

2021

## Teacher Quality and Teacher Education: A Critical Policy Analysis of International and Australian Policies.

Parlo Singh  
*Griffith University*

Frances Hoyte  
*Griffith University*

Stephen Heimans  
*University of Queensland*

Beryl Exley  
*Griffith University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte>



Part of the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Singh, P., Hoyte, F., Heimans, S., & Exley, B. (2021). Teacher Quality and Teacher Education: A Critical Policy Analysis of International and Australian Policies.. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2021v46n4.1>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.  
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol46/iss4/1>

## **Teacher Quality and Teacher Education: A Critical Policy Analysis of International and Australian Policies**

Parlo Singh  
Frances Hoyte  
Griffith University  
Stephen Heimans  
University of Queensland  
Beryl Exley  
Griffith University

*Abstract: This article examines how the ‘teacher quality’ agenda, evident in the globalised discourse on education policy, constructs changes to teachers’ work and teacher education. We undertake a critical policy analysis of two reports from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), addressing three issues. First, we discuss the global and national context in which ‘teacher quality’ policies have emerged. We examine implications of policy enactment in Australia and analyse how the OECD documents construct understandings of teacher quality. We link our analysis to a recent government inquiry into the teaching profession in Australia, looking specifically at the impact of the teacher quality discourse on teacher education. The OECD documents constrain what is perceived as acceptable curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation in teacher education. We argue, with others, that changes in response to the teacher quality discourse are narrowing what it means to undertake quality teaching work, especially in contexts of disadvantage.*

**Key Words:** Teacher quality, critical policy analysis, teacher education, OECD

### **Introduction**

Teacher quality is a concept that has influence in the policy discourses driving education reform in recent years and continues to have an impact on school education and teacher education. This article seeks to examine the concept of teacher quality by situating it in a wider discussion about the purposes of education (Biesta, 2014); the ways in which policies enact or perform schooling practices (Ball, 2016); and teacher learning, teacher professional identities and democratic formations (Bernstein, 2000; Robertson & Sorenson, 2018).

The purposes of education are clearly an important consideration for those interested in shaping teacher quality through educational policy and in the formation of future teachers. Biesta (2014; 2015) has articulated a set of three purposes or goals for schooling- including qualification (the teaching of skills and knowledge); socialisation (concerning the ability to be with others in the world), and subjectification (concerning the awareness and development of the individual’s character and potential). Biesta and Stengel (2016) argue for the importance of considering the questions of purpose, intention and relation at the centre of any

effort to understand and change teaching practices, including teacher education practices. They propose that such philosophical thinking about teaching has extremely practical implications. Likewise, Bernstein (2000) and Robertson and Sorensen (2018) suggest that defining teacher education in narrow 'learning' terms and drawing strong causal links between teacher and student learning attainment redefines what education is about and for, and impacts on democratic formations (Heimans et al., 2017; Singh, 2017). Biesta's work on educational purposes and Bernstein's work on the regulation of teacher education share some commonalities - not least the breadth of their vision for education and the challenges that they present for the formation of teacher identities and professionalism, both in initial and continuing teacher education.

In the face of the challenges posed by an understanding of the purposes of education informed by the ideas of Bernstein and Biesta, teacher educators should surely be concerned with the quality of the teachers that will be formed through the courses they design and implement. Furthermore, the purposes of education could be expected to influence how teacher quality is conceived and the design of teacher education programs. These challenges for teacher education are particularly complex when one considers the diversity of students who are to be the recipients of an education which seeks to fulfil these purposes and deliver these pedagogical rights. The challenges are perhaps most pronounced with respect to preparing teachers to work with students in schools and communities experiencing disadvantage.

In this article, we consider the extent to which the conception of teacher quality in the current Australian education policy context reflects the breadth of education outlined by scholars writing about the purposes of education, learning, professionalism and democratic formations (Bernstein, 2000; Biesta, 2014; 2015). First, we describe our conception of policy, then we review the global policy context in which teacher quality has become a significant motif, and outline some of the key policy enactments in Australia that have emerged from the global interest in 'teacher quality'. Because both global and Australian policy draws heavily on the work of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (hereafter OECD), we seek to describe the way in which the 'teacher quality' discourse has developed within OECD documents using a discourse analytical approach. Finally, we explore how policy initiatives flowing from the teacher quality discourse, especially in initial teacher education (hereafter ITE), may create additional challenges for students facing disadvantage, rather than address the barriers to educational success that already confront them.

'Teacher quality' is a motif with considerable influence in the education sphere. The term is woven through the policy discourse<sup>1</sup>, and the words recur in policy documents so that they shape policy enactments<sup>2</sup> at many levels from the global to the local. Policy discourses are not only 'ways of talking about and conceptualizing policy', but they are also 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault cited in Ball, 1990, p. 17). Policy conceptions of 'teacher quality' have long influenced the work of Australian teachers (Dinham, 2013; Scholes et al., 2017) and have ramifications for both initial teacher education (Churchward & Willis, 2019; Ledger & Vidovich, 2018; Rowe & Skourdombis, 2019) and for continuing professional development (e.g., Leonard & Roberts, 2016; Mockler, 2013). A focus on teacher quality seems to be a good thing - everyone wants teachers of quality for their children, and everyone would accept that teacher education programs should be of the highest quality. However, there is disquiet in some spheres about what the term 'quality' signifies when used in relation to teachers, the teaching profession and teacher

---

<sup>1</sup> We define discourse as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1979, p. 49).

<sup>2</sup> Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010) use the term 'enactment' to reflect an understanding that policies are interpreted and translated by diverse policy actors as they engage in making meaning of official texts for specific contexts and practices.

education. This disquiet suggests that the conception of teacher quality in current policy settings may be problematic (Churchward & Willis, 2019; Dinham, 2013; Singh et al., 2019).

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue that 'it is through policy that governments seek to reform' practices, and that policy 'desires or imagines change – it offers an imagined future state of affairs' (p. 5). Our question is about how the discourse of quality, evident in international and national policy documents, goes beyond describing to construct desired or imagined changes to teaching and teacher education; to enact what constitutes quality teachers and quality teacher education. In this article, we are specifically interested in the ensemble of policy texts that constitute 'valid' knowledge about initial teacher education, and how the mantra of quality becomes a thread through texts that sutures or binds together ideas that then become what is thinkable, sensible, sayable and doable (Bernstein, 1990). Words come to mean certain things (and not others) as they are stitched together in the discourse by those with influence over how the discourse is shaped. From this perspective, terms such as quality are 'sliding signifiers', that is, ideas with no fixed meaning which can be mobilized by various social groups to project their vision of teachers, teaching and teacher education (see Apple, 2002, p. 1767). We are interested in exploring which particular concepts of quality are created and privileged in the policy texts and enactments and the effects of these on shifting or realigning the purposes of education and teacher education in Australia. Moreover, we explore how the purposes of education and pedagogic rights are represented within these policy discourses of teacher and teaching quality.

## **A Theoretical Framing of Teacher Quality**

Biesta (2005; 2014) and Biesta and Stengel (2016) have made strong arguments about how the teacher has become invisible in current policy discourses which focus on student learning attainment and outcomes. Biesta (2005; 2015) argues against 'learnification' and the 'learning sciences' movement insisting on the importance of the teacher in any pedagogic act of learning. Teacher education, under the policy emphasis on 'learnification', an economically driven regime, runs the risk of being restricted to preparing teachers to focus on the qualification goal for their students, to the exclusion of social connectedness and personal flourishing proposed by Biesta's (2014) model. An attendant risk for teaching and hence teacher education, is that there is pressure for schools to focus on test preparation and teaching strategies rather than on a comprehensive range of educational considerations which are warranted when considering socialisation and subjectification.

Ball (1990; 2015; 2016) suggests that the processes of standardisation and measurement are technologies or instruments for governing the work of teachers and de-professionalising the teaching workforce. While teachers are held accountable and responsible for student learning, this learning is increasingly measured in narrow, standardised terms. Testing is promoted as a reliable way to measure educational success, to provide 'evidence' of quality. The results of testing are also used to identify areas of educational failure and teachers as targets for reform. In the discourse, the desire for improved student performance leads to a perceived need for better teachers (i.e., teachers of higher quality) and this necessity is then translated into a demand for reform in initial teacher education (see for example Flores, 2019; Churchward & Willis, 2019; Down & Sullivan, 2019; Fischman et al., 2019; Gore, 2016; Larsen, 2010; Mayer, 2014; Mockler, 2018). Stephen Ball (2016) argues that globalising discourses operate both hierarchically and heterarchically. Hierarchically, while the national government may take the brunt on the world stage of negative evaluation arising from publication of Australian scores, state governments may also be impacted because of Australia's constitutional arrangements (which

prioritise state government responsibility for education). Heterarchical effects mean that teachers on the front line can also be attacked directly (via media of all sorts) as well as or even without the cascading diminution/amplification of effects that a hierarchy implies (for example see Grey & Morris, 2018). Current educational policy discourses situate teachers as central targets for reform initiatives. It is important to understand how policies around 'quality' work to create understandings of teacher quality. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue 'the neoliberal imaginary of globalization' projected by international organisations such as the OECD, World Bank and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has 'led to a new way of thinking about how schools, technical colleges, universities and educational systems should be governed' (p. 117). The move from bureaucratic government of the teaching workforce to new modes of governance is intimately related to the new scalar politics of globalisation (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). In other words, national governments and the bureaucratic administrative state are no longer the only source of policy authority. Increasingly international organisations, such as the OECD, with their accompanying ensemble of measurement instruments, checklists and manuals, govern teachers' work and determine what constitutes 'quality' of teachers and teaching. In the next section of this article, we seek to understand how the OECD, as a privileged voice in the educational policy context, creates its understandings of teacher quality.

Robertson and Sorenson (2018) draw on the sociology of Basil Bernstein to argue that international organisations such as the OECD are playing an increasingly important role in driving global reforms around teacher education and regulating the work of teachers through the design of various instruments aimed at measuring quality teaching and thereby defining what counts as the 'good teacher'. They propose that while Stephen Ball's work on 'network governance' has been useful for mapping out global education reform policies, it doesn't account for which 'networks matter', how power and control are exercised, and how the network itself works pedagogically (Robertson and Sorenson, 2018, p. 472). In contrast to previous studies on global reforms to teacher education, Robertson and Sorenson (2018) focus their analysis on the formation, evolution and take-up of the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) by nations across the globe. The TALIS programme involves two questionnaires, to be completed by teachers and principals. The aim of the questionnaire is to generate data on teacher learning, including professional learning activities, self-reflection, peer or leader feedback and so forth. This focus on teacher learning parallels the OECD's interest in student learning, or what Biesta calls 'learnification' or Bernstein calls 'total pedagogisation', linking learning and pedagogy to economic productivity. TALIS is not just a survey instrument, rather it 'is a device that promotes learning through comparing, development and competition with other countries' (Robertson and Sorenson, 2018, p. 480). The device thus produces or performs what counts as teacher learning and for what purpose teachers are engaged in with these modes of learning. It thus narrows not only teacher education and teacher professionalism, but also the purposes of schooling and education, by limiting what teachers can learn, how they can learn and what they do with this learning.

Our research question in this paper considers instruments produced by the OECD, but our focus is specifically on the policy documents which act as important sources for 'patches' of meaning which are sewn into the teacher quality discourse. The OECD produces a significant body of work that collates and interprets data from its member countries. This work is used in several countries, by governments and the media, to form the views of 'teacher quality' that dominate in the global policy discourse (Grey & Morris, 2018; Nordin & Wahlström, 2019; Verger & Curran, 2014). Likewise, the work of the OECD is referenced in Australian education policy documents and influences policy enactment. The OECD has influenced the aspirations of federal governments (Sellar & Lingard, 2014); it provides the

tools to measure and compare educational progress on the world stage for example Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). It has perhaps provided impetus for the establishment of National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (ACARA), Australia's own high-stakes testing regime; the development of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) (AISTL, 2011) which serve as a quality control mechanism for teachers and for teacher education; and the creation of Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia - Standards and Procedures (AITSL, 2015, updated in 2018) which regulate ITE. In addition, as Robertson and Sorenson (2018) suggest, the OECD is increasingly involved in defining the 'problems' facing education while at the same time promoting (and providing) a raft of resources which Australia could buy into to address such problems.

We propose that there is a shift in teacher education effected by the teacher quality agenda, with its unrelenting focus on student learning attainment and outcomes. This agenda narrows the curriculum (what is taught), pedagogy (how it is taught), and evaluation (assessment or measurement instruments) of teacher education programs in Australia to constitute instrumentalist, technical notions of teaching. The push to standardise teaching, quantify student learning, and to make the results of this open to public scrutiny, privilege some learning outcomes over others. Intense pressure to measure, document and provide evidence of learning attainment over short time spans, for example after a short series of lessons during a preservice teacher professional experience placement, has turned attention away from broader aspects of education, schooling and teaching. In turn, the type of learning that can be documented and used as evidence by student teachers privileges a narrow vision of teacher education, teaching and teaching quality.

### **Global and National Contexts of Policy Development**

Reforms in initial teacher education in Australia have emerged in the context of and to a large extent, been driven by, several interconnected, global trends in education: standardisation, measurement, and processes for accountability. An increasing emphasis of standardisation in many aspects of education has influenced curriculum, testing of students, and the development of standards for teachers and school leaders. Standardisation has been coupled with another trend, that of a growing determination to measure outcomes. These two trends are interconnected because the standardising processes make measurements possible and, together with measurement, provide a pathway for accountability. A third related issue concerns the trend to make the results of these measurements open for public scrutiny. This trend is evident for student and school performance via publication in league tables. For example, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports on the global scale) and national testing programs in schools and standards documents for teachers have been developed in several other countries prior to Australia's adoption of these practices into initial teacher education (Brennan, 2009; Mayer, 2010).

In Australia, the global trend towards standardisation, measurement and public scrutiny are evident in the federal government initiatives which have been implemented across all state and independent educational jurisdictions to govern school education and teacher education. At the school level, these policy enactments started over a decade ago, with the national testing regime for literacy and numeracy, National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), from 2008 and the publication of results from NAPLAN on a publicly available MySchool website. Shortly after, in 2014, the Australian Curriculum,

Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) rolled out a national curriculum which has been taken up unabridged in some jurisdictions and used as the basis of state based curriculum reform in other jurisdictions. Other high-stakes standardised initiatives in the pipeline include the introduction of the voluntary Year One Phonics Check (Australian Government, Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2021).

The pervasive focus on standardisation, measurement and public scrutiny is also evident for Australian teachers as the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs), released by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in 2011. These standards impact the content and design of teacher education for preservice teachers and professional development for teacher in-service education and have the potential to shape career paths for teachers via new aspirational categories within the role of classroom teaching. The APSTs are at the centre of policy enactments extending standardisation, measurement, and public scrutiny into initial teacher education (see Singh et al., in press). All Australian initial teacher education providers must design their teacher preparation courses around the APSTs and undertake a rigorous accreditation and reaccreditation process, along with rigorous annual reporting. The process through which teachers progress from the Graduate level, through to Proficient, and then Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher becomes quite public due to the formal certification process. For example, those seeking Lead Teacher certification must undertake a ‘significant leadership project of greater than six months’ duration’ in a school or a cluster of schools, and also include written observations from a principal or supervisor, and written reports from between three to five referees (Queensland College of Teachers, 2021).

### **Implications of Teacher Quality Policy Enactment**

Several researchers, writing in the Australian context, have commented that the emphasis in policy, on the teacher quality discourse, has resulted in pressure for reform in teacher education (e.g., Churchward & Willis, 2019; Down & Sullivan, 2019; Rowe & Skourdoumbis, 2019). Australian reform initiatives have meant an increase in the external control of the work of teacher educators, particularly evident in the accreditation process for teacher education courses, which places restrictions on the content required of those courses in pursuit of ‘quality’ graduates. The accreditation process impacts curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ITE. External regulation constrains the content of courses, the ways in which courses are delivered, who is permitted to enter initial teacher education and the determination of eligibility for graduates to qualify for the profession. The rise in external control creates challenges for teacher educators as they seek to determine how they conduct their work and shape the content of their teaching.

Teacher educator views on issues associated with ‘teacher quality’ are not privileged in the discourse. In a recent publication (Hoyte et al., 2020), teacher educators’ contributions to the ‘teacher quality’ discourse in a recent a parliamentary inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession (Parliament of Australia, 2018-2019) were analysed. This analysis demonstrated that the contributions from teacher educators contrasted with the dominant discourse on teacher quality. Teacher educators talked about education as a process that involved much more than could be standardised and quantified. Teacher educator comments about teacher quality and quality teacher education in their submissions sit uncomfortably with the more publicly aired views in policy documents and media conversations. These differences in interpretations of teacher quality highlight that the words with which a phrase is ‘stitched together’ influence the meanings that phrase communicates. The word ‘quality’ seems to be a particularly pliable thread that has been stitched into different fabrics of

meaning. Consequently, it is important to question how the ‘patches’ of meaning sewn together in the discourse, have come to constitute valid knowledge about teacher quality and quality teacher education in official policy text.

## Global Teacher Education Reform Movements

Two OECD documents are pivotal to discussions of teacher quality in the global education reform policy discourse. The first is the *Teachers Matter: Policies for Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (OECD, 2005). The second is *Effective Teacher Policies: Insights from PISA* (OECD, 2018). These two OECD documents focus specifically on teachers and span more than a decade, so have the potential to reveal ideas that have enjoyed lasting influence within the OECD. We examine the OECD documents to explore the meanings they communicate about teacher quality and how they communicate them<sup>3</sup>. We scrutinize how the words ‘quality’, ‘teachers’ and ‘teaching’, have been sewn together in the discourse so that they have come to take up particular meanings for teachers in schools and more specifically (for the audience of this journal) for those involved in teacher education. We propose that a term such as ‘quality’ is particularly malleable, and as Apple (1993, p. 49) has observed, ‘concepts do not remain still for very long. They have wings, so to speak, and can be induced to fly from place to place’.

This article adapts a central question raised by Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 54) to frame and direct our critical policy analysis. We ask:

- 1) How does the OECD policy ‘work’ as a text?
- 2) How have ideas been sutured together in each text?
- 3) How do the ideas develop over time between the first and the second documents?

## Analytical Approach

*Teachers Matter: Policies for Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (OECD, 2005) and *Effective Teacher Policies: Insights from PISA* (OECD, 2018) both address teacher quality. In this section we examine the documents to locate and make sense of how the concept of teacher quality is embedded within the two texts. We then narrow our focus on the executive summaries of both documents and examine the way in which the concept of teacher quality is developed in each and how it evolves across the two points in time.

To restate our premise, we suggest that words come to mean something specific, because they get ‘stitched together’ with certain sets of ideas. In examining the way these documents construct teacher quality, we consider how ideas are developed within each document. We ask:

- i. Does the term ‘teacher quality’ appear in the documents and if so, how frequently?
- ii. How is teacher quality defined explicitly?

---

<sup>3</sup> Our analyses complement the work of Nordin and Wahlström (2019) who provide a detailed analysis of ten OECD and European Commission policy documents for 2005 to 2017, including the OECD Report *Teachers Matter*. Their thesis is that the policy documents differentially include descriptive, critical and evaluative approaches to addressing teacher quality as an issue of importance for education. They suggest that the 2005 Teacher Matter report addresses wider issues associated with teacher quality, going beyond economic values, a simple description of the task of teaching and incorporating appreciation for qualities in teachers beyond technical competence model.

- iii. What other words and phrases associated with the work of teachers are aligned with the use of the word 'quality' in the document (i.e., what implicit meanings are attached to the concept)?

## Results

### Analysis Of 'Teacher Quality' In *Teachers Matter* (OECD, 2005)

*Teachers Matter: Policies for Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (OECD, 2005) (hereafter *Teachers Matter*) reports on an examination of policies that supported the recruitment and retention of quality teachers in 25 countries associated with the OECD. We identified that the word 'quality' was associated with 'teacher' 40 times. There are 30 mentions of 'teacher quality', 5 of 'quality teacher', and 5 of 'quality of teachers'. In comparison, there are 14 references that focus on 'teaching' and quality, 13 on 'quality teaching' and one on 'teaching quality'. Mockler (2011) documents the discursive shift in policy documents from 'quality teaching' to 'teacher quality' and explores the implications of this focus on the individual teacher rather than on teaching (Mockler, 2013). Her analysis suggests that the discussion of *teaching* quality is underpinned by 'a desire to support and foster teacher professional learning... and pursue good teaching practice' (p. 37), whereas an emphasis on *teacher* quality reflects a drive 'to standardise practice and attribute blame to teachers where their students fail to "measure up"' (p. 37). This OECD report seemed to emphasise the individual teacher rather than the teaching process.

We then concentrated our analysis on the Executive Summary, because it provides a synopsis of the whole report, is the starting place for many readers, and carries the potential to guide the reader's viewing of this policy tapestry. Limiting our analysis to the Executive Summary also makes the data set a manageable size for this article.

The term quality occurs 21 times in the Executive Summary. The first six occurrences emphasise the broader categories of schooling, learning, teaching and schools. In contrast, the last eight emphasise teachers. The six references in the middle move back and forward between quality *teacher* and quality *teaching*. The pivotal disclaimer, at the end of these six references, includes both *teaching* and *teachers*. It states, 'The quality of teaching is determined not just by the "quality" of the teachers – although that is clearly critical – but also by the environment in which they work.' (OECD, 2005, p. 9). Clearly, despite this claim that other things are important, the Executive Summary focuses on the individual teacher's quality, not other factors which might influence student outcomes. The twelve couplings of 'quality' with 'teacher' in the Executive Summary, represent more than a quarter of the teacher quality references in the whole document and highlight the centrality of this theme in the report. The choice and patterning of wordings provide a chain of reference which moves from the broader concepts of schooling to a focus on the attributes of the individual teacher. Significantly, the second last use of the word 'quality' incorporates 'teacher education, induction, performance and development' and places teacher education in a position of responsibility for ensuring the production of quality teachers.

Turning to the second question, as to how the words 'quality teacher' might be understood, the absence of a clear definition is salient. The motif of the 'quality teacher' becomes a 'sliding signifier'. Its meaning and the scope of its application must be derived from the many words and phrases embroidered around it. We identified over fifty descriptions that exemplified attributes associated with 'quality teachers'. However, rather than providing a richly embellished picture of the quality teacher, these descriptors cluster around a much smaller set of ideas. 'Effectiveness' is referred to the most, with 10 uses of the word. 'Competence' has eight references. Teacher 'qualifications' were mentioned six times.

Aspects of performance measured via the PISA test (such as teacher performance, student learning and school improvement) were mentioned five times. References to teacher skills, experience and knowledge were also repeated, as was teachers' 'up-to-date-ness' (with respect to ideas, technology and preparedness for the future). All these factors are individual attributes of a teacher, amongst which the most prominent words were those about effectiveness. In contrast, quality in *schools* is associated with a more nuanced approach, for example, characteristics and actions of an interactional nature such as social sensitivity, responsiveness to disadvantage and complexity, tolerance and support for social cohesion were mentioned with respect to school-level capabilities.

Throughout the Executive Summary of *Teachers Matter*, the words quality and effectiveness are laced together in ways that suggest that they are parallel, almost interchangeable terms tied securely to synonyms of student achievement. For example:

*There is now substantial research indicating that the quality of teachers and their teaching are the most important factors in student outcomes that are open to policy influence. There is also substantial evidence that teachers vary markedly in their effectiveness. Differences in student performance are often greater within schools than between schools. (OECD, 2005, p. 12).*

The first three sentences to mention 'quality' exemplify how the meaning of the phrase 'quality teacher' is developed.

- The far-reaching economic and social changes underway have made high-quality schooling more important than ever before.
- Education Ministers have committed their countries to the goal of raising the quality of learning for all.
- This ambitious goal will not be achieved unless all students receive high-quality teaching.

These three pivotal statements exemplify the point made by Biesta (2005) that *learnification* has displaced *education* in the policy rhetoric. In these statements the metaphor of a goal is established with reference to 'schooling', 'learning' and 'teaching' in these first few sentences, a goal which is urgent ('more important than ever before'), ambitious ('raising the quality of learning for all'), and universal ('will not be achieved unless all students'). Because a goal is something not yet achieved, the message of a 'quality' deficit or problem is communicated. The metaphor is transferred to *teachers* when the Executive Summary segues its focus to teacher quality. Although a more comprehensive and nuanced approach may be evident in the rest of the document, as reported by Nordin and Wahlström (2019), this part of the policy document creates a clear message that teacher quality is highly desired and in short supply, and that it equates to effectiveness as measured by student achievement.

#### **Analysis of 'Teacher Quality' in Effective Teacher Policies (OECD, 2018)**

*Effective Teacher Policies: Insights from PISA* (OECD, 2018) (hereafter *Effective Teacher Policies*) reports on an examination of teacher policies employed by countries deemed to be high performers in education. This OECD report defines teacher policies as 'the regulations and principles of action at the levels of schools and education systems that shape, in a particular time and place, the teaching force and what teachers do' (p. 20). Those countries which scored highly on the OECD international testing were deemed to be high-performing countries. A search for the term 'quality' revealed that it was associated with

‘teacher’ 60 times compared with its use only 8 times for ‘teaching’.<sup>4</sup> Twenty-eight references were to ‘teacher quality’, 12 were to ‘quality teacher’, and 20 to ‘quality teachers’. Of the 14 focusing on ‘teaching’, three were to ‘quality teaching’, four were to ‘quality teaching force’ and one was to ‘teaching quality’. In the Executive Summary of this report, the term ‘quality’ only occurs five times. This is surprising, given that ‘quality’ is used nearly 70 times in the whole report. The five references to quality are tied to three different entities (teaching, teaching force and teachers), with the chain of reference shifting from a focus on teaching to a focus on teachers. The Summary starts with two couplings of ‘high quality’ with teaching. The next reference is to a ‘high-quality teaching force’ which signals a shift away from the broader concern of teaching towards the individual teacher. The penultimate move is to link quality teachers and teaching, before finally putting quality teachers centre stage in the last reference. The shift is a one-way progression away from education, schooling and teaching to a focus on the teacher and their individual attributes.

In response to the second question, as to how teacher quality might be understood from a reading of this Executive Summary, we note that this part of the document does not define teacher quality, quality teaching or indeed quality schools. It does, however, emphasise performance and PISA results and in so doing perhaps provides a proxy for a definition of quality. In this document, a more compact set of descriptors is associated with ‘quality’ than was the case in *Teachers Matter* (OECD, 2005). There are only six different descriptors, and these seem to be used in four consistent clusters. First, are the paired terms ‘effectiveness and efficiency’ (used to describe schooling and teachers). Next is the term ‘competent’ (used of people working as teachers), followed by ‘talented’ (to refer to people attracted to and retained in teaching). The fourth concerns the paired terms, ‘qualification and experience’ (referring to teachers). The phrase ‘high achieving’, used in terms of students to be attracted into the profession, could align with ‘talented’ and ‘competent’. Throughout the Executive Summary of *Effective Teacher Policies*, the issue of quality is described on ten occasions with the repetition of these four descriptions and with clear links to performance data. In this way, the summary communicates definite parameters around what quality is meant to mean and how it is to be assessed.

The narrowed focus on teachers and effectiveness which was created in the Executive Summary of *Teachers Matter* (OECD, 2005) is reiterated and strengthened in the Executive Summary of *Effective Teacher Policies* (OECD, 2018). Two chains of meaning, relevant to our analysis, are threaded through this Executive Summary. The first establishes teachers as the focus of the document, rather than schools and teaching. The second, establishes that quality is akin to effectiveness, competence, talent with each of these demonstrable by achievement. These two meanings are carefully assembled through the selection of words and patterning in their placement. Together, weaving in and around each other as they do, they create a very specific understanding of quality as an attribute residing within the teacher that will drive student outcomes. The shift from a broader discussion of quality schools and quality teaching to an emphasis on teachers in this report (identified in its title) and to a narrow focus on the individual teacher, is achieved in the opening pages of the report.

## Conclusion

*Teachers Matter: Policies for Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (OECD, 2005) and *Effective Teacher Policies: Insights from PISA* (OECD, 2018)

---

<sup>4</sup> OECD (2018) document has 60 references that focus on the ‘teacher’ (28 on ‘teacher quality’, 12 on ‘quality teacher’, and 20 ‘quality teachers’). Only 14 focus on ‘teaching’ (3 on ‘quality teaching’, 4 on ‘quality teaching force’ and 1 ‘teaching quality’).

both address teacher quality. The first document made initial links between ‘teacher quality’, student performance and education policy. The second report strengthened the discursive ties between the idea of ‘teacher quality’ and the development of policy governing education. So together, these two OECD documents thread a connection between policies for educational reform and a focus on ‘teacher quality’. There is a strong association made between quality and performance. To the general public, these documents have visibility, availability and credibility, coming as they do from an organisation of high standing on the international stage. They have come to be a privileged voice in the Australian education space. Wordings from these documents find their way into the policy discourse at national and local levels, providing support for reform and regulation of teacher education and teachers’ work.

This critical policy analysis of the Executive Summaries in two OECD documents highlights a discursive focus that concentrates specifically on teachers rather than on teaching, education or schools. In both documents, while no definitions of ‘quality’ are provided, the words associated with ‘quality’ have strong links with the economic, performance and accountability themes of globalisation and governance in education. In this section we discuss some of the implications of this perspective that pervades education policy in Australia.

Analysis of the Executive Summaries provide a glimpse of the social imaginary of globalisation to which these documents align. The convergence of policy ideas from a broader, more complex understanding of teaching and teachers’ work to a narrow view of the purposes of education which are strongly allied to economic goals is evident. Elsewhere this trend is discussed as an outworking of a top down globalisation marked by a shift in focus from democracy and social justice to one of efficiency and accountability (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). For example, in Saarinen’s (2008) analysis of OECD policy addressing higher education, quality is presented as a commodity, tightly linked with economic considerations; as something, that if not entirely lacking, at least warrants improvement. Furthermore, the routes to increased quality that are presented include increased accountability, competition and surveillance. For school communities experiencing the stresses of inequality and disadvantage, the added stress of competition and surveillance, on an unequal playing field, create additional stress for teachers and children and sap energy from agenda that may focus on other more crucial endeavours.

The OECD has become a particularly powerful player in the shift to governance in education that accompanies the processes of globalisation. With reference to the teacher quality discourse, which has been, at least in part, influenced by the policy documents, instruments and resources emerging from the OECD, a whole range of non-human policy actors have emerged. These documents, instruments and practices, that influence governance of education and teacher education in Australia, are characterised by narrow conceptions of teaching work and what counts as quality. Our analysis demonstrates how the notion of ‘teacher quality’ in the schooling context is woven through with ideas tied to economics and concepts of efficiency, performance and accountability. The merging of economics and education sits within a neoliberal imaginary and is taken up by a wide range of policy actors (e.g., Grey & Morris, 2018), but it may limit the inclusion of other goals for education, those ideas that do not share an explicit economic imperative.

The way in which these OECD documents frame teacher quality has significant implications for teacher education. Current policy settings around teacher quality and teacher education are threaded through with implicit assumptions about the purposes of education – what knowledge should be taught, how it should be taught, and how acquisition of knowledge should be measured. Constrained, technicist assumptions about education are embedded in current teacher quality and teacher education policies and captured in these Executive Summaries.

In contrast, the definition of a good education proposed by Biesta (2014; 2015) includes goals other than qualification. Under an economically driven regime, not only is school education pressured to narrow its offerings to students, but teacher education runs the risk of preparing a teaching workforce which is equipped to focus on qualification to the exclusion of social connectedness and personal flourishing proposed by Biesta's (2014) model. If, as Bernstein (2000) proposes, students in a democratic society have a right to education that allows for enhancement, social inclusion and political participation, an education which focuses predominantly on economic participation falls short of these more robust aims. If teachers have not been prepared to consider and engage in the other dimensions of education, then their students will be the poorer for this oversight. Instruments designed to regulate what teachers learn, how they learn and how their learnings are evaluated/recorded fundamentally change not only the education of teachers, but also their professionalism and professional identities and the education of their students.

The emphasis on teacher quality in the two Executive Summaries also poses the risk of situating the success or failure of students squarely on the shoulders of teachers to the exclusion of all other factors involved in educational success. By having the spotlight on teachers, as opposed to other aspects of the context that wrap around student success, education policy simplifies the issues that may be involved in providing a quality education to all students, including those facing significant disadvantage. If this naivety about the education process in complex contexts is projected back into the teacher education process, via accreditation and funding as mechanisms of control, then issues of justice and equity could be removed from or downplayed in the content of teacher education courses.

These observations raise further questions for investigation. The emphasis of the reports, on teacher quality, as opposed to teaching or education quality, is of concern if, as Mockler (2013; 2018) suggests, this trend reflects an emphasis on managing, controlling and ensuring the accountability of teachers, rather than a genuine interest in developing a creative, thoughtful and responsive profession.

Attention to teacher quality is a hallmark of these two OECD reports. In these documents, the meanings of 'teacher quality' have been stitched together with ideas from economics, including such ideas as standardisation and measurement, quality control, effectiveness, and performance. As these understandings of quality continue to shape the profession, it is essential that teachers and teacher educators persist in efforts to challenge the underlying premises of the privileged perspectives and to examine the scope of the standards, the validity of the measurements and the value of the 'teacher quality' goal.

## References

- Apple, M. W. (1993). Thinking right in the USA: ideological transformations in an age of conservatism. In R. Lingard, J. Knight, & P. Porter (Eds.), *Schooling Reform in Hard Times*. Falmer Press.
- Apple, M. W. (2002). Patriotism, Pedagogy, and Freedom: On the Educational Meanings of September 11th. *Teachers College Record*, 104(8), 1760–1772.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9620.00219>
- Apple, M. W. (2012). Why we should be worried about current educational reforms? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcPv0Pk7Uqs>: University of Melbourne.
- Australian Government, Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2021). *Year 1 Phonics Check*. Available from: <https://www.dese.gov.au/australian-curriculum/year-1-phonics-check>.

- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). (2011). *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards>
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), (2015) *Guidelines for the accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia*. AITSL.
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), (2018) *Guidelines for the accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Stage two*. AITSL.
- Ball, S. J. (1990). *Politics and Policy Making in Education. Explorations in Policy Sociology*. Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (2005). *Education Policy And Social Class: The Selected Works of Stephen Ball* (1st ed.). Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203015179>
- Ball, S. J. (2015). What is policy? 21 years later: reflections on the possibilities of policy research. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 36(3), 306-313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1015279>
- Ball, S. J. (2016). Subjectivity as a site of struggle: refusing neoliberalism? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37(8), 1129-1146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1044072>
- Baroutsis, A. (2016). Media accounts of school performance: Reinforcing dominant practices of accountability. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(5), 567-582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2016.1145253>
- Baroutsis, A. & Woods, A. (2019). Academic research and public debates: A media analysis of the proposed Australian Phonics Check. In A. Woods & B. Exley (Eds.) *Literacies in Early Childhood: Foundations for Equity and Quality* (pp. 288-299). Oxford University Press.
- Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control, and identity: Theory, research, critique* (Revised Edition). Rowman & Littlefield
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2005). Against learning. Reclaiming a language for education in an age of learning. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 25(1), 54-66.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2014). *The Beautiful Risk of Education*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315635866>
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2015) What is education for? On good education, teacher judgement, and educational professionalism. *European Journal of Education*, 50(1), 75–87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12109>
- Biesta, G. J. J., & Stengel, B. (2016). Thinking philosophically about teaching. In D. H. Gittomer & C. Bell (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (5th ed.), (pp. 7-68). American Educational Research Association. [https://doi.org/10.3102/978-0-935302-48-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.3102/978-0-935302-48-6_1)
- Bourke, T., Lidstone, J., & Ryan, M. (2013). Teachers Performing Professionalism: A Foucauldian Archaeology. *SAGE Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013511261>
- Brennan, M. (2009). Steering teachers. Working to control the feminized profession of education. *Journal of Sociology*, 45(4), 339–359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783309346473>
- Braun, A., Maguire, M., & Ball, S. J. (2010). Policy enactments in the UK secondary school: examining policy, practice and school positioning. *Journal of Education Policy*, 25(4), 547-560. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680931003698544>
- Churchward, P. and Willis, J. (2019). The pursuit of teacher quality: identifying some of the multiple discourses of quality that impact the work of teacher educators. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 47(3), 251–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2018.1555792>

- Dinham, S. (2013). The quality teaching movement in Australia encounters difficult terrain: A personal perspective. *Australian Journal of Education*, 57(2), 91-106.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/000-49-44113485840>
- Down, B., & Sullivan, A. (2019). "Classroom Ready Teachers". Gaps, Silences and Contradictions in the Australian Report into Teacher Education. In A. Sullivan, B. Johnson, & M. Simons (Eds.), *Attracting and Keeping the Best Teachers. Issues and Opportunities*. (pp. 39-64). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8621-3\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8621-3_3)
- Elliott, K. (2015). Teacher Performance Appraisal: More about Performance or Development? *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(9), 102-116.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n9.6>
- Fischman, A., Topper, M., Silova, I., Goebel, J. & Holloway, J. L. (2019). Examining the influence of international large-scale assessments on national education policies. *Journal of Education Policy*, 34(4), 470-499.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2018.1460493>
- Flores, M. A. (2019). Unpacking Teacher Quality: Key Issues for Early Career Teachers. In A. Sullivan, B. Johnson, & M. Simmons (Eds.), *Attracting and Keeping the Best Teachers. Issues and Opportunities*. (pp. 15-38). Springer.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8621-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8621-3_2)
- Foucault, M. (1974). *The order of things*. Routledge.
- Gore, J. (2016). Reform and the reconceptualisation of teacher education in Australia. In R. Brandenburg, S. McDonough, J. Burke & S. White (Eds.), *Teacher Education Innovation, Intervention and Impact*. (pp. 15-34). Springer.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0785-9\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0785-9_2)
- Grey, S. & Morris, P. (2018). PISA: multiple 'truths' and mediated global governance. *Comparative Education*, 54(2), 109-131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2018.1425243>
- Heimans, S., Singh, P., & Glasswell, K. (2017). Doing education policy enactment research in a minor key. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 38(2), 185-196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1074428>
- Hoyte, F., Singh, P., Heimans, S. & Exley, B. (2020). Discourses of quality in Australian teacher education: Critical policy analysis of a government inquiry into the status of the profession. In J. Fox, C. Alexander, & T. Aspland (Eds.) *Teacher Education in Globalised Times: Local Responses in Action*. Springer [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4124-7\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4124-7_9)
- Larsen, M. A. (2010). Troubling the discourse of teacher centrality: a comparative perspective. *Journal of Education Policy*, 25(2), 207-231.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930903428622>
- Ledger, S., & Vidovich, L. (2018). Australian Teacher Education Policy in Action: The Case of Pre-service Internships. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(7), 11-29.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v43n7.2>
- Leonard, S. N. & Roberts, P. (2016). No time to think: policy, pedagogy and professional learning. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(2), 142-160.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2015.1047801>
- Mayer, D. (2014). Forty years of teacher education in Australia: 1974–2014. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 40(5), 461–473.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2014.956536>
- McArdle, F. (2010). Preparing Quality Teachers: Making Learning Visible. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(8), 60-78.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2010v35n8.5>

- Mockler, N. (2013). Teacher Professional Learning in a Neoliberal Age: Audit, Professionalism and Identity. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(10), 35-47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n10.8>
- Mockler, N. (2018). Early career teachers in Australia: a critical policy historiography. *Journal of Education Policy*, 33(2), 262-278. <https://doi:10.1080/02680939.2017.1332785>
- Nordin, A., Wahlström, N. (2019). Transnational policy discourses on ‘teacher quality’: an educational connoisseurship and criticism approach. *Policy Futures in Education*, 17(3), 438-454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210318819200>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2005). *Teachers Matter: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers*. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/34990905.pdf>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2018). *Effective Teacher Policies: Insights from PISA*. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264301603-en>
- Queensland College of Teachers. (2021). *Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers. Frequently Asked Questions*. Retrieved from <https://www.qct.edu.au/standards-and-conduct/certification>.
- Robertson, S. L., & Sorensen, T. (2018). Global transformations of the state, governance and teachers’ labour: Putting Bernstein’s conceptual grammar to work. *European Educational Research Journal*, 17(4), 470-488. <https://doi:10.1177/1474904117724573>
- Rowe, E. & Skourdoumbis, A. (2019). Calling for ‘urgent national action to improve the quality of initial teacher education’: the reification of evidence and accountability in reform agendas. *Journal of Education Policy*, 34(1), 44-60. <https://doi:10.1080/02680939.2017.1410577>
- Sellar, S., & Lingard, B. (2014). The OECD and the expansion of PISA: New global modes of governance in education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 40(6), 917-936. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3120>
- 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), 19-43. <https://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2017v42n4.3>
- Singh, P. (2017). Pedagogic governance: theorising with/after Bernstein. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 38(2), 144-163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1081052>
- Singh, P., Allen, J., & Rowan, L. (2019). Quality teaching: Standards, professionalism, practices. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 47(1), 1-4. <https://doi:0.1080/1359866X.2019.1557925>
- Singh, P., Heimans, S. & Hoyte, F. (in press). Australian Professional Standards for Teachers: Educational Inequalities and Re-framing Teachers’ Work

## Acknowledgements

Research supported under the Australian Research Council Discovery Project scheme, DP190100518 (Investigators: Singh, Exley, Heimans & Ivinson).