

'PLAYING IT SAFE'

QUALITY TEACHING IN EXPERT TEACHER CLASSROOMS

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

Signed: _____

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Abbreviations/Acronyms

AGQTP – Australian Government Quality Teaching Project

AITSL – Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

NSWBoS – New South Wales Board of Studies

CBAM – Concern Based Adoption Model

CP – Community of Practice

CPA – Classroom Pedagogical Alignment

NSWDET – New South Wales Department of Education and Training

DEC – New South Wales Department of Education and Communities

HSC – Higher School Certificate

HSIE – Human Society and Its Environment

ICT – Information and Computer Technology

MCEETYA – Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs

NPM – New Public Management

NSW – New South Wales

NSWIT – New South Wales Institute of Teachers

NSWQTM – New South Wales Quality Teaching Model

OBE – Outcomes-based education

QSRLS – Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study

SES – Socio-economic Status

SC – School Certificate

SIPA – Systemic Implications of Pedagogy and Achievement in NSW Public Schools

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

TARS – Teacher Assessment Review Schedule

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to use the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSWDET) *Quality Teaching* model (NSWQTM) to assess the variation in teaching in secondary Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) Key Learning Area (KLA) classrooms and to explain the variations in the teaching observed from a participants' perspective. Overall, the findings indicated that the HSIE teachers in this study appeared to be 'teaching defensively' (by analogy with 'driving defensively') or 'playing it safe'.

The mixed method '*explanatory sequential design*' provided an innovative approach to researching classroom practice. This design involved two distinct data collection and analysis phases and an interpretation phase. The first phase of the study was quantitative and assessed the variation in teaching in eight Stage 4/5 History and Geography classrooms from five NSW public secondary schools using the NSWQTM descriptors. The second phase was qualitative with formal, semi-structured interviews exploring the teacher participants' perceptions of influences on their classroom practice. Both data sets were analysed and reported separately.

The first phase findings indicated that the general qualities of good pedagogy, as measured by the NSWQTM, were not evident to any great extent in these Stage 4/5 HSIE classrooms. A major contribution of this study to research was the identification of a '*typical HSIE pedagogy*' with a statistical upper ('*ceiling*') and lower limit ('*floor*') in the coded pedagogy.

The second phase of this study investigated these HSIE teachers' perceptions of influences on their classroom practice and identified four '*domains of influence*' as emerging from their responses. These included their own perceptions of '*good teaching*', teacher professional learning, and educational leadership across schools and at a state and district/regional level and '*Classroom Pedagogical Alignment*'.

In the final interpretation phase, the second phase findings provided a qualitative basis to draw inferences and links to explain the classroom observation findings. From this comparison, it appeared that the '*domains of influence*' impacted these HSIE teachers' classroom instructional decisions and, subsequently, the pedagogy observed. In the broader context, these findings have implications for policy makers about what is needed for the NSWQTM and for good teaching in general, to become part of day-to-day classroom practice.