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# The 'Class/Teacher' Effects Distortion: A Critique of Purely Positivist Teacher Effectiveness Research and Inquiry

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*Abstract: The current educational context, with its emphasis upon outcomes and accountability, explicitly centralizes the work and role of the classroom teacher practitioner in the learning outcomes of students. This paper argues that the teacher effectiveness debate increasingly represents an intensified incursion into the classroom in the belief that social and educational disadvantage may be overcome if improvements to the effectiveness of teachers and classroom instruction and practice occur.*

Keywords: Teacher Effectiveness, Research Method, Critique

## Introduction

**T**HE CURRENT REFORMIST agenda in education policy development as it is expressed in Australia and more particularly, the state of Victoria is firmly focussed on classroom teachers and modes of classroom and teacher instruction, with the ultimate aim that of improvement in student learning outcomes. In particular, the demands of an increasingly competitive and globally interconnected economy are said to require intensified forms of innovative and adaptable levels of vocational and employment related skills, thus elevating and heightening the importance of high educational outcomes for all students. The case for reform generally rests upon a premise that students in some localities often 'leave school early, with poor levels of literacy, numeracy and other core learnings' (Blueprint, 2004, p.1). Moreover, contemporary calls for reform tend to be supported by particular kinds of educational research, which suggest that 'strong interdependent effects at both the student-level and at the class/teacher level between students' (Rowe, 2003, p.21) is evident. Contemporary policy reform in education highlights the 'high variations in student outcomes between classes' (Blueprint, 2004, p.2).

The current educational context, with its emphasis upon outcomes and accountability, explicitly centralizes the work and role of the teacher in the education and learning process. This teacher and instructional effectiveness argument is varied, but in this paper it is argued that the debate increasingly represents an intensified and barefaced incursion into the classroom in the belief that social and educational disadvantage may be overcome if improvements to the effectiveness of teachers and classroom instruction occurs. In short, the paper explores the teacher effectiveness argument in the contemporary educational context and, in so doing, utilizes the theoretical framework of Bourdieu to highlight the inadequacies of a simplistic education discourse concerning the explicit link between the classroom teacher practitioner and the learning outcomes of students. In doing so, the paper advocates for a critical theory approach to the question and problem of classroom teacher effectiveness.

In the first section, the paper deals with teacher effectiveness studies and education policy development. It outlines the contemporary nature of the study of teacher and instructional effectiveness and how particular educational research is structured in order to advance policy in teaching and learning. This is followed by an account of issues of control within the debate on teacher effectiveness in recognition of the re-configured position of teachers. It is acknowledged that teachers now operate in a re-structured economic and political realm and that student learning and attainment directly correlates to an individualised and performance-based sense of teacher efficacy. The concluding and final section of the paper discusses the nature of a Bourdieuan research method, which, it is argued, although not in any teleological sense of provision of answers to issues of teacher effectiveness, may act as a basis for a rigorous research and investigative approach to matters of educational interest that relate directly to the learning outcomes of students.

### **Teacher Effectiveness Studies and Policy Formulation**

Studies into the classroom effectiveness of teachers tend to focus upon behavioural aspects considered most effective in developing and adding value to student learning outcomes. Much of the teacher effectiveness literature isolates what are considered to be key factors in student learning and are described prescriptively, suggesting a model of school and classroom learning based upon optimum conditions, (see, for example, Scheerens and Bosker, 1997, Rowe, 2003, Hattie, 2003). Studies of teacher effectiveness rely upon codifiable rationally derived learning factors considered vital and necessary for effective and successful academic learning. Indeed, as a starting point and by way of example, Carroll identifies five causal or contextual factors thought to contribute to learning including, student aptitude, ability to understand instruction, perseverance, opportunity to learn in terms of time allocated and quality of instruction (1963, p.729). The Carroll model, whilst not specifically addressing the issue of effective teaching in isolation, illustrates the compartmentalized nature of educational effectiveness theory, which incorporates aspects of teacher effectiveness, producing an articulated version of contributory learning influences. Adjustments to the Carroll model of student learning were subsequently made by Walberg (1983, pp.20-26), the emphasis of which focussed upon the psychology of learning and associated inputs considered necessary for effective learning. Walberg's research suggested that the major influences on student learning flowed from 'aptitudes, instruction and the psychological environment to learning' (Walberg, 1983, p.21). A significant feature of learning and teacher effectiveness studies of the kind cited above emphasizes the quality of instruction. For Carroll and Walberg, improvements to the time spent on and the quality of instruction offered the best chance of effective learning.

The initial developmental phase of teacher effectiveness studies sought to examine the explicit relationship between 'observed teacher behaviour and pupil achievement' (Scheerens and Bosker, 1997, p.148), a phase known as 'process-product studies' (Scheerens and Bosker, 1997, p.148). Research from within process-product studies showed that effective levels of instructional effectiveness are centred on three essential ingredients including, effective learning time, structured teaching and opportunity to learn illustrated in close alignment between items taught and items tested (Scheerens and Bosker, 1997, p.152). Research of this kind focuses on the productive nature of classroom and teacher instruction suggesting that student learning outcomes are heightened by attention to time spent on the learning task

and to the quality of instruction, which according to Carroll (1963, p.729) represents the 'most elusive quantity' to capture and analyse in his student learning model.

Conclusions from teacher effectiveness studies usually emphasize the correlative nature between classroom instructional strategies and enhanced academic achievement. Moreover, teacher effectiveness studies generally seek to simplify the student-teacher classroom situation, offering a regularized and ordered approach to teaching and learning. Its message is one closely attuned to the maximisation of student learning outcomes through structured teacher practice that is at the very least achievement oriented with a commitment to frequent assessment of student learning progress (Scheerens and Bosker, 1997, p.152).

Teacher effectiveness studies in more recent times continue to rely on a positivist research methodology seeking a "science of teaching" or more specifically a "science of school management". The positivist research method exhibits key epistemological characteristics that include a belief in an objective reality, a division or separation between researcher and the researched and an attempt to account for an educational situation through correspondence between the research account and what is or represents the independent case, thus arriving at a researched notion of truth (Pring, 2000, p.251). The positivist account views education systemically believing that knowledge is transmissible content, that the organisation of educational provision is bureaucratically fair and that education is a social commodity (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.24). This approach in education seeks to posit educational theory towards a 'concern for the scientific ideals of explanation, prediction and control' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.55) and to this extent, the pursuit and practice of education as an applied science.

Purely positivist forms of educational enquiry assume that only a particular type of research methodology yields evidence about 'what works' (Rogers, 2003, p.75) in classrooms and in schools. This belief in certain forms of evidence ignores the associated biases of the researcher in terms of political beliefs and educational values. Moreover, the research practice and method itself is also in dispute, in that its *modus operandi* is imbued with theoretical assumptions generally based on given and accepted orthodoxies. The partisan nature of research inquiry is embedded in the research methodology chosen and, far from proving a totally objective outcome or claim, often produces distorted results, generally through a lack of strong analysis that one could argue is 'not rigorous or objectifying enough' (Harding, 1993, p.51). But as Harding suggests in her "strong objectivity" thesis, positivist science is 'restricted to those processes controllable by methodological rules' (Harding, 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). The classroom teacher practitioner faced with constant and random "in time" contextual influences, cannot deal with the unexpected, regardless of appropriate planning or otherwise, and as such, lacks the necessary means of control that is often assumed within educational research inquiry.

Recent teacher effectiveness inquiry (Rowe, 2003) suggests that 'class/teacher effects' (p.1) and the 'quality of teaching and learning provision' (p.1) exert the most influence on a student's level of educational attainment. Moreover, whilst key student background characteristics incorporating literacy skills, general academic achievements, attitudes, behaviours and experiences of schooling all contribute to the learning experience and thus affect student learning outcomes, it is suggested that these factors 'pale into insignificance compared with class/teacher effects' (Rowe, 2003, p.1). Studies of this kind usually make "adjustments"

for student “abilities”, gender and school sector (government, Catholic, independent). In other words, a mathematical and statistical assignation is given for the variable described. The subsequent need for variable “adjustments” tends to suggest that the complex nature of the teaching and learning relationship requires examination that seeks prevention of ‘fictitious explanations containing nothing beyond the very relationship they presume to explain’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.87). Hence, treatment of key contributing influences to learning and the learning outcomes of students such as gender, school sector and student ability, to name but a few, must be examined, analysed and understood not as ‘isolable properties’ (Bourdieu & Passeron) but as ‘elements in a structure and moments in a process’ (1990, p.87).

Despite modern discourses and theoretical debates emphasizing the ideologies of equal opportunity and meritocracy, the dominant classes exert significant influence upon educational direction ensuring that educational systems reproduce the ‘legitimate culture as it stands and produce agents capable of manipulating it legitimately’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, pp.59-60). Indeed, conferred privilege and bases of power persist in society by way of unequal distribution of cultural resources, specifically educational credentials, mechanisms of selection and cognitive classifications (Swartz, 1997, p.190). Notwithstanding the academic ability of particular students, purely positivist teacher effectiveness studies do not adequately treat issues of say school size, continuity of staffing at a particular school site, teacher-pupil ratios and class sizes and school and neighbourhood cultures. Moreover, most purely positivist studies of classroom teacher effectiveness depend upon attainment on norm-referenced or criterion-referenced tests that invariably rely upon a particular student’s motivational capacity for test completion. The extent of a particular student’s motivation and expended effort in taking a test to measure attainment is never mentioned.

Exploration of the purely scientific method for research into education reveals an adherence to the development of inquiry processes espousing belief in the “applied science” view of educational practice. Proponents of this approach, including Thorndike and Dewey, argued for a scientific basis to questions of educational theory and practice. Thorndike, for example, argued that the ‘profession of teaching will improve in proportion as its members direct their daily work by the scientific method’ (Thorndike in Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.56). Central to this professed aim was a commitment to basic principles of scientific management and further, an attraction to quantitatively derived measurements that could be used as a platform for establishing education and school policy based upon the indisputable collection of “facts” (Lagemann, 2000, p.79). The objectification and representation ‘as a spectacle’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.96) of aspects of the social world based upon a limited and narrow form of exchanges, often removed from the contextual complexities of the contemporary classroom teacher practitioner, dismisses and ignores the ‘system of factors, acting as a system’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.87) that impact on and influence student learning outcomes and attainment.

## Issues of Control

The modernist practice of teaching and the role of the teacher exist within theoretical and political policy boundaries and formulations external to the actual classroom practice of teaching that represents an articulated commitment and acceptance of dominant modes of influence and production. Its contemporary manifestation resides in a policy legitimacy that silences the authority and voice of the teacher, an example of which includes the imposition

of standardized testing (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p.36). Moreover, for teachers, it re-inforces the symbolic nature of contemporary education policy text manifested through a “readerly” (Barthes, 1973) adherence to a system of communication characterised by ‘an excess of precision’ (Barthes, 1975, p.26) and a ‘kind of maniacal exactitude of language’ (Barthes, 1975, p.26). Imposed restrictions and limitations become the accepted pedagogical “norm”, although it could be argued that recent curriculum policy development in Victoria, Australia with the introduction of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS, 2003), releases classroom teachers from pedagogical confinement. Nevertheless, Federal government education policy requires the mandatory national “system wide testing” of students in selected year levels and stipulates anticipated and expected attainment levels to be reached (May, 2007).

The ‘authoritative allocation of values’ (Easton 1953; Anderson 1979; in Gale and Densmore, 2003, p.37) through which policy articulation and development occurs, indicates the relationship between power and control. Those most concerned with educational policy, be it policy makers or teachers, are restricted to policy production that exists within particular fields in which ‘certain cultural, social, economic and symbolic resources (capitals)’ (Gale and Densmore, 2003, p.41) operate. Fields represent spaces of competing interests and participants within a field contend in order to ‘establish monopoly over the species of capital effective in it’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.17). That is, fields are ‘fields of struggle’ (Swartz, 1997, p.121) and whilst they act as fluid sites, not only of possible domination but also of possible resistance though rarely if ever escaping the ‘logic of reproduction’ (Swartz, 1997, p.121), tend to reinforce power structures and relationships that exist within society. Whilst fields as sites of resistance and domination express what may be possible, the genuine dynamic of power resides in an artificially constructed and imposed social, cultural, economic and symbolic order that for teachers within the field of education, positions them and their practice in politically legitimated forms of containment (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p.43).

Contemporary processes of containment are expressed through a redirection and a re-evaluation of teachers’ and school practices (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p.43). Indeed, various forms of ‘surveillance mechanisms’ (Foucault, 1980, p.43), an example of which is system wide testing, now regulate matters of policy articulation and development within school and teacher based practice. Powerful neo-liberal and neo-conservative political forces contextually restrict teacher and school practice towards policy process that in explicit terms is instrumentalist in form and functionalist in mode, the end result of which is the steady and demonstrable individual competencies and capacities of the post-Fordist vocationally flexible individual worker. Moreover, the excision of teacher influence towards the fringes of educational decision-making, particularly with respect to policy formulation, limits the action and practice of teachers to policy contexts that are manifestly understood in purely rational terms, reflecting a ‘linear and discrete’ (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p.44) theoretical standpoint.

Significantly, for teachers, major forces of economic change in recent times have altered capital relationships whereby traditional forms of capital production, whilst relevant to an extent, by no means influence economic debate. Rational modes of economic theory are considered relevant with the expressed commitment to notions of economic performativity and adaptability for individuals and nation states alike. At issue within a culture of performativity is situated measures of performance, centred on measures of economic productivity or output (Ball, 2000, p.1), standing for the ‘worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation’ (Ball, 2000, p.1). The technology of performance is a system of ‘terror’, according

to Lyotard, (in Ball, 2000, p.1), and uses judgements, comparisons and displays as a ‘means of control’ (Ball, 2000, p.1). Furthermore, the current contextual economic and political milieu values the imperatives of ‘productivity, flexibility and choice’ (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p.63), with the added provision of an acute and heightened form of organisational and individual ‘accountability’ (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p.63).

Teachers then are currently positioned within an economic and political policy script that emphasizes competitive advantage as a “marketable” feature within the field of education. Teaching practice is subordinated to situated habitually-formed processes that encroach upon the role of the teacher. Teaching practice is dominated by a system of capital laden with policy values founded upon an objectivist or ‘idealist’ (Wittgenstein, 1974, p.33) form of practical logic. This recognises that teachers operate currently within a practical framework with structurally, economic and politically imposed forces which mould and maintain the behaviour of agents towards permissible and allowable parameters. 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 & Densmore, 2003, p.61) and (c) an increasing control over individuals within education (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p.61). The latter factor is best expressed in Foucauldian terms, in that controlling mechanisms are ‘increasingly at work within classrooms, in the form of strategies of surveillance, normalization, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualization, totalization and regulation’ (Gore, 1998, pp.60-61).

## Tools of Measurement

The domination of instrumental reason in studies of teacher effectiveness is obvious in terms of research methodology used and so must be a consideration when engaged in the interpretation of the outcomes and conclusions reached. Overcoming a ‘naïve observationalist’ (Feyerabend, 1981, p.23) sense of knowledge accumulation is a key component towards establishing a coherent, reliable and full explicatory account of phenomena within the practice of teaching and the theory of learning. Rigid adherence to purely objectivist forms of practical logic will develop for the researcher a ‘point of view on the action’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.96) under consideration, but will inevitably result in a limited sense of understanding as the situation under consideration, in this case, the practice of teaching, is represented as merely a set of ‘interactions’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.96) based upon a narrow form of ‘symbolic exchanges’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.96). Thus, a methodological research technique is needed that assesses teaching practice in its entirety rather than acting merely upon “simplistic” and narrow instrumentalist methods that invariably yield often misleading and skewed views of the teaching situation.

Some mention of this is made by researchers such as Ho (2008). The limitations of large scale statistical analyses if not adequately scrutinized often lead to limited and unrepresentative explanations of test score trends, gaps and gap trends. In talking about PPS (Percentage of Proficient Students) scores, Ho demonstrates that interpretations of student and school progress based on these scores are often skewed (p.351).

‘Large-scale educational statistics make headlines and motivate interventions. Trends, gaps, and gap trends influence perceptions of student achievement, teacher quality, and progress toward equity in educational opportunity. With these high stakes, the selection

of a metric that encourages a narrow and unrepresentative perspective on trends, gaps, and gap trends can have far-reaching consequences.’ (Ho, 2008, p.352).

Indeed, Ho illustrates that large scale statistical determinations of educational achievement often do not consider the “mathematical” intricacies of the reported findings. A simple example involves consideration of test score distribution in terms of examinees and the resultant PPS-based trend (p.352). Moreover, large-scale educational statistics often assume and thus incorporate ‘normal distributions with equal variances’ (Ho, 2008, p.355). But theory and practice are often removed and theoretical interpretations from large-scale educational statistics that report on student learning and achievement and teaching practice hope for rather than actually achieve close statistical correlations. Making sense of complicated statistical trends and trend gaps in student learning and achievement, let alone teaching practice may not necessarily take note of the ‘irregular nature of distributional change in educational testing’ (Ho, 2008, p.356). The essential element and guiding point here is a re-curing theme in the interpretation of education statistics, and that is as Ho states:

‘Reducing the complexities of distributional change to a single number always involves sacrificing information.’ (p.356)

It is this sacrifice in information that is of most consequence and importance. The classroom teacher practitioner cannot act or afford to sacrifice information for they are dealing with real people with real issues. The pedagogical exchange between classroom teacher and student as learner does not and should not accept a sacrifice of information. Classroom teachers use information that they accumulate from their work with students constantly. It is often information of this kind that is unquantifiable or beyond immediate description that is of most significance for the student as a learner.

The movement towards the quantified measurement of teaching practice and its associated causal link(s) to the improved learning outcomes of students, predominantly based on standardised testing, regardless of student background is obviously questionable. Pure and discrete statistical examination and analysis particularly when it purports to find a direct link between teaching practice and student learning outcomes in terms of achievement often does not deal with the complexities of school level impacts such as school composition. Indeed, school composition and peer effects as only one example, is often overlooked in purely positivist teacher effectiveness research. Yet, research has found that significant issues relating to school composition and peer effects and the impact that these particular features have on not only teaching practice but the achievement levels of students are real (Thrupp, Lauder & Robinson; 2002, Thrupp, 1999). The problematical aspect of large scale purely positivist statistical research in teacher effectiveness inquiry cannot escape the issue of complexity. The complexity issue is further exacerbated by the often underestimated or indeed discounted approach taken to purely positivist educational research that overlooks school composition and peer level effects and the influence that these features have on say teacher practice, curriculum and school organisation and management processes. Thus, the problem of measurement centres more on the question of what to measure and furthermore, on what can be measured that best captures beyond doubt, if this is at all possible, the practice(s) of classroom teacher practitioners and the achievement of students.

In my view, the work of Bourdieu provides the relevant ‘tools’ for the valid assessment of teaching practice and student learning and achievement in its complicated entirety. Bourdieu’s work in the education area incorporates an analysis of teacher function(s) as



practice thereby examining the practice of teaching in an attempt to identify and thus explain inter-connected and associative factors, that on first inspection are concealed or seemingly unobtrusive, yet remain central to, and impinge upon, the action or practice of teaching, and furthermore and perhaps importantly for teachers in the present time, act on learning outcomes attained. Bourdieu's work in the area of practice attests to the complexity and complexities involved in any particular scope or range of action, thereby uncovering often misleading or indeed erroneous explication or explanation of events post practice, which may occur if a simplistic, elementary or divisible research approach is adopted.

Practice for Bourdieu is multi-faceted and is composed of many parts, all exerting influence upon and within the process of endeavour under consideration. Thus, any research activity, in its attempt to explain and then comment upon action or practice should if it is to be cognisant of all related elements and causes, adopt an approach that at some point removes or objectifies, not only the issue in question, but the process or method of research itself. In other words, Bourdieu's work does not only attempt to examine and identify particular phenomena or seek answers to research questions in isolation, it asks questions of the action of the research itself, in a further attempt at rigorous application of inquiry. His notion of 'reflexive objectivity' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.11), can be viewed as a genuine attempt to create a "space" for much needed creative inquiry, allowing for reflective consideration of issues related to in this instance, the practice of teaching and the learning outcomes or achievement of students.

The complex nature of the research task presents obstacles requiring an applicable technique capable of bridging an apparent division between forms of knowledge. Information of an objective kind occupies and represents one aspect of obtainable knowledge, an aspect that is discrete and separate, or in short, discontinuous. Conversely, subjective knowledge provides information of the subject involved within the action or practice. Bourdieu reminds us that consideration of all knowledge forms is important as a complete illustration of an issue under examination prevails. Bourdieu's methodological technique then rests upon examination of taxonomies or classificatory systems that rationalise the actions of agents in particular fields of endeavour. Structured taxonomic systems often disguise the actual "everyday" agent realities of practice, thus mis-recognising key features of forms of practice. The often unstated but concrete and tangible function(s) of classificatory systems inevitably consists of political and economically imposed limits, generally for the continued reproduction of the social order. The resultant 'sense of limits' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.164), represents incorporated struggle(s) of class within dominant systems of classification, thus suggesting that the objective analytic research exercise purporting an indefectible claim to truth, merely mis-recognises, generally through incomplete or total disregard by way of omission, form(s) of domination. Bourdieuan analysis of a field involves in the first instance locating and analysing the field as a field of power; secondly, charting the competitive structure of relations between positions occupied by agents within a field; and thirdly recognising and analysing the habitus of agents which in essence represents the particular system of dispositions acquired by individuals as a consequence of everyday interaction within a determined set of social and economic conditions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, pp.104-107).

The relationship between habitus and social context or setting forms an important component in the examination and analysis of practice for Bourdieu. Its importance is reflected in the knowledge gathered by recognising that 'particular practices or perceptions' (Thompson, 1991, p.14) do not necessarily flow from one's habitus alone, but are generated and exist 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). Furthermore, fields embody distinctive properties one must accept in order to participate and be recognised as a "player" within the 'game' (Thompson, 1991, p.14). Participation however, varies depending upon one's accumulated 'capital' (Bourdieu in Halsey et al, 1997, p.46), which essentially determines the position an individual occupies within the field by virtue of the distributed resources accessible in that field, and possessed by the individual for exchange.

Bourdieu's writing on practice is an attempt at connecting and thereby facilitating an intelligible course of action through and between what seem on first inspection competing and one could argue opposing poles. Bourdieu has advanced interpretative analysis beyond mere attachment to a given orthodoxy, expressed as theory, imbibed with its own particular set of theoretical assumptions and ideologies, to a free space where the dichotomous distinction between competing forms of theory, lapses. In that sense, Bourdieu's theory of practice and his theoretical standpoint on matters of inquiry into practice represents an overcoming of paradigmatic and epistemological difference (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.10), and it would appear, is most suited to a consideration of matters related to the contemporary "real-world" study of classroom teacher effectiveness and the learning outcomes and achievement of students.

## Conclusion

This paper has sought to discuss the question and problem of classroom teacher effectiveness within the current educational context using a critical theory approach. It acknowledges that any discussion of classroom teacher effectiveness cannot take place without recognising broader structural economic and political forces at work that influence the practice of teachers and thus affect the learning outcomes of students. It also refers to issues of school context, in particular, school composition and peer effects as further considerations worthy of scrutiny when pontificating on classroom teacher effects and the learning outcomes of students. The paper discusses the prevailing dominance of purely positivist research to the question and problem of classroom teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes. It also makes clear the link between positivist teacher effectiveness research and current educational policy development. The significance of the link is in an accepted belief that student learning outcomes and heightened levels of achievement are enhanced and maximised only through effective teaching or quality of instruction. I suggest in this paper that any worthy consideration of the question and problem of classroom teacher effectiveness requires a research approach that adequately interprets all facets of a teacher's practice including the quality of instruction. This encompasses a research approach that can develop an intrinsic research design capable of carefully extracting contributory variables that perhaps are not necessarily openly distinctive or easily identified. As Bourdieu and Wacquant explain, objectivism too readily falls into the 'reductionist trap' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.9) and that it must recognise that 'the consciousness and interpretations of agents are an essential component of the full reality of the social world' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.9). This relates to the capabilities of a school or schooling system to make a difference and is 'completely imbricated with context dependent factors' (Thomson, 2000, p.159). In so doing, it is anticipated that only then can research on the question and problem of classroom teacher

effectiveness and its relationship to the learning outcomes of students be free of possible biases, or, at the very least incomplete research interpretations.

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I have been a classroom teacher practitioner (high school maths/science teacher) for twenty years. I have recently been appointed as lecturer in teacher education at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. I have a Masters of Education (by research) and am interested in critical theory, research method(s) in education as it applies to teacher practice, and theory and philosophy of education. I am currently working towards a PhD in the area of teacher effectiveness. I have presented on the issue of teacher effectiveness at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conferences in 2005 and 2006.

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