

2017

## The Politics of Quality Teacher Discourses: Implications for Pre-service Teachers in High Poverty Schools

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### Recommended Citation

Scholes, L., Lampert, J., Burnett, B., Comber, B. M., Hoff, L., & Ferguson, A. (2017). The Politics of Quality Teacher Discourses: Implications for Pre-service Teachers in High Poverty Schools. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(4). <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2017v42n4.3>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.  
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol42/iss4/3>

## The Politics of Quality Teacher Discourses: Implications for Pre-service Teachers in High Poverty Schools

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*Abstract: Improving the quality of education for young people growing up in high poverty and culturally diverse communities is an escalating problem in affluent nations with increasing gaps between the wealthy and the poor. Improving the quality of teachers and improving the quality of teaching are amongst the prominent solutions offered to redress the differences between student academic performances related to socio-economic family circumstances. This article examines the different discourses of 'quality' in relation to the preparation of pre-service teachers to work in high poverty schools such as graduates of the National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools pre-service teacher education program. Key tenets of 'quality teacher' and 'quality teaching' solutions are summarized along with their critiques. An alternative approach starting from a position of social justice is considered. This approach situates the work of teaching within high poverty school communities and considers what pre-service teachers need to understand and learn to do with respect to context.*

### Introduction

There is an increasing international focus on improving the quality of teaching and educational outcomes for students (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2014). The quality of teachers and quality of teaching are critical terms in discussions about teacher effectiveness in an internationally competitive environment focusing on measures such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). In countries such as Australia this focus on the quality of teaching manifests in the development of standardised national professional standards for teachers, a national focus on teacher performance, and school improvement templates that foreground teacher expertise. Yet, despite this emphasis on improving quality, definitions of quality and how quality is measured are widely debated (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012; Sayed & Ahmed, 2015; Skourdoumbis, 2014).

As Alexander (2015) notes, there is a notable lack of precision in the use of the keyword "quality" as "quality" is often used quasi-adjectivally, as in "quality healthcare", "quality teaching" or "quality learning". The adjectival use of "quality" is a slogan, offering limited purchase on what quality actually entails (Alexander, 2015). Used as a noun,

“quality” is multi-faceted, for it can mean an attribute such as in the qualities we look for in a teacher or the degree of excellence, as when we say teaching is of outstanding quality, in which case “outstanding” needs to be defined (Alexander, 2015). “Teacher quality” becomes meaningless without a clear understanding of what pedagogical processes are generative of quality learning and how teacher agency, and therefore teacher quality can enable such learning (Sayed & Ahmed, 2015). As the quality agenda is being shaped by measurable outcomes from a narrow range of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, a broader conceptualization is needed (Sayed & Ahmed, 2015).

One group of researchers (Wang et al, 2011, p.333) use the image of a kaleidoscope as a metaphor for the ways in which the ‘image of quality teaching changes with shifts in individuals, contexts, ideologies, and other factors.’ However, the influence of school contexts on teaching experiences and how educational outcomes are mediated by student characteristics (socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicity, refugee status, gender) and geographical location are often omitted from discussions about quality (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). The separation of teachers, teaching and contexts removes the relationships which are integral to change. In addition, much of the discussion tends to decouple two clearly inter-related concepts i) the *quality teacher* and; ii) *quality teaching*. We argue, (following Sayed & Ahmed, 2015, p. 1), that quality needs to be understood as a ‘dynamic, process-oriented social justice endeavour’ in order for teacher education programs to be designed in ways that are responsive to the material realities of life in schools and communities.

Quality teacher and quality teaching discourses have different implications for policy solutions targeting improving educational achievement of students in low socio-economic status (SES) schools. These different discourses also have different implications for pre-service education. In our experience however, the sustainable improvement of education for low SES students is more complex than either or both of these options. It is clear that such schools need “quality teachers” who are well-prepared, the best in their field, disposed to working voluntarily in these communities and who are able to design and enact “quality teaching”. However, long-term sustainable education, we argue, involves an approach underpinned by social justice both in terms of the macro and micro processes of everyday school life. Hence in this paper we re-define quality teaching in relation to social justice drawing on Nancy Fraser’s (2008) three dimensional theory towards “parity of participation”. We consider the complexity of the teacher education policy agenda from a social justice perspective and highlight the tensions inherent in the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* and current climate of school reform. Finally, we propose the *National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools* (NETDS) program provides one avenue for preparing individuals for quality teaching for social justice by putting poverty at the forefront of teacher education curriculum. The program explicitly builds pre-service teachers’ understandings of the ways in which poverty and other forms of disadvantage are produced.

We first examine different discourses of “quality”. Key tenets of “quality teacher” and “quality teaching” solutions are summarized along with their critiques and relevance for the preparation of pre-service teachers. An alternative approach that re-conceptualises quality as inseparable from equity is considered drawing on Fraser (2008, 2010), who conceptualises justice that requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. This “parity of participation” view of equity provides a lens through which to articulate the cultural, economic and political domains of justice that define quality teaching in high poverty schools. This approach situates the work of teaching within actual communities and considers what teachers need to understand and learn to do with respect to context.

## **“Quality Teacher” and “Quality Teaching”: In the Context of School Improvement Agenda**

Traditionally, the “quality teacher” discourse has been influenced by psycho-social beliefs about innate qualities within individuals such as extroversion, caring natures or resilience that make some people more suited to be good teachers (Coe et. al, 2014; LeCornu, 2009; Moseley et al., 2014). In addition, quality teachers have been conceptualised as those who have acquired the tools of their trade such as effective pedagogical skills, or innovative ways to teach subject areas such as literacy, or numeracy (Comber & Kamler, 2004, 2005; Gore, Griffiths & Ladwig, 2004; Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard, 2006; Luke, 2004). In this version, quality is still believed to reside within the individual teacher in terms of them having particular repertoires of practices they enact. Claims about the impact of quality teachers have been highlighted, for example, by Rowe (2003); Hattie (2003); and Darling-Hammond (2006). Rowe (2003) argues that the proportion of variation in students’ achievement progress due to differences in student background and ability (9-15 per cent) is less important than variation associated with class/teacher membership (30-60 per cent), while Hattie (2003) contends that individual teacher quality accounts for 30 per cent of the variance in student performance. Darling-Hammond (2006) suggests that students who have “highly effective” teachers for three consecutive years score as much as 50 percentile points higher on achievement tests than those who have “ineffective” teachers for the same amount of time.

Simply put, there are many educators who believe that “high-quality” teachers are important in terms of their re-distribution in schools with high numbers of students from high poverty situations (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). These kinds of findings have led some to believe that the biggest equity issue in Australian education is the provision of a quality teacher in every classroom (Dinham, 2011). Indeed, the issue of teacher quality is seen as a social justice concern by many who want effective teachers in schools that need them most. As Twigg (2012, p.671) reminds us ‘there is fantastic practice happening...the challenge is to spread this best practice while giving teachers the freedom to innovate and inspire.’ Yet while teacher quality is desirable many researchers argue it cannot, of course, override the effects of poverty on students (Berliner, 2013; Lingard, 2007; Skourdumbis, 2014; Zeichner, Payne & Bravko, 2015).

The question of how quality teacher and teaching should be defined, studied, and measured is an important one, not least because of expanding policies for promoting high-stakes practices associated with linking teacher compensation to student performance that are already in place in some countries (Baker et al., 2010). For example, discussions about “quality teachers” have led to measures of effectiveness linking pay to performance and retaining only those teachers who raise student achievement (Hanushek et al., 2004), terminating employment of the 5% of teachers deemed to be the “lowest performing” (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007) and punishing and rewarding schools based on “performance” (Dinham, 2013). In order to link teacher quality to student outcomes, the attributes of a “good teacher” have to be identifiable and measurable. Consequently, both government and researchers have sought to define and quantify the attributes, skills and knowledge that they believe have the most significant effect on student outcomes (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2016; Bahr & Mellor, 2016). The need to quantify, has led in some cases to the identification of Value-Added Models (VAMS), which measure or quantify teacher quality (Dinham & Scott, 2012; Zhao, 2010). In essence, they seek to identify the variables that make teachers “effective” primarily in terms of their impact on student test scores. The intent is to find an

objective, “scientific” way to be explicit about what teachers can be doing to make a difference.

The outcome of an approach to improving teacher quality based on VAMs imposes greater control over, and surveillance of, teachers, ‘to the extent that some principals are said to engage in a growing practice of snap inspections of classrooms, sometimes accompanied by video-taking, to “catch” teachers performing badly’ (Dinham, 2013, p.94) and the practice of dropping into classrooms, filling out rubrics, and sending them to teachers. These strategies, rather than being done *with* and *for* teachers, are essentially being done *to* teachers and without their involvement (Dinham, 2013). As teacher quality is said to locate effective teaching within the individual teacher, this perspective has contributed to “teacher blame” in debates about the crisis in education (Thrupp, 2009).

One controversial aspect of the quality teacher debate is the idea that a good teacher is a good teacher regardless of context (Loeb et. al., 2014) promoting “indifference to difference” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997, p. 186). The “good teacher” argument can intentionally or inadvertently promote an individualized conception of a school and a belief in individual teacher autonomy, without regard for the influence of factors such as high poverty and social disadvantage. Assumptions about quality are based on student international and national measures as predictors (Dinham, 2013) and that a quality teacher can be recognised based on practice (Strong, Gargani, & Hacifazlioglu, 2011).

The assumption that teachers are the only element that make *the* difference (Skourdombis, 2012) discounts context and conceals the connections between school and its broader social context, including the ways that students’ cultural resources enable or constrain success in the traditional structures of schooling (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Connell, 1994, 2002; Hayes et al., 2006). While the focus on quality teachers promotes misrecognition of teachers’ work as collective, recognition of quality teaching as collective labour (collegiality, teachers and school communities and the work they do together), has the potential to recognise the complexities of contextual factors teachers face in challenging teaching situations such as high poverty schools (Sammons et al., 2007).

Quality *teaching* is typically referred to when discussing general improvement of student outcomes. For example, The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2013) states that high-quality teaching is the greatest in-school influence on student engagement and student outcomes. While what counts as quality teaching varies amongst different stakeholders, operationally, it is defined as teaching that produces an improvement in student outcomes (Zammit et al., 2007). For example, Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (2005) estimate that having five years of good teaching in a row (1.0 standard deviation above average) can overcome the average seventh-grade mathematics achievement gap between lower-income students and those from higher-income families and that there is no more important empirical determinant of student outcomes than good teaching (Barber & Mourshed, 2009).

Quality *teaching* discourse is often, and some feel dangerously (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009), linked to student outcome measures, however even those who are critical of the quality teacher discourse do not discount the fact that individual teachers may vary, and can make a difference. To discount the value of a good teacher would be what Nancy Fraser (1997, p. 7) might call ‘throw[ing] out the baby with the bath water’. Many researchers who fear the impact of teacher blame or the neoliberal overemphasis on testing as a measure of successful teaching remain convinced that high quality teachers, including those with strong knowledge of their teaching areas, remain crucial to a social justice agenda that provides strong teachers for students who have been historically underserved. As Whitty (2010, p. 30) cautions, we need to make sure that criticizing the discourse of quality ‘does not have the unintended consequence of denying disadvantaged groups access to... “powerful” knowledge’.

The term “quality teaching” allows both teacher and context to be taken more fully into account for as Zammit et al. (2007) explain, quality *teaching* resides within three domains, including; i) the teaching context and its relationship with quality teaching and student outcomes; ii) links between professional practices and quality teaching; and iii) associations between quality teaching and teacher attributes and capabilities. In this way there is recognition that individual teacher attributes, skills and knowledges do matter, but importantly, there is recognition of contextual factors and professional practices. Changing societal expectations; diverse student communities; and school environment and management, are salient. As such, quality teaching needs to be contextual and flexible with content connected to students’ lives, of high intellectual quality, with learning strategies that fit the needs of diverse students (Zammit et al, 2007).

When understood in this way, the discourse of quality *teaching*, has the potential to provide a more nuanced approach than teacher quality, as it is reflective of the complexities such as context, political climate, disparities in school funding and difficulties involved in teaching. Quality teaching then is a collective endeavor. As Connell (2010) points out, much of what happens in the daily life of a school involves joint endeavours of the staff, and the staff’s collective relationship to the collective presence of the students (their social class backgrounds, gender, ethnicity, regional culture, religion; and their current peer group life, hierarchies and exclusions, bullying, cooperation, and so on). Much of the learning of students results from the shared efforts of a group of staff, from interactive learning processes among the students, and from the working of the institution around them (Connell, 2010). In this way, when an individual teacher appears to be performing well (or not) it depends a great deal on what other people are doing (Connell, 2010).

The pursuit of quality teaching in high poverty communities is considered one way to close the achievement gaps for marginalised groups (Banks et al., 2005; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Again, while these accountability measures are sometimes criticized as merely a neoliberal strategy, with no social justice benefits (Dinham, 2013), educational outcomes on national testing regimes such as the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2015) and international measures such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2013) continue to consistently show links between disadvantage and poor performance at school. Quality teaching, then, *is* an equity issue, that requires redistributing certain kinds of teachers for those who continue to hope for the best teaching in low socio-economic communities (Thrupp & Lupton, 2011).

Social justice advocates question the focus on international measures such as PISA, comparing Australian students with others countries based solely on high stakes test scores, and the preoccupation with measurement frameworks (Connell, 2009; Dinham, 2009; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Moving beyond economic measures, quality teaching may have other goals such as advocating for students, and resisting hegemonic practices and policies (Goodwin et. al., 2014), practicing culturally appropriate pedagogies, communicating respectfully with families and examining their cultural biases (Sleeter, 2015). The measures of quality teaching in contexts of high poverty require moving beyond simplistic notions of what constitutes quality teaching, and indeed a quality teacher, to include understanding the nuances that enable and constrain quality teaching for social justice in areas of high poverty. In this way quality and equity are interrelated and dependent.

As noted, current literature tends to define “quality teaching” indirectly, through its impact on student outcomes (i.e., quality teaching is teaching that has a positive impact on student outcomes) (Zammit et al., 2007). With recognition of the ambiguity of the term, quality teaching, we argue for the need to explicitly conceptualise the term as it relates to

students from high poverty communities. While schools can have a strong influence on students' performance, external factors (socio-economic background, ethnicity, culture, religion, refugee status, geographical location) can have greater influence. Furthermore, we argue the need for social justice, through quality teaching, reflects building national and international recognition of the need for social change. Quality teaching discourses aligned with a finite number of measurable traits and attributes associated with test scores do not account for the kinds of traits, attributes or dispositions that make the greatest social, political or life-changing difference to young people from high poverty backgrounds, such as having teachers who enact a sense of social justice (Sleeter & Montecinos, 2016), commitment to anti-racist teaching (Aveling, 2002) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education (Price, 2016) or transformational practices (Crawford-Garrett, 2015).

Quality has been an Education for All (EFA) goal since the 2000 Dakar framework, with the focus on quality reflected in the 2014 Global Monitoring Report, *Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2014). "Quality", however, is elusive, in part due to the inseparability of quality from *equity* if the aim of education is equitable enrolment, gender parity, retention, outcomes and completion (Alexander, 2015).

### Quality Teaching for Social Justice

Global processes in constant flux influence the way we think about social justice. The historically constituted nature of social inequalities means that there can never be a definitive answer as shifts in the political, economic and cultural landscape disturb existing social patterns, produce new sets of demands for recognition among disaffected groups and generate new questions for educators working for social justice in schooling (McInervey, 2003). Broadly speaking Carlisle et al. (2006) refer to social justice as the conscious and reflexive blend of content and process intended to enhance equity across multiple social identity groups (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability) to foster critical perspectives, and promote social action. According to Giroux (2003), fostering a critical transformative agenda requires a particular kind of teacher who is knowledgeable about issues of marginality and who embodies a strong sense of social justice. In this way, social justice approaches make visible the broader moral and social purposes of schooling (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). They inspire notions of self-reflexivity that challenge the barriers which impede injustices related to particular groups of students' equitable participation in education. Social justice sensitivities in teaching provide understanding of the approaches necessary for productively engaging with the unprecedented and rising levels of ethnic, racial, religious and class diversity within their classroom to provide equitable educational outcomes for disadvantaged students.

Nancy Fraser (1997, 2007, 2008) offers a view of social justice concerned with "parity of participation". From this view, social justice includes dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction (Fraser, 2008). This approach has been adapted by Tikly and Barrett (2011) to understand global social justice in terms of education quality in low income countries; by Cochran-Smith and Villegar, (2016) to understand teaching in low income schools in the United States; in Australia by Scholes, Lunn Brownlee, Davis and Farrell (2016) to understand educational leadership in low income countries; by Keddie (2012, 2014) to consider socially just education for cultural diversity; by Woods, Dooley, Luke and Exley (2014) and Mills (2013) to consider school leadership, literacy and social justice. Fraser's

theoretical work also offers a lens for thinking about quality teaching for social justice in high poverty schools.

According to Nancy Fraser (2008), obstacles that prevent parity of participation include economic structures that deny access to resources; institutional hierarchies of cultural value that deny equality; and problematic governance structures that impede democratic participation (Fraser, 2008). Fraser (2007, 2008, 2010) proposes a three dimensional theory of social justice that includes redistribution (economic), recognition (cultural) and representation (political). These three domains provide a lens for thinking about injustice and how teaching can respond however, the domains are complex, inter-related and there is an understanding that there may be some overlap. First, redistribution is achieved when public resources are directed towards the least advantaged (Fraser, 2008). Redistribution is critical as there are established links between student economic marginalization, lower test scores, early school leaving and future lack of access to labour markets (Mills & Gale, 2010). Specifically, class injustices are reproduced as students work within a system that privileges middle class culture. Redistribution, in education, involves access to quality education that is not impeded by contextual factors. Providing marginalised students access to “cultural capital” involves teaching them the academic skills and competence required to be successful in mainstream society (Keddie, 2012; Mills & Gale, 2010). This means, in part, teaching that is focused on high academic outcomes, and avoiding the “watering down” of measures of achievement that further perpetuate disadvantage (Anyon, 1997; Sarra, 2003). As Lampert & Burnett (2014, p.8) explain:

*High expectations within this context are crucial, but without a corresponding high level of content knowledge, this is simply magical thinking. Although a teacher may believe in her student’s dream of becoming a doctor or engineer, unless somewhere along the way a “good” teacher teaches that child some “good” science, the dream will be very difficult to realise’.*

If teachers are to be agents of change there is a need to address what is being taught in high poverty schools, and at what levels. As far back as 1997, in the United States, there has been empirical evidence of the ways schools reproduced social hierarchies by offering different kinds of preparation to students based on their social class, highlighting the relationship between poverty, inequality, and educational outcomes (Anyon, 1997). In Europe, Ramon Flecha (2015), reflecting some of the socially minded European community argues that poor communities are deserving of, and should demand the right to deep (even canonical) knowledge, such as classic literature and philosophy, something the underserved communities in which he has worked have not had access to. Rather than arguing against the discourse of quality teaching, Flecha and others demand it, believing disadvantaged communities ‘spend less time on instructional activities, the material and content they are exposed to is less challenging, instruction is of lower quality and the pace of instruction slower’ (Flecha, 2015, p.22).

Teaching in high poverty schools, from a redistributive perspective, also requires a high-level skill set to overcome constraining contextual factors. Responding to the challenges of local context often leads to trade-offs between equally valuable activities such as dealing with welfare issues or behavior, while detracting from preparing lesson or planning new initiatives (Thrupp, 2006). Furthermore, teachers in high poverty classrooms need more complex adaptations for lesson lengths, class sizes, ability groups, additional learning support, attendance management pastoral care and extra-curricular activities (Lupton, 2005).

The Australian Government has in the past acknowledged the relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and student outcomes, however redistributive school funding models such as “The Gonski Review” (Gonski et al., 2011), and the Smarter Schools Partnerships (Australian Government, 2014), have been either wound back or are under threat



since the 2013 change in government. While there is recognition of the need for differential allocation of resources and treatment to achieve equity and quality (Sayed & Ahmed, 2015) this agenda has been rendered by some commentators as a competition between public and private schooling. Redistribution of resources is a key tenet of teaching for social justice, however not all schools in disadvantaged communities face the same contextual challenges, indicating the need to take into consideration factors beyond socio-economic indicators (Thrupp, 2006; Thrupp & Lupton, 2011). As Comber (2016) points out, in the Australian context there are many ways of being poor and many routes to poverty. Children may come from homes with generational unemployment, may be recently arrived refugees, may come from single parent families or separated families now running two households, may be living with parents on health benefits, or living with grandparents. How children then present in classrooms may be very different (Comber, 2016).

The second of Fraser's dimensions, recognition, redresses social *mis*recognition by identifying and acknowledging historically marginalised groupings within schooling contexts. It is clear that there is a need for better recognition of marginalised school populations (Thrupp, 2006) to redress the bleaching of context from analytic frames (Slee & Weiner, 1998). In the Australian education system there are signs of misrecognition that occur through practices of exclusion, for instance as demonstrated by the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school outcomes. While such practices can be subtle, some school practices quite blatantly exclude students on the basis of wealth, gender, sexuality, religion and geography or in the attempt to serve particular exclusionary communities (Bates, 2006). Misrecognition can be multifaceted. For example, Indigenous and refugee students may experience the material effects of poverty, but also the impact of culturally inappropriate curriculum and racism (Burnett & Lampert, 2016; Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013).

Teaching for social justice in high-poverty schools would include both curriculum and pedagogies that recognise the value of their students' lives and experiences, analysis of issues of power, perspective, and positioning, along with explicit attention to the realities of poverty and social class (Jones & Vagel, 2013; Sleeter, Montecinos, & Jiménez, 2016). Recognition includes acknowledging diverse forms of identity including faith-based identities, racial identities, as well as the identities of those with disabilities (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Valuing is an important element in destabilizing the hierarchical patterns that create misrecognition of particular social groups that are invisible in dominant modes of curriculum pedagogy and assessment (Gay, 2000). In addition, teachers in high poverty schools must be ready (and we would suggested prepared by their teacher education courses) to be self-reflective about their own cultural positioning, biases and blind spots.

The third of Fraser's dimensions, representation, involves connections between education and social justice that promotes public policy (Tikly & Barrett, 2011), including the rights of individuals or groups to have a voice and to actively participate in decision making (Fraser, 2008; Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Misrepresentation can be understood in relation to debates around good governance in education and can embrace issues of participation, voice, accountability and decision-making at different levels of the education system (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). While learner autonomy is associated with enhanced schooling participation, political constitution of most western schooling denies marginalised groups equal voice in democratic decision making, contributing to what Fraser (2008) refers to as political injustice or misrepresentation. Responsiveness to community experience and knowledge is part of what occurs in quality teaching for social justice.

## Definition of Quality Teaching for Social Justice

If we are to consider the broader moral and social purposes of schooling (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009) within Fraser's (2007, 2008) social justice framework, quality teaching in high poverty schools would be multi-dimensional. One significant challenge is to change organizing principles of quality teaching from economic to humanitarian. Defining quality teaching would, first, include teaching that is productive of practices and policies that facilitate recognition of students (socio-economic background, ethnicity, culture, religion, identity, and geographical location) reflected within the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Second, it would include teaching with respect for redistribution of cultural capital (high academic rigor and expectations) positioned within broader avenues of academic and social support. Third, at the heart of teaching would be democratic representation (giving a voice to students and being a voice for students), as educators connect with, and represent the needs of disadvantaged students and families and work towards dismantling barriers impeding the voices of marginalised groups.

Teachers' attempts to affiliate with marginalised students can be impeded as many do not share high poverty experiences. The white and middle class identities of most teachers in western schooling contexts requires specific preparedness and expertise in addressing issues of diversity and justice in schools (Keddie, 2012; Mills, 2008) for as societies grow more diverse, the need for teachers to better understand and work with difference productively becomes increasingly critical (Allard & Santoro, 2006; D'Cruz, 2007). In western contexts such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, there is a critical and growing gap between the rich and poor (OECD, 2014). Though poverty looks markedly different between countries, and is relative (Burnett & Lampert, 2015), poverty in affluent countries is defined by the economic, social and cultural capital that students bring with them, mediated by local, regional and national processes that permit access to education, training, employment and participation in local and global economic and cultural exchanges (Berliner, 2013; Raffo et al, 2010; Thrupp, 2011). Poverty, in affluent countries, is contextual with differences within schools occupying similar places on the spectrum of social disadvantage (Berliner, 2013; Comber, 2016; Thrupp, 2011).

Factors that impact on student experiences in Australian schools extend beyond socio-economic background as poverty interplays with, and is, a compounding factor associated with English proficiency, refugee or immigrant status, disability, family configuration, gender and location (disparity between remoteness/rurality/urbanity). For example, education experiences for boys remain strongly associated with markers of disadvantage such as socio-economic background (household income, earners' education, and occupation) ethnicity (cultural characteristic that identifies members of a particular ethnicity) and geographical location (remoteness) (ACARA, 2015; OECD, 2012). Growing poverty, unprecedented diversity, transient populations and shifting identities require the pursuit of equity through teachers who 'think and act against the grain' (Giroux, 2003, p.6). While there is under-representation of teachers from marginalised groups, the pursuit of social justice through quality teaching would dictate that *all* teachers work towards re-inscribing quality teaching in order to mitigate inequities for marginalised students. This would include teachers contributing to and influencing the debates about quality teachers and quality teaching. In this way there needs to be challenges about politics of blame and a move away from the emphasis on quality teachers and teaching that distract from wider social issues such as poverty (Thrupp, 2009).

Democratization and representation requires moving on from the politics of blame that are often implicit in policy as governments construct student failure as the responsibility of schools and teachers (Thrupp, 2009). Social justice teaching then requires a shift from

seeing problems of poor people as personal failures to seeing them as reflections of unfair policies and systems (Jones & Vagel, 2013). Teaching for social justice means understanding structural inequities in which families and communities in poverty are situated, and learning to act as an advocate for them (Lampert & Burnett, 2014, 2016; Sleeter, Montecinos & Jiménez, 2016).

A social justice framework can provide an alternative rationale for considering quality that emphasizes the importance of context, providing a normative basis for thinking about quality in relation to disadvantage (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). It provides a useful starting point for re-conceptualising education quality that draws attention to the central importance of public dialogue and debate at the local, national and global levels about the nature of a quality education and quality frameworks (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Contextual differences provide a cumulative affect whereby nuances in local communities mediated by student and community characteristic (ethnicity, religion, refugee statuses, socio-economic background, and location) impact on school processes, teaching and student outcomes (Lupton, 2006, Thrupp, 2009; Thrupp & Lupton, 2011). We argue from a social justice rationale, for the need to take context seriously, making visible constraints that are reflected in policy, practice and student experiences.

It is important to develop a less “neutral” discourse on schooling and give greater recognition to the importance of social injustices in reproducing educational inequalities. From this position, a more serious recognition of context could contribute to fairer evaluation of school performance, a fairer distribution of resources, and the provision of more appropriate advice and support to schools in less privileged contexts (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). Darling-Hammond (2005, p.1) contends that ‘preparing accomplished teachers who are committed to equity may be among the most important keys to the survival of our democratic way of life’ because ‘the ability to learn is increasingly essential to individual and societal success...in a knowledge-based society.’ This is especially critical in a time of dramatic economic, technological, and social change for with knowledge-based work now comprising the majority of all new jobs within developed countries, those with low levels of education will struggle to find employment. This means the education system must develop teaching that goes beyond dispensing information, giving a test and allocating a grade. We will need to teach in ways that respond to students’ diverse approaches to learning, that take advantage of students’ unique starting points, and that carefully scaffold work aimed at more proficient performances. We will also need to understand what schools must do to organize themselves to support such teaching and learning.

### **The Educational Standards Policy Agenda**

Inequality in educational opportunity and educational achievement are increasingly being associated with the future of a nation’s prosperity and wellbeing (Fenwick & Cooper, 2013) as those without the skills to participate socially and emotionally generate higher costs for health, income support, child welfare and security with long term social and financial costs of educational failure high (Field, Kuczera & Pont, 2007). Instead of investment in schools and teacher preparation, however, there has been the construction of an imposing new apparatus of certification and regulation for teachers (Connell, 2009, 2013). As Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) argues, in teacher education reform there is a belief that policies will solve the teacher supply problem, enhance the quality of teachers and lead to desired student outcomes. In this way teacher education reform is equated to a policy problem (Cochran-Smith, 2005). As a result, statutory institutes have been created, and tasked with defining minimum standards for entry into school teaching and teacher training, and this has

an impact on university teacher education programs.

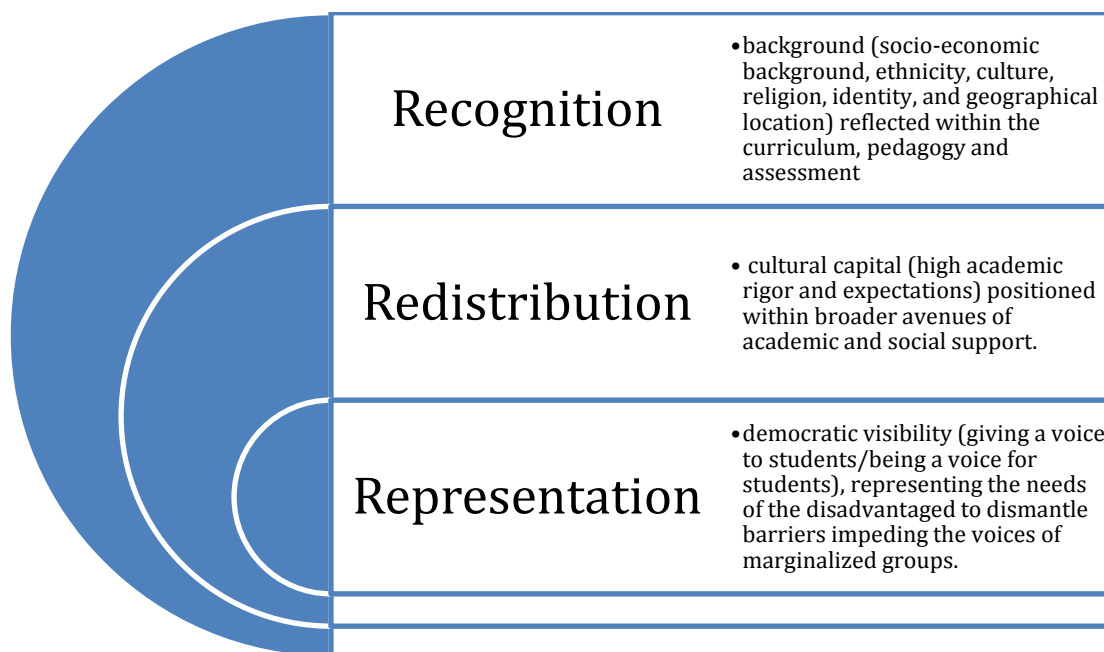
In the Australian context, identifying quality is a key aim of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2016) reflecting the goals of the Melbourne Declaration of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2008). This quest for quality however has been framed within economic terms by the recent Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes report (Australian Government, 2016) where the need for higher educational outcomes is linked to a more productive workforce. As the Australian Government believes that teacher quality is critical to the future prosperity of young Australians and the productivity of the nation there is increased accountability of initial teacher education programs to develop graduate teachers who are better prepared (Finger et al., 2015).

However, while many agree that teacher quality must be maintained, there are well-founded fears around the popularizing of a myth that University Education courses are letting just anyone into their programs, or are graduating sub-standard teachers. For instance, Amrein-Beardsley et al. (2013) caution against exaggerations that teacher education is failing. They see this claim as feeding a neoliberal agenda whereby corporations can begin to perform similar roles to universities, turning teaching into a business. Conversely, there is a naïve simplicity in claiming that pre-service teachers' academic abilities do not matter at all – that all that is needed is a caring heart and a passion for working with young people. Nancy Fraser's theory is useful here too, reminding us that this second point, with respect to equity and social justice, is a matter of redistribution. Middle class families feel entitled to demand "high standards" (such as teachers who are well versed in literature, or know deep levels of physics) whereas young people in high poverty schools are often not imagined as needing teachers with the same levels of content specialisation. Thus students graduating from high poverty schools are limited in their life options merely by the subjects they were offered in high school and the depth at which it was taught.

Nationally, teacher education has been influenced by a heightened political focus on the Standards and a reform agenda that posits teacher quality solely within the individual. As Connell (2009) points out, any system of monitoring that imposes a single model of excellence on the teaching workforce – whatever that model may be – is likely to be damaging to the education system as a whole. Such standards break down the work of teaching into auditable competencies and individualise the teacher, narrowing practice and narrowing conceptions of quality (Connell, 2009). Regardless of concerns, national professional standards have been put in place to describe a model of what is deemed most worthy, and most desirable to achieve, in graduate and in-service teacher knowledge and practice. In this way teachers are believed to come to understand the most distinctive features and aspirations of their profession. Standards are also used as measurement tools for making professional judgements. From an idealistic perspective standards are said to be a tool for rendering judgements and decisions in a context of *shared meanings and values* (Sykes & Plastrik, 1993). Therefore the process of implementing policies such as the Standards give rise to competing *shared meanings and values* in terms of priorities, principles of practice and conceptions of quality.

How then do the Standards reflect *shared meaning and values* when we re-direct teacher quality to quality teaching for social justice? As noted earlier, quality teaching for social justice in high poverty schools would include knowledge, practice and professional policies that embody economic (redistribution), cultural (recognition), and political justice (representation). In this way the Standards for graduate teachers would need to reflect *shared meaning and values* about what is deemed appropriate teacher education for social justice. Teacher education curriculum would need to transcend simplistic teaching skills, tools and what is deemed current curriculum, to develop pre-service teachers who think about, and

approach teaching and learning to promote social justice, parity of participation and equity that may include inequitable redistribution to the most disadvantaged. Earlier, drawing on the work of Fraser (2007, 2008), we identified three domains associated with quality teaching for social justice in high poverty schools. Figure 1 provides an overview of our definition of quality teaching for social justice.



Drawing on the above conception of quality teaching for social justice we consider tensions inherent in the Standards.

**Figure 1. Definition of quality teaching for social justice.**

### **Situated within AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers**

The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (the Standards) define a framework that reflects what the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) believes to constitute *teacher quality*. The framework articulates the knowledge, practice and professional engagement professed to be indicators of a quality teacher across a career, as a, graduate, proficient, highly accomplished, and lead educator. As a public statement, the Standards define explicitly what a teacher should know, plan, create, assess and engage with, at the micro level. Quality is defined by how a pre-service teacher can meet the graduate stage of the Standards while in-service quality is rendered when a teacher uses the *Classroom Practice Continuum* (Continuum) as an instrument to translate how *Focus Areas of the Professional Domains of the Standards* are enacted in the classroom. According to AITSL (2016) by ‘demonstrating progression along the Continuum, teachers can see what it looks like to improve their own classroom practice and the consequent impact of this improvement on student learning, student engagement in learning and student wellbeing’.

Within the framework the Standards allude to the problem of teacher quality and the need to improve quality (Ryan & Bourke, 2013). According to AITSL, the Standards:

*...reflect and build on national and international evidence that a teachers’ effectiveness has a powerful impact on students, with broad consensus that*

*teacher quality is the single most important in-school factor influencing student achievement. (2011, p.2)*

The emphasis of the Standards is on the teacher. According to Ryan and Bourke (2013) the Standards serve as governance, providing clear parameters of effective teaching that have been decided for teachers, presented as a list of competencies that indicate what teacher should know and be able to do. In this way education is represented as a marketplace where teachers are assessed in terms of how they meet the demands of the market through a list of competencies that can be measured (Ryan & Bourke, 2013). The seven AITSL Standards include:

Professional knowledge

Standard 1: Know students and how they learn

Standard 2: Know the content and how to teach it

Professional practice

Standard 3: Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning

Standard 4: Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments Standard

5: Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning

Professional engagement

Standard 6: Engage in professional learning

Standard 7: Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community

The seven Standards provide descriptors of desirable teacher practice. According to Bloomfield (2006) explicit accountability and standardization of any form of standards legitimize a particular form of quality teacher. In this case, the quality teacher enacts particular competencies. As Connell (2009) points out a single model of excellence on the teaching workforce is problematic when it breaks down the work of teaching into competencies, narrow practice and narrow conceptions of quality. The Standards present a list of competencies with language that appears to allude to a sense of social justice, however a close critical reading of the Standards indicates that quality teaching for social justice is invisible, or, reduced to responding to individual differences.

## Recognition

As noted, within a social justice framework we consider *recognition* of students (socio-economic background, ethnicity, culture, religion, identity, and geographical location) to be reflected within the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The structure of the Standards and associated language implies some element of recognition has been taken into account. For example, under the first broad heading Professional Knowledge, Standard 1: *Know student and how they learn*, there are a range of six indicators that imply some measure of response to diversity. For example:

*Standard 1.3: Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Graduate attribute: Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.*

While alluding to socially just responsiveness to diversity the focus is on teacher *strategies*. Furthermore, the illustration of practice that is provided <sup>1</sup>is not in fact responsive to the student cohort, described as being from a very diverse, predominantly Asian, low SES background.

The illustration of practice vignette focuses on whole group direct mathematics instruction and then small group work. Practice includes using concrete materials (chocolate bars) in mathematics to represent in pictures, number (percentage, fractions and decimals) and words. While providing a generic example of “good practice”, the vignette, as a micro level classroom example, does not include any recognition of students’ noted diversity. The use of the chocolate bar is left unremarked. Rather, the high Asian, low SES background of the students, noted by the principal, was invisible in this example of desirable graduate practice. Furthermore, comments by the first year teacher about knowing students were based solely on data from pre-assessment activities. What is missing is evidence of recognition of diversity associated with disadvantage or marginalization reflected within the curriculum or pedagogy.

*In a similar way Standard 1.4 provokes a sense of teaching for diversity.*

*1.4: Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.*

*Graduates attribute: Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.*

Again, however, the focus is on teacher *strategies*, although in this case there is no elaboration about what this practice might look like with no illustration of practice provided at the graduate level. What is missing is recognition of the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Once again, the indicator “knowing students” is stated, but examples rarely reflect teaching and learning processes that recognise and value students’ cultures. Thus they do not destabilise hierarchical patterns that misrecognise social groups’ invisible in dominant modes of curriculum, pedagogy and curriculum (Gay, 2000; Luke et al., 2013; Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

## **Redistribution**

Previously, from a social justice perspective, we defined *redistribution* of cultural capital (high academic rigor and expectations in all schools, including high poverty schools) positioned within broader avenues of academic and social support. This requires high content knowledge and high expectations (Luke et al., 2013; Sarra, 2011). Redistribution of resources is another element of teaching in high poverty schools which requires responding to constraining contextual factors that require more complex adaptations for lesson lengths, class sizes, ability groups, and additional learning support.

The second broad heading Professional Knowledge, Standard 2: *Know the content and how to teach*, implies a sense of redistribution. For example:

*2.4: Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.*

*Graduate attribute: Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.*

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<sup>1</sup> AITSL provides short video-taped vignettes as illustrations of practice after each Standard. The one referred to here can be found on (<http://www.aitsl.edu.au/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers/illustrations-of-practice/detail?id=IOP00155>)

The illustration of practice includes a pre-service Indigenous teacher from an Alice Springs primary school who explores some of the challenges for teachers in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who may previously not have experienced success in their learning. In exploring some of the issues for schools and teachers, she reflects on the importance of building relationships and trust with communities, of using available expertise and networks, and of taking advantage of relevant professional learning opportunities. Understanding the challenges and gaining the respect of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture are very important factors. The mere inclusion of *respect* for Indigenous students, while admirable, as Garcia (2001) argues, will not ensure members are included. Listening to community voices is a crucial element as teachers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities do not work in isolation and a collaborative approach is a fundamental part of teaching in high-needs schools however this is rarely taught in teacher-education courses (Price, 2016).

What is absent from the Standard is evidence of ways of redistributing resources and cultural capital (high academic rigor and expectations), including the redistribution of resources such as books and computers in the home, access to opportunities offered to more privileged students and indeed, better paid employment for parents and families. In other words, the overriding impact of poverty itself cannot be solved merely by teachers who can build relationships. While all graduating teachers will need to meet the Standard, there is no evidence of what a non-Indigenous pre-service teacher should know, do, or practically experience to facilitate quality teaching in high-needs Indigenous schools. This is why any definition of quality teaching for social justice must include preparing teacher to be agents of change in a larger sense. We elaborate in the next section.

## Representation

From a social justice perspective we defined *representation* (giving a voice to students and being a voice for students) as educators connect with and work towards dismantling barriers impeding the voices of marginalised groups. The third broad heading Professional Engagement, Standard 7: *Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community*, offers some hope of representation. For example:

*7.4 Engage with professional teaching networks and broader communities.*

*Graduate attribute: Understand the role of external professionals and community representatives in broadening teachers' professional knowledge and practice.*

While this Standard was perhaps a home for what constitutes representation there are no indicators to suggest any benefit to the communities themselves. Indeed, as a graduate moves on the continuum to “proficient” this professional engagement serves only to improve teacher practice.

*Proficient attribute: Participate in professional and community networks and forums to broaden knowledge and improve practice.*

As the Standards currently inform and define what constitutes teacher education the narrow definitions and illustrations of practice contribute to a particular kind of teacher who moves up the continuum based on narrow measures of competence. There are no examples of giving voice to students. In this way there is no representation or work towards dismantling barriers impeding the voices of marginalised groups.

As the rigorous assessments of pre-service teachers, based on the Standards, determine whether an initial teacher education program is effective, surveillance of teacher education programs serves to narrow the curriculum, focus and intent. The relatively narrow



and ambiguous use of terms such as “effective strategies” does not provide explicit examples or a framework to define good teaching (Ladwig & Gore, 2009). As the prescriptive nature of the standards are closely linked to accreditation, some teacher educators are asking if they constrain the flexibility to design teacher education curriculum that will transcend discrete teaching skills and tools to prepare teachers for a future that is not understood (Santoro, Reid, Mayer & Singh, 2012).

What teachers do and how they see themselves are defined by the discourses and power relations within which they are located, both as individuals and as a profession (Gore & Bowe, 2015). What beginning teachers talk and think about, will shape, and be shaped, by how they are seen by others and how they see themselves and their experiences in diverse school contexts (Gore & Bowe, 2015). We propose that teacher education curriculum needs to move beyond the Standards to develop thinking about, and developing, approaches to teaching, that contextualise quality teaching for social justice in high poverty schools.

### **Australian Teacher Education**

A key platform for enhancing quality teaching for social justice is the provision of pre-service teacher education that embodies cultural, economic and political justice. A social justice agenda requires sustained special training in justice issues for teachers (Lampert & Burnett, 2014; Mills & Ballantyne 2010) and a more inclusive approach, which entertains scholarly critique, includes multiple perspectives and voices, and acknowledges teaching as a group activity carried out in the particular context of a school, within a particular community, and against a particular policy background (Zeichner et. al., 2015). A starting point is pre-service teachers who understand and examine their own positioning, developing understanding and insights into taken for granted beliefs about themselves and others (Burnett & Lampert, 2016; Mills & Ballantyne, 2009). In this way some teachers might understand student disadvantage on the basis of race or ethnicity associated primarily with economic obstacles or barriers, whereas others might associate this disadvantage with cultural or political barriers (Keddie, 2012). As Keddie (2012) points out, these understandings will impact on how teachers address issues of equity. When disadvantage is thought to be an economic issue, redistributive measures might be prioritised (greater allocation of material or human resources), when it is associated with cultural barriers, recognition measures might be the focus (increased cultural recognition and valuing) and when it is thought to be a political issue, representative measures might be considered salient (increased avenues to accord equitable representation/political voice) (Keddie, 2012).

One such program that responds to the growing gap between the rich and poor (OECD, 2014) and aims to prepare individuals to collectively participate in quality teaching with a social justice agenda is the *National Exceptional Teaching for Disadvantaged Schools* (NETDS) program. The NETDS initiative positions social justice at the core of its design. Details of the NETDS program and the modified curriculum that highlights a lens of poverty and disadvantage have previously been articulated (see Burnett & Lampert, 2016; Lampert & Burnett, 2014, 2016). A starting point for the program includes pre-service teachers examining their own positioning, developing understanding and insights into taken for granted beliefs about themselves and others (Burnett & Lampert, 2016). The program then opens up opportunities for pre-service teachers to acquire an ethical stance surrounding social justice as they are supported to unpack and consider professional qualities of ethical and moral conduct before undertaking practicum experiences in high poverty schools. Pre-service teachers are then supported to reflect on their practicum experiences and to develop critical

analysis of relations to high poverty schools and advocacy for social justice. The NETDS program also recognises that teaching is effective when it influences the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of students who can participate in all aspects of society in equitable and empowered ways. This includes teaching students to think critically and participate actively in constructing a just and equitable society (Lampert & Burnett, 2014; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001).

The problem is not merely one of graduating more teachers, for disadvantaged schools already receive disproportionate numbers of beginning teachers (Connell, 1994; Vickers & Ferfolja, 2006), due to the common practice of “[p]lacing the least experienced teachers with the most needy students” (Grossman & Loeb, 2010, p. 22). Furthermore, rather than binarising whether disadvantaged schools need ‘high-achieving’ or ‘culturally diverse’ teachers, both are needed. This means that in the increasingly complex world of schooling teachers need to be taught not only the methods to teach to a diverse community of students, but also methods and tools that can help them to better understand their teacher selves. Life history, school context, worldview, and personality all play a part, as do mentorship, teacher education, and reflective practice (Cook, 2009). We argue that recognition, redistribution and representation must all be part of the strategy of defining quality teaching for disadvantaged schools. To do any one without the other (e.g. without the redistribution of particular high content teachers who have not historically ended up teaching in these schools) we have missed an important step in the process. Like Fraser (1997, p. 3) we dispute that these are ‘mutually exclusive alternatives, that we must choose between social equality and multiculturalism, that redistribution and recognition cannot be combined’. This is part of the political, emancipatory project.

We would argue that the challenge for enacting quality teaching includes appropriate education in understanding the construction of knowledge, valuing different types of knowledge, and social and economic contexts. Towards this equity there needs to be visibility about what is endorsed and legitimized by individual teachers, teacher education, school culture, community context and relations, policy initiatives and political will. Because quality teaching has the potential to improve the whole of society, it is vital to understand it, and as so many teachers in disadvantaged schools are early career teachers, it is important to see how the pre-service education, shapes their understandings of practice.

## Conclusion

Quality teacher and quality teaching discourses impact on improving educational achievement of students in high poverty schools. Similarly, they influence policy agendas, determining what constitutes quality teacher graduate Standards, with implications for pre-service education. We have argued that improvement of education for students in high poverty schools is complex and mediated by diverse contextual factors. While “quality teaching” is desirable, long term sustainable education needs to be underpinned by a social justice agenda. In this paper we have offered a definition of quality teaching for social justice drawing on Nancy Fraser’s (2008) three dimensional theory. This definition involves quality teaching for social justice in high poverty schools that includes knowledge, practice and professional policies that embody cultural (recognition), economic (redistribution) and political justice (representation). From a social justice perspective we have highlighted the tensions inherent in the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* and current climate of school reform. These tensions have been argued to be visible in graduate Standards and teacher education for social justice. We propose the NETDS programs, now operating within seven universities in Australia, provide a significant alternative platform to re-dress injustice

in schools and offer a bridge between graduate Standards and principles and practices for social justice. As discussed elsewhere graduates of NETDS go into teaching with a complex understanding of social justice and equally importantly an understanding of the ways in which disadvantage is produced and how it might be reproduced ameliorated by education (Burnett & Lampert, 2016; Lampert & Burnett, 2014, 2016).

What constitutes quality teaching for social justice in high poverty schools needs further research, as do the ways in which early career teachers become participants in their production, and in how they understand the enactment of “quality teaching” in their classrooms. As Sayed and Ahmed (2015) remind us, we should be discussing ‘the extent to which equity, participation, and diversity are [currently missing] in the conceptualisation of quality’ (p. 333). Without independent and alternative agendas, education researchers may lose the ability to make a full contribution to scholarship that contribute to theory building and the development of alternative practices, instead being reduced to evaluating goals, programs and practices led by others. Unless we find alternative ways to understand quality, research on teaching will consist solely of studying the impact of teaching as measured by standardised tests (Valli, Croninger, & Buese, 2012).

A move to quality education would be underpinned by theories and practices of social justice that explain the ways in which the school and the classroom are caught up in relations of power beyond the school. The local ecologies of communities are also caught up in global restructuring of work and everyday life. Classroom teachers need an analysis of how power and privilege work in and out of the classroom and beyond the school. Teachers are often motivated by a sense of the potential of education for social good – they want to make a difference. In order to develop quality educators who will stay and continue to enhance the profession, they need to be equipped with more than good will; they need analytical capacities they can apply in the range of changing and challenging situations in which they find themselves, their colleagues, their communities and their students.

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