

CONTRADICTIONS IN THE TEACHER DEBATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

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The generalised crisis of schooling has become focused as a crisis of teachers and teaching in many countries in recent years (Hill, 1990; Poppleton and Riseborough, 1990). The predominant debates have been about how to reform teachers as professionals and policy implementation, but this has entailed a further, often less explicit, debate about how best to understand teachers and teaching (eg. Holly, 1986; Demaine, 1988; Hargreaves, 1988). This conceptual debate centres on the nature of the 'problem' of teachers and teaching, that is the basis from which policy and emerging reform strategies arise.

In Australia most interventions can be seen as outgrowths of the international debates about teachers. They target teachers as individuals. But some interventions show a different lineage, converging with the teacher debate from a general concern with industry and award restructuring. The problem of teachers and teaching is seen as a problem of work. In this paper I map these recent developments in the Australian teacher debate and argue that interventions are being informed by conceptually contradictory individual and work problematics. I discuss the conceptual contradiction and examine its actual and potential implications for policy and research around teachers and teaching.¹

Recent developments in the Australian teacher debate

The turmoil in schooling over the last thirty years has led to major changes in the nature of teachers' work. But since the late 1970s the character of educational reform has changed. We have moved from an era of equality of opportunity to an era in which market choice is becoming the primary organising principle (Marginson, 1989). Through this period of transition governmental reports have advocated both teacher and system reform, but until recently the emphasis has been on the latter. Change in the agencies regulating teachers' and students' work has affected teachers indirectly. Direct reform of teachers and their actual work has received only cursory attention and little action, but this is now changing.

In 1989, the Schools Council (SC), an advisory body to National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET), released its Teacher Quality: An issues paper (SC, 1989), arguing for the better management of teaching and learning by teacher and school improvement. It advocates improving teachers through a 'value added' strategy which extends opportunities for pre- and in-service teacher education oriented to the preparation of a preferred 'professional'; one showing 'teacherly' and managerial capacities. The professional should be an industrially conscious, reflective practitioner, focused on local school circumstances to the extent that they impinge upon their classroom teaching. 'Professionalism' is defined in terms of individual attributes and capacities, and encourages an orientation focused on the act of

teaching. But there is little discussion of the content they require, nor the context they will work in. And the report does not address questions of control or how teacher education should be restructured, apart from occasional references to 'partnership'.

The following year a working party, chaired by Dr F.Ebbert, tabled a report for the Australian Education Council (AEC) titled, Teacher Education in Australia (AEC, 1990). This report shows an implicit suspicion of educational workers and advocates improving teaching by more closely controlling and monitoring what teachers and students do. It parallels other AEC initiatives (eg. national curriculum) in pressing a corporate federalist strategy oriented to creating a national system of schooling which circumvents the constitutional and financial implications of Australian federalism (Lingard, 1990). The Ebbert report builds upon the liberal proposals of the Schools Council with significant developments and omissions. It sharpens the image of the 'professional' by spelling out a preferred 'one model' for teacher education, involving a 3 year 'first degree and 2 further years 'associateship' as probationary employee (50% pay and some aspects of load) and parttime student leading to a BEd.

This blueprint redefines access to the profession as the completion of two degrees and associateship. The preferred professional is to be skilled in psychology and teaching studies, but, it seems, with no study of the social and historical context and limited opportunity for free inquiry or contact with other educational workers. There is to be a network of 'partnerships' controlling teacher education. The primary partnership is between teacher employers and higher education institutions (HEIs) based upon a competitively negotiated contract. The employer would be the 'consumer' choosing between a range of pre- and in-service programs, all giving credit toward the award of degrees. The HEIs would have to compete in this marketplace because their student load and funding depend upon their offering attractive and marketable courses. This organisation of teacher education would vest power in the hands of teacher employers, sharply reducing the autonomy of teacher education providers.

Alongside these educational managerial interventions, teacher unions have been arguing that (1) the problem of teachers is due to the lack of an

adequate
career structure, declining real wages and falling relativites, but
with
increasing work demands and (2) these are not simply industrial issues
because
separating industrial and educational questions is meaningless when the
conditions of teachers' work are also the conditions of students'
learning. The
need to improve the career structure as a way of enhancing teacher
professionalism is gaining increasingly wide support and becoming a
point of
convergence in the interventions. But the teacher unions are not just
arguing
that the nature of teachers' work effects the attractiveness of the
profession
(an issue of supply and demand). Rather, it improves the quality of
teacher and
student experience in schools more generally. In other words, the
crisis of
schooling, teachers and teaching is a problem, not of individual
teachers, but
of work.
<r<å This work perspective, focusing on the conditions of schooling as a
site for
both teachers' work and students' learning, is a longstanding union
concern.
But the recent teacher union campaign has also been loosely informed by
broader
labour movement interest in industry and award restructuring.

The general strategy of award restructuring has been developed by the
ACTU in
a bid to sustain the Accord between the union movement, and federal
Labor
government and to counter New Right economic and industrial strategies.
In
their report, Australia Reconstructed (ACTU/TDC, 1987), they argue that
Australia's economic crisis and vulnerability to the international
economy must
be tackled through national economic management and industry
restructuring. It
involves negotiating and actively pursuing a set of national economic
and social
objectives which aim to achieve full employment, low inflation, and
equitable
increases in living standards. These objectives are to be achieved by
maximising economic growth and development through innovative,
tripartite
management and the removal of impediments to change.

Such consensual management rests upon: maintaining a stable economic
context
through a prices and income accord; strategically guided trade and
industry
policies; measures to encourage productive investment; and industry
restructuring programs. These restructuring programs have two
dimensions. The
first is an active labour market program which tackles unemployment not
through
passive programs of minimalist cash transfer effectively expressing a
blame the

victim mentality, but through actively promoting skill formation, effective job placement and reduced labour market segmentation.

The second dimension of industry restructuring entails a reformed practice of work. Firstly, it requires the promotion of a production consciousness and culture which recognises that the 'creation of wealth is a prerequisite of its distribution' (ACTU/TDC, 1987:154), ie. that there is a basis for cooperation in production, as well as conflict over distribution. Secondly, it demands the reform of production, that is the interaction of skill formation, technology, work organisation, industrial relations, training and education. No one element can be separated out and privileged as an autonomous good. Neither technology (nor education) can be treated as 'cargo cult' (ACTU/TDC, 1987: 156). The emphasis is firmly on the integration of these elements in 'harnessing the human factor to the quality and productivity challenge' (Dix, 1985: 6)

Central to the process of restructuring is skills formation, not viewed as a cost, but as an investment in people who are productive resources (ACTU/TDC, 1987: 155) and able to production in many ways. The use of such productive resources requires radically different management practices which provide scope for such contributions rather than controlling and limiting workers' contributions to the performance of prespecified tasks. Skills formation and industrial democracy places education and training at the centre of award restructuring; education and training for both workers and managers.

In 1986 the ACTU accepted the principle of a two tiered system of wage fixation, involving flat rate increases and percentage increases linked to improved performance and efficiency. Between 1987 and 1988 this principle was institutionalised in the National Wage Case (NWC) and linked to award restructuring in line with the Australian Industrial Relations Commission's structural efficiency principle. This stated that employers and unions should cooperate to review their awards in order to improve industry efficiency and workers' career opportunities.

Australian teacher unions have actively grasped the opportunities opened up by award restructuring. The traditional teacher union concerns with improving teacher career structures and for rewards commensurate with work done have been

broadened to accommodate ACTU commitments to restructure awards, making workers access to and movement between careers more flexible, and introducing national benchmark salaries. In 1987 the ACTU congress agreed to mount a special case for teachers and in 1989 the proposal for teacher award restructuring was submitted to the NWC and state industrial jurisdictions. It proposed national benchmark salaries and the introduction of an Advanced Skills Teacher category and salary range. Since then negotiations have continued, being coordinated as a national campaign. Agreements are well along the way in all States and Territories, although this has been complicated because teacher award restructuring has coincided with budget cuts and other educational reform programs. This has led to delays, trade-offs and in some cases the suspension of negotiations.

In late 1989 private educational consultant Dean Ashenden intervened in the teacher debate. He argued that the problem of schooling rests on low educational productivity which is unsatisfactory for both teachers and their employers. The problem is a problem of teaching, not teachers. Educational productivity is not limited by deficient teachers, but by the poor organisation of teachers' labour process which inappropriately uses teachers' effort. Criticising teacher award restructuring for its limited agenda premised upon an unrealistic acceptance of the metal industry's model of award restructuring and its degeneration into an antagonistic trade off situation, Ashenden formulates his solution: to seek productivity increases 'not from spending more or working harder, but from working smarter' (Ashenden, 1990:4 emphasis included).

Following Marginson (1990b), Ashenden distinguishes between 'efficiency' and 'productivity' perspectives in award restructuring. 'Efficiency' addresses the relationship of inputs and outputs in monetary terms, describing the cost per unit at a constant level of output. 'Productivity' addresses actual inputs and outputs (not their monetary value), describing volume of output for constant levels of input. An efficiency perspective on award restructuring seeks to reduce the cost of output by reducing labour costs or increasing work demands. It increases exploitation. A productivity perspective aims to increase actual outputs, both in quality and quantity, using a constant amount of labour over a

constant time. It is not intrinsically exploitative, although productivity gains can always be cashed in as efficiency gains, restoring prior return levels but at reduced cost.

The great significance of Ashenden's intervention is to place work organisation and the teaching labour process firmly on the agenda, but his reconceptualisation and reform proposals are more questionable. He argues that the problem of teachers and teaching should be addressed by an unconstrained look at teachers' work to identify limits on the 'productivity of learning'. Prime targets are the industrial agreements which institutionalise teachers work, the division of labour, the organisation of teachers' and students' labour process and the reward structure for individuals and schools. More concretely, he suggests offering varied career structures, easy movement in and out of the profession, a more complex division of labour which reduces the range of teachers' tasks while increasing the kinds of educational workers who can take on the 'non-teacherly' work. 'Teachers' would be 'freed to concentrate on high-level educational work'. Their training would stress not multi-skilling, but deep-skilling in both knowledge of curriculum areas and in teaching and learning methods and strategies (Ashenden, 1990:11).

The message is that no-one and everyone is responsible for the poor organisation of teachers' work because it is an historical development, consolidated by both teachers, through their unions, and employers. But everyone suffers from it and is dissatisfied with it. With no problem individuals, with blame and suffering generalised to all, the heat can be taken out of teacher industrial relations and both parties can sit down together, talk through their preferences for future schooling and collaborate to bring about reform satisfactory to all. He proposes a round table, beyond media glare (public view ?), where the big picture and detail of future schooling can be worked out and the (managerial) problem of getting schools to own this picture can be tackled.

Ashenden's perspective on teachers' work is potentially attractive because (1) it bridges educational and industrial strategies, but sidesteps current conflict by offering a way of seeing the problems of teachers and teaching which lies outside either framework and (2) assumes that the appropriate unit for analysis

of teachers' work is the classroom, confirming educational managerial commitments. Certainly, the convergence between Ashenden's and the conservative Ebbert specifications for the reconstruction of teachers and teaching is striking. It gives some support to union fears that they are being asked to reconsider industrial agreements on teachers working conditions as a basis for dialogue, without any guarantees that the protection historically afforded to teachers by industrial agreements will be maintained.

There are now indications that the work perspective is being picked up by educational managers as a basis for reform policy. A review of a forthcoming Schools Council (1990) report notes that 'teachers' work' is expanding and continues:

The [Schools] Council says, "We believe that the quality of teaching in its broadest sense is to improve the quality of learning in the most exact sense, the working relationship of teachers and students in a classroom." In other words, back to basics, back to the core of teaching and fostering learning that genuinely is teachers' work.

Teachers' work is defined in a "charter" which outlines the characteristics and qualities that good teachers need. This charter is designed to shape teacher pre-service and in-service training and appraisal procedures. (McRae, 1990:20)

This notion of teachers' work is trapped in an perspective which cannot see beyond the classroom, the teaching learning relationship and the personal characteristics of individual workers. It is hard to imagine a similar statement in for example, the metal industry award restructure, expressing concern with the personal qualities of metal workers or focusing on a spatially and temporally limited act of producing to the exclusion of industry-wide processes and relations of production. It seems that what is emerging is a hybrid intervention which colonises the language of work to press an agenda of individualist educational reform.

The conceptual contradiction: individual vs work interventions

By the late 1980s two distinct ways of problematising teachers and teaching are discernable. The educational managerial interventions target teachers as individuals, seeing the improvement of teachers as a means for

improving schooling. The implication is that teachers are deficient. The solution is to define a preferred professional behaviourally, designating individual attributes, capacities and orientations, and begin to press for system changes which would enable the realisation of the behavioural norm. These interventions are premised on: (1) a psychological view of individuals as the source of behaviour (activity); (2) an assumed separation of individual and context (ie. a dermatological preoccupation!) and (3) a notion that the relationship between individual and context follows a simple or complex stimulus response logic (ie. change x is followed by, 'causes', change y). From these assumptions the teacher appears as an individual actor existing in a system and subject to, but not closely integrated with, its influences. If preferred teacher behaviour is not evident, teachers must be improved through system change which: provides experience in work and training to conform individuals' behaviour (socialisation), monitors and regulates deviance (social control) or screens individuals so they self-select on preferred characteristics (trait theory) (Anderson, 1987).

What differentiates the Ebbert and SC interventions is their assumptions about individuals and the nature of the stimulus-response logic. The former seems to assume teachers can be made into passive vessels through networks of control and then filled up with content and their behaviour shaped through their simple responses to system factors. Such a stance parallels developments in Britain, where Thatcherite teacher reforms have come under heavy attack. The major critiques seem to challenge this simple socialisation - social control model by arguing that individuals are active, not passive, subjects of policy and show a complex stimulus response logic (Hargreaves, 1988; Broadfoot, 1990).

Individuals are thinking meaning makers who respond to their circumstances by working out ways of coping with, adapting to and transforming the situations they find themselves in. The implication is that if particular teacher behaviour is not evident it is because the understandings generated by teachers <rdain their interaction with context, make such behaviour inappropriate. More than ever, the pressure is for system improvement to ensure the circumstances to which preferred behaviour is a rational response. But it also encourages

interventions which target the intellectual processes of teachers;
education
which enhances teachers' capacity to think and make meanings. This
strategy of
school improvement coupled with the preparation of reflective
practitioners is
evident in Teacher Quality. But interestingly the 1990 SC report has
beefed up
teacher appraisal procedures which, it is argued (McRae, 1990:20), are
crucial
for professional growth and dialogue. But recognising the
socialisation
function of teacher appraisal does not deny its potential social
control and
trait-based screening applications. One application cannot be
absolutely
quarantined from the others, particularly when educational
interventions may
enhance teachers meaning making, but not guarantee preferred teacher
behaviour.

In sum, the educational managerial interventions are limited to
improving
teachers through some combination of training, control and screening
because
their definition of the problem of teachers and teaching and hence
their
solutions are premised upon psychological, methodological individualist
and
positivist assumptions. These common features encourage notions of
teacher
deficit which underpins an antagonistic industrial relations context
and a quest
for solutions in top-down management of individual change. In hard
times both
are likely to become overtly conflictual, limiting the possibility of
effecting
the desired reform and encouraging a policy mix which tends toward an
emphasis
on coercion and control over the more liberal and humanistic concern
with
education.

In contrast to the educational managerial interventions those of the
teacher
unions, Ashenden and Australia Reconstructed target work as a social
process.
The unit of analysis is the activity which integrates people's
capacities for
action and circumstances. From this perspective the problem of
teachers and
teaching is a problem not of individual teachers, but of the teaching
labour
process and the historically specific bringing together of teachers as
workers
and work organisation.

The assumptions upon which this problematic rest are not generally
made
explicit. However, reading across the documents it seems that people
and

circumstances are not seen separately and unambiguously bounded; not individuals in contexts. Rather, they are intimately interrelated with each constituting, shaping and constraining the other. People are active in historically specific conditions and through their activity (work) change those conditions and themselves -- their culture, consciousness and identity. The constructions 'teachers as workers' and 'work organisation' do not designate socially abstract 'individuals' or fixed circumstances devoid of people, but social forms which change from past, into present and future. Their character is defined at any point in time by the relationships between people and between people and the conditions in which they work. Peoples' behaviour arises from and is shaped by these intersecting relations. It is stimulated, as Ashenden suggests, by contradictory experience, such as the difficulty of reconciling a professional ideology which aspires to 'educate' with the lived reality of actual classrooms in which 'education' is marginalised by the immediate demands of classroom management, discipline and instruction. Such activity is not simply responsive to particular stimuli, but creative and self-creating. As Ashenden indicates the contradiction between educational aspiration and situation generates on one hand, educational experiments, new patterns of collective organisation and practical politics which contest the way things are, and on the other, personal satisfactions and opportunities for growth and learning.

The solutions actually proposed to this work problematic are ambiguous. Firstly, the interventions are targeted at different sites. Australia Reconstructed addresses national policy and industry policy in manufacturing. Teacher award restructuring is oriented to teaching at a system level, while Ashenden restricts the teaching labour process to classrooms. Secondly, the translation of the work perspective into managerial interventions entails different fragmentations of the the integrated nature of work. Teacher unions interpret award restructuring through the interests of their members. They seek to improve teaching and enhance teacher morale by improving pay, relativities and career structure and increasing opportunities for training. For both teacher unions and teacher employers, aspects of work such as the wage, career and skill formation seem to become associated with

individuals, rather than maintained as integrations of both people and circumstances. This individualisation leaves work conditions as a 'context' and an intensely contested agenda item. Ashenden effects a somewhat different fragmentation. Having identified the creative contradiction between aspiration and situation, that is, between an ideal of education and a practice of instruction, his analysis consistently privileges the abstracted ideology of 'education' over the actual practice of teachers' work. Award restructuring here is interpreted through his commitment to idealised 'education'. Improving teaching means making the ideal real, through the reorganisation of teachers' work to allow situation to converge with aspiration for at least some educational workers. The effect is to stress the abstracted discourse of 'education', 'teaching and learning' and 'professionalism' which obscures actual inequality in schooling and conflicts in teachers' work. It also reconfirms the traditional touchstones of education -- education as students' 'learning to think' and the solid good sense of 'the profession' -- and their socially divisive underpinings, the academic - vocational, mental - manual polarities.

In brief, the work perspective on teachers and teaching problematises not teachers as individuals, but the teaching labour process, that is, the relational and historically specific integration of teachers' capacities or powers as workers and an organisation of work. The general principles underpinning this perspective await clear statement. The actual interventions it has informed offer new strategies for reform, but they seem limited because they fail to maintain an integrated notion of work. Clearly the promise of the work perspective awaits realisation. Yet it is important because it opens up a way of seeing schooling which is quite different, indeed contradictory, to the individualist educational managerial perspective.

Challenges for policy and research

The conceptual contradiction posed by the individual and work perspectives present challenges for both policy and research. For policy and other forms of managerialism, the challenge is to move beyond the contradiction so that straight forward solutions to the problems of teachers and teaching can be presented as a basis for practical politics. We see in current policy proposals a harmonisation of the contradiction by the reassertion of

individualist or idealist conceptual frames. Teacher unions re-separate individuals (their members) from work conditions and McRae uses the language of work to reaffirm educational managerial reform proposals, while Ashenden advocates the 'educational' ideal over the real. These solutions to the conceptual contradiction have opened the way for new strategies for the reconstruction of teachers' and teaching, but they are not the only solutions. Logically, there are other ways of moving beyond the conceptual contradiction and therefore other potential reform strategies which policy can ill-afford to ignore.

The challenge for research is to explore the work perspective and the opportunities it opens up for new understandings of schooling, for framing new questions and for generating new solutions to the old problems of the crisis of teachers, teaching and the more general crisis of schooling. It sets an agenda for research, rather than an immediately accessible basis for policy, although there is no reason to doubt that, once we have learned how to look at schooling relationally rather than through the familiar individualist and idealist frames, the work perspective will point to strategies for action, change and practical politics too. Space does not permit an elaboration of such a research agenda, but I want to finish by mapping out some existing work which may contribute to the research challenge and to indicate just one set of questions which might be addressed.

Schooling as work: toward a research agenda

A beginning has already been made in researching teachers from a work perspective. Lawn and Ozga's (1981) seminal essay on 'the educational worker' has encouraged the convergence of work on the teacher as worker; the classroom, school and school system as workplace; and the teaching labour process (eg. Connell, 1985; Apple, 1986; Seddon and Connell, 1988). One view, that teachers' work shows deskilling and intensification, leading to the 'proletarianisation' of teachers (Apple, 1990), points to further relevant research in industrial sociology and the sociology of work. In the last 20 years, the conceptual contradiction noted in this paper has polarised these fields. Braverman's (1973) pioneering study did much to reorient this research from the study of individuals to a focus on the labour process. It also stimulated debate. One set of debates explores better ways of theorising work and the labour

process(Thompson, 1983). Another set re-examines the interpretation of Marx which provides the conceptual basis of Braverman's argument (eg. Haug, 1984) and paves the way for a more anthropological analysis of work in the constitution of culture, consciousness and what it means to be truly human (Williams, 1983; Kessler, 1987). Here is another body of research which offers important insights for an understanding of schooling.

Such research poses a range of questions about teachers' work and schooling more generally which require empirical investigation. For example, they encourage a view of schooling as a site of production and social reproduction, that is a site for praxis which ... changes not only the objective conditions ... but the producers change with it, by the emergence of new qualities, by transforming and developing themselves in production, forming new powers and new conceptions, new modes of intercourse, new needs, and new speech. (Marx, 1964: 93)

Such praxis is not just the prerogative of teachers', but also of students. Schooling then, is a site at which teachers' and students' labour processes intersect.

Individualist analysis assumes that schooling is centred upon a single relationship between teachers and students. The work perspective suggests there are (at least) two; the intersecting labour processes in which teachers' and students' as workers act upon an organisation of work in ways which create and recreate their circumstances and themselves. In contrast with individualist assumptions, these labour processes may bear no necessary relationship with one another and may indeed, be quite contradictory. These are important questions to research through, for example, extended life history accounts or detailed case studies. Their significance does not lie just in their academic interest, but in their implications for the ways we understand schooling and teachers' work, the ways we conceptualise the problems and for the solutions which emerge as a basis for practical school reform. Such research has potentially profound implications not just for policy, but for students' and teachers' lives.

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Notes

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