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POSITIVIST RESEARCH AS ILLUSIO: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS DEBATES.

Andrew Skourdoubis
Monash University

ABSTRACT

This paper is a discussion about the dominance of particular forms of research inquiry into education and provides a critique of educational research inquiry which utilises a totally positivist research methodology. The paper considers the basis for the positivist research tradition in educational inquiry and, in particular how this constructs the problem of teacher effectiveness. In considering this “problem” the paper advocates an inquiry approach informed by critical theory. The claim is that only a critical approach to the problem of teacher effectiveness can adequately identify dominant features of contemporary social interaction of an economic and political kind, whose intrusion into the education policy debate has manifestly affected the work of teachers. In pursuing this agenda, the paper examines the theoretical frameworks of Foucault and Bourdieu. It discusses a Foucauldian approach to critique, of ‘governmentalization’ (Foucault, 1997, p.32) and uses Bourdieuan analysis with its emphasis on ‘reflexive objectivity’ (Grenfell et al, 1998, p.11) in order to establish an argument for an alternative approach to the study of classroom teacher effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The current educational context with its emphasis upon outcomes explicitly centralizes the work and role of the teacher in the education and learning process. Teacher effectiveness and by its association, instructional effectiveness, represents the new offensive in overcoming social and educational disadvantage and furthermore for improving the educational outcomes of the ‘not so bright students’ (Hattie, 2003, p.1). The learning outcomes of students incorporating literacy and numeracy skills, general academic achievement, attitudes to schooling, behaviours and experiences of schooling whilst influenced to a degree by family background characteristics, generally, ‘pale into insignificance compared with class/teacher effects’ (Rowe, 2003, p.1). Moreover, research of this kind suggests that ‘the quality of teaching and learning provision are by far the most salient influences on students’ cognitive, affective, and behavioural outcomes of schooling-regardless of their gender or backgrounds. Indeed, findings from the related local and international evidence-based research indicate that what matters most is quality teachers and teaching, supported by strategic teacher professional development’ (Rowe, 2003, p.1).

Interestingly, a significant feature of the research that informs educational and teacher effectiveness debates is an accepted belief in positivist forms of research inquiry. Indeed, the major aspect of research of this kind explicitly resides

in its tendency for quantification as its methodological basis, overlaid often by complex statistical computational procedures. It appears to seek ‘causal conclusions’ (Hill, 1995, p.2) and in so doing utilises multi-level modelling techniques that relate an “outcome” or “response variable” across samples. This type of an approach must then account for mathematical residuals that arise as a consequence of non-uniformity across samples that must also incorporate associated variance measures. Moreover, purely positivist teacher effectiveness research inquiry often implies in its claims an almost pre-conceived linear and discrete endpoint as a result of the research before it has begun. In essence, multi-level modelling techniques use statistically derived mathematical algorithms for determination of educational or teacher effectiveness. Algorithms of this kind substitute a numerically attained figure for human action or practice thereby pushing and confining the debate on the issue of teacher effectiveness towards not only narrow and “rationalist” interpretations, but, in effect, portraying what is a complex and difficult problem in a seemingly plain and idiomatic manner.

There are two major parts to this paper. In the first section, the paper deals with possible reasons for the utilisation of purely positivist research in educational inquiry and furthermore, considers the involvement of purely positivist research in the problem and question of teacher effectiveness. In particular, it considers how the problem of teacher effectiveness is constructed by seeking to examine dominant features of contemporary social interaction within an economic and political configuration that increasingly exerts significant influence within education policy and practice. In doing so, the paper articulates a case for consideration of the problem of teacher effectiveness from a standpoint that is informed by the critical theory of Foucault. The second section of the paper considers the nature of a Bourdieuan research method, which, it is argued, could act as a basis for a rigorous research and investigative approach to matters of educational interest. It is suggested by the paper that Bourdieu’s notion of “reflexive objectivity” could be substituted for and act as an alternative foundational basis to educational research inquiry for the study of classroom teacher effectiveness and is an attempt at applying Bourdieuan analysis to the teacher effectiveness question. Notwithstanding this, the paper in this section considers the notion of bias in educational research and in so doing, uses the theory of Bourdieu to expound upon research bias and the question of teacher effectiveness.

THE POSITIVIST RESEARCH TRADITION IN EDUCATIONAL INQUIRY

In seeking to examine and discuss the foundational basis to the positivist research tradition in educational inquiry, I adopt a critical theory perspective utilising Foucault’s theory of critique. I suggest that totally positivist studies of teacher effectiveness emphasize limits and controls on the practice of teaching. Furthermore, I contend that positivist

research inquiry occupies a dominant position into matters of educational practice at present particularly in terms of its acceptance by governments and policy-makers. Reliance purely or solely on the scientific method often distorts or misrecognises the fundamental nature of teaching practice. An inquiry approach informed by critical theory into matters of educational interest and, in particular, classroom teacher effectiveness provides for not only an alternative method of inquiry into the effectiveness of teachers, but can often highlight inadequacies of positivist analysis. Purely positivist forms of scientific research method in educational inquiry suggest that facts ‘become separated from values’ (Giroux, 1983, p.13) and that critique is subordinate to objectivity. Positivist research analysis in education claims to display the world as it is or at the very least as it appears to the positivist educational researcher and so may not necessarily deal with questions that concern the development and nature of ‘conceptual systems that select, organise and define the facts’ (Giroux, 1983, p.14). The omission of relevant issues that may determine the “facts” by positivist forms of research analysis also results in omission of history and what Giroux calls ‘historical consciousness’ (Giroux, 1983, p.14). In other words, purely positivist forms of research analysis in education fail to engage with broader issues that Foucault reminds us reside in assessments of power-knowledge relationships and forms of governmentality.

These studies into the classroom effectiveness of teachers tend to express the intricate relationships prevalent in the classroom as a uniform “whole” seemingly unaffected by external influences or for that matter internal contextual influences and constraints whereas Foucauldian critical theory takes note of power relationships between participants and acknowledges that human beings as subjects are constantly “moulded” by ‘practices and techniques of subjectivation’ (Simola et al, 1998, p.66). Studies of teacher effectiveness that prescribe through and after the inquiry process a framework or set of constituent elements that have been found “to work” in the classroom exhibit not only the manifested outcomes of “technologies of truth” but represent an articulated response to what constitutes “truth” for the educational researcher. Governmentalization for Foucault represents the subjugation of individuals through the everyday realities of social practice that, as a consequence of adherence to particular truths, form ‘mechanisms of power’ (Foucault, 1997, p.32). Foucault rejects the often-presumed relationship between an immediate acquisition of knowledge and the knowing subject recognising that relationships of power exist and exert their influence over everyday action. Thus, critique for Foucault represents a legitimate form of action through the ‘politics of truth’ (1997, p.32) that essentially reflects the ‘desubjugation of the subject’ (Foucault, 1997, p.32).

The positivist research tradition in the study of education and particularly the study of teacher effectiveness is based on a belief in a ‘science of education’ (Lagemann, 2000, p.171). It holds that ‘valid knowledge can only be established by

reference to that which is manifested in experience' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.63) and is principally occupied with "fact gathering". Two features are implicit in methodological processes of positivist inquiry. The first is that claims of knowledge 'must stand or fall by the results of observation and experiment' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.63) and as such, knowledge obtained in this way is "value neutral" and free of personal and ideological bias. Secondly, matters of educational theory must 'conform to the logical requirements of scientific explanations' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.65). Positivist studies of teacher effectiveness and teaching practice rely on a rational and empiricist methodological framework seeking an undisputed objective reality that is detached from any moderating or impinging causal factors. Knowledge, in its simplest cause and effect form is sought through adherence to quantitative inquiry focussing solely on the practice under analysis. In its "fact gathering" educational investigations, positivist research employs an investigatory technique that has as its core function not only the demonstrated articulation of a particular educational theoretical view through empirical inquiry, but two further aims. The first is collection of "data" for the demonstration of the nature of a particular problem thereby revealing the essential 'nature of things' (Kuhn, 1962, p.25) and second, the 'factual determinations' (Kuhn, 1962, pp.25-26) that can be used for direct comparisons with predictions based on particular educational theory or viewpoints. But as Harding suggests in her "strong objectivity" thesis, positivist science is 'restricted to those processes controllable by methodological rules' (Harding, 1993, p.70) and further, that what remains untouched by the purely rational scientific method are 'those values and interests entrenched in the very statement of what problem is to be researched and in the concepts favoured in the hypotheses to be tested' (Harding, 1993, p.70). Moreover, in trying to locate a basis for the genesis of the positivist tradition in the study of teacher effectiveness, we need to consider Foucault and his analysis of what he terms the new 'political anatomy':

'A meticulous observation of detail, and at the same time a political awareness of these small things, for the control and use of men, emerge through the classical age bearing with them a whole set of techniques, a whole corpus of methods and knowledge, descriptions, plans and data. And from such trifles, no doubt, the man of modern humanism was born' (Foucault, 1977, p.138).

The 'utilitarian rationalization of detail' (Foucault, 1977, p.139) having surfaced progressively in response to particular needs, fashioned a system or systems of inquiry for purposes of accountability and political control. Thus, one could argue, that purely positivist forms of inquiry into the study of teacher effectiveness in order to develop a "science of teaching" or more specifically a "science of school management" reflects a growing sense of systemic surveillance and political control of teachers and teaching practice. It is this aspect of Foucauldian critical theory and analysis into governmentality that for teachers in the contemporary school and education system context is most relevant. In other words, an accepted belief in the purely positivist research method and its concomitant application into matters of what is considered to be effective classroom teaching and practice that, in conjunction with the political and economic imperatives of the post-Fordist world, act to constrain and weaken the position of teachers.

The scientific research agenda favoured by teacher effectiveness studies raises issues of context and control; in the first instance, a control over the practice of teaching and, second, control over the situational context where the practice of teaching occurs. A broader social and political framework with an overlapping policy context envelops each of these and subsumes not only teaching practice, but also the context within which teachers' work. The modern practice of teaching and role of the teacher exist within dominant political policy boundaries and formulations external to the actual practice of classroom teaching. The imposition of standardized testing (Gale and Densmore, 2003, p.36) as an example, illustrates how external surveillance techniques silences the authority and voice of teachers. Foucault talks about this type of supervision and constraint that exists as mechanisms of surveillance, which for classroom teachers is expressed through a redirection, and a re-estimation of school and teacher practices. Powerful and dominant neo-liberal and neo-conservative political operations having restricted teacher and school practice towards a policy process that is instrumentalist in form and functionalist in mode, the aim of which is demonstrated forms of compliance involving individual competencies and capacities, serve to fulfil contemporary economic and political requirements. The post-Fordist vocationally flexible individual and worker is the subject of this process of "transforming" and for teachers is most easily represented in the new articulation of accountability that 'brings at least two curious elements to the teacher's subjectivity: first, a constant self-reflectivity and self-evaluation as a new technique of the self, and second, a market-oriented "new entrepreneur" as the telos of teacherhood' (Simola et al, 1998, p.80).

Contemporary shifts in economic order towards "knowledge intensive" industries and smaller work units reflects dominant and rationalist modes of economic theory that espouse higher national and individual levels of commitment to economic performativity and adaptability. Moreover, a nation's workforce must be 'capable of responding quickly to the demands created by technological and structural change' (OECD,1989, p.36), at the centre of which is a culture of performativity (Lyotard in Ball, 2000, p.1) which is based on measurable outputs of economic productivity. Key features of the current economic and political neo-liberal employment orientation whilst relying on improved workplace capacity in the form of individual productivity celebrate choice and flexibility. This has consequences for teachers in that the economic and political script in which teachers are currently positioned emphasizes competitive advantage as the new educational mandate incorporating competitiveness not only as a social value but a social good. Teachers and schools exist not necessarily to uphold the lofty Enlightenment ideals of freedom and reason with an expressed charter to liberate humanity from ignorance and poverty, but the desired economic and political aims of promoting 'use values' (Robertson, 2000, p.160) generally considered to be the required knowledge and skills needed for students to participate in society as workers and consumers and less so as citizens. Positivist studies of teacher effectiveness do not take

account of the habitually formed processes that encroach upon the role of the teacher seemingly unable to incorporate aspects of these processes into their inquiry method or dismissive of their importance and worthiness for the study. Notwithstanding this, positivist teacher effectiveness studies do not incorporate the economic and politically imposed parameters which teachers currently face. These parameters generally include (a) state control, even though much mainstream political rhetoric espouses aloofness and state retreat; (b) a re-conception of social and cultural areas with education given a 'starring role' (Ball in Gale and Densmore, 2003, p.61) and (c) an increasing control over individuals within education (Gale and Densmore, 2003, p.61). Purely positivist teacher effectiveness studies do not adequately recognise the manifold variety or multiplicities acting on classroom teachers at any one moment in a given classroom situation and thus, rather than assist in the educative process by provision of useful pedagogic knowledge, they merely add to the insidious objectification of teachers in order to form a 'body of knowledge' (Foucault, 1977, p.220) for purposes of control at the local school management level and more broadly at the education "system" level. One could argue this would appear to contradict a key platform of positivist teacher effectiveness analysis, that only a "scientific" basis to research inquiry accounts for all of the classroom "details" experienced on a daily basis by teachers.

In this paper I suggest that an alternative approach to the study of teacher effectiveness is necessary and indeed warranted, for at least four reasons. The first is centred on the identification of the parameters of the research itself. It is important to establish the groundwork upon which valid and worthy research into the question of teacher effectiveness is constituted. The second reason relates to the need for a teacher-practitioner basis to the research and study of teacher effectiveness. This is needed in order to provide for the "voice" and experience of the classroom teacher in contributing to any examination and discussion involving the effectiveness of classroom teaching. A third reason is to illustrate that the term "teacher effectiveness" itself is extremely problematic. It denotes, if taken literally, a type of practical efficiency that is thought to exist within a classroom at all times and is thus not representative and cognisant of the actual everyday complexities faced by teachers in classrooms. This stems from identifying a concept of teaching practice as opposed to an idea or concept of teacher effectiveness. This is needed in order to illustrate that the practice of teaching is a complex activity varied in its execution and delivery. Lastly, an alternative approach to the study of teacher effectiveness is needed so that a broader definition of what an effective teacher is and should be is articulated, particularly as the contemporary emphasis on teacher effectiveness has largely positioned teachers and classroom teaching towards narrow and marginalized interpretations.

"REFLEXIVE OBJECTIVITY": AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF CLASSROOM

TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

In proposing an alternative research approach to the study of teacher effectiveness, this paper draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu. A Bourdieuan method rejects dualist constructions of theory. Knowledge for Bourdieu is an uninterrupted 'continual dialectic' (Grenfell et al, 1998, p.12). The imposition of quite arbitrary and random limits and constraints on fields of knowledge for the purposes of comprehensibility is to be avoided for it rejects 'constituent knowledge' (Grenfell et al, 1998, p.13) in all of its varied guises. Reflexive objectivity represents an important and valuable stage in the inquiry and research process. Reflexivity encapsulates the fundamental constituent elements in research by seeking understanding of a topic or situation through acknowledgment of the 'immediate, lived experience of agents in order to explicate the categories of perception and appreciation (dispositions) that structure their action from inside' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, pp.10-11). Moreover, the educational researcher's social relationship to the object of study becomes in itself an object of study as it is important in Bourdieuan methodology to objectify a researcher's relation to the study in order that an unconscious projected relation, "symbolic violence", to the object is avoided. This reflective approach allows for the identification of the researcher's field positioning and reveals the true and veritable 'nature of the sources and maintenance of one's interest' (Grenfell et al, 1998, p.128) in a particular study. Thus, an alternative approach to the study of teacher effectiveness, one that incorporates Bourdieuan reflexivity, aims to overturn the opposition between science and its object. It implicitly recognises that the:

'scientific field can lay claim to no special privilege as against other fields; it too is structured by forces in terms of which agents struggle to improve their positions. Science seeks to analyze the contribution of agents' conceptions to the construction of social reality, while recognizing that those conceptions frequently misrecognize that social reality. By the same token, scientists' constructions of their own reality-the scientific field and the motivations for scientific behaviour-often misrecognize that reality. Consequently, it is essential to advance and endorse a reflexive science of society' (Calhoun et al, 1993, p.3).

Consequently, Bourdieuan reflexivity represents I would argue, a valid and more rigorous epistemological examination of the problem of teacher effectiveness and classroom teaching practice.

Bourdieu's theoretical perspective requires the educational researcher to examine the interaction between individuals and everyday surroundings in which they find themselves. An individual's account of their situation is analysed adjacent to a larger and more significant historical, political, economic and symbolic context. In utilising Bourdieuan analysis, the educational researcher needs to examine the problem of teacher effectiveness from three distinct levels that are summarised as follows:

1. Analyse the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power;
2. Map out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which the field is the site;
3. Analyse the habitus of agents; the systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a determinate type of social and economic condition. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, pp.104-107).

The problem of teacher effectiveness as a topic of study in the field of education cannot escape the hierarchies of power that exist and have an effect on individuals. Firstly, there is the relationship between education and the broader systems of society incorporating the economic and political. One must account for the broader aims of education and its configuration in society and recognise not only its limitations but seek to map its organization. Secondly, there is the relationship between the institutions and agents that comprise the field of education and the relevant position not only of agents in this field but also of the institution that they are a part. Thirdly, the particular behaviours and dispositions, habitus, of the agents involved in the field is important. The relationship between habitus and social context forms an important component in the examination of teaching practice in that knowledge gained about teachers and their classroom practice can be generated as a consequence of the 'relation between the habitus on the one hand, and the specific social contexts or "fields" within which individuals act' (Thompson, 1991, p.14).

(1) Bourdieuan analysis and the problem of teacher effectiveness

Powerful and dominant political and economic forces exert significant control over the field of education at present. The problem of teacher effectiveness can be viewed and examined from within a contextual framework encompassing the relationship between those forces and the field of education, including recognition of the role and importance of an unequal distribution of cultural capital prevalent throughout contemporary society. Moreover, recognising that the school system itself has been re-configured over time, from an organised institution, that once offered clear and undifferentiated pathways which as Bourdieu states were 'all based on sharp divisions' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.154) and clear-cut boundaries to a new system with 'its fuzzy classifications and blurred edges' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.154) is also important and relevant to the question and problem of teacher effectiveness. Indeed, the new system of education operates in an economic and political context that emphasizes change and an ever-continuous reliance on flexible and novel approaches to work and employment. The old school system with its established sense of 'proper limits, which

was the basis of an acute sense of hierarchy' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.155) has been replaced by a system favouring the 'development of a less realistic, less resigned relationship to the future' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.155). This has consequences for teachers and for the field of education. The contextual emphasis of change is centred primarily on the 'globalisation of the economy within a post-Keynesian framework' (Lingard, 2000, p.29) that has resulted in a 'restructured managerialist, competitive and performative state apparatus' (Lingard, 2000, p.29). The field of education now serves to a significant extent the needs of the economy, which operates increasingly on a transnational level. The post-Keynesian economic order vigorously relies upon and emphasizes the advancement of 'specified outcomes from schooling at constant or reducing cost' (Lingard, 2000, p.28). Furthermore, significant shifts in the form of contemporary manufacturing that has generally seen a small but emerging 'information age' sector and the re-location of labour and material intensive industries to low-cost international destinations has resulted in a heightened and intensified commitment to skill formation. A job market that rapidly changes requires trained workers who are flexible and adaptable with the capabilities to respond quickly to 'the changing requirements of new technologies' (Cetron, 1985, p.3). Schools and the education system itself must adapt and become familiar and comfortable with the post-Fordist themes of multi-skilling and 'flexible skilling' (Hinkson, 1997, p.87). The field of education for all of the agents involved in its everyday actions becomes important for at least two reasons. Firstly, schools act as the sites where students gain and are equipped with the necessary 'tools' for entry into the 'new world' of work and secondly, teachers are responsible for ensuring the transmission and acquisition of required skills.

The competitive struggle to maintain one's dominant class position for most in society involves utilising the education system. As an implement of reproduction, the educational system can provide the necessary requirements, which generally entail the bestowal of academic credentials, for movement in a social space and can act as the basis for survival in 'changing labour markets' (Campbell, 2005, p.4). The significant shift in contemporary economic policy with its commitment to neo-liberal and neo-conservative forms of monetary and economic exchange, has resulted in a change to the capital to be reproduced. This leads to as Bourdieu states a 'restructuring of the system of reproduction strategies' (1984, p.125), that, for the dominant social classes, implies the incorporation of 'reconversion strategies' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.15). The intensified competition for academic qualifications amongst all social classes has also seen a rise in the investment made by those groups whose reproduction depended primarily upon education. New advantages are now sought in order to maintain and conserve one's dominant social position. Recent research in this area from within Victoria indicates that parents with the 'freedom to choose expensive private schools seek to protect and augment the cultural capital of their children through social and academic segregation' (Teese and Polesel, 2003, p.119). Parents from the dominant groups in society favour the interconnected richness that combined cultural and

economic resources provides as it enables the pedagogical multiplication of 'individual advantage' (Teese and Polesel, 2003, p.119) and acts as a foundation for 'competitive achievement in search of academic excellence' (Teese and Polesel, 2003, p.119). Similarly, recent research from New South Wales indicates that a 'dramatic shift of secondary students from enrolment in state school systems into the non-government sector' (Campbell, 2005, p.5) is occurring. At the centre of this school population movement is a belief in the protection offered against the 'many uncertainties of life in post-welfare Australia' (Campbell, 2005, p.8) by independent or privately funded schools.

Political adherence to a fervent form of individualism and competitiveness generated by sustained neo-liberal economic reform in Australia has exposed many from within the middle class to a perceived sense of risk. The adjustments or reconversion strategies experienced by those from within once dominant class positions now reflect the specific and altered 'rules' of the game in question. Bourdieu reminds us that the,

'strategies which individuals and families employ with a view to safeguarding or improving their position in social space are reflected in transformations which modify both the volume of the different class fractions and the structure of their assets' (1984, p.135)

The effects of this are clearly illustrated in the education system through the 'segregative strategies' (Teese and Polesel, 2003, p.122) used by the dominant middle class. At one level it is manifested through the already mentioned movement to independent or private schooling, but also occurs through the established school curriculum, which also represents another form of cultural capital.

In the examination then of the problem of teacher effectiveness, the educational researcher should acknowledge that significant change at the political and economic level has had an impact on the field of education. Having considered some of the issues pertinent to the current positioning of the field of education, that is, the impact of significant economic change and the sense of risk experienced by virtually all classes within society, the persistent attention that teacher effectiveness is receiving in an education policy sense at present also relates to a desire by government to be taking action in terms of addressing educational and social disadvantage on the one hand and seeking to support an ailing public education system on the other. As it is the case that the majority of public schools contain students that do not necessarily have the required cultural capital, particularly if compared to their independent or private school counterparts, 'effective learning depends very largely on the capacity of teachers' (Teese and Polesel, 2003, p.123). Teachers will bridge the difference between inadequate resources and the curricula demands placed upon students. Indeed, researchers such as Teese and Polesel claim that only the 'willingness and ability of teachers acting in isolation'

(2003, p.197) with the motivation to make the curriculum more socially inclusive is how weaknesses in student cultural capital on the one hand and curriculum design on the other may be overcome if at all.

It is at this point that consideration should be given to aspects of educational research that mentions the relevance and importance of effective teaching to improved student-learning outcomes. The work of Newmann (1996) for example, that focussed upon the identification of key factors considered most significant in enhancing the academic achievement of the disadvantaged, led to the development of learning strategies that successful schools constantly exhibited.

Newmann's work showed that the academic achievement of the disadvantaged could be elevated if attention was paid to the cultural and structural foundations considered necessary for authentic student achievement. Newmann's research grew out of a different form of school effectiveness research, one that relied upon teachers and their classroom practices as the 'most significant factors for making a difference, especially in relation to the school performance of those usually characterised as disadvantaged' (Lingard, 2006, p.9). The major focus of Newmann's work was centred on issues relating to authentic forms of pedagogy and assessment, extending also into the area of school organisation and external system support. Newmann's research appeared to contradict the work of earlier researchers such as Coleman et al (1966) and Jencks et al (1967) that showed the significance and importance of family background and related social influences to student learning. In Australia, the work of Lingard et al (2003) led to the idea of 'productive pedagogies' that arose out of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS). It too focussed upon teacher practices considered most effective in enhancing student achievement, especially amongst the disadvantaged.

The identification of teacher practices considered most worthy in enhancing student achievement, whilst welcome and important, has tended to influence the debate on learning outcomes and centred dialogue directly upon the issue of teacher effectiveness. The most extreme form of this debate equates student failure and low levels of student academic achievement with poor teaching and inept teacher practice. It also suggests that teachers are the difference in the educational exchange between students and schooling. According to Gale (2005, pp.9-10), this debate is characterised by four separate accounts. These include:

- 1) disappointment with student outcomes, particularly those within government systems,
- 2) the shortsightedness, irrelevance and inappropriateness of much school curricula,
- 3) teaching's aging and potentially diminishing workforce, and,

- 4) the inadequacies of teacher's professional development programs.

I wish to add to the list provided by Gale by suggesting that the current emphasis on teacher effectiveness in education policy is also underpinned by an almost utopian and suppositional belief or faith, in firstly, the application of research methodology to questions of classroom teaching and, secondly, the alleged evidence and claims made from the inquiry process. In other words, the development of education policy with respect to teacher effectiveness is legitimated by the enacted adherence to research method and the desire for an objectified teacher/practitioner led response to unequal educational outcomes.

(2) Bias

A significant feature of Bourdieu's theoretical methodology notwithstanding the key points as outlined above, is its "politics". The objectivists or "idealists" attraction to singularly reduced factors for a given situation as a method of explication, does not take account of what Wittgenstein terms 'spatial relations' (1974, p.23). Bourdieu's theory of knowledge posits a 'knowing subject' (Grenfell et al, 1998, p.11) within the knowledge framework and he insists on recognition by researchers of their 'personal biases that may blur the sociological gaze and acknowledge that these, as well as the historical, ideological moment in which they live, will influence the direction of their research' (Mills and Gale, 2005, p.7). Partisanship and bias in educational research appears inescapable in that the educational researcher brings to their inquiry some 'commitment concerning its purpose, value and goals' (Carr, 2000, p.440). Moreover,

'the problem of partisanship only arises for those who maintain a philosophically uninformed and intellectually naïve view of educational research as a purely technical and methodical activity that can and should remain uncontaminated by politics, values and ideology: a view which those who criticise the partisan nature of educational research never explicitly defend but to which they always implicitly subscribe' (Carr, 2000, p.439).

Bourdieu espouses an epistemic reflexivity that at its most basic level takes note of the educational researcher's 'social origins and co-ordinates (class, gender, ethnicity, etc)' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.38). These aspects according to Bourdieu represent 'the most obvious bias and thus the more readily controlled one by means of mutual and self-criticism' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.38).

Indeed, for Bourdieu there are three types of biases that act to blur the sociological gaze (Bourdieu and Wacquant,

1992). The first is the above, incorporating the social origins of the teacher effectiveness researcher. The second is linked to a researcher's position within the academic field as a field of power and furthermore, the 'space of possible intellectual positions offered to him or her at a given moment, and, beyond' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.39) within academe. The third represents the 'intellectual bias, which entices us to construe the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically,' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.39). This particular bias must be monitored consistently and carefully or as Bourdieu states 'constantly scrutinized and neutralized' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.39) for it is this bias that constructs the object through projection of the teacher effectiveness researcher's 'collective scientific unconscious' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.39), the product of which is founded and stems from attachment to particular scholarly and academic traditions.

My motivation in critically examining positivist teacher effectiveness research stems from an experiential viewpoint, as one who is immersed on a daily basis in classroom teaching as a public-school classroom teacher practitioner.

Professional experience has shown me that the various, often unexpected and multitudinous classroom influences that occur daily, do not necessarily align with the research evidence presented by positivist teacher effectiveness studies.

The work of Ellsworth (1997) perhaps captures much of how I too have come to experience classroom teaching of late, in that 'teaching is undecidable' (p.50) and that the relationship between say curriculum and student understanding may not be linear. The undecideability of classroom teaching resides in acknowledging that we often 'cannot directly observe, inspect, or regulate the spaces opened up by imperfect fits between what curricula say we are supposed to be and what we have in actuality not become' (Ellsworth, 1997, p.52). In this, Ellsworth is in agreement with Freud, in that education and teaching represents one of the 'impossible professions' (p.52), for it appears never to adequately produce the necessary and 'desired social outcomes' (Ellsworth, 1997, p.52). Hence, teaching by definition is undecideable.

The undecideability of teaching presents direct challenges to all models of education that have as their basis particular outcomes and measurable or quantifiable objectives. A definitive post-enlightenment or post-Fordist philosophy of the teacher as classroom practitioner directly and fully responsible for the learning achievement of students is in itself a contradictory aim. The post-Fordist reality appears to be a 'shaking of the foundations' (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p.25) especially of an educational ethos and system founded upon modernist ideals and beliefs. An unsteady coherence is evident between education on the one hand which cannot easily conjoin into the 'post modern moment' (Usher and Edwards, 1997, p.24) and educational theory and practice, founded largely along modernist and traditional lines.

Consequently, in a complete counter to positivist and teacher effectiveness researchers, 'no uniform, unified post-modern discourse of education' (Usher and Edwards, 1997, p.25) exists, nor is it desirable that it does exist, for what then occurs is closure to 'unforeseen educational possibilities' (Tubbs, 2005, p.281). Indeed, one could argue, that what

is needed in a post-Fordist world is an educational system with capacity and ability to ‘resist dogmas that prejudice totality or operate for closure’ (Tubbs, 2005, p.281).

CONCLUSION

The major thrust of this paper has been to critique purely positivist studies of teacher effectiveness. The paper has discussed the issue of teacher effectiveness by considering the methodological basis to positivist research inquiry in education and, in particular, how the problem of teacher effectiveness is constructed by the inquiry method used. The paper provides a critique of totally positivist methods of inquiry into the problem of teacher effectiveness in order to show that research of this type into the question of effective teaching does not adequately capture all aspects of classroom teaching and furthermore, that policy debate and development in education at present overemphasizes the impact of teaching practice to improved student learning outcomes. This overemphasis resides in the attachment given to purely positivist research methodologies for inquiry into matters of educational interest and it is argued within the paper that a Bourdieuan *illusio* is experienced, in that, the major players in the “game” of education, implicitly believe in not only the research methods used but also the evidence that is gained and presented.

The first section of the paper examines the positivist research tradition into matters of educational interest, in this case, the effectiveness or lack thereof of classroom teachers. The paper suggests in this section that a purely positivist method of inquiry into the problem of teacher effectiveness is symptomatic of a broader economic and political agenda whose intrusion into the education policy area has affected the work of teachers. This, in turn, points to augmented “systems” of surveillance and inspection that constrain and constrict teaching practice towards normative outcomes, thereby highlighting the contemporary theoretical relevance of Foucault and his idea of governmentality.

The second section of the paper proposes an alternative research inquiry method based on the Bourdieuan notion of “reflexive objectivity”. The paper suggests in this section that a research approach based on Bourdieuan principles of reflexive objectivity represents a research inquiry model that is suitably equipped for the study and examination of teacher effectiveness. It is suggested in this section of the paper that the application of Bourdieuan analysis to the problem of teacher effectiveness reveals a complex web of significant influences that exert control over the field of education at present. These significant influences incorporate dominant political and economic forces that impact upon the lives of the players within the educational “game”, and furthermore, impose and exert conditions upon firstly, the field of education, and secondly, the classroom practice of education and teaching. These conditions essentially influence the distribution of cultural capital prevalent in society, and have forced once dominant social groups into feelings of fear regarding loss of social position and standing. As a consequence, these groups have sought to re-assert

their position by educational re-location through intensified and heightened investment in the independent education sector, the dominant social repository of cultural capital. Education policy-makers and governments have responded to the inequitable distribution of cultural capital by seeking to buttress a public-education system in perceived decline through a plan of action that has as one of its major aims attention to social and educational dis-advantage. The work and role of teachers is the key to this plan of action, for it is teachers that represent the only aspect of the educational system that can be controlled and acted upon by governmental policy.

The final part of the second section of the paper considers the notion of bias in educational research. It presents a discussion of Bourdieu's theory of analysis with respect to the problem of bias in any method of inquiry. This part of the paper also includes my declaration of interest regarding the problem and question of teacher effectiveness. It illustrates that my aim for this paper is to indicate that an examination of the problem of teacher effectiveness requires a critical theory approach with the added capability of carefully and meticulously scrutinizing each and every aspect of teacher related practice. Moreover, I advocate a research method that incorporates the examination and analysis of teacher practice liberated from the confines of purely positivist inquiry the aim of which is narrow interpretations of student learning and achievement. In summary, I have sought to broaden the discussion regarding the problem and question of teacher effectiveness by emphasizing the necessary input of critical theory to any form of educational research and to suggest that an analysis of effective teaching cannot occur without consideration within the research method itself of contextual influences, the impact of which, generally speaking, contributes to the learning achievement of students. To this end, although not explicitly, I, in one sense argue for an alternative interpretation of teacher effectiveness, one that is relevant to a post-Fordist world.

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