Classroom teacher effectiveness research: a conceptual critique

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Teacher effectiveness research now informs the rationale of much Australian education policy aimed at redressing student under-achievement. The approach draws a ‘straight line’ between teacher practice and student outcomes, ‘controlling’ for and ultimately dismissive of other possible influences. The paper calls into question this conception of teaching–learning relations, particularly the extent to which teaching practice can be reasonably quantified and improvements in students’ academic achievement can be solely attributed to and/or sole responsibility placed on the pedagogic strategies employed by teachers. Drawing on the theoretical resources of Foucault and Bourdieu, the paper argues further that teacher effectiveness research is flawed in both means and ends. It concludes that in its ranking of student and teacher performance, such research actually works against the purposes of education; specifically, authentic teaching and learning.

Introduction

This paper explores the problematical nature of positivist teacher effectiveness research for the evaluation of teacher performance, specifically in relation to their classroom instruction. It employs a critical theoretical framework and perspective, informed by an admixture of the theoretical resources of Foucault and Bourdieu. The specific intent of the paper is to highlight the problematical character of much teacher effectiveness research and to question and contest its contemporary utilisation as an evaluative tool and technique of analysis for the documentation of classroom teaching practice and student achievement.

Maintenance of current school systems—in Australia, the UK, the US and other OECD nations—particularly as they involve government school teachers and include aims and goals for them as employees, occurs in a world increasingly at odds with an explicit ideological approach to education (Mouffe, 1993, 2007) and an equally ‘value-neutral’ education policy agenda constructed largely through self-named evidence-based quantitative research (Lingard, 2011). In drawing attention to teacher effectiveness approaches, we acknowledge that there are distinctive points of difference between the various educational jurisdictions in the maintenance and governance of their respective school systems and the implementation of ‘effectiveness (get better results)’ (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p. 21) strategies. For example, in the US, teacher effectiveness research is used to justify teacher pay rewards in the form of bonuses or pay sanctions/demotions, and in firing staff and closing schools (see Ravitch, 2011). Such specific teacher effectiveness data and rewards/sanctions have

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been raised as possibilities in Australia but are not yet evident. The emphasis in the UK is more on school effectiveness research (see Gorard, 2009). Even with the emphasis on teacher effectiveness in the Australian context, there is also a school effectiveness approach evident in the MySchool website, a federal Australian government initiative that displays student achievement data for all schools. Well-considered critique of this approach is already emerging (see Lingard, 2010). In this paper we expand the critique to include a focus on teacher effectiveness accounts.

The theoretical frameworks of Foucault and Bourdieu are important in this context, in providing ways in which to work across contemporary issues of classroom teacher effectiveness research in order to unveil and highlight the problematical nature of contemporary schooling practice in neo-liberal political and economic times. Indeed, the relevance of Foucault and Bourdieu emerges as one traverses the specific ‘techniques of accountability, measurement and management’ (Marshall, 2000, p. 230), which are representative of the dominant economic and political power bloc that increasingly influences educational matters.

In this discursive and critical analysis, which employs a Foucauldian and Bourdieuian theoretical framework, we examine the problem of teacher effectiveness research and what this says about student achievement and about its claims to objectivist science as a tool of inquiry for observing and measuring the practical. Foucault’s theoretical contributions focus this critical inquiry on specific technologies of practice in order to centre and distinctively enunciate what practices produce, whereas Bourdieu’s theoretical tools enable a consideration of the practice(s) of technological observation illustrating what produces particular practices. This represents a decisive difference between these theorists. Importantly, it signifies a distinguishing element in their theoretical approaches. A unique mediated advantage is gained in their combination. First, it enables an examination and analysis of the practical that is mindful of the organised way in which individuals—classroom teachers—are made available for observation and narration. Secondly, and crucially, the role and action of a theory of practice can be ascertained enclosing strategies of theory exposing relevant and implicit rules and postulates. In short, the Foucault–Bourdieu theoretical panorama offers the critical theorist a form of pragmatism that allows for and considers ‘modernist elements of the present’ (Lingard et al., 2003, p. 13).

The paper is in two broad sections. The first discusses the specific and contemporary model of value-added teacher effectiveness research. A discursive analysis and elaboration of the model of value-added forms of teacher effectiveness are undertaken and articulated. This reveals the dominance of policy-driven approaches to classroom-based instruction, which equate student achievement and teaching practice. In this accounting of teaching–learning relations, measurable definitions of teaching practice distinctively elevated in status and import, eliminate and under-sell qualitative aspects. An injustice is enacted between the theoretical displays and outcomes of value-added research, portrayed through an elaborately furnished and mathematically derived planned artifice of inquiry, and the complex interactions embedded in teaching and learning. The second part of the paper broadens out understandings of the teaching–learning relationship in ways that problematise linear and ‘closed’ accounts of classroom instruction and student learning. The paper ends with an account of a
possible way forward. It puts the case for the affirmation of student outcomes based on authentic and powerful learning and presents an argument for their evaluation.

Technologies of positioning and the practice(s) of technological observation

Providing a critique of classroom teacher effectiveness universals stems from scepticism about forms of methodological puritanism. The art of positivist classroom teacher effectiveness research is a particular way of analysing classroom instruction, and extending the inquiry to the relationship between forms of teaching practice as instruction and student learning/academic achievement. The site of veridiction, taken as the school classroom but expressed through a well-structured and planned ‘natural mechanism’ (Foucault, 2008, p. 32) of positivist classroom teacher effectiveness research, constitutes a ‘standard of truth’ (Foucault, 2008, p. 32) that enables discernment, thus leading to and producing generalisations about teaching practices. This enables one to ‘falsify and verify’ (Foucault, 2008, p. 32) particular forms of teaching practice based upon expectations of what is seen to offer the best approach for enhancing the learning outcomes of students. Consequently, one could argue that classroom teacher effectiveness research identifies and determines a ‘good’, ‘competent’ or ‘effective’ teacher based on or according to a pre-determined and tested/modelled ‘truth’. In saying this, we acknowledge the importance of teacher and learner agency and recognise that teachers constantly ‘balance requirements to meet benchmarks and improve standards while promoting and fostering creative teaching and learning’ (Burnard & White, 2008, p. 668). We agree that teachers ‘self-present as decision-making individuals with a clear professional plan and purpose that guide those decisions’ (Moore et al., 2002, p. 554; see also Gale & Densmore 2003, pp. 36–53). Nevertheless, the veridictional role of classroom teacher effectiveness research provides the basis upon which it can ‘command, dictate and prescribe’ (Foucault, 2008, p. 32) pedagogic mechanisms of teaching and learning on which education policy is articulated. The tendency for the ‘emergence of a centralised pedagogy (or ‘one best way’ approach to lesson delivery) potentially diminishes the creative space within which teachers exercise professional judgement’ (Burnard & White, 2008, p. 669). In other words, centralised teaching approaches tend to strip teachers of their pedagogic authority (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990). This forms a core and important albeit questionable component of contemporary neo-liberal education policy-making, for it enables governmental processes of action, based on contested albeit tested models of educational practice.

Schematically devised versions of teaching practice, the ideal and ultimate aim of classroom teacher effectiveness research, rely on complex scientific delineations and processes of teaching and learning. A standardised and ‘legible and predictable’ (Stickney, 2009, p. 199) focus for classroom and education system action is a driving mechanism. Student learning outcomes and academic achievement measured and evaluated through quality assurance techniques and manipulations of teaching and learning, remove the ‘deep contextualization’ (Stickney, 2009, p. 214) that accompanies and escorts classroom action. A cause and effect model of teaching and learning adopted mainly for education system accountability purposes of control, meets the political imperative of an imposed and rationalised order of conformity. Indeed, to speak about teacher effectiveness is to acknowledge the influence of the school...
effectiveness movement. As the dominant and related forerunner, school effectiveness research provides the foundational attributes required of teacher effectiveness research that signify its acceptance and credibility. Wrigley (2004) outlines four specific aspects of school effectiveness research that ‘provide a structure for examining school effectiveness’; two of these, ‘(i) a mechanistic causality, e.g. a belief in one-to-one correspondences’ and ‘(ii) a failure to examine environmental influences and effects when tracing causal relationships within a system’ (Wrigley, 2004, p. 229), typify teacher effectiveness research. Their relatedness lies in ‘methodological and contextual reductionism’ (Wrigley, 2004, p. 229), the pre-eminent and guiding force inherent in research methods that usually hold a ‘variety of other factors constant in order to examine quantitatively the relationship between one chosen input factor and a particular output’ (Wrigley, 2004, p. 229). Moreover, their convergence is fixed and dependent on two significant developments, one historical and ‘relates to research and theorizing about the capacity of schools to make a difference’ (Lingard et al., 1998, p. 86). The other development relates to the ‘changing political and economic conditions and emergent state structures that frame contemporary politics of education’ (Lingard et al., 1998, p. 86). Notwithstanding this, the ‘available discourses on what might count as institutional, administrative and pedagogical “performance” and “effectiveness” in schools, and corporate managerialism as the dominant approach to the reconstruction of secular schooling in the postmodern state’ (Lingard et al., 1998, p. 86), signify their relatedness and their contemporary relevance and importance.

The influence of education policy-makers has re-cast the problem of classroom teacher effectiveness, by focusing attention on student learning and, in particular, academic underperformance. Value-added research makes the case for the evaluation of an effective teacher by ‘offering a quantifiable methodology’ (Imig & Imig, 2006, p. 10), the statistical and theoretical basis of which resides in utilising the test performance history of individual pupils and measuring expected gain scores over a defined period of time. In broad terms, to add value may be defined as an ‘attempt to indicate the educational value that the school adds over and above that which could be predicted given the backgrounds and prior attainments of the students within the school’ (Hill, 1995, p. 10). A change in emphasis from school effectiveness to teacher effectiveness refines ‘influences’ on student achievement. The classroom teacher and their instruction have prominence. This development stems from the quantitative comparison of school effects and teacher effects. Scheerens (1993, p. 20), for example, states that:

... teacher and classroom variables account for more of the variance in pupil achievement than school variables. Also, in general, more powerful classroom level variables are found that account for between-class variance than school level variables in accounting for between-school variance.

Other writers (see Muijs, 2006; Hattie, 2009) in the school effectiveness field reiterate these findings. In short, value-added teacher effectiveness research is thought to be more revealing of the ‘detrimental impact of poor teachers on pupil performance’ (Imig & Imig, 2006, p. 10). Specifically, the plotted test scores of pupils exposed to several consecutive years of ineffective teachers shift downwards whereas the plotted test scores of pupils exposed to effective teachers shift upwards. Interestingly, recent developments in valued-added analysis have given rise to contextual value-added
(CVA) research. This is not the contextual explanation for student under-achievement imagined by Mills and Gale (2011). Instead, predicated on the value-added research ‘model’, CVA has its basis in and is touted as an improvement to ‘simple valued-added’ (Department for Education, 2012a, p. 1) analyses. The alleged improvement of CVA ‘not only measures progress based on prior attainment but also adjusts to account for the impact of certain external factors which are known to have an impact on the progress of individual pupils’ (A technical guide to contextual value-added 2007 and 2008; DfE, 2012b, p. 2). Furthermore:

This means that CVA gives a much fairer statistical measure of the effectiveness of a school and provides a solid basis for comparisons. Nevertheless, no single measure of performance can tell the whole story about a school’s effectiveness and CVA must not be viewed in isolation. Attainment data continues to play an important role in painting the full picture of a school’s performance. (Department for Education, 2012b, p. 2)

It is worth noting that the ‘power of CVA is that it is based on statistical relationships’ (Department for Education, 2012b, p. 3).

Evident here is the underlying assumption of value-added research in education, that schools and teachers have direct or ‘causal’ effects on the learning outcomes of students. As a tool for accountability, two types of effects can be estimated (Raudenbush, 2004, p. 121). The first may be of more interest to parents and is reflective of their child’s potential outcome in a particular school compared with the outcome(s) their child may attain if they were in another school. Although, Rowe and Windle (2012) and Windle (2012) have shown that middle class and working class parents in Australia pay little attention to official student performance outcomes when choosing between schools. The second effect is perhaps of more interest to policy-makers and school system administrators. It measures or estimates the difference in potential outcome(s) of a student within a particular school, when school practice P is in operation as compared to the potential outcome(s) of the same student within a particular school when school practice P+ is in operation. The problematical issue here is that school and/or teacher practice is often difficult to define and observe (Raudenbush, 2004, p. 123) and hence difficult to attribute to student outcomes. This type of ‘value-added’ teacher effectiveness research holds school personnel to account as it specifically focuses on practice rather than variables over which school personnel have little control, such as the socioeconomic circumstances of the school’s community or hierarchical post-compulsory curriculum models ‘particularly in high-stakes subjects’ (Teese & Polesel, 2003, p. 99) that emphasise the ‘routine of classroom instruction and testing, private study, homework, personal responsibility and competitiveness’ (Teese & Polesel, 2003, p. 99). In these circumstances, teacher effectiveness research tends to focus on those aspects of school and teacher practice that can be reasonably identified and measured and dismissive of other aspects of teacher practice, or indeed broader contextual influence, which is less amenable to objectivist research claims.

Bourdieu says of objectivist modes of research method and inquiry that they attempt to destroy the ‘vagueness and the mist of imprecision and uncertainty’ (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 18); in this case, teaching practice and classroom action. Reason, which ‘aspires to ground itself, proceeding by rigorous deduction from principles’ (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 18), often fails to adequately account for the practical
world that is the public-school classroom. Far from identifying a distinctive rela-
tionship between the practices of a particular classroom teacher practitioner and
student learning, the value-added theoretical framework with claims of ‘mixed-
method methodology’ (Ballou et al., 2004, p. 5) expressed in terms of mathematical
vector models of fixed and random effects, is really a study of the act of objectifica-
tion. Rubin et al. (2004) make a similar point. In a review of value-added classroom
teacher effectiveness models, they suggest that ‘there is a focus on the estimation
techniques rather than the definition of the estimand, i.e., the target of estimation’
(p. 104). There are various reasons given for this but the over-riding defence of
value-added models of teacher effectiveness is in the justification of statistical ran-
domness, particularly in terms of student and school selection. Advocates of positiv-
ist teacher effectiveness research make the claim that the ‘value-added method
measures gain from a student’s own starting point’ and thus it ‘implicitly controls
for socioeconomic status and other background factors to the extent that their influ-
ence on the post-test is already reflected in the pre-test score’ (Ballou et al., 2004,
p. 38). This would seem an assumption without much validity or justification. It
assumes that unobserved and unobservable influences—other than the influence of
school and teacher—have no more or less influence from one year (or test) to
another.

Advocates of value-added models of teacher effectiveness acknowledge the poten-
tial damage that may be inflicted upon the standards movement in education if
classroom teacher practitioners ‘are being held accountable for student achievement
without due regard for factors beyond their control’ (Ballou et al., 2004, p. 37).
Indeed, value-added teacher effectiveness researchers often refer to assumptions,
predictions and estimations made, particularly in terms of teacher effects. It is also
the case that teacher effectiveness research of this kind often denotes a numerical
value of zero to co-variances. This aspect of value-added models blurs any distinc-
tion between variances. In other words, it assumes a direct and unimpeded linear
fit between teaching and learning, which informs the formulation of rules of regu-
ularity and confers numerical and indeed an ‘anthropological description on the the-
oretical model constructed in order to account for practices’ (Bourdieu, 1977,
p. 29). Furthermore, value-added models of classroom teacher effectiveness as the-
tories of action merely represent through the ‘execution of the model (in the twofold
sense of norm and scientific construct)’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 29) an ‘imaginary
anthropology which objectivism engenders when, with the aid of words’ (Bourdieu,
2004, p. 29)—or, in the case of value-added teacher effectiveness research, words
and mathematical equations—‘obscure the distinction between the things of logic
and the logic of things’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 30). Teacher effectiveness research
thus presents the ‘objective meaning of practices or works as the subjective purpose
of the action of the producers of those practices of works’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 30).
Take, for example, the following from a mixed-model method of value-added
research where models seeking to evaluate teacher effectiveness are applied in the form:

\[ y = Xb + Zu + e \]
where \( b \) is a vector of fixed effects, \( u \) is a vector of random (teacher) effects, \( X \) and \( Z \) are incidence matrices (indicating students assigned to particular teachers, subjects and years), and \( e \) is a vector of random error terms (Ballou et al., 2004, p. 41). Description of teacher effects and random student components occurs through an elaborately organised series of mathematical computations or matrices. The description of teacher effects and random student components is written as:

\[
\text{var}(u) = D, \text{var}(e) = R, \text{Var}(Zu + e) = V = ZDZ' + R
\]

\( D \) is assumed to be diagonal. Co-variances are zero, even within-teacher co-variances across years and subjects. \( R \) is block-diagonal, with unrestricted within-student covariance and zeros in the off-diagonal blocks. Estimates of \( b \) and \( u \) are obtained as solutions to the mathematical system configured below:

\[
\begin{align*}
[X' R^{-1} X] & \quad [b] = [X' R^{-1} y] \\
[Z' R^{-1} X + D] & \quad [u] = [Z' R^{-1} y]
\end{align*}
\]

The solution for the effects of a teacher on individual student learning is thus given by:

\[
U^* = DZ' V^{-1} (y - Xb^*) = E(u/y)
\]

\( U^* \) is known as a shrinkage estimator. An elaborate explanation of \( U \) and other components of equation (3) follow (see Ballou et al., 2004, p. 42).

Nevertheless, a mathematised schema of pedagogical evaluation supposedly depicting effective teaching practice does not imply or indeed constitute an uncontestable or indisputable analytical framework. The ‘formation of forms of knowledge and practices of veridiction’ (Foucault, 2011, p. 42) by school and teacher effectiveness research, provide for a ‘government of self’ (Foucault, 2011, p. 37) that is operationally a governmentality of teaching practice. For the school as an institution it means constant evaluations of student attendance figures (enrolments), and an attention to arbitrarily contrived numerical comparisons of school performance (standards) within and across geographic regions or zones and across a State. It is also characterised by attention to curriculum policy and its development, and here is where we suggest positivist forms of classroom teacher effectiveness research should be challenged and contested. The challenge for teachers is to reclaim their ‘pedagogic authority and the relative autonomy of the agency commissioned to exercise it’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 12) and to move beyond a ‘self-limiting governmental reason’ (Foucault, 2008, p. 37) that they impose on themselves as a form of self-governance. Indeed, reified teacher effectiveness metrics are constructed for the observation and quantification of what in the main are cognitive student skill sets: levels of literacy and numeracy. Yet the new economic order requires a comprehensive range of skills and abilities that simple cause-effect processes of estimation and examination cannot adequately capture. In our view, an alternative approach for the evaluation of student learning outcomes that is, first, thorough and inclusive and, second, broad in scope and outlook, would offer a new
direction and way forward. We return in the conclusion to an outline of such an approach.

**Classroom instruction and student learning outcomes**

The attachment to a type of ‘naïve naturalism’ (Foucault, 2008, p. 67) expressed by the mathematical and scientific account of positivist classroom teacher effectiveness research and constructed models of inquiry, define the market of educational exchange between teacher and student by ‘thinking of it as a sort of given of nature’ (Foucault, 2008, p. 120). Yet, as those engaged in classroom teaching practice—classroom teacher practitioners—can attest, teaching and learning are definitely not ‘givens’, and are not easily documented, verified or explained. The ‘vagueness’ (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 18) of teaching and learning cannot be easily translated into formulae of mathematical origin and description, such as those above, nor can it be debated by bare and seemingly donnish governmental claims to certainty expressing a teleological endpoint about student learning and academic achievement. Despite this, maintenance of the current order of school systems and the primary concern with student under-achievement and classroom instruction as the decisive means to enhance learning outcomes, are framed by an education policy agenda constructed largely through self-named evidence-based quantitative research. It is for this reason that a closer inspection is needed of the relationship between classroom instruction and student learning outcomes in order to develop a broader and deeper sense of what teacher effectiveness research seeks and claims to measure and evaluate.

The contemporary neo-liberal emphasis on the standardisation of education depicted by outcomes-based educational measures is central to policy reform strategies, particularly those that are unique to classroom instruction and student achievement. The aim of the teacher effectiveness researcher is to observe and assess teaching practice and student learning. But significantly, systemic neo-liberal audits of classroom instruction and student achievement are a prominent display of the success or failure of schools, their students and teachers. Indeed, teacher effectiveness research limits its depictions of classroom practice and student achievement to the knowledge gained about teaching and learning from standardised external tests attending to ‘limited aspects of schooling, such as student achievement in mathematical and reading literacy, exit examination results, or intended teacher classroom behaviour’ (Salhberg, 2007, p. 151).

To this extent, the majority of teacher effectiveness studies in terms of classroom instruction can be classified into four categories (Campbell et al., 2003, p. 348). All of them use the contribution of the teacher to the learning outcome(s) and academic achievement of students as the specific and principal criterion of measurement. Core questions that the approach seeks to answer include: What are the traits and characteristics of effective teachers? What must an effective teacher carry to the classroom in terms of requisite skills and knowledge, background, and experience? What do effective teachers do in the classroom? How would one know an effective teacher? (Imig & Imig, 2006, p. 5).

Importantly, a significant aspect that is overlooked in debates of student achievement, classroom instruction and teacher effectiveness is the need to examine how
individual schools are organised in order to maximise student learning outcomes. For example, the contemporary policy-making emphasis on teacher centrality overlooks school leadership and how the roles and actions of individual school leaders impact on student achievement (Lingard *et al.*, 2003). The established models of teacher effectiveness (see Cheng & Tsui, 1999) are central to this argument, for they are manifestly expressions of a teacher’s capacity to carry out implied tasks devoid of imposed managerial constraints. Yet, each of the models takes for granted that schools exist in a perfect and established school-system; pure, intact, untouched and unaffected by contextual influences.

Bourdieu reminds us that a theoretical schema that seeks to model the practical scheme ‘reconstructed by the analyst, lets slip everything that makes the temporal reality of practice in process’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 81) a possibility. Indeed, Bourdieu (1990, p. 82) suggests that there is ‘no chance of giving a scientific account of practice—and in particular of the properties it derives from the fact that it unfolds in time—unless one is aware of the effects that scientific practice produces by mere totalisation’. Nevertheless, scientific accounts of teaching practice and classroom instruction and what represents effective teaching dominate contemporary thoughts on the work of schooling and pedagogical action. However, the problematic of them is often understated. Problematical aspects of contemporary schooling practice, including the ‘centrality of the teacher’ (Larsen, 2010, p. 207) their classroom instruction and their effect intended or otherwise on student learning outcomes, can be articulated by focusing on why and how these particular features of the work of schooling dominate current education policy-making. Central to the argument is the extent to which teacher effectiveness research acts as a Foucauldian regime of truth, equipped with its own particular discourse and mode(s) of operation. A vital and important characteristic remains the veridical exposé of the subjugated classroom teacher based upon simplistic determinations of cognitive skill sets. (See also Walker—2008, p. 273—on the reductionism of the skills paradigm in higher education.)

The application of a regime of truth as an analytical tool for the critical examination of models of classroom instruction that reportedly document and discursively describe effective teaching practices, essentially conveys a connection between power and knowledge, which in turn is produced by and produces a specific and characteristic science of teaching practice; in Foucauldian terms, ‘a specific art of government’ (Gore, 1993, p. 55). The critical application of a regime of truth to the problem of classroom teacher effectiveness that reports upon effective models of classroom instruction, becomes a question of ‘government’ and of governance and/or control. Contemporary neo-liberal and neo-conservative exertions of economic and political rationality on public education policy-making produce ‘self-disciplining or self-styling’ (Gore, 1993, p. 55) modes of operation within classroom teaching practice. Models of classroom instruction based on objectified and positivist accounts of what is considered effective teaching practice rely on a ‘technology of the self’, actualised and acted out, on and through the body of the classroom teacher practitioner. Direct instruction, interactive teaching and constructivist teaching, as models of teaching practice, all exhibit the embodied involvement of the classroom teacher, through which they are expected to enact their pedagogical strategies of instruction. Direct instruction requires the bodily involvement of a classroom teacher in a total sense. It
is constant, generally all encompassing, as it focuses on the classroom teacher as the principal and indissoluble instructor. The interactive model requires somewhat less of the teacher, although s/he maintains a significant and definite pedagogical and authorial presence, as s/he does in a constructivist model of teaching. The tendency in all models of classroom instruction is to focus teaching practice on its performative or functional processes; that is, on its intent in an actionable form: focus the class, gain control, secure student interest, maintain student engagement, and constantly re-assert authority.

Notwithstanding this, models of teacher effectiveness focus on deficit depictions of teacher performance. Individualising the teacher is the preferred condition for assessment and evaluation of that performance. Teacher actions including classroom instruction occur within conceptualised models of teacher effectiveness emphasising demonstrated capacities to achieve, use, satisfy, adapt, change, enact, complete, manage, allocate and possess (Cheng & Tsui, 1999, p. 142).

The performative constitution of actions and/or behaviours enacted through the body of the classroom teacher reiterates a set of standardised norms. These are representative of specific teaching acts, which include the use of voice and bodily movement and position within the classroom. The teacher's body becomes a site through which power is actualised, generally in terms of actions and behaviour. It is the action(s) of power that are in turn expressed by positivist and rational accounts of classroom teaching practices that act on the body/agency of the teacher. ‘Political regimes of the body’ (Gore, 1993, p. 55) can be identified, generally as the actual ‘real-world’ and in ‘real-time’ manifestation of a ‘regime (or regimes) of truth’ (Gore, 1993, p. 55) in operation around the teacher’s body, described and defined by models of classroom instruction. The performative connotation(s) of teacher behaviours signify ‘competent performance of teaching’ (Vick & Martinez, 2009, p. 9). A normative performative regime of teaching action constituted by bodily significations incorporating ‘body and eye movement around the classroom, quick response to student words and actions’ (Vick & Martinez, 2009, p. 9) and an overall disciplined approach in body and deed, indicate competence. Alternatively, particular teacher significations in ‘their difference from the behaviours available to students’ distinctively assert the ‘authority of the teacher’ (Vick & Martinez, 2009, p. 9).

The classroom spectacle of teacher instruction and the multiplicity of exchanges as a result and function of modern teaching and learning, occur against a broader social set of background influences and contestations. The hidden reference point is the social stratification built into the system of education and expressed by and through one’s social class position. The process of education may be seen quite simply as a system at work with the capacity to educate all but, in fact, social stratification and one’s social class position transforms the process of teaching and learning so that it tends to become a competition between students and/or systems.

To understand the process of transformation at work in classroom instruction requires an analysis of the social construction of the entire ‘system(s) of schooling’. For example, in examining the intricacies of mathematics education, Brown (2008, p. 239) adds the following:
There are other factors governing mathematical activity: emotion, intelligence, mode of compliance/resistance of pupil, school context, affective dimensions of mathematics in particular learning sites, conceptions of learning relation; the quest to please the teacher; the satisfaction derived from particular relations with a teacher; the perverse pleasures achieved by those who paint themselves as mathematical illiterates, etc. Such is the domain of the Real. This domain cannot be ignored, and if such factors are ignored the efficacy of our research is compromised.

That is, genuine and reliable evaluation of student learning outcomes requires an educational basis indicative of basic cognitive skill sets, but must also reflect and provide for broader educational outcomes. This includes non-cognitive skill sets but with its educational characterisation firmly entrenched in classroom practices supporting ‘inquiry that is varied, serendipitous, and transactional’ (Boyles, 2006, p. 66). In other words, teachers need the assurance that their classroom practice is not simply evaluated for system accountability purposes. They require the freedom and confidence to pursue classroom instructional practices that take account of ‘emergent contexts for the development of inquiry’ (Boyles, 2006, p. 66). Enhancing intellectual rigour rather than simple determinations of standardised norm-referenced competencies for system accountability purposes, needs to fashion new conceptions and articulations of affective teacher practice and classroom instruction. This would involve an ethical dimension of pedagogical practice constituted by the need for establishing how well schools, school leaders and school systems provide for both classroom teachers and students. Above all, it involves the re-conceptualisation of classroom instruction for the development of the whole person.

Conclusion

In the first part of this paper we suggested that value-added teacher effectiveness research is the most recent example and expression of published accounts of teaching practice for individual and system accountability purposes. In our analysis, it represents in a very acute sense the ‘desubstantialization’ (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 49) effect of mathematics. There are two important and crucial points to be made here. The first relates to regularisation and the ‘imperative of regularization’ leading to the representation of teaching practice ‘which may be in complete transgression of the rule as being performed in accordance with the rule’ (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 25). Secondly, and perhaps most crucially, is the manipulation by mathematical formulation of substantive and important aspects of the classroom incorporating teaching and learning. As Bourdieu argues: ‘The use of abstract mathematical formulations weakens the tendency to conceive matter in substantial terms and leads to emphasis being placed on relational aspects. (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 49).

This is demonstrated above in our analysis of value-added teacher effectiveness research. As discussed, models of teacher effectiveness utilise substituted functional relations comprising complex and elaborate mathematical equations and their symbolic meanings for educational practice, including the assignations made and given to class position and socioeconomic background.

In the second part of the paper we called into question the validity of the teacher effectiveness approach to evaluating classroom instruction particularly in terms of its...
relation to student learning outcomes. Indeed, the key consideration is the depiction of teacher effectiveness studies as disputable, and as fallible modulated scientific representations of teaching practice. In teacher effectiveness research, the subjugated teacher symbolically and emblematically constrained through models of teacher effectiveness, becomes the focus of attention. Qualifying explications of likely and possible causes and influences of student performance and achievement are elided.

A possible way forward, beyond these accounts, may lie in how classroom teacher effectiveness is conceived and performed. First, the evaluation of learning outcomes is desirable if it ascertains the depth of authentic and active learning based primarily on affirmative and substantial educational experiences. The unassailability of imposed curriculum conditions and models of learning are then, if not totally rejected, at the mercy of an active and questioning engagement by students and teachers alike. Secondly, any declarative evaluation of learning outcomes should propound and endorse affective teacher practice, a missing component of current evaluative analyses of teacher performance and student learning outcomes.

Authentic and active learning, as distinct from simple achievement gains, focuses on intellectual quality (Newmann et al., 1996). Student learning outcomes that display and reflect disciplined inquiry include and acknowledge individual prior knowledge that is necessary and vital for in-depth understanding. Enriched and elaborated forms of communication are core elements of authentic learning. Knowledge and understanding derived through higher-order thinking, which invariably involves ‘synthesizing, generalizing, explaining, hypothesizing, or arriving at conclusions that produce new meanings and understandings’ (Newmann et al., 1996, p. 288) for students, cannot be measured against standardised tests or system sanctioned external examinations. Indeed, student learning and academic achievement that reflect substantive conversation, deep knowledge and connections to the world beyond the classroom (see Newmann et al., 1996), can only be ascertained through the implementation of assessment tasks that cover broad and important meanings. This involves tasks that encompass broad learning often combined with creativity. The teaching and learning focus is on deep and expansive learning that is mindful of breadth, thickening the learning experiences and knowledge of individual students. Its curriculum aim is not necessarily non-specific. On the contrary, evaluations of academic performance rest upon significant learner analysis of curriculum content that is often problem centred. Moreover and ideally, it gives equal measure to the whole person respecting and acknowledging an individual’s growth in terms of personality, creativity, knowledge and skills (see Sahlberg, 2007, p. 152). Indeed, it is perhaps the development of the non-cognitive skill sets of students that much of contemporary metricated forms of teacher effectiveness research cannot measure or speak to.

Competitive achievement that emphasises ‘easily measured knowledge and skill domains’ (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 164) is not necessarily a key or core component of authentic learning and achievement. Similarly, the ordered ranking of students or indeed schools as ‘good or poor performers’ (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 164), important outcomes of teacher effectiveness research notwithstanding, is not an aim of active and authentic teaching and learning. The implementation and facilitation of student achievement processes that develop learning beyond simplistic knowledge gains,
situate the school as a site of learning and caring. Depth is characterised by the learning that occurs and is measured in relation to the development of an individual’s unique potential and growth. It is not measured or defined in terms of universal systemic standards.

For this reason, education policy-making needs to provide the necessary means through which long-term educational goals are realised. In such ideal circumstances, learning is paramount and standardised testing or simplistic measures of teacher performance do not dominate. To achieve this requires educational leadership that can also articulate a set of educational values that respect learning and an individual’s capacity to learn without system-imposed constraints and sanctions. This encompasses respect for diversity—something that uniform testing cannot do nor can positivist accounts of teacher practice—and also recognises that a socially just educational system consists of uniformly excellent schools that support teachers in their classroom instruction. A fully supportive educational system that seeks excellent student learning outcomes complements classroom instruction with non-classroom based systems of assistance; for example: ‘healthful nutrition, health services, psychological counselling and student guidance’ (Sahlberg, 2007, pp. 167–168).

The need to embrace educational interventions that complement the modern era is a decisive and basic flaw and limitation of positivist classroom teacher effectiveness research. Intellectual development for deep conceptual and authentic learning develops the whole person (see Lovat, 2010). It draws together disciplinary knowledge with the life experiences of learners confounding experience and curriculum. Individual experiential relevance and connectedness through a deliberate strategy of ‘epistemological equity’ (Sefa Dei, 2010, p. 98) or ‘epistemological inclusion’ (Wrigley et al., 2012) based on curricula of intellectual depth and quality, valorises and enriches the learning environment. Moreover, genuine in-depth learning that is fully expressive of key facets of a rigorous education inclusive of classroom instruction immerses the learner in rich cognitive and affective tasks. Positivist teacher effectiveness research, with its compliant and subservient operational derivatives of reporting, serves a narrow and reductionist interpretation of learning. The inadequacies and superficial constraints of surface learning do not sufficiently engage students, in which the necessary vitality to empower students with a ‘love’ and desire for learning is lacking.

Teaching strategies that cater for the diverse needs of students underpinned by the coherent organisation of schools for ‘the express purpose of student achievement’ (Lovat, 2010, p. 490) is what we suggest a learning environment should encompass. Indeed, teacher care and student trust form highly significant components of student performance and achievement (see Rowe, 2004). Teacher effectiveness research in its current forms functions to undermine and subvert this. The challenge is to rebalance aspects of the teacher effectiveness research agenda and its associated tensions and dilemmas that at present ignore the ‘interrelationships between creative teaching, teaching for creativity and creative learning’ (Craft, 2005, p. 131). Such a rebalancing moves beyond system imposed instrumentalism towards what Taylor (1985) has termed ‘strong evaluation’.
References


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