How Did We Ever Arrive at the Conclusion that Teachers are the Problem? A critical reading in the discourses of Australian schooling

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Introduction
Accounts of what is wrong with teaching rarely begin by exploring the politics of schooling and almost never by placing it within broader socio-economic contexts. This chapter is different in that regard. From the outset it situates the current Quality Teacher debate within historical and contemporary contexts, including a political history of Australian schooling over the last 20 or so years. Briefly, it argues that there is a crisis of confidence in schooling, which is currently being played out by positioning teachers as the ‘problem’ and not just the ‘solution’ to this crisis. In naming these problems and solutions, I identify four central and interrelated discourses that speak of: poor student outcomes, outdated curricula, a shortage of (quality) teachers, and inadequate ongoing teacher development. Towards the end of the chapter, I single out the latter, teachers’ professional learning, for closer examination, particularly in relation to a recent government departmental document which ‘outlines a vision for professional learning in Victorian government schools’ (DE&T 2005, p. 2). Rather than a direct engagement with this text, the chapter explores what is missing in the document and how this works to disconnect teaching from learning, schools from society and students from their backgrounds. The chapter concludes by outlining an alternative set of conditions that might constitute a reinvigorated profession; conditions informed by a politics of recognition (Young 1990; Fraser 1995) and a sense of social justice in teaching and learning spaces.
The promise and the present

There is something of a crisis of confidence in contemporary Australian schooling, which has been brewing over the last few decades and which has its origins in the introduction of mass compulsory schooling in the mid 1800s. In Victoria, for example, one of the first Australian states to introduce compulsory schooling for the masses:

The Education Act 1872 [of Victoria, Australia] came into being in obedience to the desire of the majority of the electors of Victoria that every child in the colony should be given the rudiments of an English education [the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic]. In order to effect this, it contained three main provisions ... It made education secular, compulsory, and free.
(Sweetman, Long & Smyth 1922, p. 65)

A revised Education Act 1876 and Part VIII of the Neglected Children's Act 1887 completed the early framework of legislation for compulsory and free education in Victoria.

Subsequent legislation ... particularly the Education Act of 1958 and the Community Welfare Services Act of 1970, strengthened compulsory education law which obligates students to attend school [initially to the age of 14 years, later increased to 15 years] and accept a range of schooling experiences purported to provide the necessary tools for their future adulthood.'
(Coventry 1988, p. 82)

In these initially 'elementary' and later 'comprehensive' schools, English constituted the core curriculum, and grammar the regulating influence over mind and body, not simply over language.

In Britain, Raymond Williams (1961) suggests that the introduction of compulsory public schooling represented a victory for 'industrial trainers' (advocates of a vocational education) made possible through the support of the 'public educators' (those who sought a democratic curriculum) over an 'old humanist' advocacy for a liberal education. More generally, within industrialising nations of the time:

The introduction of mass schooling ... arose in the broader context of a struggle for social improvement and transformation, to provide opportunities for the 'poorer classes'. This is not to deny that the introduction of mass schooling was also motivated by a number of other purposes, including the need to supply a more educated workforce for the newly mechanised industries and the desire of the authorities to contain social disorder among the propertyless masses. ... They [social reformers] thus viewed the expansion of school systems under compulsory education laws as a great achievement because such laws reflected an overriding concern for social justice. With mass schooling, so it was thought, everyone was given an opportunity for social improvement, and for access to power and privilege which only a few in society had hitherto enjoyed.
(Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry 1997, p. 126)

In brief, the state's promises and the public's hopes for compulsory schooling were two-fold. Instructing society's children in the moral and work ethics of industry would provide it with a source of skilled labour. Such preparation, it was said, would also enable students to gain access to a better life; with a job, for example. While I argue for a broad set of purposes for schooling (Gale & Densmore 2000, pp. 74–89) – not just the narrow neoliberal and neo-conservative ideology that dominates current public discourse – in vocational and democratic terms, neither of schooling's initial promises has stood the test of time. Despite the rhetoric, it has not delivered all students with the necessary tools to embrace 'adulthood' in an increasingly capitalist society or the means to improve their lot in life. While some students in the twenty-first century seem to benefit enormously from their experiences at school, increasing numbers of students are alienated from 'the means of production' (capital) and, more broadly, from the means to productively engage with society.

A 'jobless recovery' from recession is now a reality for Western economies such as the United States of America, with companies cutting local jobs in an effort to increase shareholder profits, replacing workers with new technologies or increasingly outsourcing or 'offshoring' their work to a cheaper labour force located in developing countries. Much industry no longer looks to schools in its host nation to provide skilled workers, and many students no longer look to a future of secure employment and its associated financial and social benefits, especially given the Australian government's proposed changes to industrial relations. Instead, full-time workers in Australia (and in other Western nations, such as Canada) now represent less than 50 per cent of all paid work (Lacharite 2002). Most Australian workers are now more likely to be employed in 'low paid, part-time and casual jobs in the service sector, which are largely non-unionised' (Bell 1997, p. 111): the most vulnerable in the Australian government's proposed more 'flexible' industrial relations environment. Adjusting for these new work conditions, the Australian government now defines employment as two hours or more of work in any given week, which has
had the effect of securing record low official unemployment rates while illustrating the wonders of ‘hard data’!

This crisis in work is not just about how much work one gets but also about how much one gets paid for it and the conditions under which one has to work in order to secure this. Some point to the increasing of average incomes by A$20 per week (from 1999 to 2003) of the bottom 20 per cent of Australian workers as evidence that the system is still working. Yet, across the same time period the top 20 per cent of Australian incomes rose by an average A$220 per week (Community Affairs References Committee 2004). In other words, egalitarianism – the traditional mainstay of Australian culture – is being severely tested in the face of a widening gap between rich and poor. For many, average incomes – inflated by greater than average rises at the upper end of income brackets – no longer deliver sustainable living standards. To illustrate, Forster and Pearson found that ‘on average across 21 OECD countries, the incomes of the poor are some 28 per cent below the poverty threshold of 50 per cent of the median’ (2002, p. 10). These figures do not refer to those who are without work – the unemployed – but to the working poor. There is a whole other story to tell about the extent to which the state has delivered on its promises for those who live outside the workforce, particularly about the young and the marginalised, and how they experience contemporary capitalism and the shifting gaze of the regulatory state (Gale 2005).

Locating the problem in schools
It is important to note how schooling and its ‘message systems’ (Beinstein 1971) – of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy, to which we should add school governance (Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie 2003) – speak to students in this unfolding crisis, brought on by changing political, economic and social conditions and particular ways of understanding them. Peter Beilharz (1987) suggests that irrespective of the ‘problems’, policy makers tend to name these in ways that they (believe they) are able to solve (see also Gale 1994). For example, the globalisation of markets has rendered ‘walled’ economies obsolete and government regulation of multinational corporations increasingly impotent, even irrelevant, in protecting local industries. Many jobs in manufacturing (once prevalent in Victoria and in other pockets of Australia) are now relocated or relocating to China (now the world’s manufacturing hub) while many service industries have taken up residence in India. In brief, many jobs once available to young people leaving school are no more, and governments are unwilling or unable to reinstate them. Instead, schools and, more recently, teachers have been constructed as the problem in this globalisation of work, for preparing their students for a (working) future that no longer exists (at least not in Australia) or for one that Australians cannot or should not entertain (Rowe 2003; Donnelly 2005).

The curriculum has passed its use-by date
Clearly, schools in themselves can do little about changing global socio-economic conditions. However, they have been called on to respond to these, initially through revisiting their curricula. The call in the 1980s to establish Australia as a ‘clever country’ – as a way of enabling Australians to gain access to high-skill high-status employment, at that time outside the grasp of Third World countries – first drew a response in the form of the National Curriculum Agreement (the Hobart declaration) by the Australian Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA): Australian state government ministers responsible for education. Independent and yet relatively common curriculum frameworks flowed from the agreement. Victoria, for example, developed a Curriculum Standards Framework (CSF) derived from The National Statement and Profile, and similar frameworks were developed in other states. More recent revisions to school curricula in Australia have included Queensland’s ‘New Basics’, the Tasmanian Essential Learnings Framework and the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). Each iteration of ‘official knowledge’ (Apple 1993) has evoked debates between a championing of the ‘basics’ (reading, writing and arithmetic) against curricula cognisant of new times and new expectations (e.g. New Basics). A recent alteration was played out in Queensland where the newly appointed Minister for Education (Rod Welford) ‘vowed to clean up his state’s controversial English syllabus and to remove post-modernist “mumbo jumbo” from the classroom’ (Slattery 2005, p. 1), despite its apparent usefulness in helping students to value difference and critically read the society in which they live.

Our students just don’t measure up
A second chapter in the Australian schooling saga questions the legitimacy of how schools assess and progress students through the system. This agenda was initiated in the mid 1990s by the then Australian Federal
Minister for Education, Dr Kemp, who determined that a national testing regime was required in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 to measure (via written examination) the literacy and numeracy of all Australian students at particular points in their schooling. The idea was to catch students before it was too late; before their (automatic) progression through school left them illiterate and innumerate on exit. Employers, after all, require workers who can at least read and write and who have competent levels of spelling and computation (Donnelly 2005). The fact that education is the constitutional responsibility of Australian states, and so outside official federal regulation, was easily overcome by tying additional funding to implementation of the tests. And the strategy was employed despite the fact that Australian students, then and now, are among the world’s most literate and numerate, currently ranked second on literacy and fifth on numeracy among all OECD nations by the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2004) tests.

The persistence of this argument in the current discourse on Australian education is perhaps the clearest evidence of ideological bias in the absence of evidence-based research driving the current agenda. As Barry McGaw (Head of the OECD’s Education Directorate and also an Australian) observed regarding a recent Schooling for the 21st Century conference organised by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government:

A lot of the presentations started from the assumption there was a disaster in Australian education, but the evidence shows we’re doing pretty well. Not the best, but close. (in Marshall 2005, p. 16)

It is possible to give instances of student assessment in Australia that sit outside this narrow audit culture. The Queensland ‘Rich Tasks’ are probably the standout example. They are based on the proposition that authentic assessment is embedded in good teaching and in real-world activities that are meaningful for students. However, deference for disconnected knowledge and statistical data generated from add-on assessment – championed as ‘hard data’ that informs ‘evidence-based’ practice – continues to dominate mainstream schooling in Australia. This is despite the research evidence that:

Pedagogy under the influence of testing regimes tends to assume a certain task oriented efficiency focused on exam performance and as such tends to ‘thin out’ pedagogy. In this context, some of the dimensions of ‘authentic pedagogy’, such as connectedness to the world beyond the classroom and substantive conversation, tend to be branded (mistakenly) as too time consuming, or requiring too much preparation. (Lingard, Hayes & Mills 2000, pp. 14-15)

Yet, commissioned reviews of students’ abilities, statistically measured and manipulated, are almost commonplace. Australia has recently experienced its second review of reading (chaired by Ken Rowe), despite the fact that the last review (commissioned under the previous federal minister from the same political party) delivered a favourable report. Again, the underlying motivation in this is clearly ideological. Neo-conservatives are just not willing to accept that ‘fuzzy’ mathematics and ‘faddish’ language approaches (Donnelly 2005) employed by some schools and teachers deliver benefits to students. The benefits they have in mind are narrowly technical and vaguely vocational, and not the earlier promises of schooling reinterpreted within contemporary times. Consequently, international benchmarks (i.e. PISA) that suggest otherwise – that we are doing well, at least academically – are claimed to be imbued with the same flawed ‘fuzzy’ and ‘faddish’ logic.

Schools are wasting opportunities

In the early to mid 1990s in most parts of Australia, the problem with schooling shifted to matters of school management and organisation. A focus on school governance can be seen as far back as the first Karmel Report (1973) of the early 1970s, although it would be inaccurate to assume that approaches to school governance are all of a kind (Rizvi 1994). The problem with government schools in the 1990s, it was argued, was that they were disconnected from a concern for the management of resources, human and material, associated with operating a school. Not only did this mean there was potential for waste, primarily of financial resources, but it also meant they were less effective in achieving better student outcomes. There is a certain shift in focus here from students and their achievements to the effectiveness of schools, which draws on a large body of school effectiveness literature and, again, reflects the solutions on hand to name problems. That is, there is a tendency to identify problems that lend themselves to relatively straightforward solutions. Departments can then invest a lot of time developing initiatives in order to address these problems while the question goes begging as to whether their original diagnosis actually identified where the real problems lay.
From the market perspective of the 1990s, for example, the problem was seen as a consequence of the control of schools by bureaucracies, which insulated them from the ‘real world’ and concealed the need for schools to take responsibility for themselves and their students. This was a convenient argument at the time (and even now) because it meant governments and bureaucracies could sh f responsibility for shortcomings to schools themselves and make them directly answerable to public and media scrutiny for students’ achievement (or the lack thereof).

The solution – which is not hard to recognise once the problem has been articulated in this way – was to remove schools from the ‘shelter’ of bureaucracies and to establish centrifugal and centripetal relations between ‘central office’ and schools characterised by elaborate accountability measures to ensure compliance with system imperatives. Governments and bureaucracies were now repositioned as the representatives of the interests of parents and public, whereas schools were required to adopt the efficiencies of scientific management (Taylor 1911) and the enterprise of modern corporations. Nowhere in Australia was this neoliberal version of self-managing schools more fully embraced than in Victoria under the Kennett State Government and its Schools of the Future (Education Victoria 1993) initiative. In this new way of working, schools and particularly principals needed to develop a ‘corporate literacy’ (Bartlett & Gale 1995), which included an entrepreneurial flair to generate income while also maintaining a tight rein on spending. This deference to markets and corporatism was ‘accompanied by a renewed emphasis on achieving better outcomes from schooling, most or very often without increased funding’ (Lingard, Hayes & Mills 2000, p. 15). In short, poor student outcomes were identified as the problem and restructuring the management of schools was claimed as its solution.

In the competition between schools that ensued, some school principals (now frontline managers rather than leading or principal teachers) aggressively embraced the new marketplace of schooling and began to attract (or ‘poach’) students from neighbouring schools who were high academic achievers, in order to establish ‘centres of excellence’. Ken Rowe (mentioned above) was Principal of such a school, located in one of Melbourne’s low socio-economic areas but bordering on more affluent suburbs and benefiting from the gentrification of older more established housing within its traditional catchment area. The strategy worked, of course, but only for some. The concentration of these particular students produced for their schools enviable reputations, attracted highly skilled staff and generated higher student outcomes now listed on league tables. Bearing all this in mind, it is interesting to note that one of the key intellectual architects of self-managing schools in Victoria, Brian Caldwell, has since acknowledged that it is difficult to establish a strong relationship between neoliberal visions of self-managing schools and improved student outcomes overall. As he suggests:

There is no doubt that, while factors underpinning the movement to self-managing schools are many and varied, there has always been an expectation that they will make a contribution to improved outcomes for students. There is also no doubt that evidence of a direct cause-and-effect relationship between self-management and improved outcomes is minimal. This is understandable given that few initiatives in self-management have been linked in a systematic way to what occurs in classrooms in a manner that is likely to impact on learning. (Caldwell 1998, p. 38)

**It’s the teachers who are to blame**

Hence, when Queensland embarked on an extended evaluation of their own version of self-managing schools, namely Leading Schools (Education Queensland 1997), the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) team argued that it was more useful to consider student learning in the context of what good teachers did (rather than what school structures did) with students, with each other and with communities. Reflecting this shift from school governance to teacher pedagogy in contemplating better ‘solutions’ for poor student outcomes, one of the many publications derived from the research is appropriately titled Leading Learning (Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie 2003). This same title, Leading Learning, was later commandeered by a professional learning conference held at The King’s School, Sydney, in 2006, reinforcing the changed emphasis on teachers’ pedagogy although, as discussed below, not with the same subtlety as evidenced by the QSRLS.

In brief, the major contribution of the QSRLS research is the notion of ‘productive pedagogies’ – which are informed by Newmann’s (1996) ‘authentic pedagogy’. Under the banner of Productive Pedagogies, the research identifies four dimensions (aggregated up from twenty elements) of good teaching: intellectual quality; connectedness; supportive classroom environments; and recognition of difference. In particular, the
QSRLS report notes teachers’ recognition of student differences in their teaching as most important in helping to raise the outcomes for students disadvantaged by their ‘backgrounds’, followed by the intellectual quality of that teaching. The research also identified that many teachers were not strong on these fronts, particularly the former. A second significant contribution of the research was the foregrounding or centring of pedagogies in relation to curriculum and assessment; the three major systems within schools through which students receive messages about what is valued in society (Bernstein 1971). Cognisance of the relations among these message systems had a flow-on effect within the Queensland Department of Education, which then embarked on the development of New Basics and Rich Tasks (described above), although strangely the New Basics descriptor is sometimes utilised to mean all three.

The New Basics, Productive Pedagogies, Rich Tasks package sparked considerable interest and professional learning opportunities for teachers within the state and elsewhere. Productive Pedagogies, in particular, elevated the status of teachers’ knowledge and provided them with a language to speak with each other (Zyngier & Gale 2003), across traditional disciplinary, systemic and geographical boundaries. Many found the opportunities created for interaction across these borders (in seminars, workshops, online discussions, informal meetings at the pub, and so on) to be highly stimulating and rewarding, particularly because teachers organised and led many of the discussions themselves while they were also developing the expertise. However, not all teachers were enamoured with the concepts or the process and it also had an interesting effect of repositioning the bureaucracy as follower rather than initiator of change, which produced its own internal struggles. Importantly, though, this reinvigorated conception of teaching and learning provided the intellectual rigour for government schooling to challenge the drift (some say ‘flood’) of students from public to private schooling within the state.

Given such a dynamic and powerful body of research and practice, it is hardly surprising that most Australian states have since turned their attention to issues of pedagogy in seeking a solution to poor student outcomes and also in naming the ‘problem’. ‘Quality Teaching’ (NSW), ‘Powerful Pedagogies’ (Tasmania) and ‘Principles of Learning and Teaching’ or PoLT (Victoria) are just a few of the legacies of Productive Pedagogies. However, some of what the QSRLS team intended has been lost in the translation. The New South Wales version, for example, dropped ‘recognition of difference’ as a dimension of teaching, although some of its constituent elements have been reassigned or scattered throughout the remaining renamed three. But probably more significantly, pedagogy – once an empowering concept for teachers, energising their professional learning – has come under the influence of a standards discourse, driven in Australia by the newly established Institutes of Teaching in most states and particularly by the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership (NIQTSI) recently renamed Teaching Australia.

The effect of this has been that the encouragement given to teachers by Productive Pedagogies and its descendants – that ‘teachers can make a difference’ (cf. Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett 1982; Hayes, Mills, Christie & Lingard 2005) to their students’ learning and lives (to refer once again to the promises of schooling), including students from low socio-economic backgrounds – has been transfigured into ‘teachers are the difference’. As the editorial in a New Zealand newspaper recently articulated, ‘the obvious point is that it is quality teachers who make the difference’ (in Nash & Prochnow 2004, p. 187). Again, such assertions are made on the basis of no or dubious references to the research in this area. As Nash and Prochnow point out in their analysis of these claims in the New Zealand context:

In the face of all the evidence, it is unrealistic to expect that the attainment of middle-class and working-class families can be equalised, as some speakers within this broad discourse assert, as a result of pedagogic action by the school. (2004, p. 189)

This sleight of hand – shifting from teachers as a significant influence on students’ learning to being the difference in their learning – has dramatic implications. For example, now, if students’ achievements are deemed to be low, then their teachers are at fault and, presumably, open to reprimand and to ‘teacher bashing’. At the very least, it ‘positions teachers in so tight a frame as to leave them virtually no room for manoeuvre’ (Nash & Prochnow 2004, p. 188).

This way of thinking about the problem of low student outcomes is quite strong in current public discourses around schooling, even among some teachers. It is rightly termed ‘Teacher Effectiveness’, demonstrating its links with school effectiveness (some even adopting similar slogans; for example, Teachers for the
Some student outcomes are not as good as we'd answer (a single-issue solution) – Ken Rowe, What teachers are teaching students might not taught and what they taught and the likelihood of going to universities than taught and what they taught the problem is concentrated in government schooling. Moreover, those from middle and high income groups. Moreover, the problem is clearly on this distinction.

The teacher problem
While I argue that students' low achievement is now primarily attributed to poor pedagogy, it would seem that teachers are a problem on a number of fronts. Now reconfigured as a teacher issue, the discourses in the field – in policy documents, the media, and public debate – are distinguishable by four sometimes contradictory accounts: (1) disappointment with student outcomes, particularly those within government systems; (2) the shortsightedness, irrelevance and inappropriateness of much school curricula; (3) teaching's ageing and potentially diminishing workforce; and (4) the inadequacies of teachers' professional development programs. The last of these is revisited shortly. First, though, I want to recount and articulate these four problems and their various solutions as they are currently imagined, to set the problem of and need for teachers' professional (re)learning in context.

**Problem 1:** Some student outcomes are not as good as we'd like them to be and/or should be.
While the tests noted above suggest that Australian students are, on average, performing well in comparison with students from other OECD countries, there is considerable evidence over an extended period of time that some Australian students do not perform as well as others at what schooling and our political and socioeconomic systems regard as important. As a problem, then, it is clearly *demonstrable* (evident in the research) and *chronic*: a problem that seems to be always with us (a bit like poverty in this regard). In fact, the group of students this applies to most are those from low socioeconomic backgrounds (often in combination with other descriptors, such as race, ethnicity, gender, geography and so on). To take just one measure of school success, the proportion of university students from low socio-economic backgrounds is declining in Australia (from 14.7% in 1991 to 14.5% in 2002) from an already below average representation. People from a low socio-economic background constitute 25% of the total Australian population. In other words, they have roughly half the likelihood of going to university than those from middle and high income groups. Moreover, the problem is concentrated in government schooling.

In 1999, 31% of Victorian government school Year 12 students went on to university in 2000, compared with 48% of Victorian Catholic school Year 12 students and 60% of Victorian independent school Year 12 students (Birrell et al. 2002).

Connell, a leading researcher in this field over an extended period, concludes that ‘the best advice we can give to a poor child keen to get ahead through education is to choose richer parents’ (Connell 1993, p. 22). It is hardly a solution that schools (or society) are willing or able to implement, but Connell is reflecting exasperation over this continuing problem rather than offering a serious way forward. At the extremes, the intended solutions tend to suggest that good teachers are *the* answer (a single-issue solution) – Ken Rowe, mentioned earlier, is a vocal advocate of this position – compared with the alternative proposition that the very best teachers are indeed vital, but only if their professional accomplishments include a capacity to work within the socio-political, material, and cultural contexts in which they find themselves. In the lead-up to the 2004 Australian federal election, the then leader of the Federal Opposition, Mark Latham, suggested that all we need to do is transfer good teachers from schools in which students are doing well, into schools in which students are not doing so well. This is in stark contrast to the initiatives of his political mentor, Gough Whitlam, whose federal government of the 1970s established the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP), which supported teachers in these schools to develop approaches to teaching particular to their students and contexts.

**Problem 2:** What teachers are teaching students might not be what they need for their future.
What students *are* taught and what they *should* be taught are issues that, in the current political climate, are frequently on the public agenda. Without revisiting all the discussion above, the debates are between those who champion a traditional set of knowledge and skills (and we should note that these are not necessarily internally coherent or even fixed), and those that advocate a new (or additional) set of knowledge and skills for a different present and imagined future. Advocates of the latter point to changes in the nature of (available) work, globalisation, information and communication technologies (ICTs), and so on; the former argue that basic skills and classical understandings are still relevant and even important in themselves and worth conserving. At one level, the need for a particular kind of curriculum
for the future is felt more than demonstrated, given that none of us know with certainty what the future holds. The need for such a curriculum also seems more acute at present, as if the inadequacy of the curriculum in this regard has crept up on us.

Solutions to this problem of what (and how) teachers should teach range from introducing the material trappings of the future (typically in the form of new technologies), compared to encouraging systems, schools and teachers to confront real world problems by exploring creative and generative relationships that traverse conceptual, social and material boundaries; the stuff of innovation. Teachers are usually on dangerous ground in the first scenario because their students are almost always far more literate with respect to new technologies, and often have far greater access and time with which to engage with them. For example, for some schools, the quantum leap has been from blackboards to whiteboards, some that even provide a print-out. Others supply their staff with laptop computers and encourage online teaching through computer collectives or ‘pods’, while the appearance of ‘podcasting’ in teaching and learning contexts is probably one of the more innovative engagements with recent technology. Yet, none of these technologies or others really engage teachers to explore new ways of addressing problems, or provide them with opportunities to contribute understandings and values that have importance in their lives.

Probably in recognition of the uncertainty of current knowledge and its usefulness for the future, many Australian schools and systems have placed greater emphasis on generic critical thinking and problem solving skills. In themselves, these are quite useful but they tend to be decontextualised and prescriptive in ways similar to the teaching of language genres in the 1980s and 1990s (Gale & Densmore 2000). They provide one way to confront the future. Another is to recognise that ‘the future is already with us’ (Luke, Luke & Mayer 2000) and to name curricula that address it. Hence, the rationale for the ‘four organisers within the New Basics curriculum, namely: Life Pathways and Social Futures, Multilitgeries and Communication Media, Active Citizenship, and Environments and Technologies’ (Lingard, Hayes & Mills 2000, p. 24).

**Problem 3:** We have a workforce problem; we might run out of teachers.

For some time now, state governments in Australia have made it financially attractive for teachers to retire shortly before they turn 55 years old, by institutionalising rules that maximise superannuation payouts at that age. It is a practice that seems unsustainable, not for financial reasons but because of an impending shortage of teachers. More generally, the middle-age demographic bulge that is Australia’s ‘baby boomers’ has the potential to cause similar problems in other industries (e.g. academia) as this population group approaches retirement. The problem is clearly demonstrable in the demographic data and acute rather than chronic, given that it is probably a one-off event that will be resolved when this hump works its way through the system and population distributions become more evenly spread across age groups. In recognition of its current impact, along with other economic and social considerations, the Australian federal government recently announced measures to alter the superannuation rules to encourage older Australians to remain longer in the workforce.

But for schools and schooling, the problem is not just that teachers are retiring. It is also about why they are leaving teaching and why others do not find it an attractive profession to enter. Some point to barriers that deter them from entering; people shifting from other professions who claim that their existing knowledge and skills and potential contributions are not appreciated and males who see potential litigation (or at least innuendos of molestation) associated with working with children. There are also those who point to the feminisation of teaching and its relegation behind other (often male-dominated and more lucrative) occupations. Others suggest that within school systems teachers are not treated as professionals who are recognised for their expertise and given licence to make independent judgements.

Once again, the solutions vary according to how the problem is conceived. They include superficial responses such as rebadging teaching, focusing on improving its image, fast-tracking professionals from other fields through their preparation and induction, teacher-training scholarships exclusively for males, and so on. More considered and nuanced proposals seek to reconceive teaching, repositioning teachers as knowledge producers, not just knowledge retailers, giving them status by valuing their knowledge and increasing their contributions to what schooling entails; the kind of valuing that might encourage teachers to hang around and for others to want to join them.
**Problem 4: Teachers are not well enough informed re current teaching and learning issues**

Teachers’ professional development has a particular tradition in Australia, which usually involves venturing outside the school to attend ‘one-off seminars, conferences and workshops … events [that some claim] usually do not appreciably enhance the learning of teachers or their students’ (DE&T 2005, p. 4). Some teachers also choose to engage in graduate studies at university and/or participate in other non-award courses or subject association meetings in order to ‘learn specific knowledge and skills, such as deepening their understanding of key subject-matter concepts’ (DE&T 2005, p. 11). At other times learning events are arranged within the school context, either facilitated by inviting ‘an expert into the school to work with individual teachers or professional learning teams’ (DE&T 2005, p. 11) or by teachers themselves identifying their own learning objectives and pursuing these.

Despite this array of professional development activity, or perhaps because of it, there is a perception that teachers are not well informed on what it means to teach and how best it can be done; that they are ignorant of current ‘best practice’. It is a perception that relies on some of the discussion above, that some students are not achieving at desired levels and that this must be related to the teaching students are receiving. There is also evidence generated by the QSRRLS team to suggest that not all teachers are engaging in Productive Pedagogies, or at least not across all their four dimensions. However, the link with teachers’ professional development is implied rather than proven. Hence, whether the problematising of professional development is **demonstrable or felt** is somewhat open to debate. It is nonetheless a **chronic problem**; teachers are often dissatisfied with the professional development on offer and how it is configured. At worst, professional development is conceived as being done ‘to’ and ‘on’ teachers. It is technical in character, disconnected from teachers’ particular contexts and short-lived in effect. At best, teachers’ professional learning is conceived as done ‘with’, ‘by’ and ‘for’ teachers. It is collaborative, generative and cognisant of broader agendas.

**What are we going to do with them?**

It is this last ‘teacher problem’ associated with professional learning on which I now want to focus. Having identified teachers as the problem, it is beholden on school systems to provide them with ways of improving their performance. More punitive means of dealing with teachers and schools are also possible, but given the belief in the scale of the problem (large numbers of students and, therefore, teachers who are underperforming) and also the difficulties of finding replacements, it makes more sense for systems to produce policy about professional learning and to ‘direct traffic’ in the ‘right’ (neoliberal) direction.

And that is where I want to break momentarily with the rhythm of my discussion so far by introducing an anecdote or two as a way of engaging with the most recent Victorian example of professional learning documentation – *Professional Learning in Effective Schools* (DE&T 2005) – or, more accurately, as a way of disregarding its narrative and reframing neoliberal and neo-conservative debates (Lakoff 2004) around teachers’ professional learning. In fact, the document in question almost dares us to, defining evidence as something other than anecdotal (p. 15) in preference for what it interprets as ‘hard’ and generalisable data. With my out-of-order anecdote I hope to illustrate what else is out of order or absent from this account.

Recently, I had the privilege of spending time with a principal of a large secondary school located in a low socio-economic area of Melbourne. There I met a group of teachers who were incredibly generous and honest and insightful. During the day, one of the Assistant Principals told me the following story about a boy he had expelled from school earlier in the week. The boy, now 12 years old and in Year 7, used to live with his drug-addicted parents when he was in primary school, until his mother died from an overdose. Two years on, the boy went to the police to inform them he could not live with his father any more because of the drug-induced violence that characterised his home life, and his grandparents subsequently took him in. Sadly, early in his first year of secondary school, the boy’s grandmother died.

On the day I was at the school, the boy’s grandfather telephoned from his hospital bed to discuss his grandson’s future, post expulsion. The grandfather was diabetic and had just had one of his legs amputated, a not uncommon diabetic related occurrence. On the telephone with the grandfather and then in conversations with me, the Assistant Principal showed incredible sensitivity towards the boy and his grandfather as he described all they had tried to do to assist and all they were currently doing. They had, for example, sent the boy to a special program that specifically works with students’ with difficult behavioural problems. Unfortunately, he was expelled from the program and
sent back when he and another boy smashed their skateboards over the head of a third boy. Now the school was working on placing him in a nearby school so he might maintain contact with his friends.

According to the Assistant Principal, the teachers in the school had tried numerous things to incorporate the boy into classes but his behaviour was so disruptive that they reluctantly decided to expel him. They just did not believe they had anything more they could offer. And, in case you are still thinking this is just anecdotal, the school had expelled five similar students (with different life histories, of course) during the year and dared not expel any more in fear of being asked to explain to the bureaucracy the school’s variation from the statistical norm. In fact, I sat in his office at one point in the day while the Principal held court with another student on the verge of expulsion but given a ‘reprieve’ because of the numbers of those who had gone before her.

There is a lot in this story but the main reason I narrate it is that the most recent departmental document on professional learning to which I refer does not take any account of these circumstances or the likes of them. Instead, students (and teachers) are objectified and teaching is instrumentalised. Paulo Freire’s (1972) critique of teaching informed by a ‘banking’ concept – students with empty heads ready for teachers to make deposits – seems most apt here. If we are to commit to this notion of professionalism, then good teachers ‘act on’ students and, if they act on them skilfully enough, students learn, irrespective of their life circumstances or their interests. In fact, students are almost redundant in the whole exchange, except the extent to which they produce data or, rather (tellingly), data about them is produced. It is data that measures them against criteria on which student and teacher agency must engage. The neoliberal notion that ‘students can learn if they want to’, now reformulated by the neo-conservative caveat ‘if they have good teachers’, just does not wash in the above anecdote; first, because for the boy in question the academic demands of schooling were well down on his list of priorities; and secondly, because it reduces learning to that which is validated by schooling and dominant systems and, by extension, delegitimizes all else. The boy had, in fact, learned an incredible amount about life but it was unlikely to register on system-generated data and it was unlikely to be regarded as part of the official curriculum.

As my teacher colleague implies above, this emphasis on student achievement data actually works to disconnect teaching from learning and teachers from learners. Bob Lingard and his colleagues (2000), researching quality teaching in Queensland, make almost exactly the same observation (noted above). Teaching focused on improving student achievement data actually bypasses learning. It champions the end result, or at least one end result, over everything else. It may be effective but it does not equate with meaningful learning, by students or by teachers. Again, in this respect, ‘Teacher Effectiveness’ (as opposed to ‘Teacher Quality’) is well named. The emphasis in teacher effectiveness is on a product (good data). Success in this account is measured summatively (not formatively despite the references in the Professional Learning in Effective Schools (DE&T 2005) document); it is a success belonging to systems, schools and perhaps to teachers but certainly not to students.

Settlements and conditions
Three things remain to be said about the issues I have raised above. The first is a short analysis of the politics of schooling over time, the problems and their solutions, and where we might expect this all to go in the future. The second is to offer the hint of a new settlement, particularly for teachers’ professional learning.
Finally, I provide a very brief sketch of a renegotiation of schooling: the questions and answers that a politics of recognition might provoke. In the end, they are related endeavours with considerable overlap.

Elsewhere I have argued that political settlements, like the various parameters and particulars of Australian schooling outlined, are contextual, asymmetrical and temporary (Gale 1997; 1999). Central to this notion of settlements are crises or alternative settlements 'in waiting', which are indicative of the inherent contradictions and tensions within society and, in this case, schooling. Claus Offe (1984; 1985) suggests that political and bureaucratic systems typically work in ways to maintain settlements by making slight adjustments, as part concession to alternatives, but also by shifting the gaze to new problems and solutions. In this sense, political settlements are clearly 'a moving discursive frame' (Ball 1994, p. 23).

Hence, we can read the progression from problem to problem (and solution to solution) within Australian schooling as the state's attempt to ward off crisis by tinkering at the edges, but also as evidence of its attempts to respond to broader frames and changing conditions not always within its control. However, Offe (1984; 1985) notes that contradictions within the economic system (some of the current ones are highlighted above) increasingly express themselves as contradictions within the political system, leading to a 'crisis in crisis management' with degenerative effects on political settlements (cf. Gale 1997; 1999). That is, strategies used to arrest crisis (for example, focusing teachers' efforts on raising student achievement data), while potentially effective in the short term, cannot forestall the inevitable collapse of un-renegotiated settlements and may even contribute to their collapse.

The settlement agreed to at the introduction of compulsory schooling in Australia (the promise of meaningful work and a better way of life for the masses) is seriously under threat and in need of renegotiation. While schooling and teaching should always be the subject of ongoing review and improvement, teachers are currently being blamed for schooling's failure to deliver on its initial promises within contemporary times. In the short term, I expect such blaming to continue and to find purchase. And there may well be other problems and solutions that follow. For example, one need only read the survey recently collecting data on teacher education courses for the latest review of reading (noted above), to anticipate the tying of funding for such programs to their implementation of a 'best practice' or reductionist (single solution) approach to its teaching (i.e. phonics). That is, teacher education is to blame and the solution is 'payment by results'. In the end, though, these are matters that are largely outside the control of teachers and schools, although there is much that could be done if the culture of blame was replaced with respect, if teachers were 'looked to' (as experts) rather than 'acted on' (as adversaries or as self-interested).

In this more generous spirit, then, I want to offer three broad conditions for teachers' professional learning. They are informed by a politics of recognition (Young 1990; Fraser 1995) and draw directly from the notion of cognitive justice (Gale & Densmore 2000, p. 18, emphasis original): '(i) to rethink what we mean by social justice and (ii) to acknowledge the place of social groups [and their relations] within this.' In linking this conception of social justice with teachers' professional learning, I am attempting to instil a positive regard for teachers and by teachers, and for teaching and in teaching. I am suggesting that these conditions of professional learning serve the interests not only of teachers but also of students and society as a whole.

**Conditions of self-identity and self-respect: Beginning from the standpoint of teachers**

Kathleen Lynch (1999), writing about equality in educational research, argues the need to engage in research with the researched (see also Mills & Gale 2004). She argues this in response to previous research events where research participants have found themselves in a position in which others are able to say more about them than they know themselves. The current dominant discourse on professional learning performs a similar function on teachers. It speaks about them in ways they do not readily recognise and which does not always match their reality. Thinking differently about professional learning will involve acknowledging who teachers are, as they name themselves, and for that naming to be respected and given credibility. We need to think again about what it means to be a teacher (in contemporary times) and, to borrow from Lynch (1999), the conversation needs to be directed by and with them, not just on and about them.

**Conditions of self-expression and self-development: Positioning teachers as experts & learners**

Teachers know a great deal about teaching. However, too often, institutionalised 'professional development'
programs restrict opportunities for them to express (or even acknowledge) this and for it to inform their development. What I mean here is probably best explained by way of an illustration. In one of my better teaching moments, I once placed a plant before some Year 3 students and asked them what they already knew about plants in general. Our list was extensive and created opportunities for others to learn from their peers. I then asked them what they did not know about plants. Among a number of responses, one young boy offered, ‘I know that plants draw water up through their roots into their leaves. I also know that gravity works to push things down. But I don’t understand how both can be true.’ This one observation generated incredible fascination within the group (including me) and sparked an entire term’s investigation by a small team of budding scientists. It was a simple exercise but with incredible opportunities for real learning. It took them beyond the ‘hard data’ to focus on what this did not explain.

How we conceive of teachers’ professional learning depends a great deal on how we conceive of the role of the teacher and teaching in our societies. We need to start with what teachers already know (about themselves, teaching, learning, students, socio-economic conditions, globalisation, and so on) and then with the questions these knowledge combinations generate. They are questions that will need to speak of student and teacher diversity, for example, and of contexts, and generally problematise teaching and learning relations, given that the ‘law of gravity’ does not apply equally to all students. In all of this we need to reposition teachers as producers of knowledge about teaching (and content, etc.), not just as knowledge retailers and consumers.

Conditions of self-determination: Beyond being heard
Teachers can sometimes feel as though they are at the sharp end of policy, that they are positioned as the ‘objects of policy interventions rather than as the authors of social change’ (Connell 1994, p. 133). Such a view is understandable given their virtual exclusion from education policymaking forums over the last couple of decades, with ‘their control over meaning lost, [and] their professional preferences replaced’ (Ball 1990, p. 18). Still, ‘educational reforms eventually have to work through teachers, and worthwhile reforms have to work with them’ (Connell 1993, p. 57, emphasis added). Sometimes ‘working with’ and ‘working through’ are interpreted as ‘consultation’ or even ‘participation’, but teachers have become increasingly sceptical of information sessions that allow them to have a say only to find that their ideas and concerns are not reflected in the final outcomes. It is reasonable to expect governments, which claim to represent the electorate and its wishes, to have a strong position on schooling and teaching, but representative government is only one manifestation of democracy (Lummis 1996). In its fullest sense, ‘for the people and by the people’ necessitates including within decision-making processes those whom these decisions directly affect. In schooling, this should include students and their parents as well as teachers.

If we were to take these conditions of recognitive justice and write them large across schooling, understanding teachers’ professional learning as embedded in schooling, they might generate questions and responses something like the following:

- **What should be the purposes of schooling?** Provision of the means for all people to exercise their capabilities and determine their actions;
- **How should it be achieved?** Through democratic processes that generalise the interests of the least advantaged;
- **Who should schooling benefit?** All people, differently experienced within and among different social groups;
- **What should schooling deliver?** Positive self-identity; opportunities for self-expression and development; self-determination.

Herein lies the possibility of a renegotiated settlement for schooling and a revitalised teaching profession.

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