The construction of teacher identities in educational policy documents: a Critical Discourse Analysis

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The construction of teacher identities in educational policy documents: a Critical Discourse Analysis

Abstract: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a complex eclectic method that has potential to be a valuable tool for critical policy analysis. This paper highlights this potential by demonstrating how CDA can be applied to policy texts. That is, it focuses on the processes involved in ‘doing’ critical discourse analysis. In particular, it examines the framework identified by Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999) as the means by which CDA can be ‘operationalised’ in order to produce ‘theoretically grounded analyses in a wide range of cases’. The framework is outlined and discussed in relation to the construction of teacher identities in educational policies. The paper then applies CDA to an analysis of one education policy document to illustrate the framework in operation. In so doing, it addresses the problem of teacher quality, which is analysed in terms of the discursive constructions of teachers’ professional identities. The analysis demonstrates how CDA may be used both as a tool for critical policy analysis and for the analysis of the construction of identities in educational, and other, documents.

Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a complex eclectic method for critical social science research that is constantly evolving as it is applied to new areas of social life and as the theorisation of discourse develops. This paper explores the possibilities inherent in CDA in two ways. First, the paper illustrates how the methodological framework identified by Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999) can be operationalised, and in so doing, shows that CDA entails more than a linguistic analysis of texts. Second, by applying the framework to the critical analysis of education policy, the paper interrogates the possibilities of using CDA for critical policy analysis, an area that has seen little application of CDA to date (Taylor 2004).
Of particular interest is the construction of teacher identities in education policy documents on teacher quality. The analysis demonstrates the potential of CDA as a tool for critical policy analysis, and for the analysis of the construction of identities in educational, and other, documents.

The paper begins with a discussion of education policy as discursive practice and notes the importance of the discursive construction of identities in policy processes. Next, it outlines Chouliaraki & Fairclough’s (1999) framework for doing CDA and applies this framework to an analysis of the construction of teacher identities in educational policies. The application of the framework to critical policy analysis is illustrated in relation to a recent policy document that includes a discussion of teacher quality and standards. That document is the report *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future – Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics* (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a), hereafter referred to as *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future*. The paper concludes by making suggestions for future applications.

**CDA and critical policy research**

This paper argues that Critical Discourse Analysis is a valuable tool for critical policy research, given that educational policy can be understood as discursive practices and educational policies can be examined as discourse-related problems. Language conflicts in educational policy debates have been identified as a focus of educational policy research because the words that label a problem also constrain the solution and advance certain interests and values (cf. Codd 1988, Placier, Walker & Foster 2002, Poulson 1996, Taylor
Bacchi (2000) notes the ‘non-innocence of how “problems” get framed within policy proposals, how the frames will affect what can be thought about and how this affects possibilities for action’ (p. 50). Consequently, policy discourses construct the policy topic and appear across a range of text forms and practices at a number of different sites at any one time (Ball 1998). Further, policy documents are discursively produced ‘within particular contexts whose parameters and particulars have been temporarily (and strategically) settled by discourse(s) in dominance’ (Gale 1999, p. 405). The policy process, therefore, is a matter of discursive and textual practices (Jones, Lee & Poynton 1998, p. 146). It is a site of discursive struggle between competing but unequal interests (Ball 1993, Gale 2003, Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry 1997).

Such an understanding of policy draws on the Foucauldian theory of discourse as the conjunction of power and knowledge (cf. Foucault 1976) and raises questions about how power is exercised in the policy process. Discourses are manifestations of power (Harvey 1996) that constitute both particular social realities (objects) (Fairclough 1995a, Miller & Glassner 1997) and identities (subjects) (Foucault 1982). Further, discourses constitute identities that position people in potentially contradictory ways (Fairclough 1995b, Gee 1996, 1999). Such positionings may be homogenizing, in that particular groups of people are represented in ways that privilege the voice of some groups over others.

However, these positionings also provide resources for creativity and differentiation, allowing people to represent themselves as a collective identity (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). People recognise, or know themselves as certain kinds of people as they ‘enact, perform, and recognize different socially, situated identities’ (Gee 1999, p. 86) through
discourse. That is, positionings constructed in discourse constitute identities, not only in terms of the way people are represented by others, but also in terms of the way they represent themselves (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). Such an understanding of identities recognises that people actively construct their individual and collective identities in discourse. It includes an interactive focus, acknowledging that identities are not stable entities but are in constant flux as they are negotiated through discourse. The process of identification in discourse is a feature of social life (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999), including the processes of education policy-making. That is, policy discourses, define not only what can be said and thought about policy problems, but also who can speak, where, when and with what authority (Ball 1993). Education policy discourses are sites of struggles and negotiations over the construction of competing and contradictory educational identities. Critical Discourse Analysis, therefore, is a valuable tool for tracing both policy discourses, and the ways in which identities are constructed within and through such discourses. It contributes to understandings of struggles over identity by describing how social groups are represented as well as identifying unrealised potentials (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999).

Questions about identity have gained increasing prominence in education research (Gee 2001), including critical education policy research (Thomas in press 2005). The following discussion explores the potential of Critical Discourse Analysis to contribute to educational policy research as it applies CDA to the construction of teacher identities in educational policies on teacher quality. While some recent work (cf. Mulderrig 2003, Taylor 2004, Thomas in press 2005) has employed CDA to analyse policy texts, this paper extends current understandings of the application of CDA to critical policy analysis by explicating how the framework developed by Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999) can be used with educational
policy texts. In so doing, the paper shows how a critical discourse analysis of an educational policy text on teacher quality enables the analyst to trace constructions of the good teacher in the text.

**Doing CDA: a framework**

Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999) outline a framework for ‘doing’ Critical Discourse Analysis. The framework identifies five stages by which CDA can be ‘operationalised’ in order to produce ‘theoretically grounded analyses in a wide range of cases’ (see Table 1).

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Table 1: Critical Discourse Analysis: A framework

Source: (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999, p. 60)
It is not necessary for a critical discourse analysis to involve all five stages of the framework and it may focus on some stages and not others. Nor is it necessary for the stages to be completed in the order described above. The discussion that follows illustrates how the framework might be applied to an analysis of the problem of teacher quality in educational policies. First, the discussion focuses on the discourse-related problem of teacher quality. This section illustrates the application of stage 1 and stages 2a and 2b of the framework. The second section applies stage 2c, the analysis of the discourse, as it analyses the discourses about teachers found in the policy document. The third section addresses stages 3 and 4 and focuses particularly on alternative discursive constructions of teacher quality, constructions that ‘ought’ to be. Finally, the critical discourse analysis of the policy concludes with a reflection on the position of the analyst.

**Stages 1, 2a and 2b: the problem of teacher quality**

1. A problem (activity, reflexivity)
2. Obstacles to its being tackled
   (a) analysis of the conjuncture
   (b) analysis of the practice re its discourse moment
   (i) relevant practice(s)?
   (ii) relation of discourse to other moments?
      - discourse as part of the activity
      - discourse and reflexivity

CDA begins with the perception of a discourse-related problem in social life. The first stage of the framework, therefore, is the identification of a social problem. The problem may be in the activities of a social practice, or in the reflexive construction of a social practice. The
latter problems concern problems of misrepresentation and miscognition. This paper focuses on such a problem, the problem of teacher quality. It examines representations of teachers, in particular, the discursive constructions of the ‘good’ teacher, in an educational policy document at a time when teacher quality is perceived by governments to be problematic (cf. Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000).

Next, the framework identifies the obstacles that work against the problem being tackled. That is, the analysis seeks to ‘understand how the problem arises and how it is rooted in the way social life is organised’ (Fairclough 2003, p. 209). This is the second stage of the framework, which includes three types of analysis, only one of which is an analysis of the discourse. The first type of analysis is the analysis of the conjuncture, the network of social practices, within which the discourse is located. This analysis should result in a broad understanding of which social practices are brought together, that is, of the struggles over power that are internalised in the discourse.

Similarly, the second type of analysis in this stage of the framework focuses on questions of power and power struggles. This type of analysis, the analysis of the practice in relation to its discourse moment, examines how the discourse articulates with other moments. It is based on the premise that the discursive moment is but one of several moments, or “basic markers” (Harvey 1996, p. 78) that constitute the network of social practices that make up contemporary social life. It is important that a critical discourse analysis specifies the relationships between the discourse and other social moments, in order both to reconstruct the practices within which the discourse is located, and to identify the ways in which power struggles are internalised within the discourse. That is, a critical discourse analysis seeks an
understanding of ‘how the discourse works in relation to “other things”’ (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999, p. 62) within relations of power.

Both the analysis of the conjuncture, and the analysis of the practices within which the discursive moment is located, require the use of an ensemble of techniques to illuminate multiple aspects of practice. A critical discourse analysis, therefore, works together with other social scientific methods to gain understandings of the discourse-related moment in relation to the social practices of which it is a part. That is, both types of analysis are concerned with contextualising the problem. In a critical discourse analysis of policy texts, both types of analysis work to reconstruct the relationship between the policy texts and the context in which they are used. Including such analyses in a critical discourse analysis of policy texts satisfies Taylor’s (1997) call for the critical analysis of policy to be placed within a broader political and social analysis. The analysis of the conjuncture and the analysis of the discursive moment will be included in the following discussion of teacher quality. This discussion first identifies the problem and then places the problem in the social context that frames the text under analysis.

**The Discourse-related Problem of Teacher Quality**

Discourses on quality have been a feature of education policy for the last twenty years (Vidovich & Porter 1999). Such discourses have impacted at a global level (cf. Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, & Taylor 2001, for a discussion the impact of the global discourse of quality on the OECD), and on individual nations. For example, Apple (2004) has discussed the impact of quality discourses in the USA; Whitty (2002) examines their impact on teacher professionalism in the UK; and Sachs (2003) analyses discourses on teacher quality in
Australia. The following discussion of the development of policies for teacher quality analyses the conjuncture of practices within which discourses on teacher quality are located in the Australian context. It presents a contextual frame for such policies and identifies the struggles over power that are internalised within discourses on quality teachers. As it does so, it shows how these discourses work in relation to other institutions and practices.

In Australia, several state and national education policies during the 1980s reflected concerns about the quality and relevance of education (cf. Board of Teacher Registration 1987, Quality of Education Review Committee 1985), emphasising improving the quality of educational outcomes in selected target areas and the notion of equity. However, the release of a ministerial statement, *Strengthening Australia’s Schools* (Dawkins 1988) in 1988 added a new dimension to debate on the issue. This statement stressed the critical and central role schools played in the nature of society and the economy. Now quality was assessed not in terms of equity but in terms of the process of national microeconomic reform. That is, policy discourses saw a shift from discourses of equity to discourses of economy as education began to be seen as the ‘handmaiden to the economy’ (Henry et al. 2001, p.62). At the same time, policy discourses on quality shifted to a focus on teachers and students, as improving the quality of teaching was seen to be central to the quality of schools and to the maximisation of their potential. These shifts were linked to the emergence of discourses of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism in almost every sphere in society (Apple, 2004). In Australian education at this time, these discourses resulted in moves towards national curricula and national testing.
The impact of the discourses of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, of the ‘conservative restoration’ (Apple 2004, p. 174), increased with the election of a conservative Commonwealth government in 1996. Education policies focused on the need for standardisation, strict control over curricula and pedagogy, and reductive models of accountability, models that focused heavily on the quality of teachers. A public campaign highlighting low standards of literacy and numeracy and the purported failure of the education system to teach a significant proportion of young people to read and write was begun. A feature of this campaign was the introduction of a program of standardised testing as a part of national literacy policies (cf. Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 1998). This program was linked to questions of teacher quality (cf. Kemp 1997, O'Chee 1997). A culture of blaming and shaming teachers characterised education policy-making as was evident in the Commonwealth report, *Teachers for the Twenty-first Century Making the Difference* (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000), released in 2000.

This report reiterated the link between teacher quality and national productivity and noted that “education of the highest quality requires teachers of the highest quality” (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000, p. 3). *Teachers for the Twenty-first Century* painted a picture of low educational standards in Australian schools and stressed the need to raise these standards (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000, p. 12). The cause of these low standards was identified as being the quality of the teaching profession and improving teacher quality was central to the program outlined in the report. Indeed, the report noted that “there has been growing concern over the status and quality of the teaching profession” (Department of Employment Education Training and
Youth Affairs 2000, p. 11) and outlined a strategy to achieve improved teacher quality through professional development and the development of standards and certification (cf. Thomas in press 2005, for a more detailed analysis of this report).

Most recently, the Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training has developed the *National Quality Schooling Framework*, “an interactive, accessible web-based tool to support pre-primary, primary and secondary Australian school leaders and teachers implement innovative and evidence-based projects to improve student learning outcomes” (Department of Education Science and Training 2003b). The framework aims to assist schools to build a shared understanding of teacher quality assurance processes and to embed the principles and criteria of quality assurance in practice. At the same time, *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future* (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a) was released. A major part of the report focused on attracting, preparing and retaining quality teachers, and it is this part of the report, together with the Executive Summary, that is the focus of analysis in the next stage.

**Stage 2c: analysing the policy discourse on teacher quality**

2. Obstacles to its being tackled
   (c) analysis of the discourse

The third type of analysis in the second stage of the framework is the analysis of the discourse. Together with the other two types of analyses in this stage, the analysis of the discourse identifies the obstacles to the problem being tackled. This analysis is oriented both to structure and to interaction. It is concerned with the structural elements of the discourse
that enables and constrains interactions, and with how these elements work together in the
textual process. That is, the analysis of the discourse examines the dialectic between structure
and interaction, or between the linguistic elements and the social. The following analysis of
the discourses constructed in *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future* focuses on the
linguistic features of the report. In so doing, it acknowledges the links between CDA and
Systemic Functional Grammar or Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) noted by Gee
(1999) and Fairclough (2003, Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). The analysis draws on these
links as it identifies the use of grammatical structures in the policy and outlines how these
structures realise the processes of identification in discourse.

An understanding of the processes of identification in the discourses constructed in
*Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future* is gained through an analysis of the relations
between the authors, in this case, the Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher
Education, the readers, and the representations of teachers and teacher quality constructed in
the report. These relations are realised in the grammatical features of modality and evaluation
(Fairclough 2003). Both features are discussed in terms of what the authors of the policy
commit themselves to. For example, modality is investigated in terms of what the authors of
the policy commit themselves to when they make statements (declarations) and ask questions.
Making statements is a key feature of the report under analysis and involves the exchange of
knowledge or what Fairclough (2003) calls epistemic modality. Epistemic modality refers to
the authors’ commitment to the truth. Assertions or statements of fact realise strong
commitments to truth. Asking questions also involves the exchange of knowledge as the
authors elicit others’ commitment to truth. Questions were used rarely in *Australia’s*
Teachers: Australia’s Future, but were significant in their positioning of the reader to agree with the discourse on teachers constructed through the report.

Evaluation refers to the ways in which authors commit themselves to values and concerns the authors’ commitment to desirability (Fairclough 2003). Of particular interest to this analysis are evaluative statements about desirability and undesirability, about what is good and what is bad. In both modality and evaluation, the authors’ commitments contribute to processes of identification because what the authors commit themselves to is a significant part of what they are. Further, Fairclough (2003) notes that identificational meanings presuppose representational meanings, that is, meanings about ‘what is’. Analyses of modality and evaluation involve analyses of not only how the authors identify themselves, but also of how the world is represented and how the identity of social groups, such as teachers, is constructed. What follows is an analysis of modality and evaluation as they are realised in the Executive Summary and in Part 2: Attracting, preparing and retaining quality teachers.

Both Part 2 and the Executive Summary are comprised almost entirely of declarative statements, many of them evaluative, about teachers and education. As noted above, an analysis of statements reveals how the authors identify themselves. Fairclough (2001) notes that declarative statements work to position the authors as givers, and readers as receivers, of information. Through its use of declarative statements, the Committee identifies itself as the giver of information, as the authority, on teachers and teaching. This authority is reflected in the use of phrases such as ‘The Committee believes’ and ‘The Committee considers’. Further, declarative statements, particularly assertions of the kind in the Executive Summary, realise
strong commitments by the author to the truth represented in the report and work together to construct a discourse on teachers and teacher quality.

This discourse is evident in the opening statements of the Executive Summary.

Sustained innovation is the key to future growth and prosperity in a global competitive economy. Building a culture of continuous innovation is an essential requirement, parallel to and supporting research and development. …

Innovation in the knowledge economy is not confined to a small group of specialists. It must be supported by a highly educated workforce and citizenry. Schools have a major role. So too do families, businesses and the wider community.

Teachers are the key to mobilising schools for innovation.…

Australia has a comprehensive and inclusive educational system which performs very well in international comparisons, meeting requirements for a well educated citizenry and workforce. Average standards are high and the best students and schools are among the best anywhere, but there is no cause for complacency.

(Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. xvii)

The discourse constructed in the report links schooling to innovation and to future growth and prosperity. While several social groups are acknowledged as having a major role to play in building and sustaining innovation, the discourse identifies teachers as the key to mobilising schools. That is, the discourse positions teachers as pivotal to the building of sustained innovation and as significant contributors to quality schooling, and so to the economic prosperity of the nation, for ‘teachers and teaching are crucial to the knowledge economy and more value needs to be placed on the profession and its standing in the wider community’
Having established the importance of teachers to the economy, the discourse then turns to questions of quality. The final paragraph quoted above recognized the high quality of Australian’s education systems, in which ‘average standards are high and the best students and schools are among the best anywhere’.

However, this acknowledgement of the quality of Australian schools is qualified with ‘but there is no cause for complacency’. With this qualification, the discourse raises the need to improve quality, particularly quality in teachers, as ‘high quality teachers make a significant and lasting contribution to young people’s lives’ (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. xx). The means advocated to ensure high quality teachers is the introduction of professional standards for teachers because ‘professional standards will provide a basis of competence for all teachers’ (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. xxi). Further, professional standards provide the means for ‘recognising and rewarding teaching excellence and providing opportunities for teachers to further develop their expertise and leadership within the profession will aid quality improvement. The profession itself should play a leading role in steps to achieve these outcomes’ (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. xxi). With this latter statement, the discourse recognises teachers as having a significant role to play in the development of professional standards.

In addition, the discourse recognises the complexities of teaching and understands teaching to be ‘a complex, sophisticated task requiring a high level of skill and training’ (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. 102). It recognises also the difficulties of teachers’
work and teachers’ need for support when it notes that ‘to meet these challenges teachers need a great deal of support in the often difficult conditions of the contemporary school’ (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. xxiv). Thus, the discourse on teacher quality constructed in this report emphasises existing quality practices in Australian schools and acknowledges the potential of these schools and the teaching profession to meet the changes demanded of them. This emphasis is evident in the final paragraphs of the Executive Summary.

The exemplary teaching and learning practices that daily occur in Australia’s schools are too often submerged beneath highly publicised problems. An investment in the dissemination of good practice and more systematic recognition of outstanding achievement would benefit all schools and give the community a better understanding of how schools are changing.

Schooling in Australia is on the verge of transformation to drive forward policies and strategies to reach new national standards of educational quality and relevance. (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. xxv)

However, while the potential of the teaching profession to meet these changes is recognised, the nature of teacher professionalism is questioned. The discussion on teacher professionalism includes one of the rare instances in the report when a question is used. As noted above, the use of questions indicates a knowledge exchange where the authors elicit the reader’s commitment to truth. This is certainly the case in the following passage where a question about recent moves to revitalise the teaching profession leads to a declarative statement about teachers and professional standards for teachers. This statement elicits the reader’s agreement to the discourse about teachers and teacher professionalism constructed
throughout the report. The statement repeatedly uses the modal finite *will* (underlined in the following extract) as it establishes the truth about the report’s discourse on teacher professionalism and represents the desirable qualities of teachers and education authorities. That is, it constructs a particular identity of the good teacher through a discourse on teacher professionalism.

What, then, is new or different about the recent moves to enhance teacher professionalism and revitalise the teaching profession?

Crucial to revitalising the profession is recognition by teachers themselves that the activity of teaching is an integral part of the knowledge revolution and the new global networks, as discussed in Chapter 1. This means that teachers and education authorities will in future make greater use of research and of systemic evidence in deciding what and how to teach, and in assessing the effects of schooling and of schooling on students’ learning. They will draw more widely on data sources, make greater use of ICT, and use face-to-face collaboration and sharing of information and ideas. There will be wider acceptance that very high standards for teaching will be set by and for the profession and that there will be more open dialogue about what these standards are, the conditions needed to meet them and the way in which high quality performance will be recognised.

(Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. 109)

The above extract contains many evaluative statements about teachers. These statements are not explicit in that they do not contain words such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Rather, these statements evaluate in terms of importance, where desirability is assumed (Fairclough 2003). As Gee (1996) notes, words ‘have meanings only relative to choices (by speakers and
writers) and guesses (by hearers and readers) about other words, and assumptions about contexts’ [emphasis in original] (p. 76). That is, meanings constructed in a text depend greatly on guesses and assumptions, or presuppositions, made by the reader of the text (Fairclough 2003). *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future* constructs a professional identity of the good teacher through the use of evaluative statements in which the desirable qualities of the good teacher are assumed.

Evaluative statements of importance are found both in the above extract and throughout the report and lead the reader to presuppose the desirable qualities of the good teacher. These qualities concern what sort of person a good teacher is and the practices, both teaching and professional, of a good teacher. The good teacher is ‘talented, energetic and creative… look[ing] for challenging and fulfilling career[s]’ and decides that teaching is a ‘career of choice’ (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. 104). She/he is part of a ‘new generation of talented young teachers’ or one of ‘large numbers of able people with experience in other careers’ (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. 117). The good teacher comes from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as ‘the composition of the teaching workforce should better reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of society’ (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. 74).

As noted in the extract above, the good teacher uses teaching practices that are informed by research and draws widely on data sources. She/he is involved in the strategic planning and decision-making that characterises the devolvement of greater responsibility to schools. The good teacher is collaborative, sharing information and ideas. She/he identifies as an ‘Australian teacher’ and sees teaching as a national profession (Department of Education
Science and Training 2003a, p. 104). The good teacher accepts the need for very high standards that are set by the profession and engages in dialogue about what these standards are and about how high quality performance is recognised. She/he is professionally autonomous, but this autonomy ‘has a distinctive meaning in teaching, and should not be seen as more independence and freedom of judgement by teachers’ (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. 110). Rather, the good teacher accepts the need for continuing appraisal, increasing regulation, accountability and greater transparency (Department of Education Science and Training 2003a, p. 110).

The analysis of the discourse on teacher quality constructed in *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future* has shown how the grammatical features of modality and evaluation have realised process of identification in the discourse. In particular, it has shown how these processes have worked to establish the authors of the report, the Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, as authorities committed to a particular discourse on teacher quality. This discourse represents teachers and schools as having high standards, but recognises that contextual factors require a rethinking and revitalising of the teaching profession. Such a revitalisation entails the development of national professional standards through dialogue within the profession. The discourse constructs a particular professional identity for teachers, which emphasises teachers’ expertise in teaching and professional practices.

**Stages 3 & 4: shifting from is to ought**

3. Function of the problem in the practice
The third stage of the framework looks at whether the problem has a particular function within the network of social practices. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) describe this stage as shifting from ‘is’ to ‘ought’, involving a ‘shift from explanation of what it is about a practice that leads to the problem, to evaluation of the practice in terms of its problematic results’ (p. 65). This stage of the framework investigates who benefits most from the way social life is organised and, who therefore, might have an interest in the problem not being resolved. The fourth stage identifies possible ways past the obstacles as it looks for previously unrealised possibilities for change in the way social life is organised. It, too, is part of the shift to ‘ought’ as it looks for possible resources for changing things as they are. The following discussion examines the discursive constructions of teacher identities in *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future* in terms of what ought to be. It places particular emphasis on questions about whose interests are being served by the discourse, and on possibilities for alternative discourses.

The discourse on teachers constructed in *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future* clearly linked quality teachers to the economy and to national prosperity. It did so by emphasising the need to revitalise the teaching profession to meet the increasing challenges posed by the knowledge economy at the same time as large numbers of experienced, but aging, teachers leave the teaching workforce. The focus for this revitalisation was placed on teacher professionalism and developing the teacher profession through professional standards. That is, the report constructed a discourse of quality improvement through standards (Sachs 2003). Such a discourse takes a developmental approach to standards in the context of teacher
professional development, learning and career advancement. Professional standards
developed in this context signal a democratic form of professionalism (Ingvarson 1998) and
are most likely to be in the best interests of teachers (Sachs 2003). A revitalised teaching
profession is what ‘ought’ to be and teachers are identified as the resource for this change.

That is, the discourse constructed in Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future defines the
problem of quality in terms of enhanced teacher professionalism, not one of lifting the
standards of teachers. As such it shifts from the culture of blaming and shaming noted earlier,
as it constructs an alternative discourse on teacher quality to that traced in Teachers for the
Twenty-first Century Making the Difference (Department of Employment Education Training
and Youth Affairs 2000). Significantly, less than two years after the release of Australia’s
Teachers: Australia’s Future, the Commonwealth government announced another inquiry
into teacher education. This announcement indicates possible dissatisfaction with the report’s
findings and the possibility that the new inquiry’s findings may construct alternative,
contradictory discourses on teachers and teacher quality, discourses that may serve the
interests of government requirements for increased regulation and control (cf. Thomas in
press 2005).

Stage 5: reflections on the analysis

Finally, the fifth stage involves a reflection on the position from which the analysis is carried
out, that is, on how the analyst is socially positioned. Such a reflection recognises the
relationship between the theoretical practice of the analyst and the practices that are analysed
in order to clarify the perspective of the analyst and to acknowledge the limitations of the
analysis. It is pertinent to this stage of analysis to acknowledge this analyst’s position as an
academic who works within the field of critical policy analysis and whose previous work has
focused on discourses of derision and mistrust about teachers, discourses that resulted in
teachers’ marginalisation in policy-making processes. Consequently, the analysis of
*Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future* was begun with certain assumptions about the
constructions of teacher identity that would be found. It was expected that the report would
construct similar discourses on teacher quality to that constructed in the earlier *Teachers for
the Twenty-first Century*. However, the application of the CDA analytical framework resulted
in the tracing of a very different discourse on teacher quality. This is one of the strengths of
the framework. Another strength is the opportunity it gives to the analyst to overcome the
limitations associated with a reliance on linguistic analysis. Thus, this analysis has
demonstrated the need for CDA to develop new and hybrid blends of analytic techniques that
are suited to a critical analysis of the discourses constructed in policy texts.

*Conclusion*

This paper applied the analytical framework for using CDA to the analysis of the discursive
construction of teacher identities in an educational policy document. In so doing, it
established the discursive nature of policy. That is, it outlined a concept of policy as
discourse that is constructed through hegemonic struggles over policy problems and
solutions. The particular focus of this paper was the policy problem of teacher quality, which
was analysed in terms of the discursive construction of the good teacher. The analysis
showed how teacher quality was defined in relation to the significant contribution that
teachers needed to make to the knowledge economy and to national prosperity as it
constructed a discourse on teachers that emphasised professional development and
revitalisation through professional standards. This discourse marked a shift from previous
discourses of derision and distrust as it outlined what ought to be done to revitalise the
teaching profession.

The application of the analytical framework for critical discourse analysis outlined in this
paper demonstrated the relevance and suitability of this method to critical policy analysis.
The analysis established the complexity of critical discourse analysis and revealed CDA to be
more than a linguistic method of analysis. The analysis drew on an ensemble of social science
techniques to analyse policy discourses on teacher quality and, in so doing, confirmed CDA
to be a transdisciplinary method of analysis. In addition, the paper demonstrated the
complexity inherent in the application of the analytical framework and pointed to the need for
flexibility during the analytic process. Such complexity requires the analyst to move beyond a
stage-by-stage analysis to an analysis that recognises the interrelationships between stages.
Finally, the analysis in this paper demonstrated the dynamic nature of critical discourse
analysis and contributed to the evolvement of CDA as an appropriate method for critical
policy analysis.
References


