PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, PEDAGOGICAL IMPROVEMENT, AND THE CIRCULATION OF POWER

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In this paper we outline key theoretical concerns relating to the professional learning interests of the *Systemic Implications of Pedagogy and Achievement in NSW Public schools* (SIPA) research study. In particular, we draw on the release of the NSW model of pedagogy, *Quality Teaching*, as an opportunity to examine issues of power in professional learning and school reform agendas. That is, the specific context provided by the release of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 Quality Teaching materials (see www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/qualityteaching), designed as they are to support professional learning, allow for focused analysis of both the physical and discursive conditions that impact on pedagogical reform.

In this context, we explore issues such as (1) the operation of the Quality Teaching framework as a regime of truth, (2) discourses surrounding schools' implementation of the Quality Teaching framework, and (3) the circulation of power as teachers engage with the Quality Teaching framework. Working hypotheses are posited and some preliminary data from the SIPA study are analysed in relation to these questions.

As the study progresses, we will also consider implications of this specific case (Quality Teaching and SIPA) for teacher professional learning in general. We will offer some preliminary ideas on how commonly accepted principles of professional development both produce and constrain teacher learning and impact on the accomplishment of reform goals including, in this case, the substantial goals for pedagogical improvement that underpin the Quality Teaching framework.

Quality Teaching as a Regime of Truth

Professional practice in all fields, including teaching, is produced at the intersection of power and knowledge. What is accepted can be inscribed in policy and regulations, or articulated and demonstrated in research literature, or subscribed to formally or informally in local settings. No matter where the views have come from, for various reasons, certain views carry more weight than others and survive longer than others.

Professional practice in education has variously been shaped by views about everything from how to teach various subject matters, to industrial matters about workload and distribution of labor, child protection guidelines about ways of being and interacting with students, syllabus and assessment demands and how they are interpreted, and notions of effective classroom practice.

The concept of 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980) implies that the knowledge valued in a particular field carries with it and authorizes the exercise of power by certain individuals in relation to others. Regimes of truth, according to Feher (1987), (see also Gore, 1993), have both political and ethical dimensions. The political dimensions relate to the relations of power set up between people, while the ethical dimensions relate to the ways in which subscribing to a particular regime of truth requires the exercise of power in relation to one's self.

It is crucial to recognize that the notion of regime of truth does not imply a judgment as to the way truth functions or ought to function. Rather, it is descriptive of the way in which truth and

power operate in tandem. The analysis of Quality Teaching as a regime of truth does not, in and of itself, make the Quality Teaching framework bad or good. We could just as easily have analysed de Bono's thinking hats, or student-centred learning, or differentiated curriculum or any number of other educational views through this same methodology. We have chosen to apply this analysis to QT in order to deepen our understanding teachers' reactions and the pace of change in relation to Quality Teaching. We will, however, offer some comment on the "goodness" of QT, acknowledging from the start that as authors of the framework we clearly see it as "good."

It is worth noting that QT is both a framework and, through the support materials provided, a process of working to deepen understanding of what constitutes high quality pedagogy that will improve educational outcomes for all students. Both of these ways of looking at QT are considered in the following analysis.

Political dimensions

The Differentiations

Quality Teaching, like its analytical predecessors, Authentic Pedagogy and Productive Pedagogy, functions through a system of differentiations that distinguishes authentic from inauthentic, productive from unproductive, and quality from ordinary pedagogy. The distinctions are much more fine-grained however, through the coding system ascribing detail to characterizations of classroom and assessment practice on a scale from 1-5 for, in the case of QT, eighteen separate elements. That is, QT rests on a system of differentiations between, for example, deep and shallow understanding, the participation of all students or only some students, high and low expectations, explicit and implicit criteria, connected and disconnected learning, and so on.

Both the coding process (involving observation of filmed lesson segments and coding using the 1-5 scales) and the resources created to support teachers in using the coding process, allow differentiation of those teachers who have developed an understanding of the specific elements from those who have not yet developed that understanding. When teachers check their codes against those provided with the resources, such differentiation is both possible and, in public settings, likely to occur.

There is a crucial though sometimes overlooked distinction to be made also between the quality of the teacher and the quality of the teaching. It is important to us, to highlight that the framework itself does not distinguish *teachers* from each other, only *teaching practices*. The framework carefully characterizes teach*ing* rather than teach*ers,* thus implying that any teacher is capable of producing quality teaching.

The objectives
In whose interests are these differentiations made? Clarifying the objectives of a particular regime of truth helps to identify the relations of power that are established by that regime. Quality Teaching purports to function in the interests of equity, ostensibly producing better outcomes for all students, deepening their learning, making their learning more meaningful (significant), and improving the quality of the learning environment. QT also purports to function in the interests of teachers through the production of more engaging classrooms and more fulfilling teaching experiences.

Techniques and Practices

The specific techniques for producing Quality Teaching are identified in the support resources. The coding scales themselves identify what Quality Teaching looks like and several "suggestions" are provided to assist teachers in translating the ideas into their own classroom practice. These techniques are not dependent on being a particular kind of teacher or even on working in a particular kind of school or classroom. Rather, they are presented as classroom and assessment practices that can be used in any context, by any kind of teacher. Teachers who prefer quiet independent seat work as well as those who prefer noisy, collaborative or project oriented activity, can access the techniques of quality teaching.

The techniques required for quality teaching are specific but not overly limiting. The support material does not present a simple formula to be adopted by unthinking teachers. Instead, it

depends on the judgments and decisions of teachers, in relation to their own knowledge, disciplinary bases, and understanding of their particular school contexts and of the students with whom they work.

A second set of techniques or practices is elaborated in the "continuing the discussion" documentation that outlines specific ways of working with the support resources. These techniques centre on independent reflection, coding, and collective discussion with colleagues and are posited as general strategies characteristic of learning communities.

Institutions

The institutions which integrate the regime of truth that is Quality Teaching centre on the NSW DET, schools, universities (especially Newcastle), and some external providers of professional development with varying degrees of understanding.

The institutional context for QT presents particular difficulties (and opportunities) given processes in the history of the formation of school culture, teachers' federation, the 'us' and 'them' mentality among teachers in relation to The Department, classroom and professional isolation, and more. NSW public schools also present a context in which ongoing professional learning has been seen as tokenistic, with, until 2004, average annual dollar amounts per teacher provided directly to schools of around $27. The new professional learning budget (around $700 per teacher per year) and policies will potentially change perceptions of professional learning support for teachers. But this will not happen quickly. Another aspect of the institutional integration of QT is the time provided for professional learning. Three school development days and after school staff meetings are far from the ideals espoused in the professional learning literature about ongoing and sustained opportunities for teachers to work together. Furthermore, in schools characterized by professional isolation, where teachers rarely visit each others' classrooms for purposes of observing and discussing each others' teaching, the potential to use the QT framework as a mechanism for coding their own practice is, for many, daunting.

One reason why peer observation is so daunting relates to another aspect of the institutionalization of QT in NSW public schools, namely an historical tendency to associate good teaching with individuals. Awards for teaching excellence, and professional teaching standards imply that teachers, the embodied individuals, are the placeholders of good teaching. The QT framework begins from a different premise, one that acknowledges the capacity of all teachers to teach well (just as it works from the premise that all students can learn). Stages of professional accomplishment, as outlined in many standards frameworks, distinguish teachers from each other. Under such conditions, teachers can easily begin to see themselves in rather singular ways, and act accordingly. QT implies instead that any teacher can create a fabulous assessment task or design and deliver an excellent lesson.

Reception and understanding of Quality Teaching is also influenced by its institutional affiliation with a university. The research base underpinning QT provides a form of legitimacy whereby the authority (or power) of the academy bestows a status of true knowledge on the framework (see Ladwig and King, 2003). Its development at The University of Newcastle and its ancestry in prior research, including the highly regarded "authentic pedagogy" from the US and influential "productive pedagogy" in Australia, add to the legitimacy and authority of the initiative. On the other hand, some teachers are skeptical about what academic research can offer the 'real world' of classroom practice (Gore and Gitlin, 2004). In either case, part of the way in which QT functions as a form of knowledge is linked to its university association.

Formation of knowledge or rationalization

This institutionalisation of QT means that its reception varies markedly among individual teachers and schools. In places where "good teaching" is identified with teachers' bodies rather than with teachers' practices, QT is perhaps more easily rationalized as 'something we already do' because we are good teachers. In places where teaching practice is seen as dynamic and open to change, the knowledge formed about QT is more likely to engage teachers in serious processes of reflection and refinement of what they do.

While some teachers and others have expressed concern about the potential misuse of coding processes, the rationalization of knowledge about QT is that the coding process is a means to

deep understanding. Those who are most afraid of QT coding are likely to be those who see good teaching as the province of good teachers. When it is understood and accepted that any teacher can produce good teaching, the fear of coding should reduce.

The need for QT itself is explained as ensuring that children do better and schools are more productive in the eyes of students, their parents and, indeed, their teachers. Such rationalization is, of course, used to justify most education policies. The SIPA research hopes to demonstrate rather than simply assert the efficacy of QT.

Ethical dimensions

The ethical substance

Any regime of truth requires those who subscribe to it to style or discipline themselves in particular ways. The aspects of self considered problematic within QT are not teaching style, not age or amount of teaching experience, not sex or race of the teacher, not a teacher's capacity to deliver quality teaching, since there is no conception of innate capacity. Instead, the practices advocated by QT are manifestations of what teachers are trying to achieve and the materials are designed to build teachers' capacity to more consistently deliver high quality pedagogy. If self-styling is required, it relates to the teacher's expectations, knowledge of subject matter, and kind of planning. The four questions:
  ➢ What do you want your students to learn?
  ➢ Why does that learning matter?
  ➢ What do you want your students to produce?
  ➢ How well do you expect them to do it?
(which have taken on a life of their own) require teachers to think more carefully about what their students will learn and what they will produce. QT doesn't in any narrow way require teachers to spend more time planning, or to use any particular teaching technique more frequently, or to become more or less authoritarian. It does require teachers to think more deeply and perhaps more boldly about what they can and should try to achieve with their students.

Mode of subjection
The self-styling that is implied by QT is done in the name of improving one's performance/doing one's job/teaching better. In QT, teaching better relates directly to improving outcomes for all students by increasing the intellectual quality and significance of learning experiences and ensuring that the environment supports student learning.

Techniques of self-styling
The main technique of self-styling required within QT is that teachers need to subject themselves to the forms of thinking, planning, delivering and reflecting that are implied by and outlined in the support documents. A possible strength of the model is that it quite deliberately and explicitly does not require teachers to change who they are and their fundamental ways of being in classrooms with students. Rather, it requires a change of mind-set or approach to what they are trying to achieve. There is a form of disciplining of self (King,) required in planning lessons and tasks that have a tighter conceptual focus or that directly articulate what students are to do to produce high quality work or to think about how best to link lessons or tasks with students' own worlds and interests outside of the school. There is also some self-styling needed in, for example, working differently with students to purposefully produce more sustained and substantive conversations or to consistently try to communicate high expectations of all students. There are no limits on which kinds of teachers can access these techniques, except perhaps that only those teachers who are willing to work to improve their own teaching will be willing to have a go at these forms of self-styling. We reiterate that QT was designed as a framework for all teachers.

Given the support materials that propose collaborative activity around coding and planning, QT also requires self-disciplining in working with others. Designed to support teacher professional learning in pedagogy, the QT processes require teachers to listen to each others' interpretations of the elements in relation to particular lesson segments or assessment tasks and suggests collective planning. This collective activity in relation to QT is perhaps one of the major differences between QT and other models of pedagogy that assume the teacher as individual practitioner.

The Telos

All regimes have a *telos*, a kind of being to which we aspire becoming. Put simply, within the regime of QT, the being to which teachers aspire is the teacher who consistently delivers high levels of quality teaching.

Summary

How is this regime of pedagogy, or school reform in general, different from others (which leads us back to the "goodness" discussion)? Most pedagogical reform attempts involve central mandates that are imposed (or try to be imposed) on teachers. QT entails both a (weak) central mandate (through its presentation as a "discussion" and schools' invitation to engage with the materials) coupled with attention to professional community, which can only be built locally as a context for teachers' learning and implementation of the model. There is almost an intended awkward intersection of top and bottom, official and unofficial knowledges, that requires (1) instructional and distributed leadership that not many do not know how to do, and (2) teacher collaboration and joint inquiry which directly subverts the individualistic culture developed out of the industrial model of schooling.

QT is a regime of truth/game of power that minimizes (oppressive) domination, both at the teacher learning level and teacher-student level. It promotes a new form of subjectivity for teachers that they share in inventing. That is, domination is minimized in the clarity, transparency, and accessibility of the QT framework and processes. Instead of feedback on teaching that relies on idiosyncratic views of what constitutes good pedagogy, QT provides a basis for shared language and discussion. The framework is not one that attempts to "de-skill" teachers, but rather one that rests on teachers' capacities to learn through collaborative endeavour. For these reasons, among others, QT is a "good" regime. Whether teachers experience it in this way, however, will depend greatly on the intersection of power and knowledge at the local level, taking into account the analysis provided above, such as the influence of institutional factors.

Discourses surrounding schools' implementation of QT

The ways in which teachers and others in schools talk about QT provides insight into the formation of discourses surrounding QT's operation. Our engagement with teachers in many different contexts since the release of the QT Discussion Paper, indicate the following common statements:

- ❖ We've heard it all before, there is nothing new in QT
- ❖ It's not going to last, it's just the latest thing
- ❖ We don't *have* to do it, so why would we bother
- ❖ The is the best thing the Department has done in years, it's refreshing and validating
- ❖ It's changed how I teach and how I think about teaching:
- ❖ It's really useful and practical and provides teachers with a common language
- ❖ QT is too hard to understand, too overwhelming
- ❖ It's too hard to do it all
- ❖ We're already doing it
- ❖ We don't need it, we're already going well and getting good results.
- ❖ Our school has other priorities
- ❖ We don't have time to engage in it, but we're interested

Analysing these statements through the regime of truth lens helps us to understand them and to understand how to work with them. As one example of the analysis that we will continue throughout the SIPA project, the idea that teachers are "already doing QT" is consistent with a view of good teaching as embodied rather than practised. One way of working with this argument, made against engaging with QT, is to highlight QT as a set of practices that can improve the performance of even the best teacher. Decoupling teaching and teachers may be an important strategy.

The response that there is "nothing new" about QT can be understood as partly shaped by a discursive field in education that privileges innovation, even over quality. As another example,

responses relating to the level of perceived "compulsion" to engage in QT are further indication of power's circulation. Survey data collected on an annual basis, as well as interviews with teachers in the SIPA project, will allow these issues to be explored in greater depth.

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Circulation of power

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Foucault's notion of power posits power as something that circulates rather than as a possession of particular people or groups. Some key issues surrounding the circulation of power as QT is implemented and teachers engage with it include the following:

The power of the messenger
We have heard many reports on the knowledge (or lack thereof) of QT presenters and hence the reaction of teachers following initial exposure. As a model of pedagogy made available in a large system of public education, with limited personnel support in the implementation phase, it is not surprising that there are vast differences in the perceived quality of presenters.

The perceived integrity/credibility of the presenter is also a factor. Any presenter who has "been out of schools" for any length of time is considered by some teachers to lack the authority to speak about classrooms and working with students. This perception applies both to university academics and to Departmental consultants.

Other interviewees have spoken of the passion and skill of presenters and the important effects of initial introductions to QT in determining its uptake by their staff.

School culture

Where teachers engage in coding of each other's practice, Foucault's idea of the confessional is expanded to schools as teachers deprivatize, reveal their pedagogy to others, have it assessed through coding—in what can be seen as a technology to transform oneself. It is still the renunciation of the self. Yet in a somewhat unique way, it is not obedience (self-subjugation) that is paramount but a committing to the model by redefining it as a schoolwide (i.e., collective, not individual) focus.

Our experience in working with schools outside of the SIPA project indicates very different levels of engagement with QT in different settings. This variation in part seems to relate to the particular culture of schools and school education areas.

The survey data will allow us to explore the extent to which the different responses to QT of different teachers are linked to any teacher characteristics such as years of experience, sex, or primary/secondary school location. Conclusions will be drawn carefully. For instance, if there was a correlation between years of experience and the view that QT is unlikely to impact on schools, we would consider that such a view might relate as much to past experience with DET reform attempts as it does to views about the QT framework itself.

Some schools have developed a stronger culture of ongoing reflection and learning and collaboration than others. Moreover, particularly in secondary schools, the openness may exist at a Faculty level while other faculties show antipathy.

Teacher trust
Interpersonal relations also seem to impact on uptake and engagement with QT. In some schools, teachers are coding and discussing each others' practice. In others, this activity is inconceivable because the relationships among teachers are not sufficiently trusting/too strained (or perhaps there is not the level of confidence in their own teaching that they are willing to share?) Again, this can operate at a school level, but there are likely to be significant differences within schools. Leadership plays a role in these relations as well. Where the principal or another member of the executive is seen as too imposing, or too demanding, some resistance to QT may relate more to their personal relationship than to views on QT.

The circulation of power in the implementation of QT will be further explored through the survey data collected for the SIPA study. For instance, we will be able to tell whether teachers who

responded that they felt "forced to participate in QT" also reported a lower levels of understanding of QT and less enthusiasm for QT than their peers who did not feel forced.

Hypotheses

As this analysis deepens, a number of hypotheses will be developed and tested during the SIPA project. The analysis provided above has produced our first hypothesis, namely that where good teaching is understood as being about practices rather than bodies, there is likely to be a stronger receptivity to the idea of change in pedagogy as advocated in QT, and there are likely to be greater improvements in pedagogy over time.

As a corollary, the more systems of standards rely on credentialing and classifying teachers at various levels or stages of professional development, the greater the coupling with teaching. Such approaches to teacher development are, in our view, based on a failure to understand power's operation. Bodies are not placeholders for assumed power. In the view we are building here, good teaching depends on what teachers do.

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