Constructions of primary teaching practice in the wake of 90s reforms

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ABSTRACT:

This paper draws on collaborative research undertaken with Graham Vulliamy and Rosemary Webb from the University of York on the impact of 1990s "reforms" on the nature of teachers’ work and their sense of professional identity. In this paper, we focus on the reflections of 12 Waikato teachers on their sense of themselves as classroom practitioners. In particular, we discuss findings which summarise their reflections on changes that have become embedded in their practice and the extent to which they see these changes as a break from the past and affecting their sense of professional identity. In particular, we will be looking at ways in which certain concepts central to their sense of themselves are being deconstructed (or erased) and reconstructed in discourse – concepts such as integration, assessment, child-centredness and creative teaching. In conclusion we discuss briefly some of the implications of this process for teacher education and teacher professional development.

Introduction

The immediate context for our focus is the raft of educational "reforms" which has changed the face of New Zealand education in the late 1980s and 1990s (see, for example, Gordon, 1992). In administrative terms, New Zealand primary schools became self-managing units with their own Boards of Trustees, performance management systems and various other accountability mechanisms designed to make them more transparently available for external audit by the newly created Education Review Office. In curriculum terms, primary teachers in the 1990s were asked to implement a new national curriculum, which in many respects differed from its predecessors. Effectively, the new curriculum offered a new construction of what was officially deemed to be worthwhile knowledge. It also impacted on pedagogy, assessment practice and reporting.

The word "reform" is in inverted commas to signal both its contestedness and its non-neutrality as a description. No aspect of the reforms has been without its critics. Taken as a whole, the reforms were viewed by some as a hijacking of the educational agenda by powerfully entrenched, neo-liberal economic interests, both global and national (for example, Codd, 1997; Peters & Marshall, 1996). Other critics focused on aspects of the reform process in terms of its lack of consultation (for example, Gordon, 1992). Yet other critics focused on aspects of the curriculum reforms: its emphasis on skills acquisition (for example, Peters & Marshall, 1996); its use of levels (for example, Elley, 1996); its terminology (for example, Locke, 2000); its discursive reconstruction of the child (for example, Cawkwell, 2002), to name just a few.

While we defer to this body of critique, it is another, perhaps complementary, aspect of the 90s context that is more pertinent to the concerns of this paper. The last decade of the Twentieth Century witnessed a strong interest in the nature of teachers’ work, teachers’ lives and teacher identity. Debates have continued to rage in respect of the nature and constructedness of words such
as "profession", "professionality" and "professionalisation" (for example, Downie, 1990; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Hirst, 1982; Hoyle, 1982; Hoyle & John, 1995). There has also been a growing literature concerned with the impact of recent reforms on teacher identity and especially on ways in which teachers identify as professionals (for example, Apple, 1995; Helsby & McCulloch, 1996; Locke, 2001; Robertson, 1996). The study this paper in part reports on contributes to this literature.

The York-Waikato project

In one way, the genesis of this study lies in a comparative research project investigating the processes of curriculum change in primary schools in England and Finland, which was instigated by Professor Graham Vulliamy and Dr Rosemary Webb, both of the University of York (See for example Vulliamy, Kimonen, Nevalainen, & Webb, 1997; Webb & Vulliamy, 1999a; Webb & Vulliamy, 1999b). The justification for these studies was the interest arising from the fact that in many respects the educational policies of England and Finland moved in opposite directions during the 1990s. "Thus, whilst England was revising its detailed and prescriptive National Curriculum, first introduced with the 1988 Education Reform Act, Finnish legislation in 1994 dismantled its long-standing subject-based national curriculum, which had been in place for over twenty years, and encouraged schools to develop school-based curricula incorporating integrated topic work and accompanied by more active-learning pedagogies" (Webb & Vulliamy, 1999b, pp. 117-118).

An invitation to articulate the experience of New Zealand primary teachers to this comparative project was extended to us by Webb and Vulliamy in 2001. In terms of the international context, the New Zealand reforms were viewed as occupying something of a middle ground between those in England and Finland. In consort with these United Kingdom colleagues and researchers in Finland we established two project aims:

- To examine the effect of changes in the nature of teachers’ work as a result of national educational reforms on teacher professionalism;
- To compare these effects across three educational constituencies: England, Finland and New Zealand

Our research questions were as follows:

- How do primary teachers perceive teaching as a profession in the current climate?
- What are the key characteristics and demands of primary teaching?
- How have changes in these demands as reflected in the roles and responsibilities of primary teachers altered their perceptions of teaching as a profession?
- What are the implications of these changing perceptions for the recruitment and retention of teachers and the future of primary teaching as a profession?

Research method

A New Zealand profile of six schools (roughly comparable to the UK sample) was selected as per Figure 1 (schools are identified by pseudonym):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central city school with mixed</td>
<td>Rimu School</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catchment area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Because we were concerned to ask teachers to share at some depth their responses to a decade of educational reforms, two teachers in each of the selected schools were chosen (in consultation with the principals) in part on the basis of their years of experience. All teachers bar one in the resultant sample of 12 began teaching prior to 1990. The exception ("Roberta") began teaching in 1998, but had worked for 10 years prior to this date as a teacher aide. Three of the teachers interviewed were principals of their respective schools ("June", "Carla" and "Hilda"), and three others were involved in senior management ("Jocelyn", "Tom" and "Bronwyn"). The remainder – "Hazel", "Joy", "Dorothe", "Hilda", "Pauline" and "Georgina" – were experienced teachers.

It needs to be emphasised that this is not a random sample of teachers. A degree of selectedness and serendipity was at work in the process of assembling the sample. And, of course, the willingness of teachers themselves to engage as subjects in a research process in the midst of busy lives was a not inconsiderable determining factor. As researchers we were committed to the close-up rather than the wide sweep, with the aim of arriving at findings in respect of teachers’ sense of their professionalism that would be indicative rather than generalisable.

One educational research tradition we were locating ourselves in is interactionist ethnography (Hammersley, 1999b). Such an approach assumes social situations to be complex and irreducible to simplistic sets of assumptions. Moreover, the approach is accompanied by a "concern with exploring the perspectives of the people involved rather than rushing to judgments about them and what they are doing. This concern is premised in part on the assumption that people’s behaviour is structured by how they interpret the world and the particular situations they face" (Hammersley, 1999a, p. 2)

The data collection process began with a loosely structured interview, conducted usually by both of us, with one acting as interviewer and the other taking notes. Such an arrangement provided a written "back-up" account, allowed us as interviewers to monitor each other’s performance and, in many instances, allowed us to complement each other in the asking of questions. Interviews ranged from 35 minutes to an hour and a quarter, were conducted during the school day or after school, and were audio-taped. Once transcribed, the interviews were sent to the teacher interviewees for emendation and approval. The process of data analysis was not begun until participating teachers had given their consent and approval.

In the initial stages of data analysis, the interview questions themselves provided a broad set of thematic categories. However, it was important for us methodologically to allow for "the derivation of relevant but unanticipated", categories from the concepts of the research participants themselves (Vulliamy & Webb, 1992, pp. 218-219). With each of us working independently with a "guinea-pig" transcript, we made margin notes indicating emergent themes and concerns. In the course of a
number of conversations and with the majority of the transcripts so scanned, we arrived at an initial set of major and minor categories.

This first-level winnowing out of thematic strands was complemented by the analytical techniques of "cognitive mapping" and "dilemma analysis" discussed by Webb and Vulliamy (1992). Statements suggesting causal connections were noted as well as passages indicating dilemmas. In March, 2002, Vulliamy and Webb visited New Zealand. Over a period of three days, our New Zealand-based, first-level categories were set alongside the first-level categories generated by our English colleagues. The outcome was the production of set of categories that embraced both sets without affecting the groundedness of either.¹

In a discussion of qualitative research methodology, Vulliamy and Webb (1992) describe the final stage of analysis as "relating the categories, concepts and typologies which have been grounded in the data, to other published research and theorising" (p. 221). This relates to development of what Yin (1989), in his theorisation of case study research, calls analytical generalisations, where "the investigator is striving to generalise a particular set of results to some broader theory" (p. 44).

In our final report on the New Zealand aspect of the study (Locke & Hill, 2003) we attempted to be exhaustive in presenting findings which reported teachers’ responses across a range of thematic categories. Even at this level, however, the act of presentation was accompanied by interpretations reflective of the discursive framings we were operating out of. Our intention in the report, as in this paper, is to ensure that the data are sufficient for other readers to have a basis for challenging our framings and readings.

As mentioned earlier, one aspect of our analysis was to identify dilemmas and contradictions, not just between but within respondents. Our approach to this aspect relates to another research tradition we identify with, that of policy ethnography. Ball and Bowe (1990) describe this approach as follows:

> For policy ethnography the concern needs to be both with exploring policy making, in terms of the processes of value dispute and material influence which underlie and invest the formation of policy discourses, as well as portraying and analysing the processes of active interpretation and meaning-making which relate policy texts to practice. In part at least this also involves the identification of resistance, accommodation, subterfuge and conformity within and between arenas of practice. It involves the plotting of clashes and mismatches between contending discourses at work in these arenas, e.g. professionalism vs conformity, autonomy vs constraint, specification vs latitude, the political vs the educational. Policy ethnography should rest on the recognition of a clear distinction between intended and actual policy-in-use, and will attend carefully to processes of mediation and recontextualization (p. 4).

This description is particularly apt in respect of the project we are reporting on. Certainly, the teachers we interviewed were engaged in acts of interpretation and meaning-making viz-à-viz the reforms. Moreover, the dilemmas and contradictions mentioned above we found to be susceptible to critical analysis as a means of identifying (again, through interpretative acts) what we will be describing as patterns of discursive contestation at work. Indeed, the patterns of conflict we will be discussing resonate with the examples of Ball and Bowe.

¹ These categories provided headings for our final report of our New Zealand findings (Locke & Hill, 2003).
A discussion of some findings

The findings we discuss here are drawn from section 3.1 and 4.1 – on the demands and requirements characterising primary teaching today – of the above mentioned report (Locke & Hill, 2003). Three topics are discussed: curriculum and assessment, classroom practice: pedagogy and school wide management practices. Each is discussed in relation to teachers perceptions of changes contingent upon the 90s reforms and their sense of themselves as professionals.

Curriculum and assessment: "All the curriculum documents have changed" – Bronwyn.

During the 1990s, New Zealand primary teachers witnessed an upheaval in their work practices. In the first instance, they were expected to "deliver" a completely new curriculum, articulated in the form of seven curriculum statements, each with strands and substrands, and with each strand described in terms of eight "levels" of achievement, each with its own defined achievement objectives. Teachers were told that they were expected to "monitor" the achievement of each student against these achievement objectives. To draw on a distinction made by Apple (1995), it was not only the content that changed but also the form that organised this content in a particular way. Our sample of teachers responded to both. Though workload considerations are not a particular concern of this article, teachers in our sample would agree with Roberta's modest claim that "we cover more curriculum areas perhaps that some teachers taught back in those days."

Our teachers made relatively few content-related comments in respect of the curriculum reforms, usually reflective of their own curriculum interests or touching on the new Technology statement. Some teachers commented critically on what they saw as the non-integrated nature of this curriculum. However, such comments were rare in our study. Indeed, any sense of a critique of ways in which various curriculum documents constructed their respective knowledge domains was totally absent in our data. Rather, respondents were more inclined to endorse the new curriculum, though not necessarily in such glowing terms as Dorothy does:

I mean those documents really are exceptionally good, I think. When you actually sit down and look, there’s no excuse for anyone really not to have one good idea a day. Let’s say if you looked at nothing else, if you just looked at the content with ideas and focuses, it’s all there in front of you. There’s such a huge chance, and it’s all been made simple and I don’t know who … I haven’t got a clue who wrote them but whoever did, I mean what a mission, I think, you know, I really think they’re well put together, most of them, and people would nit-pick if you were a purist music person, you might nit-pick with that. But I’m not a purist at anything, I’m just jack of all trades, so I actually think they’re all pretty good and I think they’re pretty clear, pretty well set out and yeah, we just have to take the time to read them and work through them. (Dorothy)

It is interesting to note that Dorothy positions herself here as a non-specialist, generalist teacher. She likes the curriculum because it makes her life simpler; it is a source of ideas. Another teacher, Jocelyn, commented on her sense of increased professional "upskilling" as a result of changes in curriculum content. For her, the changes meant depth as well as breadth, with the "old" curriculum being constructed as somewhat superficial and narrow. "The Science didn’t have as much depth to it. We certainly did nature study and things like that, but not the physical side of Science in the primary level."

Technology was made one of the four "core" curriculum areas by Dr Lockwood Smith, Ministry of Education, in announcing the Achievement Initiative in 1991 (Ministry of Education, 1991).
Two themes emerged strongly from the data in respect of curriculum-related change. The first was pressure of curriculum coverage; the second related to the formal organisation of the curriculum into discrete outcomes (levels-based achievement objectives [AOs] across a large number of content-related strands). The pressure was seen as related to both the pace of change, the sheer breadth of the documentation and, for some, a lack of resourcing. While there was a view expressed that things had recently settled down, four teachers did identify curriculum coverage as having a negative impact on teaching because of work intensification pressures. In the same breath, one teacher (Pauline) can be found speaking positively of the curriculum's new "depth" on the one hand, and on the other the debilitating effect of its structural constraints.

I don’t think my teaching style has changed dramatically apart from trying to fit in a heck of a lot more. To me we tend to now, to sort of do this quickly, on to the next thing, on to the next thing, so we don’t do it in as much depth and gone is the kid turning up with something wonderful like a spider and you think, cool, we’ll go and do something on spiders … because, oh, no, I’m busy doing this so I can’t just do what the kids are interested in. You tend to say, Oh, lovely spider, push that on, come on now, we’re doing Maths because you’re so tied up with what you have to cover and I find that quite sad really. (Pauline)

All teachers in our sample would have agreed with Hilda's sense of the way in which the curriculum's form signalled a break from past practice: "…I've had to have staff meetings on how you make the achievement objective the specific learning outcome and the assessment tasks actually relate to each other because that wasn't the way that they thought."

Classroom practice: pedagogy

The particular version of outcomes-based planning constructed by the curriculum documents had a mixed response from our sample. Some saw such planning as leading to more focused teaching and one, Bronwyn, offered an argument supporting the use of AOs because it facilitated "child-centred" assessment practices. Others saw themselves as caught in a dilemma, reacting positively to a sense that the stipulation of learning outcomes encouraged a tighter connection between AOs and assessment tasks and more focused planning, and yet wondering whether teaching was becoming less fun and more fragmented. At least two teachers described the need to tick off AOs as a joyless chore that had the potential to undermine holistic approaches by reducing everything to parts and leading to rote teaching, rote learning and rote record-keeping.

The most articulate critic of the formal structure of the curriculum as it affected teaching was Jocelyn, with her metaphor of the factory.

I personally find it more difficult because what we’re doing is so curriculum objective driven and so…assessment driven, and so…many of the things that I’m talking about, although I can assess them and I know the sorts of things and the child does, they’re not ones that you can readily tick and cross and assess, not easily assess. And they are, I guess, your values and those sorts of things, attitudes and they’re not as easy to evaluate or to assess. I mean I like my children to do a lot of self-evaluation and things like that and at the beginning of the year. It’s a lot of thinking about thinking, and they need to be learning those sorts of things which I don’t think fit easily into any particular curriculum….Yeah, the objectives, obviously we’re looking for an outcome to assess and I think that that’s where it’s narrowed for me, because I don’t believe that some of the things that I teach children can have an output. I mean a lot of teaching is not easily assessed I don’t think. It’s not very easy. It’s not like putting something in at the beginning … a raw material thing, the beginning of the conveyor belt and having something, a product at the end of it, at all. And I just think that, in a way I guess that it is a narrowing although there’s a lot more work to it. Maybe it is a narrower vision. I don’t know. Interesting to know. (Jocelyn)
However, in terms of our sample, Hilda was the most typical in her response to the curriculum, maintaining her own proven practice and fitting the curriculum requirements around it. Adopting a stance we might describe as "constrained flexibility" she draws on what Shulman (1986) calls "pedagogical content knowledge" to balance the "curriculum content knowledge" that has been imposed on her.

And the books, the social studies one...is a perfect example of...where on earth does it come from? It has got nothing to do with the children's lives and if it doesn't...the levels aren't meaningful. You can't say that you've achieved level one social organisation and now you're going to work on level two. They're completely discrete so there's nothing, they've got nothing to do with each other....I was in a country school last year to teach a three-level social studies unit with three different levels which I could do in Maths quite nicely or even in science or in writing. In social studies they're completely different, you know, completely different. So you pick the middle one and you do a working towards and an achieving and extending and what you actually do, well....what I actually did was teach my unit and make it fit whatever curriculum I could fit it into and if I had to fit an essential skill somewhere I'd just fit it into that. (Hilda)

Such statements as the above reflect the inevitable transformative effect on pedagogical practice by changes in the official curriculum, especially when these are far-reaching in terms of content and form. But such transformations are not a matter of simple causality. At the individual, classroom-teacher level, our interview data reveal ways in which they are mediated by the teaching philosophies and temperaments of different teachers – by the positions they adopt and the discourses they are acting out of. In these data a number of themes and terms emerged as discussion nodes: focus (as in focused planning), child-centredness, integration, assessment, creative and flexibility, and individual needs.

By way of example, let us offer a discussion of the construction of "integrated" as it operates in this statement from Jocelyn who, as we have noted, was critical of aspects of the reforms:

I guess I do a lot more integrated teaching so that I'm covering as much of the documents or as many of the documents as I can and I think that's good, especially in the senior school, we find that's really easy and we do a lot of shared planning and, as much as possible, we integrate topics and I think that's really good. And I think it's easy to do. But then again when I think back, I don't know that that's come about because of the curriculum documents or whether we just focus more on using those curriculum documents because there are objectives that we have to cover, but we actually did used to teach in an integrated way anyway. I don't know. (Jocelyn)

An interesting aspect of this statement is the chain of causalities. Initially, Jocelyn flirts with the idea of seeing "integrated teaching" as caused by the need to achieve curriculum coverage. She then asserts the value of integration. She then resists the notion that it is the curriculum documents which are causing the integrated teaching. Rather they become a condition for the use of integrated approaches – after all, there are objectives that have to be covered – but then, almost as an afterthought, she asserts that integrated teaching (in terms of an older discourse, perhaps) was central to her practice before the reforms.

Because the meanings of terms such as "integrated" are discourse-specific, we can explain the apparent contradiction in Jocelyn's being able to view the new curriculum as facilitating more formal and focused planning, and more integrated or structured learning, despite a sense of its being actually fragmented. As researchers, we would be inclined to argue that the prevailing discourse preceding the reforms related the term "integrated" to teaching approaches that were often activity-centred or based around rich tasks, that actively took account of the interests of the child, and which were more inclined to make use of what Eisner (2002) terms "expressive" and "problem-solving"
outcomes. We would further argue that the pedagogical discourse encouraged by the reforms has favoured the use of "behavioural" outcomes, mandated by the State, discrete, pre-determined and levels-related. In terms of this discourse, "integrated" means the weaving together of these outcomes into goals for individual episodes, lessons and units of work. As Jocelyn’s statement shows, one can gain a sense of pride by managing to integrate so many strands and thereby preserve, at least in name, a pedagogy that pre-dated the reforms.

The word "focus" was another to recur repeatedly in discussion with respondents. The word occurred in a number of contexts. Sometimes it described a teacher's approach in response to the pressure of curriculum coverage – a response to work intensification. A number of teachers used the word positively to describe changes in assessment practice. Hazel, for example, described assessment as "so much more focused" and Roberta agreed, arguing that "teachers are much more focusing on a child's needs and strengths". (Other teachers used the word "specific" or "specificity" for a similar purpose.) Here, the word "focus" is made meaningful by its being linked to a discourse of individual needs mediated by assessment practices linked to levels-based achievement outcomes. Suppressed, we would argue, is a recognition that these individual needs (what children need to know and be able to do) are being constructed by the curriculum document and assessment practices deriving from it and that there are other bases for ascertaining a student's needs.

A similar potential for ambivalence characterised discussion around such concepts as flexibility, adaptability, child-centeredness and "hands on" learning. "Child-centeredness" was a frequent touchstone in discussions about reform impact. At least three teachers described themselves as having been child-centred before the reforms. But child-centred in what terms? For Jocelyn, child-centred meant an emphasis on the "whole child". For a majority, however, it meant an emphasis on learning: "whole learning" (Pauline), "child-centred programmes" (Georgina), "child-centred learning" (June).

Child-centred learning. We have come away from this whole class teaching. We have come away from where a teacher stands up the front and teaches. We’ve moved more into the group type teaching where teachers have to look for more in-depth outcomes. I see teachers identifying groups of children now and working with children, catering for individual needs. I see teachers involving children more in research. I see the resources that are available are more hands on for children. I think there is more focus on a developmental approach. (June)

June was one of a number of respondents to see this emphasis as signalling a break from a past constructed as characterised by "whole class teaching". In a number of teachers, the wheel comes full circle as we become returned to the matter of needs analysis – with Tom’s hallowing of increased specificity and what he calls a "honing in on what the child's needs are" and Roberta's assertion that "you've got to assess your children's needs and make your decisions from there". So: child-centred becomes related to individual needs analysis – but needs as identified in terms of what kind of analysis?

As we shall discuss, the achievement objectives provide one kind of available answer for our respondents. But there are others. Another slant on "child-centred learning" is to see it in terms of a diminution of teacher-directedness with more emphasis on students having the opportunity to negotiate classroom content. A number of teachers endorsed this construction of "child-centred", linking it not so much with the reforms as with such wider changes as the increased uptake of ICT and an awareness of different learning styles and the importance of metacognition.

As previously noted, changes in assessment practice contingent upon the 1990s reforms were often referenced to "individual needs" discourses. Teachers in our sample readily differentiated between different assessment practices as serving different, and sometimes conflicting, purposes.
Ongoing assessment – you want to know where your children are and their needs and strengths, which I tend to do that as well as what the school requires. (Roberta)

Two kinds of assessment practice are implicit here. One is diagnostic and focused on the child's learning needs. The other is systemic and accountability-driven. A number of teachers in our sample felt that the changes in assessment fostered by the reforms encouraged both kinds of practice. As a case in point, June, a principal, drew on the discourse of individual needs and public accountability in the space of a single utterance.

I think that teachers are seeing it [assessment] as a very important focus and this is what it is all about. We are here to give our children maximum opportunity to achieve and this is how we show that we are making a difference for these children and I think that’s the focus now. (June)

Hazel felt that changing assessment practices meant that she was better able to scaffold learning for her students. Tom felt that as a result his approach had become more individualised. In the following statement, we can observe Hilda's balanced view of the way these two discourses demand a tricky balancing act.

Well, I think you can spend so much time assessing it, you forget about teaching and I think we’ve got to, I think we’ve got to use it to benefit the kids, we’ve always got to be looking at why we’re doing it. And if, if we’re assessing children so that children can learn about their learning and the next bit of learning that they’ll be doing, then that’s good. If we’re doing things, if teachers are doing things because they don’t own them, they have to do them because the Principal or someone else told them to do it, they’ve got to put this in this box and tick it off because it’s a school way of doing it and then get on and do the real business, then I think it’s not good at all. So there’s an awful lot of, I think there’s an awful lot of getting the whole staff on board, taking staff where they’re at in a little journey, a little step at a time and the teachers understanding and owning what they’re doing and why they’re doing it. (Hilda)

She doesn't reject accountability-driven assessment practice. Rather she insists on the need for teachers to own the way in which it is implemented, that is, she relates it to issues of teacher autonomy.

Comments from a number of our respondents, in fact, did indicate how easy it was for the balance Hilda talks about to get out of kilter. June, for example, commented that for some teachers assessment had become the "be all and end all" of teaching, making an explicit connection between accountability-driven assessment and the curriculum AOs: "And we've got these things set out that we hope at Level 4, Level 3, that they are achieving them, so we've got to find ways of doing, getting those skills across and the vehicle is often chosen because it will get that across." What emerges from comments such as this is the sense of contestation, not complementation, between accountability-driven and child-centred assessment discourses. In the following extract, Carla (a principal) links the latter with "meaningful" assessment.

For me assessment has to be meaningful. Even in reporting to school there was an assessment done here just on ball handling skills and reported to the board and for me that was...you have to question why would anyone want to report it to the board, and to me that’s a waste of time; it’s not going to make a difference for children because there is nothing that is going to be a result of that, nothing is going to change. (Carla)

In conversation, both Carla and Dorothy described accountability-driven assessment as reducing them to paper-shufflers (Carla) and box-tickers (Dorothy) and as strangling creativity in teaching, sentiments echoed by a comments by Jocelyn that being "curriculum assessment driven" stopped
her focusing on more desirable learning outcomes and processes, by Pauline with her sense of her
practice as exhaustingly accountability assessment-driven, and by Roberta with her sense of having
her classroom practices controlled by the amount of assessment she was required to do.

Another theme related to pedagogical practice highlighted by some of our respondents was
creativity and flexibility. Reflecting on the post-reform period, Hazel saw herself as being a more
flexible and creative teacher on the basis of her being able to accommodate a range of different
learning and teaching styles. In a similar way, Carla saw the reforms as encouraging a diversity of
individual teaching styles, while Pauline linked enhanced flexibility with more recent pedagogical
emphases on active, inquiry-related, "hands-on" teaching (which other teachers also commented
on). Again, these positive comments were balanced by other comments which viewed the reforms
as constraining creativity and flexibility. Pauline herself commented that the work intensification
accompanying accountability-driven assessment demands gave her less time to prepare resources
and simply play with the children. Roberta lamented the loss of a certain kind of creative energy
from classrooms. Hilda sensed that the innovations of the late 1980s had disappeared. The most
strikingly elegiac note was struck by Tom (who generally spoke positively of the reforms) in the
following passage.

It’s a bit like being flexible I think with some of the flexibility is gone where you can come and say
right today we are not going to do that we are going to just focus in on art for the day. I think those
days are gone where, unfortunately, sort of you are tied down to teaching to your goals so much that
some of the exciting parts of teaching have actually gone. You can still bring them in but sort of like
flying by the seat of your pants but, you probably know what I am trying to say, just some of the sort
of exciting days we could do something different. You can do it once or twice but just to bring some
real excitement into your teaching spontaneous, spontaneity, a lot of that has actually gone, where
you can sort of come in and decide gee you’ve talked about that, we will drop everything we are
going to do day we are going to do what you’ve brought in and a lot of that has gone, taking the kids
point of view for just a day or a couple of days and gone on a different tangent, because its laid
down this is what we are doing, this curriculum integration work, this is what we are doing, this is
what we have to do at the end, here are the objectives we want to work to, here are the assessments
for the term and the spontaneity to a degree has actually gone. Which is a shame really because
some of the tracks people used to go down to were fantastic, sort of developed a lot of different
areas. (Tom)

The word “gone” recurs, signalling Tom’s sense that a certain kind of practice has disappeared.
This practice is associated with words like “flexibility”, “exciting”, “different” and “spontaneity”.
Replacing it is a pedagogy associated with words like “laid down”, “this is what we are doing”
twice), “have to do” and other phrases suggesting constraints. Integration, as related to this
constraining pedagogy, is constructed discursively (as discussed previously) as the necessary
weaving together of curriculum objectives into goals for individual episodes, lessons and units of
work. What is being woven, it might be argued, is a strait jacket.

School-wide management practices

The mandatory introduction of Performance Management Systems (PMS) into schools in 1997, as
well as pressures brought about by the curriculum and assessment reforms, also led to school-wide
changes in planning, the tracking of pupil learning and the ways in which professional development
needs were ascertained. As with changes in pedagogical practice, these also had a mixed response
from our sample of teachers.

Our respondents were united in agreeing that school-wide planning had increased and was, in part,
driven by pressures of reform implementation. June, a principal, used the word "inclusive" to
highlight the desirability of such a practice and contrasted this with the undesirability of teachers working in isolation and "doing their own thing". Carla, another principal, saw joint preparation as a rarity in pre-reforms times. A third principal, Hilda, provides the following detailed vignette of the school-wide planning process noting the various tasks it might address: curriculum integration, review, reporting procedures and the development of school-wide assessment tasks.

I think it’s related to the changes in that as a whole school and then broken into two syndicates. The school has decided at the beginning of the year, this is what we’re going to cover this year and around these sort of month…and times of the year and to do with what topic. So we are going to sort of hit this type of writing and fit it in with the social studies theme or something like that….at the end of this year we will sit down as part of that also and work out what whole-school things we will assess in there as part of what sort falls out of that and try and make it as manageable as possible and also what things teachers want to put in the achievement books. But very much from the case what the teachers want to do because otherwise it won’t happen anyway. It’s got to be what they want to do and own it but I will give a bit of a general push in the general direction and they will come up with…like they may decide to assess every Maths unit from one piece of writing a term type of thing. They might decide to go and do poetic one term, one term transactional and something like that. I’ll leave that up to them as long as they all do the same thing. And it fits in with what I expect to be able to, or what I expect to call a reasonable report as long as I can live with it. Your question was whether the collegial was to do with the curriculum and I think it is because it is a way of managing it. It’s a way of sitting down together and saying let’s get a handle on this because by myself I’m just going to jump here, there and everywhere, but if I make a plan and we all stick together we can make it happen. (Hilda)

For Hilda, school-wide planning was a way of managing the workload incurred as a result of increased accountability demands and her insight into the way in which such planning necessarily acted as a curb on a classroom teacher's autonomy. In this respect, she was aligning herself with Hoyle's (1975) advocacy for "extended professionalism": "Collaborative teaching and collaborative decision-making both involve a loss in teachers' autonomy but increased potentiality for teacher control" (p. 317). At one point in her conversation with us, Hilda had identified teachers who might feel their autonomy unduly constrained by whole-school planning as either creative, "independent" teachers or those who were lagging behind in respect of current practices. Tom was another respondent who drew attention to the tensions created with teachers who were unsympathetic to certain goals of school-wide planning, for example, integrated planning to meet national curriculum requirements.

Through various vignettes and reflections, teachers gave a number of reasons for endorsing school-wide or syndicate-wide planning processes. For Georgina it was a spur, a constraint on autonomy (a way of keeping teachers on track) and a source of reassurance. For June, it was an aid to flexible programming and the organisation of shared teaching. A number of teachers saw collective planning as a way of managing reform demands – almost a survival strategy. Jocelyn saw it as necessary if resource production issues were to be faced. Pauline saw it as necessary because of the number of topics to cover. Dorothy exemplified those teachers who saw the group process working if it had a collective focus. She used expressions such as "made us focus and look at ourselves" with connotations of scrutiny or surveillance. Joy was another such teacher, viewing collegiality (a term frequently occurring in discussion) as a coping strategy. She suggested that her fear of being fixed by an appraising or surveilling eye had not been realised. Nor had Jocelyn's similar fears.

Our analysis suggested that a more focused tracking of pupil learning was another school-wide management practice to emerge in the wake of the reforms. June, as a principal, provided a clear picture of how whole-school planning enabled the setting of flexible achievement targets for her school's low-decile clientele and how this target-setting played a key role in enabling staff to gain a picture of "whole-school" achievement. For her, such a measure was vital and empowering in providing feedback on the school's programme and the extent it was "making a difference" for its
students. Roberta was less ringing in her endorsement, but was persuaded by the way it provided "hard data" – an expression echoed by June in her interview – on students (which she contrasted with intuitive and anecdotal evidence). For Dorothy, this practice signalled a clear break from the past and was vital to the process of programme review. She clearly saw the practice as an accountability mechanism, as did Tom, who listed "the person at the top, the school, the Board of Trustees" as people he felt accountable to. In his interview, Tom drew on an "individual needs" discourse to justify the accountability measures involved in school-wide tracking systems.

The way in which these school-wide tracking systems impacted on reporting was noted by a number of our respondents. Jocelyn described reporting as "greater" and "more in depth". Hazel showed in a vignette how the levels-based AOs had shaped reporting practice and turned it into a tick/cross affair, a practice she didn't question. Carla also described a practice that deferred to the AOs, thus allowing for the accountability pressure of curriculum coverage, but this practice was supplemented by measures more personalised to the individual child.

It became clear to us from the interview data that school-wide planning could operate as a performance management system. Involvement in such a process was reported by some teachers as providing a spur for professional development and self-appraisal (for example, Dorothy's comment that "it has made us focus and look at ourselves"). Speaking as a principal, June noted how school-based professional development was a reform outcome. While we would argue that there is a potential downside to this public mechanism for identifying professional development needs in the sense of teachers being observed and found wanting, we found little evidence of this in the comments of our respondents apart from the report of fears later found to be unrealised.

Conclusions and implications

One way of making sense of the range of dilemmas and "mixed" attitudes being discussed here is to relate these findings to two competing constructions of teacher's work and teacher identity. One such schema was developed by Codd (1997), who argued that advocates of the sorts of neo-liberal, market-driven reforms characteristic of New Zealand, England and Australia tended to have a technocratic-reductionist view (as opposed to a professional-contextualist view) of teaching (See Figure 2.) "In the technocratic view, good practice can be reduced to a set of predefined skills or competences, with little or no acknowledgement given of the moral dimensions of teaching. In the professional view, on the other hand, the good practitioner is a well-rounded person who can integrate all aspects of their prior knowledge and act in a teaching situation with moral integrity" (p. 140).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role model</th>
<th>Technocratic-Reductionist</th>
<th>Professional-Contextualist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criterion of good practice</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical aim</td>
<td>To produce the attainment of specific learning outcomes</td>
<td>To enable the development of diverse human capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative context</td>
<td>Efficient management (Hierarchical)</td>
<td>Professional leadership (Collaborative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of motivation</td>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of accountability</td>
<td>Contractual compliance</td>
<td>Professional commitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Codd (1997): Contrasting conceptions of teaching
As Locke (2001) has pointed out, Codd's technocratic-reductionist view of teaching can be related to Brennan's (1996) view of the managerial professional "who clearly meets corporate goals, set elsewhere, manages a range of students well and documents their achievement and problems for public accountability purposes. The successful professional in this corporate model is one who works efficiently and effectively in meeting the standardised criteria set for the accomplishment of both students and teachers, and who contributes to the school's formal accountability processes" (p. 3). Conversely, the professional/contextualist can be linked to a view of the classic professional who is expert by virtue of their possession of a broad knowledge of the theory and skilful practice of teaching and its content domains, who is committed to the individual well-being of each student and to the development in each of them of relevant knowledges, skills and attitudes, who values his or her autonomy and views it as essential to have the freedom to make his or her own judgments with regard to appropriate practice in many situations, and who is prepared to speak out on broad matters of educational policy and social justice.

The discourse(s) producing Codd’s technocratic-reductionist teacher relate to what Marshall (1995) calls “busnocratic rationality” which he describes as shaping “autonomous choosers as particular kinds of subjects who are constructed to choose in certain pre-defined ways” (p. 2). This discourse is characterised by:

- skills as opposed to knowledge
- information and information retrieval as opposed to knowledge and understanding
- consumers (especially industry) as opposed to providers as defining quality in education.

According to Marshall, autonomy as so defined is different from a kind personal autonomy that assumes an independence free of manipulation and imposition. The latter relates to a philosophy of education that starts from the child’s needs and interests, and from the child’s nature and growth patterns. In respect of the autonomous chooser, the needs and interests of the child are determined elsewhere by external definitions of quality.

Drawing on these schematizations, one can represent some of the tensions and dilemmas found in this report's findings as per Figure 3. As Luke (1995) has pointed out, "The meanings of...keywords are tied closely to particular orientations to the world. They are dynamic, changing in accordance with the demands and needs of the institution or community in question" (p.15). We have noted these "key words" as they have been used by teachers in our sample to reflect on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key word(s)</th>
<th>Technocratic-Reductionist</th>
<th>Professional-Contextualist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Managerial professionalism/new professionalism</td>
<td>Classical professionalism/activist professionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td>State-mandated, behavioural, predetermined</td>
<td>Teacher-determined, inclusive of expressive/problem-solving, negotiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-centred</td>
<td>Focused on a universalising version of the child whose performance is monitored against curriculum AOs</td>
<td>Focused on individual children as connected to diverse cultural settings and bringing diverse learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused</td>
<td>The “autonomous chooser”</td>
<td>Personal autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated teaching and learning</td>
<td>Making connections between curriculum strands in planning</td>
<td>Viewed as a holistic solution to the complex of learning needs brought by students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
<td>System-driven</td>
<td>Linked to the socially contextualised learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Accountability-driven</td>
<td>Diagnostic, formative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The capacity to bring together AOs in novel ways

The capacity to respond imaginatively to the world of the child

Figure 3: Competing discourses of teaching and learning

changes in their practice. As the table shows, these words can be seen to mean differently according to the discourses that construct these meanings.

In line with Figure 3, we offer Figure 4 as a way of indicating ways in which school-wide practices can take on a different meaning depending on their discursive construction. As the preceding discussion shows, our respondents were fairly kindly disposed to these changes in school-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key word(s)</th>
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<th>Professional-Contextualist</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School-wide planning</td>
<td>Accountability-driven by the need to be seen as effective in terms of a contractual obligation to meet state-mandated curriculum AOs.</td>
<td>Driven by the sense of a convenant with the local community which imposes a duty to address the learning needs of that community's children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>&quot;Contrived&quot; collegiality (almost for survival)</td>
<td>&quot;Extended professionalism&quot; Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>Shaped by the national curriculum's AOs and taking a tick/cross form.</td>
<td>Formative documents addressing the whole child (and his/her parents) and his/her learning needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Externally determined and designed to make teachers fit systems.</td>
<td>Individually determined by teachers seeking to find better ways of addressing a community's learning needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Constructing school-wide management practices

wide management processes, despite the work intensification burden. Most saw them as a way of coping better with accountability pressures better and in a constrained but adaptable fashion were attempting to make these processes serve two discursive masters.

Like any schematisation, Figures 3 and 4 are simplifications. They are certainly not meant to suggest that technocratic/reductionist teachers are bad. Indeed, many of the dilemmas experienced by our respondents suggest that they wanted to be both sorts of teacher and that their allegiance was torn.

Rather such schemata are a way of mapping the kinds of discursive shift and potential for discursive contestation we would view as the major finding to emerge from our interpretation of the interview data. They also provide a way of addressing the sorts of questions Helsby and McCulloch (1997) raise in respect of the impact of curriculum changes in England on teachers' lives:

To what extent should classroom teachers be viewed as passive victims, disempowered by some monolithic structure which prescribes their actions and removes their autonomy? Alternatively, how far can they be seen as active agents, using their professional judgement in their day-to-day work and making many decisions which fundamentally shape the development and form of the new curriculum (p. 4)?
Our respondents had taken time out of busy professional working lives to reflect on questions for which there were no simple answers. As researchers we were humbled by their ability to reflect on causalities and to explore genuine dilemmas. Such ability on the face of it bespeaks "active agency" and the use of "professional judgment".

Our teachers, then, were certainly not disempowered in some crude sense by the sovereign power of the state and its mandated reforms. But they were certainly constrained, in two broad ways. The first was by the complex of particular requirements arising from the form of the new curriculum, the overt practices which it encouraged and the performance management systems that were established in response to new forms of accountability instrumentation.

The second was by discourse itself – by ways in which they were being "interpellated" (Althusser, 1971) to bring new meanings to some of the concepts they were attached to as professional values. In our discussion we have mentioned such concepts as "professional", "learning outcomes", "child-centred", "autonomy", "integrated", "need", "collegiality" and so on. To say, for example, that state mandated reforms are mediated by the value systems of teachers at the chalkface is, we believe, to give insufficient credence to the power of what Broadfoot (1996) calls discursive colonisation, a process which occurs when the goals associated with a reform agenda become “…the currency of the self-imposed moral and professional accountability of teachers and other actors in the educational system” (p. 200). These shifts in meaning are subtle, reinforced by a range of discursive practices, frequently unconscious and relatively quickly naturalised.

The critical question for teachers and teacher educators is not so much whether a hegemonic colonising discourse should be resisted, but the conditions whereby teacher autonomy and agency are maximised so that modes of resistance can at least be contemplated. Helsby and McCulloch (1997), writing in the context of English reforms, cite Bowe and Ball (1992) as suggesting that such maximisation is more likely to be present in schools "with high 'capacity' (teacher experience in responding to change), 'commitment' (firmly held subject or pedagogical paradigms) and 'history' (of curriculum innovation and development)" (p. 12).

We would argue that the second of these, touching on the professional's body of expertise is of core concern. What became clear in the comments of our sample teachers was that their positive critique of changes in curriculum content was referenced narrowly to a construction of the "old" curriculum as somewhat superficial and narrow. An exception in our sample was Jocelyn, who clearly saw herself as preferring to define programme basics in terms of the affective domain ("It's about getting to know the children and having the children feeling safe and trusted and respected and feeling about themselves"). The nature and quality of this referencing is one explanation for the absence of content-related critique (compared, for instance, with the overt content-related critique in a recent study of secondary English teachers (Locke, 2001).

Shulman (1986) came up with a schema for categorising teaching knowledge in terms of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge. Locke (2003) has discussed three potential sources of a teacher's professional content knowledge – ways in which a curriculum knowledge domain might be constructed. He identifies these as: knowledge as it operates in society and across cultures; knowledge as it is constructed in the context of undergraduate and graduate degree programmes; and knowledge as constructed via curriculum statements, qualifications systems, high-stakes assessment practices and resource production. Clearly a teacher's basis for reform-related critique is going to be affected by the extent to which it can be referenced to a widely constructed basis of content knowledge. Clearly, teacher education institutions have a role here in following a curriculum of their own that is widely referenced to multiple constructions of knowledge rather than narrowly and instrumentally referenced to officially endorsed ones. We are
not talking of theory versus practice here, but rather the advocacy of diversity in terms of theory-into-practice constructions of teacher knowledge, both content and pedagogy related.

Finally, though, we would argue that Shulman's three categories, useful as they may be as an heuristic, need to be supplemented by what we would call a strategic knowledge – or critical savvy – that can empower teachers to discover avenues for critique, self-reflexivity, contestation and activism (cf Smyth, 1992). In attempting to define a "post-modern professionalism", Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) identify a number of features productive of the sort of professional autonomy which might support the development of such knowledge.

- "Commitment to working with colleagues in collaborative cultures of help and support as a way of using shared expertise to solve the ongoing problems of professional practice, rather than engaging in joint work as a motivational device to implement the external mandates of others", that is, "contrived" collegiality (Hargreaves, 1991);
- "Occupational heteronomy rather than self-protective autonomy, where teachers work authoritatively yet openly and collaboratively with other partners in a wider community (especially parents and students themselves), who have a significant stake in the students’ learning”;
- "A self-directed search and struggle for continuous learning related to one’s own expertise and standards of practice, rather than compliance with the enervating obligations of endless change demanded by others (often under the guise of continuous learning or improvement)" (pp. 20-21).

What underpins these criteria, is a new version of autonomy which draws on Hoyle's idea of extended professionalism. It offers a view of teachers acting collaboratively and reflectively in networks which acknowledge the rights of other stakeholders in educational decision-making. At the same time, an authority based on teacher expertise is acknowledged, and with this authority, the right of teachers to be agents in decision-making that affects the nature of their work and their relationship with their pupils.

Such a view of professional autonomy as desirable – as having the potential to support the struggles around professional identity exemplified by our sample of teachers – poses another sort of challenge to teacher educators. It requires them to identify very clearly the ideological basis for the reforms they are being asked to prepare teachers to implement. It means identifying clearly where they themselves stand in terms of their own discursive positions, including ways they would want to construct the content they teach pre-service teachers and the pedagogy of how pre-service teachers should be apprenticed to engage with the learning deemed to be worthwhile. It means developing and maintaining a vision of the role of education in the complex and increasingly global society of the Twenty-First Century and envisionments of how this might become manifested in the specifics of classroom practice.

In addition, the development of strategic knowledge requires an appreciation of the power of the discursive forces currently at work reshaping educational practice. Among other things, being strategically smart will mean identifying and describing the processes whereby the subject formation of teachers is occurring at present, and acknowledging that the contribution of formalised teacher education may be far less than teacher educators would like to think. This is especially true when the professional development agenda has been hijacked by reform implementation and the manufacture of consent and when resource materials which support new hegemonic discourses are just a mouse-click away. It may mean taking on an activist professional identity (Sachs, 1999), as a way of reclaiming some of the professional territory threatened by the process of erosion – working with others to build the odd seawall here and there. And finally, it will mean being smart, and realising that teacher educators need a game plan of their own. And for the Twenty-First Century,
of course, that means utilising information and communication technologies to situate the counter-hegemonic discourses they choose to embrace.

References


