Teachers and Educational Policy: Markets, Populism, and Im/Possibilities for Resistance

Meghan Stacey
UNSW Sydney

Mihajla Gavin
University of Technology Sydney

Jessica Gerrard
University of Melbourne

Anna Hogan
Queensland University of Technology
&
Jessica Holloway[1]
Australian Catholic University
Australia

[1] Subsequent to the first author, co-authors are listed alphabetically recognising their equal contribution to this article. Authors may prioritise themselves after first author on CVs, grant applications, etc.

Abstract: This double special issue, "Teachers and educational policy: markets, populism, and im/possibilities for resistance" explores the figurative politics of the teacher in current education systems around the world. In this introduction to the issue, we discuss how and why teachers have emerged as a key focus of contemporary policy reform. We argue that teachers are seen as a logical site of public commentary in the global knowledge economy, yet teacher expertise is feared as both known and unknowable, thereby becoming a target of heightened surveillance and control. The papers in the issue are divided into two instalments. First, those which address how external actors are seen to be (re)shaping teachers and teaching, as well as notions of professionalism, knowledge and 'truth' in education. Second, those which explore experiences of, and possibilities for resistance to, such shifts. We close with a discussion of the range of international contexts from which the contributors to this issue write, arguing for a need to reimagine teachers and schooling in ways that are less limited by the systems and structures that have formed common international reference points in policy development thus far.
Keywords: teachers; accountability; choice; populism; professionalism; privatisation

Docentes y política educativa: Mercados, populismos e im/posibilidades de resistencia

Resumen: Este dossier doble, "Docentes y política educativa: mercados, populismo e im/posibilidades de resistencia" explora las políticas figurativas del docente en los sistemas educativos actuales de todo el mundo. En esta introducción al dossier, nosotros y por qué los docentes han surgido como un foco clave de la reforma política contemporánea, vistos como un sitio lógico de comentarios públicos en la economía global del conocimiento, pero con la experiencia docente temida como conocida e incognoscible, convirtiéndose así en un objetivo. de mayor vigilancia y control. Los trabajos se dividen en dos entregas. Primero, aquellos que abordan cómo se considera que los actores externos están (re)formando a los docentes y la enseñanza, así como las nociones de profesionalismo, conocimiento y "verdad" en la educación. En segundo lugar, aquellos que exploran experiencias y posibilidades de resistencia a tales cambios. Cerramos con una discusión resumida de la variedad de contextos internacionales desde los cuales escriben los colaboradores de este número, argumentando la necesidad de reimaginar a los maestros y la educación de manera que estén menos limitadas por los sistemas y estructuras que han formado puntos de referencia internacionales comunes en política. desarrollo hasta ahora.
Palabras clave: docentes; *accountability*; elección; populismo; profesionalismo; privatización

Professores e política educacional: Mercados, populismo e impossibilidades de resistência

Resumo: Este duplo dossiê, "Professores e política educacional: mercados, populismo e impossibilidades/possibilidades de resistência" explora a política figurativa do professor nos atuais sistemas educacionais ao redor do mundo. Nesta introdução ao dossiê, discutimos como e por que os professores emergiram como um foco chave da reforma política contemporânea, visto como um local lógico de comentários públicos na economia do conhecimento global, mas com a experiência do professor temida como conhecida e incognoscível, tornando-se assim alvo de maior vigilância e controle. Os papéis estão divididos em duas instalações. Primeiro, aqueles que abordam como os atores externos são vistos como (re)formando professores e ensino, bem como noções de profissionalismo, conhecimento e "verdade" na educação. Em segundo lugar, aqueles que exploram experiências e possibilidades de resistência a tais mudanças. Fechamos com uma discussão resumida da gama de contextos internacionais a partir dos quais os colaboradores escrevem para esta edição, defendendo a necessidade de reimaginar professores e educação de maneiras que sejam menos limitadas pelos sistemas e estruturas que formaram pontos de referência internacionais comuns em políticas .desenvolvimento até agora.
Palavras-chave: professores; *accountability*; escolha; populismo; profissionalismo; privatização

Teachers and Educational Policy:
Markets, Populism, and Im/Possibilities for Resistance

The figure of the teacher has taken on a particular significance in education systems today. Not only are teachers – their work, status, and role – a key focus of contemporary policy reform; the figurative representation of teachers has become central to debates surrounding schooling and education systems. Teacher quality, figures of the 'good' and 'bad' teacher, fear of indoctrinating teachers, and the celebration/denigration of 'radical' teachers have all become 'policy problems' upon which any number of reforms can be justified: 'the teacher' is one of the most contested figures in contemporary education policy debates. At the same time, the context in which teachers work is changing. School choice systems drive pressure for teachers to contribute to the market success of the school (Stacey, 2020), while the rise of global populism reflects questions about the role and nature of teacher expertise. Teachers' work is built upon dominant cultural knowledges (Gerrard, 2019), but is also subject to an emphasis on top-down 'evidence-based' discourses (Helgetun & Menter, 2020). Within this context, teachers' work and what it means to be a teaching 'professional' is being re-articulated alongside the shifting role and nature of the state. Diverse non-state-based actors and institutions have gained footholds in schools and education systems (Ball, 2012), as organisations such as the OECD (Sellar & Lingard, 2013) and companies such as Pearson (Hogan et al., 2016) develop new forms of influence in education policy, including in relation to teachers (e.g. Sorensen & Robertson, 2017).

The papers in this double special issue engage with this complex range of dynamics, considering how education policy and politics operate to constitute the professional boundaries of teaching, as well as unpacking experiences of compliance and resistance to these forces. For the most part, our contributors understand teachers as dealing with various 'crises' in education. The current moment, characterised by many as a resurgence in populist politics (Wodak, 2015), reflects broader social and political contestations surrounding education that are often reduced to 'snapshots' that fall into well-worn policy dichotomies – public versus private; non-profit versus profit; social good versus private positional good; collective versus individual; developed versus developing, and so on. Such binaries serve as familiar shorthand for identifying shifts in how education is perceived and positioned. However, they can obscure the complex relations that exist between and outside of the ends of each spectrum; as Holloway (2021, p. 414) has argued, "teacher practice and the teacher subject are products of the very same policy discourses that are oftentimes being critiqued", so simple 'compliance' *or* 'resistance' is unlikely. Taken together, the articles in this special issue similarly suggest that simplistic binaries of 'good' and 'bad' in the political context surrounding teachers' work do not reflect the range of shapes which education policy can take and how this is bound up with the experiences, actions and reactions of teachers. Simplistic binaries are not only limiting for analytical purposes, however: they also feed into a climate of crisis in which simple answers are sought to complex problems. And the simplistic answer so frequently resorted to in schooling seems to be the teacher – variously construed.

We argue that current policy environments create fertile ground for education policies to place the structural 'wicked problems' in schooling at the feet of individual teachers. Teachers, having time and again served as the scapegoats for societies' ills, provide a compelling site for exploring such shifting and problematic binary discourses as those we have indicated above and which are interrogated throughout this special issue. Increasing responsibility is placed on teachers to 'fix' perceived educational crises – often through policy reform that requires teachers to be 'better' trained, more professional, more accountable and more standardised. At times, this has prompted a defence of the teaching 'professional' that may obscure opportunities for the generative critique of teachers' work, as political actors "shaped by discourses of privileged knowledge and power" (Holloway, 2021, p. 419).

Take the case of Australia, for instance – the national context from which the editorial team for this special issue write. The past 15 years in Australian education policy has featured:

the institution of standardised census testing of students via the National Assessment Program, the results of which are made public via the My School website (www.myschool.edu.au; Gorur, 2016); the introduction of national teaching standards and accreditation requirements (Talbot, 2016); and repeated inquiries into initial teacher education, with the introduction of program standards and, more recently, mandated teacher performance assessments (Stacey et al., 2020). Teachers work within (and sometimes, against [Gavin, 2019]) these complex policy positions in ways that often sit in tension with their worldviews and philosophies about what education is, and ought to be (Hogan et al., 2021). The painting of teacher as 'problem' rather than respected professional has also been routinely critiqued, including by the first editor of this issue (e.g. Mockler & Stacey, 2021; Stacey, 2017). Evident in this brief national portrait are, no doubt, features that resonate with policy contexts elsewhere about the globe. Indeed, concerns about the development and assessment of teachers are evident worldwide, as high-stakes accountability mechanisms proliferate. Yet while we do paint a picture of some "similarity and convergence" (Oyarzún et al., 2021, p. 2) in this issue, we also aim to highlight national and sub-national difference and 'exception' (Ong, 2006), a thread we pick up on further below.

For now, it seems reasonable to state that teachers are the focus of much political and popular consternation. But what is it about teachers that makes them such a target of attention and concern, and how does the current political climate contribute to these (often unrealistic) expectations? First, though, a word about how we are using populism to characterise the current moment.

According to Wodak (2015, p. 7), populism has an "appeal to the 'common man/woman' as opposed to the elites". She has argued that in populist regimes, 'difference' is denied and the 'common' is valorised, creating "a demos which exists above and beyond the divides and diversities of social class and religion, gender and generation" (2015, p. 8). In the context of declarations of 'fake news' and the 'post-truth era', it is perhaps unsurprising that 'populism' has become central for understanding the contemporary articulation of long-standing social tensions surrounding elites, experts and the exercise of authority. Here, we engage with the notion of 'populism' as a means to further understand its various meanings and practices; including the kinds of politics that are evoked in its announcement.

Even though the literature around populism and education is still developing, it is possible to view schooling (and teaching) as a logical site of public commentary, given the common experience of schooling for most populations. Indeed, it is often claimed that everyone knows what it is like to be a teacher because everyone has gone to school. As Lortie (1975) has put it, there is an 'apprenticeship of observation' in school education that means everyone, regardless of whether they become a teacher or not, forms ideas about the work of teaching simply because of their ongoing interactions with teachers throughout a significant portion of their lives. In terms of populist tendencies, this common experience and presumed knowledge about how schools should operate, positions teachers as a common ground upon which critiques can be focused. We see this special issue as an opportunity to contribute to such development and to reflect on both the emerging commentary around populism and education, as well as apparent absences and oversights within this commentary.

It is not our intention to contribute to framing populism, much like neoliberalism, as a new 'swearword' (Peck, 2010) in the scholarship of policy and politics. Yet, we wonder whether teachers, and others who traditionally speak with particular expertise within the field of education, such as teacher educators and academics, may be seen as seeking to create division. Expertise may function to emphasise difference, rather than valorise the common, and thus work against a populist approach as described by Wodak (2015). For expertise within teaching does exist. Teaching has progressively moved from apprenticeship models to a university-based credential (Connell, 2009; though recent policy agendas appear to threaten this more recent 'settlement'). There is also much to the work of a teacher that is not seen from the student's 'side' of the teacher's desk (Britzman, 2003). Teaching is complex work, with an unspecified

object of labour and a seemingly "limitless, and therefore shapeless labour process" (Connell, 2009, p. 11).

Despite the divisions that teacher expertise may engender, we would argue that teachers' work is of particular significance. Teachers increasingly bear the burden for the economic, social and political wellbeing of the countries within with they teach, with the stakes attached to such expectations also growing. That is, as the global economy becomes understood as essentially knowledge-based (Connell, 2013), the need to track and compare student achievement within and across nation-states has taken on a broad prominence typified by, for instance, the regular Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests run by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Such test scores become a representation of a nation's success in the global knowledge economy (Grek, 2009; Sellar & Lingard, 2013), and, again, the responsibility for maintaining competitive status is seemingly seen as that of the teacher. It is interesting, for example, to note that the teacher is an increasing point of focus for the OECD, which now also runs the regular Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) examining teachers' work and working conditions (e.g. Sorensen & Robertson, 2017). This, we argue, reflects a revived and rearticulated emphasis on the role of the teacher. Teachers produce student 'goods' and, given the perceived importance of education for progressing economic success, teachers too are seen as a site of responsibility for such success.

Yet, oddly enough (or perhaps not odd at all), teaching does not often become an object of respect, but rather of fear, emblematic of growing national and international anxieties around knowledge, success and the moral character of the next generation and future society. The figure of the teacher thereby sits within an uncomfortable tension. Paradoxically, teaching is known to all ("anyone could do it!"), yet also unknowable (as a university-based, complex and contested form of expertise). Teachers' success is supposedly important for global competition, but teaching is not necessarily worthy of professional status and fair working conditions (e.g., teachers have not been prioritised for COVID-19 vaccinations in many countries). We argue this convoluted arrangement of factors contributes to the reliance on simplistic dichotomies to understand the very complex labour, practice and role of teaching. In doing so, the ongoing attempts to control, standardise and responsibilise teaching and teachers becomes a rational (and even urgent) pursuit (see also Holloway, 2019; Hardy, 2016). Furthermore, the hyper-focus on teachers-as-solution creates what Wodak (2015) calls a "fear 'market'" (Wodak, 2015, p. 5), where the teacher also becomes the target of the expanding "cottage industry" (Wodak, 2015, p. 5) of commercial products aimed at controlling and containing teaching work (Hogan et al., 2018). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic that forced new technologies to respond to rapidly shifting conditions, the global education market was estimated to be a multi-billion-dollar industry (Verger et al., 2014). Not surprisingly, a great deal of this market is concentrated in the teacher/teaching sphere (e.g., professional development materials, data-tracking platforms, etc.). This special issue attempts to draw these interrelated threads together to better understand the outcomes and implications of the deeply complex socio-political settlement that currently shapes teachers' lives and their work, and how teachers are positioned and thought about today.

(Re)Shaping Teachers and Teaching

Our first instalment in this double special issue addresses how external actors are (re)shaping teachers and teaching, as well as notions of professionalism, knowledge and 'truth' in education. The papers in this instalment contribute to understandings about how teacher professionalism is being shaped and reshaped within current education policy environments. Questions raised include: what constitutes 'truth' in education? Who has 'expertise' and authority in teaching? Centralised mandates around curriculum and teacher training are critiqued, as legacies of, and continuing forces of colonisation around the globe have ongoing implications for the positioning and work of teachers. An emphasis on (particular forms of) 'evidence-based'

practice and policy is explored, as well as how this appears to have been accompanied by a growing role of those who are, or have previously been considered, external to education. This goes beyond thought-leaders and 'gurus' to also include multilateral organisations like the World Bank, United Nations and the OECD, as well as commercial businesses and philanthropists (e.g., Pearson; McGraw-Hill; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). Particularly and directly influential on teachers, perhaps, has been the 'Teach for All' movement and its reshaping of what it means to be a teaching professional today (Thomas et al., 2021), a shift considered by multiple papers in this instalment. A range of actors, usually external to schools, are thereby working to (re)shape teacher professionalism – how it is understood, and what this means for teachers as part of complex educational systems.

Populism and 'Truth'

The first theme addresses the relationship of populism to education, and in particular notions of evidence and truth when it comes to teachers' work and education policy. The two papers here reckon with contested policy framings surrounding how to 'know' educational practice. They grapple with the changing discourse of 'truth' in education and how this relates to the teacher as a 'professional'. This includes explorations of what counts as knowledge in determining teaching practice and education policy. Analysing across two very different educational contexts (US and Australia), these papers point to the ways in which contemporary trends surrounding evidence, truth, and teachers' work are *both* comparable transnationally and intensely local in character.

Taking up the idea that many feel that they are an expert – or can take an expert position – when it comes to school education, Malin and Lubienski (this issue) argue that shifting understandings of 'truth' and 'knowledge' in education policy reform must be understood in relation to the rising significance of wealthy elites in the field of education. Their analysis highlights how contemporary analyses of populism need to go beyond simplistic ideas of 'the common people' against traditional experts. Rather it is necessary to attend to the ways in which claims to truth are being shaped by highly networked elite actors, who benefit from seeding doubt around established forms of evidence to herald their account of educational practice. They make the point that education is subject to a populist impulse that often privileges cultural politics over technical expertise – where in fact, many people consider themselves educational experts, with little respect being afforded to actual educators. Drawing on and developing the notion of 'information pollution', Malin and Lubienski chart the influence of private 'alternative' sources of information and expertise in education. Describing this as a new political economy of information, they argue that such private interests benefit from, and are actively producing, anecdotal information and misinformation. The circulation of this misinformation and anecdotal 'truths' about education, they suggest, dangerously displaces and sidelines the rich empirical evidence that often runs counter to wealthy actors' agendas. They end on a cautiously optimistic note about how ideologically motivated reformers might be sidelined for a more supportive policy environment, nurtured and supported by teachers themselves. Their analysis raises important questions surrounding the meanings and practices of 'evidence' and 'expertise' in education, highlighting that neither term should be taken-for-granted and both can be rhetorically deployed to different ends.

The slippery meanings and practices of 'evidence' are also taken up by Wescott (this issue) in her analysis of how evidence-based practice has become a dominant hegemonic force in Australia. Wescott's careful analysis of the policy production of 'evidence' and teachers' experiences of this, provides an important account of the entanglement of post-truth and evidence-based policies. Rather than see these phenomena as distinct, Wescott argues the contemporary significance of 'evidence' in policies surrounding teaching practice – and in particular the narrowing of what counts as this evidence – must be understood in relation to the post-truth moment. The paper charts the emergence of evidence-based practice, and

importantly, the narrowing of what might be counted as 'evidence' to inform teachers' work. Wescott argues that the resultant (narrow) knowledge about what and how to teach is a symptom of the post-truth condition, in which a small number of 'gurus' have been elevated as knowers of irrefutable truths in education. Wescott draws on Gramsci to understand the cultural hegemonies of current education policy and practice surrounding evidence and teachers. She highlights the implications of a changing discourse of 'truth' and knowledge to the practice of teaching and warns that teachers have difficulty reconciling their professional identity with current 'evidence-based' teaching practices.

Ongoing Effects of Colonialism on Teachers and Teaching

The second theme broadly focuses on the ongoing effects of colonialism as it relates to education policies and teachers, as addressed in two papers. Hogan et al. (this issue) explore how the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) is being used as a coercive technology of government in the Pacific Islands to 'professionalise' teachers. In the second paper, Burgess and Lowe (this issue) look at the disconnect between rhetoric and reality in meaningful engagement with Aboriginal knowledges and pedagogies in Australian curriculum and policy. What these papers highlight is that oftentimes when local communities and schools are left out of standardised, top-down reform efforts, it is almost inevitable that local knowledges, perspectives and vernaculars will be left out of the final policy plans. We see these papers as contributing a critical perspective regarding tensions between the local and global relations that are central to conceptualising populist moves and trends. Using schools and teachers as a case in point, they illustrate how such relations are shaped by the historical privileging of colonial, Western knowledge about what schools should prioritise and how they should operate.

Hogan and colleagues (this issue) look specifically at attempts to professionalise the teaching workforce in the Pacific Islands. They investigate how short-term contracts have been used as a policy technique to encourage teachers to pursue professional qualifications. They argue that SDG4 has seen the emergence of reform initiatives that rely on identifying generic problems and then standardising solutions, or the idea that 'what works' in one (colonial) jurisdiction can be 'borrowed' or copied into another (postcolonial) jurisdiction, producing similar improvements. They use survey and interview data from teachers, unionists and bureaucrats to explore the limitations of policy borrowing which, in its inability to understand context, produces unintended consequences. In this context, the authors argue that short-term contracts are a coercive technology of government (and postcolonial control), and are having a negative impact on teacher wellbeing; reducing the likelihood of these education systems being able to recruit and retain teachers in the future.

Focusing on the Australian context, Burgess and Lowe (this issue) argue that Australian teachers struggle to meaningfully engage with Aboriginal knowledge and pedagogies, despite these being a compulsory component of school curriculum. This sits within a policy context imbued with deficit discourses and of misrepresentation and misconception about Aboriginal peoples. This, compounded with a lack of meaningful interaction with Aboriginal communities and few opportunities for professional learning, means teachers are often fearful of saying or doing 'the wrong thing'. The authors suggest that change has historically been driven top-down, but real, meaningful, change needs to be driven by local communities and schools. In particular, local Aboriginal community members have the ability to help build teacher confidence and skills in how they might genuinely address the impacts of colonialism, racism, disempowerment, trauma and exclusion for Aboriginal people within the school curriculum.

Privatisation and Private Actors

The third theme investigates the role of privatisation, or the impact that private actors have on teacher professionalism. This includes an analysis of how Teach For America (TFA) has both institutional and individual effects on teacher professionalism (Anderson et al., this issue),

and building on this, how Teach For New Zealand (TFNZ) is redefining teacher professionalism by shifting teacher education towards an entrepreneurial, technical, and practice-based approach (Ramsey et al., this issue). These papers question the influence of private actors, the 'expertise' they bring to education and how teachers might reclaim their agency within an increasing environment of privatisation in schooling.

Anderson and colleagues (this issue) argue that TFA, and Teach For All globally, has become synonymous with producing teacher graduates with controversial expertise and professionalism. In this paper the authors focus on the experiences of non-TFA teachers working alongside TFA teachers. They show how non-TFA teachers often have the responsibility for mentoring inexperienced TFA teachers – who are still often placed on a pedestal by education stakeholders given the influence TFA has over education policy and practice. They suggest that understanding both the institutional and individual effects of TFA is important for conceptualising teacher professionalism.

Picking up a similar thread, Ramsey et al. (this issue) investigate the TFA phenomenon in New Zealand. They argue TFNZ is focused on producing 'change agents', who might only spend a few years in the classroom before taking on leadership positions. By cutting ties with university-based teacher education, and building their own credentialing system, the authors suggest TFNZ is redefining teacher professionalism and expertise, shifting it away from the traditional research base of teacher education and towards an entrepreneurial, technical, and practice-based approach to preparing 'leaders' not teachers.

Compliance, Resistance and Activism

Our second instalment focuses on the teacher/citizen nexus and explores the hope/lessness teachers have in resisting the (re)shaping of their profession. In many ways, this instalment explores the impact of 'crises' in education and the 'fear' of the teacher, focusing specifically on how teachers are positioned as simultaneously having the blame for, and responsibility to improve, student outcomes. Most of the papers explore how teachers feel constrained, de-professionalised and demoralised in response to this positioning. Some consider how teachers may feel new forms of agency and empowerment, and a few explore teacher dissent and opportunities for activism and resistance, where teachers individually or collectively 'push back' against policy and reclaim the profession as one malleable to their worldviews. In this instalment of the issue, we thereby offer an opportunity to consider tensions between the individual and the collective, and to unpick how we may conceptualise teacher resistance. How can 'resistance' be understood as a product of current, heterogeneous conditions across the globe? Are some teachers more 'resistant' than others, or is our definition of what it means to 'resist' being re-negotiated? And is it possible to problematise the notion of 'resistance' beyond a binary construction of either resistance *or* compliance? This instalment focuses on how teacher identity is formed by a complex interweaving of policy, politics, practice and context, and the spectrum across and beyond which teachers can comply with, or resist, these forces.

The first paper in this instalment sets the scene for the themes to follow. Parcerisa et al. (this issue) provide a broad overview of how marketised education policies are shaping teacher identity by analysing how different forms of performance-based accountability impact on teachers' work. Through a comparative perspective, the authors depict how the effects of performance-based accountability on teachers' autonomy and practices vary across the globe. The authors undertake a systematic literature review to show that meso-level variables (or national policy vernaculars) play a key role in shaping teacher professionalism. They argue that test-based accountability can affect teachers' knowledge base, their professional commitment, their autonomy, and their individual and collective identities. The paper thus emphasizes local conditions and the need to understand the unique institutional and policy settings in which a

teacher works. This is particularly important given the mediating role of regulatory regimes in understanding the effects of performance-based accountability on teachers' autonomy.

Responsibilisation and Constraint

The first theme explores how teachers can feel constrained by the policy environments in which they work and have seemingly few opportunities to reclaim their identity. Papers characterise how teachers are being responsibilised for student outcomes, regardless of the fact that many issues sit outside of their locus of control, and that data and datafication is leading to feelings of de-professionalisation and demoralisation. In Garver's (this issue) ethnographic study of a racially and economically stratified school in an urban U.S. district, teachers are held individually responsible for the performance of their students, in a move termed, drawing on participant data, 'personalising the gaps'. She shows that teachers are responsibilised for addressing educational inequality, despite the fact that many of the root causes for performance were beyond the teachers' sphere of influence. She argues that school-based policies like these are a form of 'wilful ignorance' and that teachers' efforts to raise external issues were framed as making excuses and shirking their responsibilities. At the same time, the validity of the data used to 'personalise the gaps' is questioned.

Daliri-Ngametua and Hardy (this issue) explore a similarly questionable and reductive use of data in the Australian state of Queensland. These data, they argue, shape the possibilities of teachers' work and displace a teacher-led understanding of holistic student learning. Daliri-Ngametua and Hardy use the theory of practice architectures to explore how the sayings, doings and relatings of data lead to feelings of demoralisation. They argue that the datafication of teachers' work has had a detrimental impact on teacher professionalism, the consequence of which is an eviscerated form of schooling that may jeopardise students' long-term academic and social development. The teacher, meanwhile, 'disappears' from this picture, as their judgement and expertise are increasingly devalued. Together, these papers highlight the important ways in which teachers can feel marginalised under current policy settings. While they do not provide much in the way of 'hope' within these institutions, papers such as these arguably justify the need to find such hope – or engage in a more radical reimagining of education altogether (Ball, 2020).

Agency within Constraint

The second theme focuses on the constrained choices teachers make in navigating subjectivity and identity within neoliberalised policy settings. The articles we have grouped within this theme feature teachers who are responding to, but also interpreting and actively rearticulating who they are as teachers within shifting policy environments (Holloway, 2021). The particular reforms considered in this theme are focused on accountability and school choice as conditions for teachers' work. Skerritt's (this issue) paper poses the question of whether accountability – as conceptualised in the contemporary moment – achieves what democratic societies need, or what democratic citizens want. He explores a number of features of what an ideal version of accountability might include or pursue, such as trust, improved work, collegiality, just to name a few. He also challenges us, as scholars of teachers and teaching, to think about accountability in more nuanced ways, reminding us that healthy democratic systems require various forms of accountability.

Meanwhile in Castro et al.'s (this issue) paper, teachers in the US are actively choosing schools that they want to work in, for example choosing between charter schools or traditional public schools. These 'options', Castro et al. (this issue) argue, force but also enable teachers to make decisions about their working conditions, responsibilities and expectations (e.g., those between a charter school and a traditional public school). Castro et al. argue that school choice provides fertile ground for an enhanced fluidity and flexibility in teacher identity, encouraging more frequent shifts in understanding what it means to be a teacher, and the kind of teacher one wants to be. A related question is raised by Skerritt (this issue), but from a different angle: are the

current versions of accountable teacher subjects what citizens want? For Castro et al. the relationship of interest is between how teachers see themselves and how society sees schools. This dynamic, between the external and the internal, is a common concern of the papers in this theme.

The two articles in this theme offer some suggestions as to why such an internal-external dynamic for teacher identity is worth considering. In Castro et al.'s (this issue) article, teachers working in charter schools saw their professional identity as situated broadly within education, but not necessarily as a classroom teacher. Castro argues that despite teachers articulating a rhetoric of care and social justice, school choice policies are potentially impacting teachers' motivations to teach and the social goods that can be produced through schooling. Similarly in the Skerritt (this issue) paper, questions are asked about whether accountability produces 'humanistic' teachers; while 'accountability' is not seen as entirely 'good' or 'bad', whether school systems are producing the 'accountable teacher subject citizens we want' remains an important question.

Dissent and Activism

A third theme concludes the double special issue by investigating opportunities for teacher dissent and activism, where teachers might individually or collectively push back and reclaim their profession as one malleable to their worldviews. Each paper attempts to advance a 'way forward' for challenging some of the pressures outlined in the earlier themes. This includes papers that focus on how teachers 'play the game', where they superficially comply with state policy directives before getting on with the business of 'actual' teaching and learning (Duarte & Brewer, this issue); teacher perceptions about, and motivations for, taking strike action (Kurtz & White, this issue); and how teachers in Chile have found ways to exercise freedom over their pedagogies to reclaim aspects of their professional identities (Acuña, this issue).

The first paper in this theme by Duarte and Brewer (this issue) investigates the subtle acts of resistance that teachers perform while working within neoliberal policy contexts in the U.S. state of Texas. Drawing upon de Certeau's theory of consumption, Duarte and Brewer examine the ways in which teachers creatively resist the policies that constrain them, through depicting how teachers navigate a system that limits their autonomy and narrows understandings of 'success' to student outcomes on standardised tests. The authors depict how teachers work in an environment characterised by fear, increased pressure and shame, which invokes teachers to engage in *passive compliance* and *subtle acts of resistance* that blur the line between compliance and resistance. Teachers are thus 'playing the game'; their compliance with policy directives is largely a superficial act where they will do what is required to meet state standards and prove themselves 'effective' and then get on with the 'real business' of teaching and learning.

Like Duarte and Brewer (this issue), Acuña (this issue) investigates how political conditions have created new possibilities for teachers to embody a dissident subjective position in the site of Chile. Thinking with Foucault's notion of 'subjective limits', this paper argues that a new generation of teachers have found discursive cracks through which a new 'political-pedagogical dissident' subject can emerge, focusing on the case of Chilean teachers struggling against a new teachers career policy. In doing so, these teachers are able to reclaim some of their agency and professionalism as teachers. Acuña raises important questions about what it means to be a teacher, both in pedagogical and political terms, while also questioning what it means for one to exercise freedom, autonomy and agency.

Kurtz and White (this issue) focus on teacher dissent in Denver, Colorado, and specifically teachers' participation in the nation-wide 'Red for Ed' demonstrations in this state. Rather than depicting the movement as a renewed fascination with strike revivals, they use this event to explore how teachers not only experience and understand participation in strikes and the role of unions in resistance, but their own professional identities as teachers in communities of colour in relation to striking. In addition to examining the effectiveness of striking as a

strategy for resisting neoliberal agendas, they also explore how strikes afford teachers a rare opportunity to enact their complex professional identities within the public sphere.

Taken together, these papers offer novel, yet quite distinct, ways forward for conceptualising resistance to neoliberal conditions that teachers work in. Duarte and Brewer's(this issue) findings offer new ways for understanding resistance. While we commonly think of 'resistance' to be "an overt subversion of power by a small group of policy actors" , the authors also emphasise how resistance, conceptually and in practice, "is more likely to be collectively demonstrated by workers who are entangled within discourses and mechanisms of power even as they try to outmanoeuvre them" . Acuña (this issue) advances political-pedagogical dissent as the central discourse through which teachers can disrupt and critique neoliberal policies. Meanwhile, Kurtz and White(this issue) point to new forms of unionism that emerge from the work of teacher organisations, and the important work of these collective organisations in inspiring and mobilising resistance.

Teachers and Education Policy: The Local and the Global

Together, the 14 papers in this double special issue explore how teachers' work may be understood, experienced and re-imagined across contexts including the United States, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific. Perhaps unusual to readers of *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, may be the inclusion of studies from places like Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. As an editorial team based in Australia, that this geographical emphasis has emerged across the collection is not entirely surprising. In fact, it is to an extent, intentional. But why did we think this representation of geographic spaces outside of the Americas was important, and why did we approach a U.S.-based journal given our expertise lay mostly in contexts outside of this setting?

As Australia-based scholars, we find that our policies are often developed and analysed in reference to what Lingard (2010, p. 143) has termed our common "reference societies" of the US and UK. In an era of 'policy borrowing' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004), Australian education policy is often represented as being on a lamentable trajectory towards, or as nervously withholding itself from, the perils of the reforms undertaken in such contexts. Certainly, there is much that has happened and is happening in Australian education that echoes reforms these countries introduced 10 or 20 years prior; the introduction of teacher performance assessments, pioneered in the US, is one example (Stacey et al., 2020). At the same time, there are reforms which have to some extent been held off. Teach For All, the focus of multiple papers in this special issue, is a case in point, allowed to operate in only some Australian states (Thomas et al., 2021). Together these two examples highlight just why it is important to examine education policy, and teachers' work in relation to it, from diverse contexts – as Oyarzún et al. (2021, p. 2) argue, "neoliberalism cannot be understood as a pure and univocal ideology, but as a messy convergence of socio-technical practices, historically and socially embedded, that are often entangled in rearticulated social-democratic imaginaries". In Australia, for instance, "strong links" (Oyarzún et al., 2021, p. 6) with the US and UK and early adoption of neoliberal reform must be understood alongside enduring and highly problematic settler-colonial dynamics. Frequently as authors we are asked to make our work 'relevant' by situating it in relation to dominant international reform contexts. But what would happen if this demand was reversed? Should research emanating from dominant contexts instead be required to make itself relevant to more diverse, local spaces, and what analytical possibilities might this open up?

In making space in this special issue for more 'peripheral' contexts like Australia – but perhaps even more so, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands – our hope is to emphasise education policy and teacher practice as particular. This, in turn, helps to highlight the assumptions we might make when we see reform as monolithic or always in reference to somewhere 'bigger' or supposedly more influential. According to Ball and Collet-Sabé (2021, p. 10), "we must give up on all those orderly truths that have defined our purpose and our relation

to and for education" and instead "seek disengagement from or renunciation of our 'intelligible' self and become willing to test and transgress the limits of what we are able to be". Otherwise, they argue, we will be stuck in "a constant cycle of hope and despair, of progress and defeat, of challenge and incorporation" (Ball & Collet-Sabé, 2021, p. 3). These binaries must instead be interrogated, with the teacher viewed as neither hero nor villain but something much more complex in between and, potentially, beyond. We hope that, across the papers in this Special Issue, we have begun to do some of this work, emphasising a range of contexts not always given prominence in international debates about education and opening up how we can understand teachers and their work today.

Conclusion

Exploring understandings and experiences of teachers' work across the globe takes on a new significance in 2022, as the world continues to navigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This special issue was first conceptualised at a workshop at the University of New South Wales, Australia, in February of 2020, and for the editorial team is one of the last 'normal' work activities we participated in before the slew of lockdowns that was to ensue. With teachers' work taking on new forms in the years which were to follow, this is an ideal moment in which to place teacher experiences at the centre of inquiry; to ask how we might think about teachers' work in more nuanced ways, and imagine teachers and teaching differently. Individually and collectively, the papers in this special issue highlight the variously articulated 'fear' educational stakeholders have in the quality of teachers today, as global policy trends play out in local vernaculars. While simplistic binaries encouraged by this milieu place increasing significance at the feet of teachers, seen as both hero and villain, the papers in this special issue show that this way of thinking is insufficient in understanding teachers' work and experiences. Possibly, what is needed is to reimagine teachers and schooling in ways that are less limited by the systems and structures that have formed common international reference points thus far. Perhaps it is time for teachers and those who research them to truly warrant the positioning of teachers as an object of fear, by destabilising the taken-for-granted terms under which they work in pursuit of a more ethical future.

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About the Authors/Editors

Meghan Stacey
UNSW Sydney
m.stacey@unsw.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2192-9030
Meghan Stacey is a senior lecturer in the UNSW School of Education, researching in the fields of the sociology of education and education policy. Taking a particular interest in teachers, her research considers how teachers' work is framed by policy, as well as the effects of such policy for those who work with, within and against it.

Mihajla Gavin
University of Technology Sydney
mihajla.gavin@uts.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6796-5198
Mihajla Gavin is a lecturer at UTS Business School. Her PhD, completed in 2019, examined how teacher trade unions have responded to neoliberal education reform. Her current research focuses on the restructuring of teachers' work and conditions of work, worker voice, and women and employment relations.

Jessica Gerrard
University of Melbourne
jessica.gerrard@unimelb.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9011-6055
Jessica Gerrard is an associate professor at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. Jessica researches the changing formations, and lived experiences, of social inequalities in relation to education, activism, work and unemployment. She works across the disciplines of sociology, history and policy studies with an interest in critical methodologies and theories.

Anna Hogan
Queensland University of Technology
ar.hogan@qut.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1934-2548
Anna Hogan is a senior research fellow in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at the Queensland University of Technology. Her research focuses on education privatisation and commercialisation. She currently works on a number of research projects, including investigating philanthropy in Australian public schooling, the privatisation of global school provision, and the intensification of teachers' work.

Jessica Holloway
Australian Catholic University
jessica.holloway@acu.edu.au
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9267-3197

Jessica Holloway is a senior research fellow and ARC DECRA Fellow at the Australian Catholic University. Her research draws on political theory and policy sociology to investigate: (1) how metrics, data and digital tools produce new conditions, practices and subjectivities, especially as they relate to teachers and schools, and (2) how teachers and schools are positioned to respond to the evolving and emerging needs of their communities.

About the Editorial Team: https://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/epaa/about/editorialTeam

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