

Embracing Complexity: Findings from a Comparative Analysis of Representations of Teachers in the British Press and Research Literature

Emily Zemke

University of Warwick, UK

Abstract

This paper follows an empirical study of how teachers were represented in British newspapers during the 1990s. Its purpose is to describe some of the findings arising from a comparison of the data and representations of teachers in educational research literature.

The topic of teacher representation was a matter of personal interest to the researcher but an extensive review of educational literature revealed it also to have potential theoretical value. In the study representations of teachers in the literature were described conceptually according to the position of their characteristics within two continua: one relating to commonality and contradiction, the other to continuity and change. These continua were applied to data collected from a newspaper sample from the 1990s. Using illustrations from the sample this paper considers some of the insights this application afforded. This is followed by a discussion of the main similarities and differences between representations of teachers in the press and literature.

The comparative analysis revealed ways for research to develop a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of how the teacher is represented in different cultural contexts, mediums and timeframes. The paper concludes with a discussion of the main implications for research on the representation of teachers and it makes recommendations for further research.

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Introduction

Mitchell, Weber & O'Reilly-Scanlon (2005) considered the representation of teachers by cultural and political institutions largely misguided and irresponsible.

Too many outsiders – film makers, novelists, politicians – have made it their business to represent teachers and schools, and too rarely have we as teachers, as insiders, made it our business to 'write back' to the colonists of teachers' experiences¹.

They claimed that the meaning of teacher in social and cultural spheres is imposed on teachers, taking no account of their actual experiences². While this hypothesis might seem justified to most critically aware educationalists, at the time of this study supporting evidence was largely anecdotal or speculative. Furthermore, there were problematic assumptions implicit in the hypothesis. One was the claim that 'insiders' have authority on what it means to be a teacher. Another was that representations by 'outsiders' were of less relevance or worth to the teaching population than those made by 'insiders'. The only way of grounding these assumptions was to understand how the meaning of the teacher changes in different conceptual arenas. This would require knowledge of teachers' socio-cultural as well as personal identities, in other words, a more sophisticated knowledge of the supposed 'outsiders' and the difference between them and 'insiders'. To this end, the study was designed so that the representation of teachers in British national newspapers could be examined empirically and then compared with representations in educational literature on teachers. Newspapers were the chosen medium for reasons of personal interest, namely the researcher's career in newspaper journalism. The 1990s was the chosen period of study because it followed the implementation of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), the most significant recent policy change in breadth and influence. The focus was on the medium of newspapers, not on specific events such as the National Curriculum, standardised testing and assessment. However, it was still likely that this timeframe would have more theoretical value for historians and current teachers than an earlier period, or one irrespective of policy change³. The research methodology and newspaper sample are briefly described later. First, a review of literature on teachers exposes the areas and gaps of representation that this investigation went on to explore.

Teachers in the Literature

The motivation for this study grew from personal interest but as it progressed a theoretical rationale for exploring the representation of teachers became increasingly apparent. A review of educational literature revealed the identity of teachers to be widely explored but also widely contested. There were no signs of consensus on the issues of who teachers are or what being a teacher means. However, there were five distinguishing characteristics of the teacher evident in the literature which provided a way of organising some of the emerging ideas. These focussed on teachers' lives, work, profile, position in relation to the state and images. Each is discussed briefly in turn.

Teachers' lives

Teachers sometimes appeared as a population determined by structural and situational factors. Numerous contextual issues were found to impact on the make-up of the teaching workforce, such as the national and international economy, salary levels, and strategies for training and recruitment⁴. However, the effects of structural change were diluted when subjective choices, local and individual influences were considered significant, such as decisions regarding marriage, training, intellectual capacity and career breaks⁵. For instance, Gardner (1995) interviewed 44 teachers born between 1888 and 1914 to understand their perceptions of training provision in the twentieth century. Most chose to train because of the personal benefits of college experience and this element of choice was important to them. However, the establishment of training colleges was perceived differently by rural and urban teachers and training was experienced differently by elementary and secondary teachers. Gardner showed how responses to national policy varied according to a teacher's school sector, stage and environment, a point given considerably less attention in studies focussed solely on the structures of provision. Factors influencing the make-up of the teaching population were ideological and discursive as well as structural and situational. Gender discourses were prominent among these, yielding strong images of motherhood and domesticity⁶. An example is, Biklen (1995), who combined an historical study of nineteenth century fiction and autobiographies with an observation of teachers' work in US schools during the 1980s. Her findings suggested that elementary teaching was a vehicle for emancipation because it facilitated women's upward mobility, but that it was at the same time firmly embedded in

gender discourse. Biklen theorised that patriarchy perpetuates a dialogue of mistrust and hostility between teachers and mothers in order to maintain a system of gender inequalities and capitalist values which advantage the ruling elite. By contrast, other accounts of real-life experiences sought to dispel stereotypical images and discourses of 'feminism' and 'femininity'⁷. Copelman's (1996) history of nineteenth century women teachers in London highlighted the limitations of 'feminism' as explanation for changes in teaching. Interest in teachers' subjective responses to structures and ideologies yielded rich and descriptive data but also met with concerns about the validity and generalisability of findings taken from narratives and histories⁸.

Teachers' work

The teacher assumed another identity in discussions of teaching and work-related activities. In some cases teachers were subjects performing in accordance with philosophical paradigms, established techniques and methods. For instance, Alexander (1988) believed teaching to have been affected in recent years by seven pedagogical ideologies which he identified as: Elementary, Progressive, Developmental, Behavioural, Classical Humanist, Social Imperatives (adaptive/utilitarian) and Social Imperatives (reformist/egalitarian). Alexander theorised that ideologies such as these characterise a public language of education which differs from actual experiences in the classroom. Other researchers put the official languages of pedagogy and philosophy aside and instead made central the context-specific nature of teachers' work⁹. For example, Acker (1995) warned that the significance of teaching context should not be under-estimated. In an ethnographic investigation of two British primary schools in the 1990s, she claimed that teachers respond to children in whatever ways are effective and with no obvious end point. An important aspect of teachers' work was the extent of their personal and emotional engagement. The practical goals of teaching were fundamental to some discussions. Clandinin (1985), for instance, coined the phrase 'personal practical knowledge' to describe the use of individual experience and memories in classroom practice. In other studies the focus was on a combination of emotional and social/ideological biases¹⁰. Nias (1989) analysed how teachers draw on substantial and situational selves when they make decisions in the classroom. With this terminology she identified the difference between innate and learned/modified occupational identity.

Teachers' profile

A factor in teachers' identity was their socio-cultural status, an important aspect of which was public opinion of them. Teachers were sometimes held responsible for poor public opinion. Ball & Goodson (1985) associated declining esteem with teachers' behaviour during the Tyndale affair in 1976¹¹. This was despite an official report which found the Inner London Education Authority to have been largely responsible¹². At other times blame was pinned on the rhetoric of Government or unionists¹³ and media hostility¹⁴. In Cunningham's (1992) study teachers' professional identity in the press was the consequence of interaction between Government, press and teachers. Their identity was here more complex and composite than it appeared in some other histories. Issues of socio-cultural status were also intimately bound up with the notion of professionalism. Professionalism was variably deployed, sometimes signalling universal standards of professionalism¹⁵, other times representing context-specific roles, behaviours, activities and coping mechanisms¹⁶. Hoyle (1974) was a useful reference because he devised a differentiated model of professionalism to generate a more sophisticated analysis of group and individual identity. He used the terms professionalisation and professionalism to explain the dialectical relationship between teachers and social/political pressures. The former referred to their status and public perception; the latter he used to indicate an individual's rights and strategies of control within the classroom. However, other studies suggested that professionalism might elude theoretical definition altogether¹⁷.

Teachers' position

The identity of teachers also depended upon the extent of their power and influence in relation to the labour market, government, parents and schools. Larson (1980) feared this would result in a position of virtual powerlessness, while others anticipated subjugation to various forms of control at different times¹⁸. Aldrich (1982), Bergen (1982), Gardner (1998) and Simon (1991) conceptualised education in relation to complex and variable economic and political contexts. Furthermore, in some literature, teachers' appeared to be governed by measures of accountability¹⁹ and in others they negotiated these measures²⁰.

Teachers' role and responsibilities with regard to the implementation of education policies ranged from the standardised and deskilled²¹ to the

creative and interpretive²². They were often presented as issues of control. Reforms to school management were also seen to impact on teachers in numerous ways²³, and especially on their relationships with headteachers and colleagues²⁴. Webb & Vulliamy (1996) explored the issue of collaborative working relationships with 50 primary schools in 1992-3. They discovered that while schools were ostensibly involving teachers in decision making and curriculum planning, collaborative frameworks were increasingly difficult for headteachers to sustain and many were resorting to more directive styles. For teachers this meant disengaging from decisions which affected their work. Alongside, but also contradicting, these discussions were those concerning teachers' role in schooling and socialisation. Teachers were considered potential authors of social change and given the responsibility of resisting undemocratic policy and discourse²⁵.

Teachers' images

Another aspect of teacher identity was their visibility as symbols and stereotypes in society and culture. The value of teacher images for the public was a popular topic of interest in interdisciplinary fields²⁶. Weber & Mitchell (1995) were among the minority who also considered the value of these images for teachers in formulating their own sense of professional identity. They collected 600 drawings of teachers done by children and teachers in Canada, Zimbabwe and Zambia, comparing the representations with themes identified in the Hollywood movie *Kindergarten Cop* and in the *Barbie Doll*. The findings implied that teachers considered established, often nostalgic, stereotypes more valuable than newer and, arguably, more representative images. To some extent outcomes like these rested on the problematic assumption that images have simple identifiable meanings, predetermined by cultural producers. By contrast, empirical studies of difference cultures and cultural texts contested the nature of teacher images. They understood that images might be variably interpreted by cultural consumers²⁷. Trier (2001), for example, found that pre-service teachers were more inclined towards oppositional readings of cinema than to conformist readings. He suggested that cinematic representations of teachers' poor work-life balance could be used with student-teachers to help them become more critically reflective of their own priorities.

Patterns in representations of teachers

The literature review revealed two things. First, it showed that the representation of teachers was an under-explored topic. Despite acknowledgement of the impacts of modernisation and political upheaval on teachers in the last 20 years, there was little comprehensive understanding of what being a teacher meant and was coming to mean in social and cultural terms. In recent years cultural commentators had acknowledged a shift in the production of education news²⁸ and the capacity and power of news to warp and deconstruct meanings²⁹. However, judgements of stereotyping³⁰, hostility³¹ and 'teacher bashing'³² concentrated on the process of cultural communication more than the issue of teachers' identity in the socio-cultural domain³³. There were few enough studies in the educational field on teachers in the media and even fewer with a specific interest in press representation. A study of the representations of teachers in the British press during the 1990s seemed, from a theoretical standpoint, likely to yield original and interesting data.

Secondly, the review revealed the variety and diversity with which teachers were represented in the literature. For each of the five characteristics outlined above the teacher was conceptualised were varying degrees of complexity. For instance, in representations of teachers' lives, sometimes statistical trends and general descriptions were prominent and at other times these were eclipsed by insights into the potential heterogeneity of teachers' immediate real-life experiences and opinions. Although explorations of teachers' work took into consideration a wide variety of scenarios and circumstances, some showed evidence of periods in educational history, while others revealed contemporary and individual teachers' engagement with their work. Similarly, some discussions of teachers' public profile and professional identity were informed by the evolution of relationships between media, government and unions, while others offered different insights into teachers' participation in, creation of and response to those agencies in specific working contexts. In studies of teachers' position in relation to the state, there were again, aspects around which ideas clustered. Teachers were revealed to be dependent upon and determined by policy and politicians. They were also shown to respond to and interpret directions. Finally, literature on teachers' images could be observed and understood as revolving around issues of cultural reproduction and/or through issues of cultural consumption and choices. It was as a result of

the variability of focus that some characteristics of the teacher earned more detailed exposure than others.

It was proposed that the focus of representations could be described conceptually with two continua: the first relating to commonality on the one hand and contradiction on the other, the second representing continuity on the one hand and change on the other. The teachers' position within the continua would depend upon whether the focus assumed shared or variable characteristics, and whether the characteristics were time-sensitive to the present day or inconsiderate of time. The continua were identified for reasons of 'theoretical logic'³⁴. In other words, they were thought likely to yield findings relevant and valuable to existing theory. It was intended that the continua be applied to representations of teachers in British newspapers so that their socio-cultural identity following the upheavals of the 1988 ERA might be better understood.

Methodology and Sample

The investigation deployed a modified version of grounded theory³⁵. Grounded theory was an attractive option for its flexibility, open-mindedness and versatility. Since the data was to be compared with existing theory, it was important that meaning would be identified in the newspapers not imposed on them from pre-existing ideas. However, in its original form grounded theory was insufficiently pragmatic to allow for the analysis of a large and complex volume of material. Nor did its terminology take adequate account of the conditional and propositional nature of reality. Therefore this project followed the example of Charmaz (2000) and her constructivist grounded theory method. She argued that grounded theory could be 'constructed' by researchers provided they explain the way they adapt its flexible framework.

[...] we can use grounded theory methods as flexible, heuristic strategies rather than as formulaic approaches³⁶.

This approach meant that the researcher could abide by grounded theory guidelines but also take account of the subjective nature of research and analysis and the specific needs and requirements of the data.

The newspaper sample selected for investigation included the *Times*, *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *Mirror* and *Sun*. They were chosen

using a sampling rationale of typicality³⁷, meaning that they best represented the criteria for national press in Britain, identified by Seymour-Ure (2001) as reach, content and reputation. Restrictions of time meant that 90 newspapers could be studied from each year of the decade, and these were selected from February, May and October to ensure term-time coverage distributed fairly over each academic year. Each newspaper was read on microfilm or in hard copy so the researcher could take account of presentation and pictures. Selections transcribed from the newspapers were later checked for accuracy using LexisNexis Professional, an online news database. Nvivo, qualitative data handling software was used to help organise and manage the study. Selections were transcribed onto screen and coded exhaustively. Codes were categorised into key themes, which in turn were gradually refined and condensed into a series of core concepts.

Data

The intention was to apply the two continua to the data to enable a comparison of representations in the press and literature. However, the process of studying the press had revealed the need for some modification to the initial continua definitions because they did not take account of the different audiences, styles and purposes of each medium. Commonality and contradiction were to be judged, irrespective of the number of teachers being represented at any one time, and of their geographic location. For instance, a representation would have commonality if it generalised from the specific to the universal in any way. Continuity and change were to be noted irrespective of the date of publication and time-specific contextual issues. For instance, a representation of the teacher would have continuity if the characteristic was not time-sensitive.

In the study, more than 36,000 coded appearances of the teacher were organised into categories, refined and condensed into a series of core concepts. It was to these that the continua were applied. Some of the findings are described below using five illustrations from the newspaper sample. This presentation is a detailed reflection of some findings, but it does not mirror the analytic process because it omits the codes. For explanatory reasons it suits the purposes of this paper to describe how the continua were relevant and applicable. The illustrations are not exhaustive, but give an indication of the kinds of insights analysis afforded. They are followed by a discussion of the main similarities and

differences between the overall findings and the literature representations.

Illustration 1

Q1: 'Those who can, do; those who can't, teach.' Quite possibly there has never been a more destructive, philistine sentence of folk-wisdom than that.

Q4: we need to picture an Ideal Teacher - the teacher as a pillar of communities; a beacon of literacy and knowledge; a wise guide; a moral activist. This may seem slushy. It is certainly idealistic. But until we extirpate that terrible caricature of the teacher as a slothful anarchist in denim and replace it with a positive image instead, then we will not get the teachers we want and need. The Ideal Teacher would clearly be respected, properly paid and admired.

(Those Who Can, And How To Get Them Into Teaching, See Figure 1)³⁸

Figure 1

Those who can, and how to get them into teaching

"Those who can, do those who can't, teach." Quite possibly, there has never been a more destructive, philistine sentence of folk-wisdom than that. Yesterday, the Teacher Training Agency enlisted a wide spectrum of well-known people, from the Prime Minister to John Cleese, Stephen Hawking the scientist to David Seaman the goalkeeper, Skin from the band Skunk Anansie to the film-maker David Puttnam, in order to recruit new people into Teaching. The line in the new cinema advertisement, that "no one forgets a good teacher", was pitched just right, and comes not a moment too soon.

For years under the Conservatives, education minister after education minister denigrated teachers libelling many good people as trendy, idle, failures. The intention may have been well-meaning to focus attention on those teachers who were over-ideological, or simply unable to control classes, and thus to spur teachers to raise their game. But the effect was nearly the opposite. The politically inspired anti-teacher caricature spread deep into the culture, into television programmes, newspapers, cartoons and novels. It helped demoralise much of the profession. And it certainly put off many students who would have made good, dedicated teachers, and who turned instead to other, less controversial and better paid professions. By the time Labour came to power, the caricature was beginning to turn into a self-fulfilling prophesy. Give a dog a bad name...

The new government has not yet got the tone entirely right. This advertisement, aimed at raising the esteem in which teaching is held, was preceded by early Labour announcements on "naming and shaming" bad schools and fast-track sacking procedures for bad teachers. Both are necessary, but it is now essential for the Government, as a matter of national policy, to balance such announcements with powerful pro-teaching messages. It can not both play to the *Daily Mail* gallery and at the same time persuade thousands of shrewd, well-qualified people to enter what we call a profession and, too often, treat as a trade.

Tony Blair, and his co-stars, are quite right: we do remember good teachers. Many of us were given our most important life-chances by a single inspirational and energetic adult at the front of a classroom. These inspiring teachers tend to have a rare mix of characteristics - a certain dramatic flamboyant, a profound love of learning a robust and often witty demeanour, and a dogged

persistence, even with slow or unappealing youngsters. More than in most professions a relatively small number of people can have a dramatic impact on tens of thousands of lives. A school which is unlucky enough to have no exceptional, inspirational, teachers will be bad unhappy and failing school. People may respond that the great teachers will be drawn inexorably into the profession no matter what, just as great musicians are drawn to music. But it is not as simple as that. The combination of a growing culture prejudice against teachers and low salaries provides a powerful disincentive. None of us really knows how many great teachers became lawyers or sales executives and never met the children they could have transformed. None of us knows how much damage was done.

Repairing it will cost the country more than words: there is no getting away from the salary issue. While the differential between graduates entering the teaching progression (salary £14,200) and those entering the rest (average graduate starting salary £15-£16,000) is not large, the gap starts to open up alarmingly within a few years, as teachers reach around £22,000. The creation of advanced skills teachers, who can earn more, is a good first step in persuading people to stay in the classroom. But teachers need a more ambitious grade-by-grade career structure. That will cost the country money. Everyone knows that the money won't come quickly. Smaller sums could profitably be spent too on repairing and upgrading some of the grotty classrooms and staff rooms in which teachers spend their working lives. We return, however, to where we begin, the status of teaching. Politics is partly about visions of how it used to be, or will be one day. So we need to picture an Ideal Teachers – the teacher as a pillar of communities; a wise guide; a moral activist. This may seem slushy. It is certainly idealistic. But until we extirpate that terrible caricature of the teachers as slothful anarchist in denim, and replace it with a positive image instead, then we will not get the teachers we want and need. The Ideal Teacher would clearly be respected properly paid and admired. And that, after all, is precisely what the vast majority of our teachers need from us, and the Government, right now.

Commonality and contradiction

Although the article challenged some stereotypical interpretations of the ideal teacher it supported others. In effect it homogenised the teacher, looking for characteristic traits and behaviours which it argued were and ought to be universal. The homogenising tendency was perhaps inevitable in imaginary and projected characteristics applied to the entire teaching population, and this was a familiar perspective.

Continuity and change

There was variability in the idea of the teacher only insofar as common perceptions were time-sensitive. The low esteem of teachers was thought to be long-established and recent criticism to be extremely negative. The notion of an ideal teacher was presented as a new alternative but contradictorily rested on traditional principles of moral integrity and community spirit. Interestingly, public opinion was a way of inducing change, and it was implied that the make-up of the teaching population, not teachers themselves, was the key to change.

Illustration 2

At A Time When Children Need Male Role Models ... Could 'Sir' Very Soon Be Extinct?

Q2: [...] in a society riddled with family breakdown, many young people have no male authority figure in their lives.⁹⁹

Commonality and contradiction

The homogenising tendency was prolific in representations of teachers' personal dispositions. This article illustrates an assumption that teachers should act as substitute parents, and it linked male teachers with authority, implying the inadequacy or inferiority of women teachers' authority. The value of non-authoritarian teaching and of differing forms of authority possibly irrespective of gender, were absent. As role models and substitute parents, teachers were responding to market demands, not to the needs of individual children within their classroom. This demonstrates the underlying commitment to consumer/parent interests and a sense of common good and shared morality. Teachers were players in a system, and the terms and conditions of their participation were constantly fluctuating around consumer demands. Generally speaking, teachers' gender and morality were relevant in discussions of their performance, but not their ages, ethnic origins, backgrounds, training or intellect.

Continuity and change

Concerns about the feminisation of teaching were frequent, and as usual here it was presented as an immediate and current problem. The decline in male teachers was given no contextual information, with the focus being on effect rather than cause. The responsibility for change was given to some extent to teachers. They were not being asked to compensate for the breakdown in family values so much as singled out for not already compensating. There was an intrinsic assumption that teachers should be meeting the needs of education consumers and society, by responding to and anticipating change. Their inability to do so implied their out-of-date, out-of-touch position.

Illustration 3

The revised National Curriculum [stipulates ...] But it does not follow that traditional methods are being applied with enthusiasm or competence. Primary school teachers are the masters of their own classroom. Many still regard phonics as dull and old-fashioned

(Schools Fail The Key Test: The Roots Of The Problem – Where Our Teachers Have Gone Wrong ...)⁴⁰

[“...] Some are cautious and doubt the need to change from methods that have proved successful in the past. Others may suffer from technophobia - but we must encourage them all to see that they, as well as the children, can be enriched by using the new systems.”

(They're Getting The Hardware)⁴¹

Commonality and contradiction

The potential for teachers to choose their degree of involvement in the National Curriculum and IT, and the more fundamental ability to influence the education of children through their decisions, did not count as positive variability, but as problematic non-conformity. As far as teaching practice was concerned, local choices and local knowledge were valuable only as long as they did not impact on structural and general, and ambiguously defined, 'commonsense' requirements. The propensity of teachers towards certain political, moral, social and cultural inclinations rarely had positive connotations. Rather, they compromised teachers' duty of service. Creativity and initiative were praised only when teachers' also exhibited objectivity and a basic commitment to broad consumer interests.

Continuity and change

In the first extract, the supposedly long-established logic underlying the National Curriculum contrasted with teachers' allegedly recent and immediate opinions. The headline squarely placed blame on teachers, supported by an absence of detail on the demands of policy and institutional change. At the heart of the matter was teachers' mastery of their own classrooms, a point reiterated in the second extract, which found teachers again to be opponents of change. The emerging message was of teachers' continuing power, supported by increasingly dated infrastructure which gave them unnecessary freedoms.

Illustration 4

A teacher caused outrage by handing pupils sick cartoons showing a gun being held to a boy's head.

Lisa Hickson gave the homework reminder to nine and 10 year olds in the same week as the memorial service for the 17 victims of the Dunblane school massacre.

(Finish Your Homework Kids .. Or Else, See Figure 2)⁴²

Commonality and contradiction

Teachers were expected to protect children from emotional and physical harm and failure to do so, incidental or not, had severe consequences. Lisa was assumed guilty rather than ignorant or negligent, and there was an implication of malicious intent. The example illustrates how teachers' humour and opinions could appear threatening. The serious issue of personal influence was most extreme in stories of criminality and sexuality among teachers. As the decade progressed there was increasing exposure of teachers' supposedly instinctive drive for political, financial and sexual gratification. The newspapers came down hard on teachers who deviated from what were considered moral and sexual 'norms'. These varied between men and women, with the latter being less of a violent and physical threat but more volatile, passionate and titillating.

Continuity and change

Again the teacher was required to respond to change in social values and popular opinion. Lisa was to combine context-specific work with awareness of national events and sensitivities. The requirement was founded in basic social/moral logic and said nothing of the practical and emotional demands made of teachers by societal, cultural and policy change. The need for extreme political correctness and social awareness was not presented as an emerging or recent consequence of policy change.

Figure 2

FINISH YOUR HOMEWORK KIDS..OR ELSE



TASTELESS: Cartoon given to primary kids as homework reminder

School fury at gun 'joke'

A TEACHER caused outrage by handing pupils sick cartoons showing a gun being held to a boy's head.

Lise Hickson gave the homework reminder to nine and 10 year olds in the same week as the memorial service for the 17 victims of the Dunblane school massacre.

The drawing shows a woman teacher pointing the gun at a boy's temple saying: "Please return homework by Friday, 11th October."

Furious parents yesterday branded the joke "disgusting".

Warped

Mum Sarah Hull — whose daughter Sophia is in the class at Maendy Primary School in Cwmbran, South Wales — said: "It is in very bad taste.

"Some of the children have been laughing about it but I don't think it's much of a joke.

"I want it withdrawn. If these sheets got into the wrong hands it could put ideas into warped minds."

Angry Carol Jeffries, 29, walks daughters Sarah, nine, and Lisa, seven, to and from the school every

By **GEOFFREY LAKEMAN**

day — even though it is only a few hundred yards away.

She said: "Ever since the massacre I have made sure they are never out of my sight. Yet here we have the school handing out a cartoon like this — I think it's disgusting."

Embarrassed headmaster Mike Horton has scrapped the cartoon. He said: "The use of cartoons on homework sheets has been successful in motivating pupils.

"But this particular one was an unfortunate choice in the light of the tragic events of Dunblane. We are sorry."

He added that Miss Hickson "sincerely regrets any offence which may have been caused".

The teacher, who is in her mid-twenties, refused to comment but a senior colleague said was very upset.

He added: "She first used the cartoon some time before the massacre and just didn't think about the consequences now."

Maendy School has raised £200 for the Dunblane school and is planting a tree of remembrance.

Illustration 5

And what of Eve's school, where she was nicknamed 'Evil'? Colleagues talk now of the fear she inflicted on children and report a stream of complaints from parents.

Every day we are told that bad teachers are to be sacked. Surely someone could have suggested that Eve Howells – a cruel neurotic – was suspiciously ill-suited to teach Bible studies? They never did.

(Sharing Guilt For This Evil)⁴³

Commonality and contradiction

Responsibility for curbing instinctive drives was a matter of individual moral integrity, but teachers were also shown to be a community, sharing blame for each other's underperformance or bad behaviour. In the extreme case above, one teacher's colleagues were blamed for the continuation of her abusive activities in the classroom. This contradicted representations elsewhere of the classroom as a teacher's secluded private sphere. Interestingly, this sense of shared responsibility was not evident on the rare occasions that teachers were found deserving of praise. This was especially obvious in depictions of the school community, where teachers existed as uniform members of staff enacting rituals and roles determined by the headteacher. Success was commonly attributed to good leadership and failure, to poor teaching.

Continuity and change

A one-off criminal event here sparked concerns about the principles of teacher loyalty at a general level. The extract illustrates a trend among the newspapers to treat collegiality as a suspicious new phenomenon and a form of silent rebellion. It was associated with unionism, which although long-running and sometimes justifiable, was shown to involve unprecedented levels of aggression. There was never any evidence of collegiality playing an intrinsic and conventional role in schools or of its possible necessity following recent policy upheavals. Indeed, the staffroom as an institution was rebuked far more often than it was explored or applauded. This was ironic given that teachers were required to work as a unit, but the contradiction was made legitimate with the simplistic separation of work and life. Teachers were at all times required to be objective and non-social.

Similarities and differences between the press and literature

The five illustrations above give some idea of commonality and contradiction, continuity and change in the newspaper texts. The outcomes of the whole study stimulated a discussion on the similarities and differences between representations of teachers in the press and literature. In this section some of the key arguments are summarised. The empirical analysis yielded many findings which did not all fit neatly into the categories used for the literature so this discussion is only loosely organised around the structure of the review in the introduction of this paper.

Commonality and contradiction

The press and literature both described a teaching population with the use of statistics and quantitative measures. However, in the latter, the career of teaching was sometimes treated as a lifestyle choice and an opportunity for graduates⁴⁴, while in the former, teachers' origins and backgrounds were largely irrelevant in discussions of recruitment. Training was simply portrayed as a utilitarian function, with the variables most usually subjected to scrutiny being natural intellect and the ability to implement procedures. That age and ethnicity were also incidental contrasted with studies showing critical awareness of social and political ideologies affecting teachers' career choices⁴⁵. Overall, teachers' own thoughts and emotions were relevant only insofar as they might impact on pupils, parents or the education system. The role of teachers as service providers eclipsed all else, while being not half so emphatic or acceptable in the literature. Gender was recognised as significant in both sources, but the press judged gender characteristics natural or unnatural, good or bad, while recent educational literature went beyond this to deconstruct some of the stereotypes and assumptions about the feminine and femininity in teaching⁴⁶.

Although there was no consensus in the press as to the preferred pedagogy or teaching style, any absence of formulae, techniques or pre-conceived methods was unanimously repudiated. In the literature neither the possibility of an all-consuming pedagogy, nor the total absence of pedagogy, existed in empirical studies⁴⁷. Teachers were also shown to combine personal and practical knowledge⁴⁸, emotional and occupational demands⁴⁹. In the press, local knowledge was acceptable if applied locally, but it presented a constant threat to general-level theory and was undermined by the emotional nature of teachers' practice. The

implications of emotional engagement for teachers were not given serious or consistent consideration but the implications for consumers were exhaustively scrutinised, and rarely with positive outcomes. The difference between work at a primary and secondary level was noted significantly less frequently and with less specificity than in the literature. Instead, the role and responsibilities of teachers revolved more around the needs of particular pupil age groups and curriculum subject areas. Put simply, teachers' working identity appeared to be constructed more around output than input, a perspective recognised and dismissed as simplistic by some researchers⁵⁰.

Similar to some of the literature, the press recognised the issue of teachers' status as at least partly the responsibility of teachers. However, unlike the literature, responsibility turned into blame and unscrupulous criticism, which transgressed into other discussions about trustworthiness, reliability and ability. While in the literature, public opinion was often something government, media and teachers wrestled over, in the press it was something neither teachers nor government could control but to which both owed a debt of allegiance. Popularity was a topic given significant coverage but at the same time the newspapers did not implicate themselves in the creation of popular cultural myth making, as did researchers⁵¹. Accordingly, public opinion was presented as something of objective and authoritative status.

The issue of professionalism was far more ambiguous in the press than the literature, because it used the word without definition and in a variety of ways and contexts. Nonetheless professionalism and professional activities were expected and generally applied to the teaching population as a whole, in a way resembling trait method approaches in the literature⁵². These expectations took the form of unequivocal ideals more often than real-life happenings, and the extent of their applicability was questionable. What happened in individual classrooms was far removed from the concept of professionalism. This contrasted starkly with Hoyle's (1974) concept of professionalism, which denied teachers the control over their identity recognised by others⁵³.

Researchers were inclined to position the teacher as an implementer of change⁵⁴, a creative deliverer of information⁵⁵ and even an agent in the transmission of cultural pedagogy⁵⁶. By contrast, the press did not recognise a relationship of negotiation between teachers and the state, but instead saw only good or bad, function or dysfunction, as a result of either government or teacher activity. The composition of the state varied with each article, but teachers were fundamentally accountable to

the market, consumer demands and the nation. They were ammunition in political debates but they depended more on the market than on the government for their role and responsibility, position and status.

Stereotypical images of teachers were prolific in the press and literature alike. However, while the latter recognised the value of the teacher as a symbol in society⁵⁷, the former served only to perpetuate and endorse this symbolic value. This did not necessarily exonerate the teacher from derogative and harsh criticism. Rather, the juxtaposition of ideal and actual served to heighten the sense of an inadequate workforce. The symbolic status of teachers made them useful points of reference in political as well as cultural and social debates.

Continuity and change

Researchers understood the teaching population to be changing over time, largely for structural and sociological reasons. In the press, training and recruitment were sporadically affected by events such as the budget, tax and salary modifications. However, they were routinely disassociated from historical issues such as patriarchy and social inequality, which some of the literature used to understand and promote the need for change⁵⁸. At the same time, the suitability of recruits rested on the unequivocal belief in vocational calling.

In the literature, the issue of individuality in teaching arose in the context of discussions about teachers' personal investment in their work, and alongside concerns about the diminishing opportunity for creativity and autonomy⁵⁹. Contrastingly, the press showed no awareness that the organisation of the curriculum by subject areas might be at the expense of teachers' enjoyment and inspiration⁶⁰, nor of the lost potential for inspired and spontaneous dialogue⁶¹. In fact, personal investment and creativity were issues of immediate concern. Representations of teachers' individual strengths and weaknesses were disassociated from the changing context and conditions of their work, and frequently took no account of age or experience. While this lent a sense of generic unpredictability to individuals, the situations and circumstances surrounding them were not shown to hinder more reliable and consistent commitment. Therefore strengths and weaknesses could easily be interpreted as matters of personal choice, and subsequently teachers' choices as potentially or immediately threatening. Alongside this awareness, collegiality was presented as an issue growing in strength and emphasis irrespective of influences

outside the school. In the literature links were made between the changing meaning of collegiality and political rhetoric and policy upheavals⁶². In the absence of such contextual links, the newspapers projected assumptions about teachers' own reasons for not uniformly cooperating, such as their thirst for power and freedom, trendy political ideologies and resentment of authority. Variables associated in the literature with democratic school organisation were dismissed by the press as faddish phenomena contrasting with long-established institutional hierarchies.

The changing nature of social work demands was given relatively little coverage in the literature⁶³ as in the press. However, the latter did acknowledge a change in teachers' ability to handle social work responsibilities. The well-known benefits of objectivity were juxtaposed with fresh incidents of discriminative, abusive, and incompetent behaviour. The physical aspect of teachers' role had the potential to become especially problematic because of the connotations of sexual and violent abuse. There were no similar representations of criminal or sexually violent teachers in the research literature, nor any inclination to form generalisations about teachers at this level. Put simply, the literature showed much greater awareness of the boundary between work and life⁶⁴ and its consequences.

The literature review showed that researchers envisaged public opinion as something affected by broad but immediate political and economic contexts. Historians attempted to identify and judge public opinion of teachers at specific times of union action, policy events and social change⁶⁵. The press, on the other hand, often divorced the inability of teachers to achieve a positive public opinion from the economic and policy context, relating it instead to teachers' current personal values and political choices. Popularity was not perceived to be a serious and long-running concern potentially affecting teachers' status or sense of professionalism. This contrasted with literature which considered social status to be a highly significant and volatile issue for teachers and for the health of the education service. Some considered it at least in part a cultural phenomenon and searched media images for evidence of teachers' status at specific times in history⁶⁶.

It was not assumed in most literature that teachers' practical autonomy would necessarily result in resistance to policy or educational interests. Teachers were found to mediate, adapt to and comply with policy, which also benefited them in some ways and not in others⁶⁷. This was not the case in the press, where the fulfilment of policy

requirements was fundamental. New needs and expectations were projected daily, but represented as elements of an ongoing response to broad social issues such as justice, the national economy, modernisation and youth violence as well as policy reform. Concerns revolved around teachers' immediate ability to manage demands rather than on the whether those demands were changing in number and nature. Autonomy was shown to be traditionally acceptable but in recent times synonymous with non-compliance.

In the press, unionism was a key indicator of teachers' time specific characteristics. Union action was an ongoing and predictable phenomenon, but the severity and aggression of employees' defences and attacks were presented as freshly experienced and shocking. The range, variety and complexity of actions were unknown and new ways had to be found for dealing with the repercussions. The disjuncture between long-running union activities and unfamiliar tactics, served to undermine the rationale and legitimacy of teacher activity. Unlike much of the literature, the press did not understand or explore the specific and changing conditions of government-union relations⁶⁸. Policy was largely unchallenged and its immediate consequences were incompletely recognised.

The threat of nonconformity at a local, practical, national or theoretical level was something the press attributed to current trend. This threat constituted a form of power, to the same extent that positive potential did not. Therefore, analysis suggested that the notion of teacher power only ever had negative connotations. In effect, power was freedom from the consumer and an abandonment of duty. This ran contrary to Robinson's (2004a) work, which identified different and changing connotations of power in conceptualisations of teachers' 'art', 'craft' and 'science'. She associated power with knowledge rather than duty.

Implications

The subject of teachers rested on a wide and varied array of possible meanings which showed it to be a complex concept and a fertile site for exploration. Despite this variety and diversity, there were discernable patterns which affected the way teachers were conceptualised. The press routinely assumed some characteristics of the teacher to be commonly shared. It also showed there to be a heterogeneity among teachers which was sometimes absent in the literature. Analysis revealed that by

comparison with the literature, the press representations saw characteristics distributed at the extremes of commonality and contradiction significantly more than in the middle ground of the continuum. There was less chance of state-teacher relationships, minority group activities, teamwork, co-operation, shared ideas and other moderate positions. The press and literature also employed different perspectives on continuity and change. The press fluctuated in its acknowledgement of time-sensitive characteristics. Analysis revealed that by comparison with the literature, the press gave less consistent recognition to the effects of immediate and long-term change on teachers. At the same time it gave equal or more attention to teachers' responsibility for change. Characteristics were clustered more around the extremes of continuity and change than the middle ground, resulting in less recognition of, among other things, the possibility of teachers' evolving identity, learning and professional development, participation in pedagogy, modernisation and policy implementation.

Empirical evidence of commonality and contradiction, continuity and change formed a more sophisticated framework for understanding representation than simple judgements of stereotyping, hostility and 'teacher bashing'⁶⁹. With a better understanding of press representation, researchers might come to expect and predict generalising characterisations on some issues, and therefore to inform teachers of how to avoid internalising the more distorted and potentially discriminative representations. With an understanding of the significance of time-sensitive characterisations, historians may be able to predict times and issues for which teachers might be especially vulnerable to low status in cultural texts. Therefore it is recommended that further research look in more detail at variables of commonality and contradiction, continuity and change. For instance, a logical follow-up question is 'Were representations of teachers in the press different before and after the implementation of the 1988 ERA?' This might show how representations of teachers correspond to their policy/news context and the role played by the press in mediating changing conceptualisations.

The two continua used in this analysis worked as indicators of complexity. However, further research might consider what other indicators influence the complexity of teacher representations. This might be observed with other continua or through the attempted application of the existing continua in other media or timeframes. Finding continua that are applicable is fundamental to understanding

the media as a relevant and strong, if fragmented, influence. A major benefit of exploring representations is that the process opens up discussions on a range of broad theoretical issues such as teachers' duty, subjugation, conformity, work-life balance, knowledge, theory, natural propensity and personality. In other words, the topic of representation creates a conceptual arena for addressing these issues free of pre-concepts and opinions, and therefore a place for challenging assumptions. This study showed newspapers using teachers as rhetorical ammunition, and exaggerating positive and negative, old and new characteristics. It is suggested therefore, that an enhanced understanding of representation might enable more open and honest discussion of the language, vocabulary and meanings surrounding the identity of teachers. Subsequently, the meanings which Mitchell, Weber & O'Reilly-Scanlon (2005) claimed are imposed on teachers by 'outsiders', could be addressed and the potential might exist for establishing criteria of socially-responsible representation. This might also equip researchers with the tools to recognise the implications of their own representations, and thereby encourage them to embrace the inevitably complex issue of representing teachers.

NOTES

- 1 Mitchell, Weber & O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005 p.2
- 2 Similar to Joseph & Burnaford (2001) and Judge (1995)
- 3 Gardner & Cunningham (1998) claimed that theory benefits from research conducted at times of change, specifically policy reforms
- 4 Bergen (1982); Apple (1985); Tropp (1957); Evetts (1986); Stewart, Meier & Englund (1989)
- 5 Widdowson (1986); Casey (1993); Robinson (2004b); Gardner & Cunningham (1998)
- 6 Acker (1995); Biklen (1987); Grumet (1988); Steedman (1985)
- 7 Robinson (2003); Walkerdine (1986)
- 8 Goodson (1992)
- 9 Ball & Goodson (1985); Elliott (1980); Helsby (1995); Johnston (1989)
- 10 Lortie (1977); Pajak & Blase (1984); Wallace (1989)
- 11 When members of staff at William Tyndale primary school in north London were found to be practising extreme liberal pedagogies
- 12 ILEA (1976)
- 13 Grace (1987); Ozga & Lawn (1981), Robertson (1996)
- 14 Ball (1990), p.27; Grace (1987); Simon (1991)
- 15 Carr-Saunders cited in Bergen (1982); Etzioni (1969); Leigh (1979); Flexner cited in Ozga & Lawn (1981)
- 16 Edman (1968); Helsby (1995); Talbert & McLaughlin (1996); Troman (1996)

- 17 Helsby (1995); Talbert & McLaughlin (1996)
- 18 Ball & Goodson (1985); Bell (1995); Lawn & Grace (1987); Ozga & Lawn (1981)
- 19 Bell (1995); Day (2002); Horder (1995); Gardner (1999); Richardson (1995);
Sachs (2001)
- 20 Gardner (1998); Epstein (1986)
- 21 Apple (1982), (1985)
- 22 Campbell & Neill (1994a), (1994b); Croll (1996); Johnston (1989); Troman
(1996)
- 23 Smyth (1991); Mahoney & Nextall (2001); Webb (1996)
- 24 Ball (1994); Sachs (2001); Troman (1996); Webb & Vulliamy (1996)
- 25 Bowers (1987); Dale (1982); Foucault (1979); Gitlin (1982); Giroux (1981);
Giroux & Shannon (1997)
- 26 Crume (1988); Dawes & Selwyn (1999); Gardner (1999); Gitlin (1982);
Grosvenor, Lawn & Rousmaniere (1999); MacMillan (2001), (2002); Otto
(2005); Philo et al. (1982); Rousmaniere (1999); Thomas (2003); Wallace (1993);
Weber & Mitchell (1995); Weems (2000)
- 27 Fairclough (1995); Fiske (1995); Judge (1995); Novoa (2000)
- 28 Baker (1994); Doe (1999)
- 29 MacMillan (2001), (2002); Thomas (2003)
- 30 Gardner (1999); Mitchell & Weber (1999); Morgan (2002); Otto (2005);
Grosvenor, Lawn & Rousmaniere (1999); Weber & Mitchell (1995)
- 31 Grace (1987); Simon (1991)
- 32 Ball (1990)
- 33 Cunningham (1992) was an exception, but his study of representations in the
press from 1940-1990 focused on political rather than social or cultural identity.
- 34 Bryman cited in Silverman (2000)
- 35 Glaser & Strauss (1967)
- 36 Charmaz, 2000, p. 510
- 37 Schofield (2002)
- 38 *Independent*, 15.10.97, p.20
- 39 *Daily Mail*, 15.10.97, p. 16
- 40 *Times*, 07.05.96, p. 14
- 41 *Times* supplement, 06.10.99, p. 2
- 42 *Mirror*, 11.10.96, p.17
- 43 *Mirror*, 14.02.97, p.9
- 44 Gardner (1995); Gardner & Cunningham (1998); Robinson (2004a), (2004b)
- 45 Acker (1995); Biklen (1987), (1995); Copelman (1996); Epstein (1986);
Dillabough (1999); Evetts (1986); Grumet (1988); Miller, J. (1996); Robinson
(2003), (2004b); Steedman (1985)
- 46 Copelman (1996); Robinson (2003)
- 47 Acker (1995); Ball & Goodson (1985); Walkerdine (1986)
- 48 Clandinin (1985); Johnston (1989)
- 49 Nias (1989)
- 50 Elliott (1980); Croll (1996)
- 51 Wallace (1993) used the term 'myth-making' but the issue is also defined or
alluded to by Dawes & Selwyn (1999); Doe (1999); Grace (1987); Lumley
(1998); MacMillan (2001), (2002); Miller, P. (1996); Otto (2005); Philo (1982);
Rousmaniere (1999); Thomas (2003)

- 52 Carr-Saunders cited in Bergen (1982); Etzioni (1969); Leigh (1979), Fléxner cited in Ozga & Lawn (1981)
- 53 Helsby (1995); Maclure (1993)
- 54 Apple (1985)
- 55 Johnston (1989)
- 56 Apple (1982); Bowers (1987); Dale (1982); Foucault (1979); Giroux (1981); Giroux & Shannon (1997); Robertson (1996)
- 57 Gerbner cited in Morgan (2002)
- 58 Apple (1985); Bergen (1982); Grumet (1988); Simon (1991)
- 59 Bell (1985); Goodson & Hargreaves (1996); Horder (1985); Lortie (1977); Richardson (1985); Simon (1991); Webb (1985)
- 60 Webb (1993)
- 61 Measor (1985)
- 62 Smyth (1991); Webb & Vulliamy (1996)
- 63 Webb & Vulliamy (2002)
- 64 Nias (1989); Pajak & Blase (1984); Wallace (1989)
- 65 Ball & Goodson (1985); Cunningham & Gardner (2004); Evans (1963); Helsby (1995); Lawn & Grace (1987); Lortie (1977); Ozga & Lawn (1981)
- 66 Baker (1994); Crume (1988); Cunningham (1992); Doe (1999); Grace (1987); Novoa (2000)
- 67 Campbell & Neill (1994a), (1994b); Croll (1996); Goodson & Hargreaves (1996); Johnston (1989); Troman (1996); Webb (1993)
- 68 Evans (1963); Lawn & Grace (1987); Ozga & Lawn (1981); Robertson (1996)
- 69 See endnotes 30-32

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