

Teacher candidates' interpretations of 'teacher quality' policies in Australia: Policy objects or actors?

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Teachers play an important role in understand and negotiating education policy, particularly given the role of policy in attempting to 'solve' social and environmental concerns facing schools. Despite this, there has been limited research and discussion on how teacher candidates, more specifically, understand and engage with their roles as policy actors. In Australia, recent policy initiatives have focused on improving teacher quality by concentrating on the selection of teacher candidates (ACER, 2021) and their classroom readiness (AITSL, 2020). These policies position teacher candidates as not only *receivers* of policy (Ball et al., 2011) but as *objects* of policy, as these reforms explicitly aim to improve them. Therefore, there is a significant need to explore how teacher candidates understand, negotiate and interpret recent policies, particularly given the lack of empirical evidence exploring teacher candidates' policy constructions.

Drawing from the contention that policy is a process of recontextualisations and interpretations rather than unilateral implementation (Ball, 1993; Ball et al., 2011), this presentation explores the following line of inquiry: *How do teacher candidates interpret recent education policy initiatives?* Employing a qualitative case study approach, this study explores how 135 final-year teacher candidates, from a large teacher education program in Australia, interpret recent teacher education policy reform measures. This presentation examines how these teacher candidates are positioned as a teacher quality problem requiring policy solutions through reform initiatives. The findings of this study suggest that this policy positioning impacts how teacher candidates view themselves and the profession more broadly. The teacher candidates, in most cases, expected and accepted, 'hurdles' into the profession but express how this reinforces deficit views about the profession. This presentation concludes with a discussion on the unintended consequences of such policy reforms, including issues of supply and demand, teacher attrition and increased opportunities for the teaching profession to be negatively portrayed within the media and then readily consumed by the general public.