being impacted and reshaped by a number of linked and interlocking trajectories, each related to the discourse of quality, which has driven education policy in a variety of ways for approximately a decade, although only elevated to crisis proportions in recent years with the advent of the current wave of reform under the Rudd/Gillard government in Australia and with the growth of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) as a force to be reckoned with on an international scale (Sahlberg, 2011).

First, the growing links between perceived school and teacher quality and standardised test results, made high stakes through the publication of results via technologies such as the My School website, can be seen to be taking effect in a number of ways. Early research conducted on NAPLAN, for example, highlights the narrowing of curriculum and pedagogical practices as a consequence of the high-stakes nature of the tests, as well as an associated rise in both teacher and student 'stress' and 'worry' (Thompson, 2012). The phenomenon of 'cheating' teachers and schools, whether through manipulation of classrooms, populations, curriculum or students' answers themselves (Thompson & Cook, 2012) highlights a particular type of impact of the testing regime on teacher habitus and practice.

The second trajectory is represented in the suite of teacher quality initiatives such as those overseen by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), including registration and certification of teachers, the provision of "rewards for great teachers" (otherwise known as performance pay) linked to certification at higher levels of accomplishment and leadership, and the new Teacher Performance and Development Framework, which includes the mechanism for annual appraisal of teachers and the development of "performance goals" also on an annual basis. While it is still early days

in terms of the implementation of these reforms, there is a real danger that as the teaching standards and these associated processes narrow the definition of what it is to be a 'good teacher' and reshape some of the logic of practice of the field of school education, the profession's compliance with the standards will bring about an embrace of what Menter et al termed in the late 1990s "entrepreneurial professionalism" (Menter, Muschamp, Nicholls, Ozga, & Pollard, 1997). Argued by Sachs (2001, 2003a) as linked to managerialist discourses in education, entrepreneurial professionalism was seen to be individualistic, competitive, controlling and regulative and largely externally defined, a condition more imposed upon the profession than embraced by it. In the new world order of seamless standards, accountability and teacher quality, the embrace of a system that promises clarity, quality and improved status for the profession seems almost inevitable. As one teacher featured on the AITSL website enthuses:

There is certainly value in certification, because you're made to totally reflect on what you do. I suggest you attend the performance and development that's offered and make sure you have a mentor or a support network to help you along on the journey. With national certification if you were moving from one state to another, your qualifications would be recognised. It is a nice thing, it is respectful. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2013)

Finally, and clearly linked to the standards and accountability regime referenced above, is the shaping of beginning teacher identity and habitus through the narrow approach to accreditation of initial teacher education programs by AITSL. While universities in Australia are 'self-governing institutions', as defined by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Association, AITSL accredits schools and faculties of education to provide initial teacher education courses from which in turn graduates can gain registration as teachers. The guidelines for accreditation, following the associated teaching standards which largely fail to encapsulate the complex, critical and creative dimensions of teaching, betray an impoverished understanding of 'good teaching' which could be seen to privilege standardised practices and skills over these more complex dimensions.

While these three examples relate specifically to the contemporary Australian context, these policy trajectories and their manifestations are by no means uniquely Antipodean, and are reflected across the Anglophone world in the spread of the GERM, with its fixation on testing, standards, accountability, transparency and quality, manifest in similar strategies in multiple contexts.

Conclusion: Responding to the Crisis

All of this is not to argue against accountability. Teachers must be accountable for their practice – to their students, their colleagues and their school communities. But the kind of accountability embedded in critiques and crises of quality not only undermines trust in the profession but is also unlikely to bring about actual improvements in quality, despite 'ticking all the boxes'. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that the goal of attracting the 'best and brightest' into the teaching profession will be met under the current conditions and trajectory of accountability. What is required is perhaps a more intelligent form of accountability, described thus by Onora O'Neill in her BBC Reith Lectures in 2002:

Perhaps the present revolution in accountability will make us all trustworthier. Perhaps we shall be trusted once again. But I think that this is a vain hope - not because accountability is undesirable or unnecessary, but because currently fashionable methods of accountability damage rather than repair trust. If we want greater accountability without damaging professional performance we need intelligent accountability... Intelligent accountability, I suspect, requires more attention to good governance and fewer fantasies about total control (O'Neill, 2002, pp. 57-58).

For teacher educators, there are specific implications and imperatives from the 'crisis'. First, we need to understand more deeply the political context of our work and the process of neoliberalisation that education is currently caught within. On this process, Jamie Peck writes:

"How social formations and relations are neoliberalized, and with what path-forming consequences, really makes a difference. Differences are going to matter here too: not only does the neoliberalization process yield polymorphic, uneven outcomes, its contradictions and crises are differentiated too. Analytically, this underlines the importance of a process-based understanding of neoliberalism, as an evolving pattern of regulatory restructuring, associated with a flexible repertoire of policy rationales and practices" (Peck, 2010, p. 276).

Understanding these processes in education and the way they hold the potential to shape and form our own work, and in turn the future work of our teacher education students will better equip us to stand our ground and ensure that "what works" is supplemented or perhaps supplanted by "what matters". Over ten years ago, Marilyn Cochran-Smith issued a call to action around what she termed 'the outcomes question' in the face of neoliberal reform in the US:

At this critical juncture in the reform and development of teacher education, if we do not take control of framing the outcomes question, then the outcomes question will surely frame us and undermine our work as teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and policy makers committed to a democratic vision of society and to the vital role that teachers and teacher educators play in that vision (Cochran-Smith, 2001, pp. 543-544).

This call is possibly more salient for us today than it was in 2001. What is a required on the part of educators in our time is a commitment to the kind of 'activist professionalism' of which Judyth Sachs wrote, also over a decade ago (2000, 2003a, 2003b). Vigilance and a willingness to commit to playing a part in the public debate and discussion of education, speaking to address misconceptions and misunderstandings, to reject the premise of politically expedient yet educationally empty strategies and suggest generative, educationally viable alternatives are all requirements of teachers, teacher educators and educational researchers in our time. Further, we need to equip future teachers, through our curriculum and our teaching, to understand and critique the politics of their work and the context within which it is enacted. Anything less is likely to contribute to rather than address a very real crisis of educational quality.

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