

Manufacturing Teachers – A Critical Reading of the Teacher in ‘Teaching Scotland’s Future’

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Introduction

One of the most recent changes to the education policy landscape in Scotland is the arrival of Graham Donaldson’s ‘Teaching Scotland’s Future: A Review of Teacher Education in Scotland’ (Donaldson 2011). This document is intended to look at the influence of policy on teacher education and, since the Scottish Government have subsequently accepted all of the author’s recommendations in full or in part and are working to implement the changes, it also functions as a live policy document. This paper is intended as a critical discourse analysis of this document. The analysis will examine the construction of the teacher that is being envisioned within the text. It will argue that, rather than a ‘step change’ and a move in the direction of progress, it is an entrenchment of traditional values designed to maintain the current centres of power and knowledge, and create a certain type of teacher to enable this.

This analysis will move through three stages beginning with a discussion situating the document within time and place, national and supranational policy contexts, and the current political narrative and ideology with reference to useful models for making sense of the policy ‘soup’ such as ‘Hall’s model of how ideas influence policy’ (Parsons 1995, p.172). The second part explains and justifies the choice of critical discourse analysis as a framework for deconstructing the underlying power relationships and ideology in this particular

case and its importance as a critical perspective for policy analysis. The third and major part of the paper involves a detailed critical reading of the document using Fairclough's model, taken from 'New Labour, New Language', of 'style-discourse-genre' (Fairclough 2000) to make explicit the political narratives impacting upon teachers and their future development.

Situating the Policy

We are now operating within a culture that largely and popularly accepts the 'rational' or 'commonsense' view that education policy is a necessary mechanism of democratic government, coupled with the new orthodoxy that success is to be found in the 'knowledge economy' as Ball explains:

Concepts such as the 'learning society', the 'knowledge-based economy', etc., are potent policy condensates within this consensus. They serve and symbolise the increasing colonisation of education policy by economic policy imperatives. (Ball 1998, p.122)

It is within this context that 'Teaching Scotland's Future' (Donaldson 2011) was commissioned and published. The dominant neoliberal ideas of the last four decades have established the commodification of knowledge and ideas and the marketisation of education to the extent that it is legitimised and used as an underpinning premise for policymakers. Likewise globalisation, a catch all term that can be used to mean many things but here is taken to mean the rise of the global free market economy, is a key theme throughout recent education policy and in the selected bibliography for his paper Donaldson cites no less than five documents of the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD), an organisation with a vision statement emphasising their aim as helping countries to develop policies to 'promote economic

growth’ (OECD 2011). This globalised economy and the need for Scotland to be able to compete within it is a driving force in the creation of ‘Teaching Scotland’s Future’.

On a more local level the current national context in which this document has emerged is a majority SNP government calling themselves a ‘social democratic party committed to Scottish Independence’ (SNP website). Although ‘Third Way Social Democracy’ might be a more appropriate term as they are focused on economic growth, competing in the global free market economy, and wealth creation but maintain ideas of the state’s role in facilitating social justice. This attempted reconciliation of neoliberalism and social democracy is reminiscent of Blair’s ‘Third Way’ and is evidenced in the language of recent education policy such as ‘A Curriculum for Excellence’ (Scottish Executive 2004).

It appears that the drive to train teachers specifically to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence was a strong motivating factor for the commissioning of this review as Ian Smith (2010) points out that the Education Secretary at the time emphasised a strong link to the new curriculum when announcing it. This causes Smith some concern as he points to the criticisms of the curriculum made by Priestly and Humes (2010) mentioned in the following paragraphs. A Curriculum for Excellence, which Donaldson refers to frequently in his report, has four guiding capacities that reference the language of neoliberalism heavily, stating that the aim for Scotland’s children is that they become ‘Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors’ (Scottish Executive 2004, p.12).

This curriculum, which was published in 2004 under the Scottish Labour administration, has been continued and extended by

the current administration maintaining the original underlying philosophy. Since 2004 these issues of economic growth and globalisation have climbed the agenda and the adoption of the new curriculum has been endorsed and validated by further documents such as ‘Improving Scottish Education’ (HMIE 2009) and ‘Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland’ (OECD 2007). Interestingly the Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) document was introduced by HM Senior Chief Inspector – one Graham Donaldson who states, in his introduction, the importance of education to ‘Scotland’s future economic prosperity’ (HMIE 2009, p.1).

The Curriculum for Excellence purports to be a development in education policy that reduces government prescription in the school curriculum and gives more power and autonomy to teachers over what is taught in the classroom. It claims to do this by taking away objectives and assessment targets and replacing them with ‘experiences and outcomes’. However the fact that the curriculum retains the discrete subject areas and continues to prescribe the content within them gives Priestly and Humes cause to criticise: ‘The draft experiences and outcomes have effectively divided the curriculum into several hundred discrete objectives, spread over six levels to cover schooling from 3 to 18’ (2010, p.353).

When a curriculum is planned, someone has to make choices about what to include and exclude and how to organise this. These actors will have a certain field of experience, opinions, interests, and morals that will influence these choices. A curriculum can never be neutral or inclusive and will always serve some purpose based on the values chosen by those with the power to do so. Priestly and Humes (2010, p.348) point out the ‘fundamentally political and ideological’

nature of making decisions about what knowledge is important to include and exclude.

Hall's model, taken from Parsons, provides a useful overview of how ideas of experts such as Donaldson's come to influence policy making, stating that there are three factors that contribute to how an idea can be incorporated into policy:

For an idea to be adopted as policy it has to have a good fit with the economic circumstances which are existing; it has to be seen as being in the interests of the dominant political interests and it has to be judged to be feasible in administrative terms. (Parsons 1995, p.172)

There is some debate as to whether the review satisfies the third requirement but it appears a perfect fit otherwise. It is also necessary to maintain awareness that Donaldson was asked by government to produce this report so we have to assume that approval was given before it was published. As Smith (2010, p.34) points out in his paper 'Reviewing Scottish teacher education for the 21st. century: let collaborative partnership flourish', anticipating the Donaldson report, there are issues around a leadership class controlling the development of policy 'especially given the appointed nature of the Review Leader, Review Team and Review Reference Group'.

The Critical Approach

Ideology is a much contested term and in order to conduct a textual analysis to identify it it is important to first establish the definition used in this instance. For the purposes of this analysis the formulation of ideology is that described as national ideology by Van Zanten taken from Ball (1998, p.127): 'a set of values and beliefs that frames the practical thinking and agents of the main institutions of a nation-state at a given point in time'.

As Smith (2010, p.34) suggests, 'Teaching Scotland's Future' represents the most comprehensive review of teacher education in many years and subsequent policy documents like 'Advancing Professionalism in Teaching' (McCormac 2011) were based upon many of its findings and conclusions. It has been endorsed by the government response (The Scottish Government 2011) and as such it effectively exemplifies the values and aims of the dominant group regarding education.

Parsons (1995, p.178) suggests that it is a relatively recent development in policy analysis that language has played a significant role and analysts have started to decode the 'language, symbols, signs, myths, and images' in policy texts. Until then the focus of examination was on rational problem solving through the actions rather than the language contained within a policy text. However, many theorists now agree that society and relationships are constructed through discourse. It is not an objective reality we refer to through our language but our particular relationship to and construction of it. Philosophers including Foucault and Habermas built upon this constructivist view and subsequently 'public policy was increasingly informed by theories which stressed the need to analyse politics and policy as modes of discourse which structure reality' (Parsons 1995, p.70).

Language, as an important element of discourse, is not neutral (Peters 2001, p.151). There is constant meaning construction and definition at play. Manipulation of language is a well-known technique of advertisers and spin doctors these days but it is not enough to study only the sentence construction or choice of vocabulary when considering the policy context as there is also the

socio-political element of discourse acting upon it as illustrated by

Hyatt:

Bourdieu (1991) contends that it would be meaningless to try to analyse political discourse by concentrating on the utterances alone without considering the sociopolitical conditions under which the discourse is produced and received. (Hyatt 2005, p.515)

Discourse is purposeful. It aims to achieve something and this adds an extra dimension to the analysis of the text. It may be obvious or hidden but there is always an underlying aim to any instance of discourse whether it is entertainment, persuasion, chastisement, and so on and, as Olssen et al. (2004, p.71) point out, policy is the 'discourse of politics'. Fundamentally, policy is the exercise of political power and the language that is used to legitimate that process (Olssen et al. 2004, p.71).

As Edelman (1988, p.104) points out, 'It is language about political events, not the events in any other sense, that people experience'. All political events are reported to us in some way through the medium of language and policy is the formal language output of the activity politics. The associations of words and meanings are 'important for political behaviour because they lend authoritativeness to conventional perceptions and value premises and make it difficult to perceive alternative possibilities' (Edelman 1964, p.121). This illustrates how the current neoliberal discourse manifests and is presented as commonsense.

Many theorists have now rejected the positivist view that a policy event is neutral – simply a statement of rational intent – and that in effect a policy is a form of power and control. As Ball (1998, p.124) tells us when talking about opposing ideologies in education reform, 'this last point serves to remind us that policies are both

systems of values and symbolic systems; ways of representing, accounting for and legitimating political decisions'. Likewise Arnott and Ozga (2010, p.339) emphasise the constructed nature of policy as discourse and that the texts frame problems, refer to carefully selected evidence and, importantly, produce 'knowledge of particular kinds to guide the implementation of policy solutions (Byrne & Ozga 2008; Ozga et al. 2009).

Peters explains that human capital theory has now become the 'reigning orthodoxy' (Peters 2001, p.73) and the 'basis for education policy in most western countries', particularly the US and the UK (Peters 2001, p.74). He highlights the neoliberal thinking that historically there has been excessive dependence on the welfare system and that education and training will enable individuals to contribute to national economic prosperity, thus illustrating that this is not 'commonsense' but just the current dominant ideology.

When considering the ideology espoused by a specific policy document an important consideration is that all texts are authored and we cannot assume total objectivity by these policy actors. As Parsons (1995, p.87) suggests, how a problem is defined depends largely upon the perspective of the individual or group defining it and the filters through which they view the world or their particular construct of it. 'Policy actors use discourse to foreground certain key ideas and thus restrict or reduce the significance of other competing ways of seeing or thinking about a policy issue' (Arnott and Ozga 2010, p.339). It is significant that Graham Donaldson can be considered a 'privileged' member of society due to his status within the educational establishment, as according to Gramsci reality is something which is determined by the ruling classes and 'the role of intellectuals as mediators in the ideological control is of special

significance' (Parsons 1995, p.146). Donaldson has been given the power to define the problem and set the agenda.

Arnott and Ozga (2010, p.338) discuss politicians 'crafting the narrative' in their paper 'Education and Nationalism: the discourse of education policy in Scotland'. The stories that politicians tell feature significantly in this piece of work as they quote in the introduction: 'A narrative, A story. It is this, historians, political theorists and leader-writers agree that, more than anything, a government must have if it is going to succeed' (Burn from Arnott and Ozga 2010, p.335). Taking this on board it leads to contemplation of how considered a story is and the deliberate crafting entailed. The teacher is the main character in Donaldson's narrative and it is his deliberate drawing of this character that will here be decoded.

The Method

There are many ways of approaching discourse analysis. Norman Fairclough has been hugely influential in the area of critical discourse analysis and developed Foucault's ideas about discourse, ideology, and power into a method for application to textual analysis. He developed the model used below for analysis of New Labour discourse in his book 'New Labour, New Language' (Fairclough 2000).

Fairclough (1992, p.76) points out that the choices that people or policy actors make in their language are also choices about how to construct 'social identities, social relationships, and knowledge and belief'. Identifying what is implicit in a policy text is essential as 'analysis of implicit content can provide valuable insights into what is taken as given, as common sense' (Fairclough 1995, p.6). To achieve this he outlines 'three analytically separable focuses'

for the analysis of political language ‘styles, discourses and genres’ (Fairclough 2000, p.14).

The analysis of style involves a close examination of sentence structure, vocabulary chosen, use of metaphor and rhetorical devices. This is intended to deconstruct the political and social identities and values that are created in identifying the language devices Donaldson uses to demonstrate his values and assumptions.

The discourse of the text is understood to mean a focus on how the text is produced, the relationship between writer and reader, and on how power relations are enacted through the language used. Focusing on ‘political representations’ (Fairclough 2000) of the teacher and injustice and inequality implicit in the text, this reveals contradictions between teacher autonomy and increasing central control, how those in power will attempt to maintain current centres of knowledge and power, and how this is demonstrated through relational devices in the text.

Genre deals with the type of text and how the language functions as a means of government. The particular way in which the discourse is framed and manipulated in a policy advocacy document and the commissioned expert advice colludes with the dominant ideology. This element of the analysis will examine how the ‘metanarrative’ (Peters 2001, p.75) of the knowledge economy impacts on the teacher.

Fairclough (2000) explains that the three elements are only ‘analytically separable’ but in reality are always employed simultaneously. For this reason and, in the interests of readability, the analysis below is structured per page, and style, discourse, and genre are dealt with for each element of the text. The focus of this analysis will be on the first chapter of the document, as space does not allow

for an analysis of all 116 pages. This chapter presents an overview in terms of the main ideas and values illustrating how the discourse reflects the dominant ideology.

The Discourse Analysis

The document begins with a clear statement that ‘Human capital in the form of a highly educated population is now accepted as a key determinant of economic successes’ (Donaldson 2011, p.2). The underlying neoliberal values in this statement are obvious but there is also a tone of pronouncement. ‘[N]ow accepted’ is unquestioned and sets this up as an authoritative statement that embodies the values that pervade the entire report. The document suggests that there can be no doubt that this is the case.

In the same paragraph we encounter the first clue in which Donaldson sees teachers’ roles within society, politics, and the economic system. He first mentions the importance of comparative studies of educational performance in driving policy and goes on to say that the evidence suggests ‘perhaps unsurprisingly, that the foundations of successful education lie in the quality of teachers and their leadership’ (Donaldson 2011, p.2). The ‘perhaps unsurprisingly’ here again tells us that this is obvious and should not be questioned. Donaldson is using his position of authority to pronounce the truth again to the less privileged reader. The ‘quality’ of teachers is a term that is vague as it could mean anything but we are encouraged to understand this in the terminology of performativity in that the ‘quality’ of something is linked to excellence and its inherent value. In this paragraph teachers are effectively made responsible for the economic success or failure of the nation. The paragraph closes with the statement ‘High quality people achieve high quality outcomes for children’ (Donaldson 2011, p.2). Here the ‘quality’ is not only

associated with the professional domain of teacher but now with 'people'. This quality is a measure of the worth of the human being and the specific quality refers to a particular academically able individual who is successful in the mainstream education system. Does this mean that all of us who do not fall into that category are of poor quality?

Subsequently Donaldson (2011, p.2) makes explicit the five ideas which underpin his recommendations. He states that these are 'almost axiomatic', again giving the reader no opportunity to criticise or question these ideas as valid assumptions. The first mentions the 'achievable ways in which school education can realise the high aspirations Scotland has for its young people'. These 'aspirations' are unspecified but bearing in mind what has gone before and the explicit neoliberal values espoused we can take these to be academic and economic aspirations. There is no mention of happiness, fulfilment, social skills, or the like which many would argue may be of higher importance.

Another of these 'axiomatic' ideas involves leadership and 'the habits of mind which must be acquired and fostered from entry into the teaching profession' (Donaldson 2011, p.2) implying all teachers should aspire to be leaders and will be moulded that way whether they have this aspiration or not. Perhaps not referring only to school leadership but setting up the teacher as leader in relation to pupils. This is suggestive of Donaldson's view of a teacher as an authoritative figure rather than one who sees themselves as more of a facilitator or guide in the learning process. We get the sense of a traditional construct of teacher here.

In the next idea teachers are again made responsible for the 'future well being of Scotland' (Donaldson 2011, p.2) with it being

dependant upon the potential of the Curriculum for Excellence being realised. He mentions the ‘imperatives’ which ‘gave rise’ to the curriculum but there is no mention of what they might be. However, that they are ‘imperative’ suggests to us their unquestionable nature and thus the unquestionable value of the curriculum they ‘gave rise’ to.

The final idea deals with ‘career long teacher education’ which he says is ‘currently too fragmented and often haphazard’ (Donaldson 2011, p.2). Again there is no evidence presented for this statement of apparent fact but the combination of ‘fragmented’ and ‘haphazard’ paints a vivid picture for us of it being a total mess. Someone else with different values may describe the same situation as creative or diverse. However Donaldson goes on to situate this in opposition to what he says it should be for which the vocabulary is ‘quality, coherence, efficiency and impact’ (Donaldson 2011, p.2).

The final paragraph of this page functions as a tool to get the reader onside, describing that the current situation, although undergoing reform, is positive, and it uses terms such as ‘secure’, ‘commitment’, and ‘impressive’ (Donaldson 2011, p.2). He is unwilling to alienate a teaching profession who he needs onside to carry out and support his recommendations. He goes on to outline some of the aspects he considers the positives of the Scottish teaching profession using terms such as ‘framework of standards’, ‘structured induction’, and ‘contractual provision’; all terms that refer to accountability and control. What is significant here are the choices being made. There is much more that is good but Donaldson is choosing to praise those areas that align with what he hopes to improve rather than praising the activism of the profession or the innovation, which he chooses to ignore.

Page four begins with stating the importance of the Curriculum for Excellence for this review. This is set up as a positive with a reference to its 'opportunities' (Donaldson 2011, p.4). However, this is a contested and much criticised document. Donaldson ignores this and the majority of ideas about what kind of teacher we need to create refer to this curriculum. He references the often quoted 'teachers as co-creators' of this curriculum and sets it against the previous reforms which have involved more central control, thus generating validity from denigrating the previous situation. He says that the success of this curriculum is 'dependent on the quality of leadership at all levels and on the ability and willingness of teachers to respond to the opportunities it offers' (Donaldson 2011, p.4). Again we have the all important 'quality' but also this appears to be a challenge to teachers, implying that if you are not 'able' and 'willing' then you are unable and unwilling to respond, which would be an unpleasant place in which to situate yourself.

On page five of the document Donaldson moves to discuss the qualities required for a 'twenty first century teacher'. He states that the review will address the need to 'agree [on] the fundamental qualities and skills needed for twenty-first century teacher' (Donaldson 2011, p.5). Who 'agrees'? Does this refer to his team who are all of a certain privileged class in being members of the educational establishment? Is it agreed between himself and the government who likewise belong to a powerful elite? It is important at this point to take into consideration the participation in this review that was available to those who may have an opinion on the matter. In the letter to the cabinet secretary that prefaces this document Donaldson sets out the 'broad and inclusive' evidence base

for the review by detailing ‘[he] also issued a call for evidence which received almost 100 responses, and a questionnaire for serving teachers which received just under 2500 responses’ (Donaldson 2011, p.iii). This assertion of breadth is questionable as this is a small percentage of serving teachers. There is an important issue here with how this participation is managed. Only certain groups with arguably ‘privileged access to the discourse’ (Van Dijk 1993, p.255) will have been enabled to contribute to this discussion. Access was offered in specific ways restricting it to those of a certain group with no attempt made to reach those who may be socially excluded or have no access to the discourse.

A paragraph of particular significance to this analysis is identified in the original document as significant and merits quotation in full.

The foundations of a high quality teaching profession lie in the nature of the people recruited to become teachers. Every effort must be made to attract, select and retain individuals with the qualities which are essential in a twenty-first century teacher and potential school leader. (Donaldson 2011, p.5)

Overall we have the sense that this is not an inclusive profession. There is implied emphasis here on the neoliberal individualism and meritocracy ideals. We are told that the key lies in the ‘nature’ of these individuals. This implies it is not something that can be acquired but that these ‘qualities’ are inherent. The audience for this advisory document is government so the people deciding these qualities are again from a particular class and group with a traditional value system. Their objective is to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence to help improve the national economy. The words ‘must’ and ‘essential’ leave no room for doubt that this is the path to follow.

He says that ‘selection processes must relate to these qualities’ (Donaldson 2011, p.5). So these recruits will be selected according to qualities decided by the ruling class to serve the dominant neoliberal ideology.

There is a brief mention of alternative routes into the profession, which he says ‘could, however, be helpful as a means of increasing diversity’ (Donaldson 2011, p.6) but makes appear insignificant as he immediately undermines it with:

The improvements to existing undergraduate and postgraduate routes which I am proposing should in themselves bring about significant improvements in quality but employment-based opportunities which have sufficient academic rigour are worthy of further investigation. (Donaldson 2011, p.6)

Donaldson confirms his own expert status with the underlying confidence that his assessment and recommendations will ensure the required improvements and throws away the ‘employment-based opportunities’ as merely ‘worthy of further investigation’, making it clear they are not really a concern. This reinforces the assumption that the teacher is required to come from a particular background.

Overall the dominant voice throughout this document is that of Donaldson and his team, however there is a rare instance of the teacher’s voice on page six:

The values and intellectual challenges which underpin academic study should extend their own scholarship and take them beyond any inclination, however understandable, to want narrow training of immediate and direct relevance to life in the classroom. (Donaldson 2011, p.6)

In this sentence Donaldson makes clear that the knowledge and power should remain in academic institutions with his insistence that ‘academic study’ is the route which ‘should’ be taken for beginning

teachers. The 'values' he mentions are again unspecified and we are to assume that 'academic study' does have some value without questioning what this may be. The teachers' voice is implicit. There is a clear 'inclination' referred to 'to want training of immediate and direct relevance to life in the classroom' (Donaldson 2011, p.6). Although Donaldson accepts that, the use of the words 'beyond' and 'narrow' imply that this is a short-sighted desire and that these students do not know what is best for them. Again as the experts, Donaldson and his colleagues are the ones with the power to ignore the voice of the students despite mentioning elsewhere that student feedback should be considered and become part of the process of 'ongoing evaluation and improvement' (Donaldson 2011, p.7).

Donaldson describes his vision for the future of teacher education with frequent reference to 'consistency' and 'coherence' and, although he claims 'uniformity is neither necessary nor desirable' (Donaldson 2011, p.7), the language he uses to describe it points clearly in that direction. In his summing up of the chapter, one of the most important developments mentioned is 'a coherent approach to teacher education which is underpinned by a framework of standards which signpost the ways in which professional capacity should grow progressively across a career' (Donaldson 2011, p.10). The first half of this sentence sets up the uniformity and rigidity of this new system that will be imposed on the students. It will be 'coherent' nationally with courses inspected to ensure they are meeting the required standard and selecting the right people. The 'framework of standards' will be imposed again by members of the establishment, that is, those people who have proved themselves successful in the current system and achieved 'privileged access to discourse and communication' (Van Dijk 1993, p.255). This will

then ‘signpost’ the direction in which teachers ‘should’ travel throughout their career implying that this is decided for them. They will not even receive a map to enable them to choose or create their own route but are expected to follow the ‘signposts’.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although this analysis focuses only on the overview section of the document and there is much more analysis which could be undertaken, Donaldson’s construction of teachers within the narrative is a contradictory one. Teachers will be expected to view themselves as autonomous members of a reflective profession but will be carefully selected from the dominant and preferred group according to prescribed criteria and possibly subject to national assessment at the recommended ‘national assessment centre’ (Donaldson 2011, p.27) to ensure they have the desired ‘qualities’ to teach. They will be trained in the same manner as every other aspiring teacher in Scotland to meet a set of prescribed standards and to deliver the government endorsed curriculum with its ‘several hundred discrete objectives’ (Priestly and Humes 2010, p.353) governing how their students are to develop. They will not be expected to question the relevance and validity of this curriculum lest they be labelled unable or unwilling to ‘respond to the opportunities it offers’ (Donaldson 2011, p.4). The direction of their careers will also be mapped out for them and they have to follow the ‘signposts’ to develop in the ‘right’ way. In this vein, it seems education is being tightly controlled to manufacture teachers with just the right ‘qualities’ to manufacture the entrepreneurs of the future.

One of the most problematic assumptions underlying Donaldson’s construction of teachers is that they will have the

monopoly on knowledge in the classroom being 'experts' in their subject area. With developments in technology perhaps this is no longer the case and a more radical vision of a future teacher is needed: One who facilitates learning and is skilled in the craft of teaching as the knowledge is easily accessible now to everyone.

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