

Beginning teachers as policy workers in Malaysia and New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

In 2007, the Malaysia government initiated twinned primary teacher education arrangements with five Southern Hemisphere higher education institutions (HEIs). Participating students completed their teacher education in both Malaysia and a partner HEI. In this paper, we consider the preliminary findings of a comparative study tracking the beginning teacher journeys of 13 Malaysia-based twinned programme graduates and six New Zealand-based teachers. The study involved two aspects: (1) a comparative discourse analysis of key Malaysia and New Zealand education policy documents; and (2) thematic and discourse analysis of participants' reflections on their early teaching experiences. Our focus is on beginning teachers as 'policy workers': policy subjects whose work is shaped and constrained by policy discourses and imperatives, and policy actors who mediate, translate and resist these. We compare the two policy contexts and consider how policy discourses appeared and were contested in teachers' initial online questionnaire responses.

Keywords: Malaysia; New Zealand; beginning teachers; education policy

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Malaysian government initiated the development of 'twinned' primary teacher education programmes involving higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia, New Zealand, and Australia. Their aim was to foster prospective English language teachers' English language proficiency, exposure to English in context, capacity for intercultural engagement, and ability to adopt a critical standpoint in relation to teaching and learning. Students were selected for the programmes based on academic performance and their studies were fully funded by the Malaysian government. They graduated with an overseas English language teaching qualification and were 'bonded' to teach in Malaysia for five years post graduation.

Literature on beginning teachers uses the term 'shock' to describe the experience of transitioning from pre-service teacher education to classroom teaching (for example, see Caspersen & Raaen, 2013; Flores, 2001; Schaefer, 2013; Schatz-Openheimer & Dvir, 2014). Staff involved in the twinned programme development were mindful that programme graduates could face a particularly complex transition as they moved between national, socio-cultural and socio-legal contexts, as well from teacher education to classroom teaching. However, beginning teaching in

any context often involves major transitions. For example, in New Zealand, beginning teachers are not bonded, but many move between geographical and socio-economic locations to find work.

In this paper we draw on findings from a project aimed at tracking beginning teachers' first year teaching journeys in Malaysia and New Zealand. Participants included six New Zealand based beginning teachers and 13 Malaysia based graduates of a twinned programme for prospective English language teachers. The Malaysia based teachers had completed their first and final year of study at a Malaysian HEI, and the second and third, in New Zealand. All of our participants had graduated from the same New Zealand HEI and were working in primary school contexts. We included New Zealand teachers in the project as a comparative group, as we did not want to assume that the Malaysian graduates' early teaching experiences were necessarily different to those of their New Zealand counterparts (after Madge, Raghuram & Noxolo, 2009).

The project involved two aspects. The first was a comparative policy analysis of key 'vision-setting' documents relevant to the schools sector in Malaysia and New Zealand. We also followed the teachers' first year of teaching through the use of 'secret' Facebook groups, open-ended online questionnaires, and face-to-face/Skype interviews. In this paper we focus on findings from our policy comparison and the first (mid-year) questionnaire. We 'read' our data in light of work by Stephen Ball and colleagues (Ball, Maguire, Braun & Hoskins, 2011a, 2011b; Braun, Ball & Maguire, 2011; Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011; Maguire, Hoskins, Ball & Braun, 2011), who conceptualise policy as "a process" that is "diversely and repeatedly contested and/or subject to 'interpretation' as it is enacted (rather than implemented) in original and creative ways within institutions" (Braun et al., 2011, p. 586). We were interested in what similarities or differences might emerge in the teachers' reflections on their teaching work across locations, and in their experiences as *policy workers* in each context: *policy subjects* whose work was shaped and constrained by policy discourses and imperatives; and *policy actors* who mediated, translated and resisted these (Ball et al., 2011a). We were also interested in what we could learn about the implications, strengths and limitations of education policy by 'listening' to beginning teachers' reflections on their work.

The paper is organised as follows. In the next section, we outline some empirical, methodological and theoretical literature that informed our study, specifically, on beginning teaching, education policy and teachers' work in relation to broader policy imperatives. We then discuss and compare the Malaysia and New Zealand policy texts. Next, we focus on the teachers' responses to our initial online questionnaire, noting how the teachers' accounts of beginning teaching in their respective locations took up, complicated and exceeded policy discourses. We conclude by considering how teachers' reflections on their teaching work can shed new light on education policy.

BEGINNING TEACHERS AS POLICY WORKERS

Research involving beginning teachers describes the transition to teaching as challenging and demanding (for example, see Caspersen & Raaen, 2013; Flores, 2001; Schaefer, 2013; Schatz-Openheimer & Dvir, 2014). The first year of teaching is a time of tension, vulnerability, formation and transformation, when identities shift and are shaped based on the interplay between self, others and context (Britzman, 2003; Schaefer, 2013; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010). Common challenges include 'managing' students, developing effective pedagogical approaches, and coping with administrative demands (Flores and Day, 2006; Pillen, Beijaard & den Brok, 2013; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). By focusing on teachers' talk, or reflections on their teaching work, we

can gain insights into their shifting identities, and how these are “negotiated...within external contexts” (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 181).

In this paper, we understand policies as “representations of knowledge and power, discourses that construct a topic”, for example, notions of what characterises the ‘good school’, the ‘good teacher’ or the ‘good student’ (Maguire et al., 2011, p. 597). We use the term ‘discourse’ in reference to “bodies of ideas that produce and regulate the world in their own terms, rendering some things common sense and some things nonsensical” (Youdell, 2006, pp. 35-36; also see Maguire et al., 2011). We recognise that multiple discourses are at play in any policy text, and that policy discourses compete and intertwine with discourses that operate within situated school contexts (Ball et al., 2011a). Attention to policy discourses allows us to see education policy as more than a set of written guidelines or vision statements.

Braun, Ball, Maguire, et al. (2011) argue that in order to understand the complexity of policy enactment in schools, we need to attend to both the “objective” and the “the material, structural and relational” conditions under which teachers work (p. 588). We also need to recognise teachers’ dual positioning as both “agents and subjects of policy enactments” (p. 586). In this paper, we recognise policies as “discursive strategies”: sets of discourses that “become worked into/against everyday practices of school life and become set over and against, or integrated into existing discourses (discourses) that frame both [teachers’] acting and how others see their actions” (p. 598). However, we are also interested in the “fragility in all this”; for example, how policy discourses are marked by gaps, silences and contradictions (p. 598), and how teachers’ reflections allow us to see policy differently.

MALAYSIA AND NEW ZEALAND EDUCATION POLICY

In line with Braun, Ball, Maguire, et al. (2011), we recognise our participants’ teaching contexts as multi-layered, including situational, professional, material and external dimensions. Many elements make up the ‘external dimension’ that shapes the work and life of the teachers in our study, including each country’s unique colonial (and in the case of Malaysia, post-colonial history); and socio-linguistic, geographical and demographic characteristics. Our focus here is on one element of the external dimension: key policy documents in each place that outline a ‘vision’ for schools sector education. From Malaysia, we draw on the *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2012–2015* (Ministry of Education, 2012, hereafter *Blueprint*), and from New Zealand, the Ministry of Education’s *Statement of Intent, 2013–2018* (Ministry of Education, 2013, hereafter *Statement of Intent*), and *New Zealand Curriculum* front pages (Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 4-15, hereafter *NZC*). Together, these are more comparable to the *Blueprint* than either document taken alone. We begin with an overview and description of each of these documents.

Education policy for the Malaysia schools sector

The *Blueprint* was published in 2012 following a comprehensive review of Malaysia’s national education system (Ministry of Education, 2012). This was led by Malaysia’s Ministry of Education, with input from UNESCO, the OECD, the World Bank, academics, teachers, parents and students. The *Blueprint* is described as both evaluating “the performance of Malaysia’s education system” and setting a “vision” for its future (p. E-1). It outlines a range of aspirations for both the Malaysian education system and Malaysian students.

At a system level, the *Blueprint* highlights the need to ensure universal access and full enrolment of children in education from preschool to upper secondary levels; universal access to an education that is of comparable quality “to the best international systems”; reduced educational disparities; an increased sense of national unity; and outcomes commensurate with investment.

Student-specific aspirations reveal a concern with fostering children's capacity in numeracy, literacy, and other "core subjects" (p. E-9); ability to use creative, reasoning, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills; ability to lead and work with others; bilingual proficiency in Malay and English; development of "strong ethics and spirituality" (p. E-10); and identification as "Malaysian, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status" (p. E-10).

The *Blueprint* outlines 11 shifts necessary to achieve these aspirations. These include: (1) providing "equal access to quality education" (p. E-11); (2) standardising Malay and English language curricula, upskilling English language teachers and providing remedial support in both languages; (3) strengthening Islamic and Moral Education and "civics elements", promoting co-curricular activities, and enhancing inter-school programmes (p. E-13); (4) strengthening the teaching profession by recruiting top graduates, ensuring access to professional development, providing career opportunities based on performance, and promoting a "culture of excellence" including accountability to peers (p. E-14); (5) ensuring that schools have "high-performing" leaders, with a "relentless" focus on "improving student outcomes" (p. E-17); (6) increasing state, district and school leaders' decision-making power in terms of day-to-day operations and interventions; (7) leveraging ICT to "scale up quality learning" (p. E-19); (8) strengthening educational leadership capacity at Ministry level; (9) strengthening school partnerships with parents, communities and private sector stakeholders; (10) reporting on investment returns "for every [educational] initiative" (p. E-22); and (11) increasing transparency and public accountability for educational expenditure and decision-making.

The *Blueprint* reveals an intertwining of material, religious, social and economic imperatives, that are in places, apparently in tension. It acknowledges a potential tension between nation-building and 'globalising' imperatives; concerns with fostering "an unshakeable sense of national identity" (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. E-13) sit alongside concerns with fostering Malaysia's global competitiveness and school leavers' capacity as global citizens. The *Blueprint* articulates a need to address social and economic inequality, while linking educational investment to 'school performance' and 'educational outcomes' rather than economic need. It espouses the need for parent and community partnerships, but Malay, and to a lesser extent, English, remain the two dominant languages from an instructional perspective. The *Blueprint* highlights a need to reduce teachers' administrative workload so that they can focus on "the core business of teaching and learning" (p. 5-10), but stresses the use of student outcomes reporting systems and ranking information as a means for judging student, teacher and school performance (see p. 4-21). We turn now to the New Zealand context.

Education policy for the New Zealand schools sector

The *Statement of Intent* (Ministry of Education, 2013) and *NZC* front pages (Ministry of Education, 2007) together articulate a vision for New Zealand schools that is both similar to and different from the *Blueprint's* vision for Malaysian education. The *Statement of Intent* is a similarly aspirational document that envisages education as central to the future of the nation. Like the *Blueprint*, it articulates intertwined educational, economic, and social imperatives, and stresses the need to ensure maximum returns for government investment. The *Statement of Intent* promises the development of a system where "children and young people" are "at the centre" (p. 6), and where the system's performance is improved for "priority students" who have been "traditionally under-served" (p. 8). It articulates four "education system outcomes": "education provision of increasing quality and value to all", "every student achieving education success", education being "a major contributor to economic prosperity and growth", and "investment in education is providing higher returns" (p. 12). The *Statement of Intent* does not reveal the 'nation-building' or 'moral' discourses of the *Blueprint*, although values language is applied to education

to a greater extent in the front pages of the *NZC*, which articulates a vision of students as “lifelong learners” and “international citizens” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 8). In the *NZC*, citizenship is envisaged not in terms of patriotism or national identity (Ministry of Education, 2012), but in terms of students’ capacity to understand New Zealand’s “bicultural foundations”; participate actively in New Zealand’s social and economic life; and contribute to the economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). Like the *Blueprint*, the *NZC* stresses the importance of students learning to value diversity, seeing connections between their classroom learning and home lives, and having access to a “broad education” (p. 9). An emphasis on “community participation for the common good” (p. 10) sits alongside a dual focus on “enterprise” and “personal excellence” (p. 9).

Unlike the *Blueprint*, which positions citizenship in relation to “civic behaviour” and a sense of national unity or “Malaysian identity” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. E-13), the *Statement of Intent* positions citizenship in terms of success. For example, its stated vision is: “A world-leading education system that equips all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st-century” (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 12). It espouses two priorities: addressing existing educational inequalities and “maximising the contribution of education to the economy” (p. 12). Like the *Blueprint*, the *Statement of Intent* focuses on the need to ensure “greater quality and value” (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 8). ‘Increased quality’ is similarly imagined in terms of raising student achievement, particularly in numeracy and literacy; “strengthening the teacher workforce” and professional leadership (p. 16); using ‘standards’ and ‘targets’ as a basis for measuring student, teacher and school performance; and increasing (teacher, school and Ministry-level) accountability. Like the *Blueprint*, the *Statement of Intent* stresses the need to promote home-school partnerships and partnerships with other stakeholders (including the private sector). Whereas the *Blueprint* reveals the dominance of the Malay language, and to a lesser extent, English, the *Statement of Intent* reveals the dominance of English, and to a much lesser extent, Māori.

In summary, the *Blueprint* in the Malaysia context, and the *Statement of Intent* and *NZC* front pages in the New Zealand context, imagine education as central to economic gain, and stress the need for education systems that are ‘globally competitive’, while representing ‘value for money’. Accountability discourses (for example, references to ‘standards’ as a means to measure both student learning and teacher performance) sit alongside concerns with fostering equity through increased educational participation and retention and a strengthened teaching profession. However, differences are also apparent. The *Blueprint* reveals a view of education as a public or national good tasked with promoting national unity and producing ‘responsible citizens’. While acknowledging the role of education in promoting social wellbeing, the *Statement of Intent* and *NZC* position education primarily as a private or economic good tasked with producing successful (economically productive?) citizens. We turn now to the ways in which policy discourses were taken up, complicated and contested in our participants’ mid-year questionnaire responses.

TEACHING AS POLICY WORK IN MALAYSIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Following ethical approval, we invited all 2014 primary teacher education programme graduates from a New Zealand university to participate in our project. Six New Zealand based teachers and nine Malaysia based teachers agreed to do so, completing our initial questionnaire in June-July 2014. Four additional Malaysian teachers joined the project later during the interview phase, however, since they did not complete the initial online questionnaire, their responses are not included here. At the time of the questionnaire, the teachers had been working for one to five

months, depending on when they had been ‘placed’ or gained jobs. They were teaching in New Zealand’s North and South Islands, and Peninsular and East Malaysia.

We used an online questionnaire for the initial data collection phase as our participants were geographically dispersed and we were anxious to minimise demands on their time. Further, since some of our rural participants had limited connectivity, we knew that a one-response online open-ended questionnaire would be easier to engage with than either online face-to-face or email interviews. Our questionnaire was developed using Survey Monkey®. It used mainly open-ended questions to explore the teachers’ roles within their school settings, transition experiences, access to support or mentoring, ‘first day’ teaching experiences, areas of enjoyment and challenge, reflections on their earlier teacher education programmes, and advice for prospective beginning teachers and former lecturers.

Braun, Ball, Macguire, et al. (2011) conceptualise teachers’ contexts as including situational, professional, material and external dimensions. In some respects, the teachers’ responses to the questionnaire revealed the uniqueness of their teaching locations. The New Zealand teachers were all working as general classroom teachers, and had chosen their teaching positions. The Malaysian teachers had been ‘placed’ by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, in most cases, with little prior warning, and were working as specialist English language teachers. Four of the six New Zealand teachers were based in suburban schools, and two, in semi-rural schools, with five of the six teachers close to family support. All of the Malaysian teachers were in rural or semi-rural settings, most, far from family, in schools where English language performance had historically been poor. Other factors that shaped the teachers’ experiences included their access (or lack of access) to accommodation, transport and basic teaching resources; the availability or otherwise of mentoring support; the complexity and familiarity (or unfamiliarity) of their new role; and the school’s preparedness (or otherwise) for a beginning teacher.

Striking similarities were also apparent in the teachers’ responses. Most of the teachers (14) described their transition experiences as “mixed”, while one described them as “difficult”. In the remainder of this section we consider two sets of discourses that emerged in their questionnaire responses in ways that reflected, troubled and exceeded policy discourses in their respective locations. We have named these ‘responsibility and accountability’ and ‘collegiality and enjoyment’.

Responsibility and accountability

Policy documents in New Zealand and Malaysia reflect a preoccupation with accountability, teacher performance, and ensuring ‘value for money’ (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2012, 2013). Ball (2003) describes such policy in terms of “performativity”: a mode of “state regulation” that “requires individual practitioners to organise themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations” (p. 215). Ball suggests that performative approaches are characteristic of “education reform...across the globe”, although he acknowledges that they are enacted in “unstable, uneven” ways in specific locations (p. 215). Ball argues that performativity in education changes not only what teachers do, but also who they are.

Arguably, concerns with performance, or the enactment of teaching, are inherent in any beginning teacher’s early teaching journey. For example, Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002, p. 105) describe “praxis shock” as a “teachers’ confrontation with the realities and responsibilities of being a classroom teacher that puts their beliefs and ideas about teaching to the test, challenges some of them, and confirms others”. Kelchtermans and Ballet describe teachers’ “visibility” (p. 111), or

subjection to observation by others (including colleagues, principals and parents), as a factor that contributes to praxis shock for beginning teachers.

Performance-related anxiety was evident in our participants' reflections on their early experiences of teaching. However, for most of the teachers, anxiety and anticipation were intertwined. For example, Mike¹, a New Zealand teacher, revealed contradictory emotions when he recalled his first day of teaching:

The first day at school was the best and the most nerve-wracking ever. The excitement around meeting the children and being the teacher was exceptional, but the nerves [about] meeting the children that would be under my control for the rest of the year [were] huge. What would they be like, would they get on with me, would there be personality clashes?...Trying to meet the children, meet the parents, and not completely lose my cool was a juggling act.

Mike was excited about 'being the teacher', but also, fully aware of his 'visibility' as a beginning teacher (Kelchtermans and Ballet, 2002). Mike associated successful teacher performance with 'controlling' the children in his class, but also with the ability to build positive, reciprocal relationships.

Elsewhere in his questionnaire responses, Mike associated success with "being on top of everything", identifying accountability requirements such as paperwork and assessment tasks, as "jobs" that teachers must do in order to succeed. He said:

There are times when I feel on top of everything, and that I am succeeding, and then there are days that I walk out of school feeling like I have failed. The amount of paperwork, and assessment, and other jobs that we need to do as teachers is huge.

Here, Mike took up the performativity discourses inherent in New Zealand's policy focus on student outcomes, teacher accountability, and investment returns (Ministry of Education, 2013). He positioned the tasks associated with measuring, recording and reporting on students' learning as markers of successful teaching, and not keeping up with such tasks, as a marker of failure.

The Malaysian teachers in our study were 'visible' (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002), not only as beginning teachers, but also as graduates of an overseas university tasked with raising student performance outcomes. These teachers were acutely aware of their responsibility to meet high performance expectations. Hana, a Malaysian teacher, described her feelings during an initial encounter with staff at the school's district education office. She said:

Before [I] started working, I was very anxious. As I was introduced at the...State Education Office... it was nerve-wracking. The people had a high expectation of me. They kept on mentioning the [names New Zealand university] prestige. I was completely at the centre of attention.

Hana revealed the tension inherent in being both a nervous novice charged with improving students' English language proficiency, and the product of a high level of government investment.

¹ All names used are pseudonyms.

Ball (2003, p. 216) explains that in a context marked by a performative culture:

...the performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality'...As such, they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement.

Ball argues that struggles over what counts as “valuable, effective or satisfactory performance” are “often internalised”, and expressed by teachers “in the lexicons of belief and commitment, service and even love, of mental health and emotional well-being” (p. 216). Serena, another Malaysian teacher, was in a school that had previously performed poorly in English language assessments. She echoed Hana’s anxiety and sense of visibility (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002) in her description of an observation by district education office staff:

Just a week ago...two officers and two senior assistants came to observe me...I felt that I was thrown into the den because it wasn't my fault that I was put into this situation - I was new and the results last year that [were] so poor...it wasn't my fault to begin with...I was at the lowest and felt so depressed.

Serena’s comments revealed the personal and affective nature of performance-related struggles (Ball, 2003). Despite contesting the basis for, and fairness of, the observation, Serena took up performativity discourses in her assertion that “it wasn’t my fault” (that student outcomes were poor); she linked student outcomes to ‘teacher fault’, implicitly holding the previous teacher accountable for poor student outcomes. At the same time, Serena grappled with the affective implications of performative measures that link a teacher’s worth with “displays of ‘quality’” (Ball, 2003, p. 216), describing her response to the visit in terms of depression.

The *Blueprint* positions the ‘ideal citizen’ as “responsible and capable of achieving high levels of personal well-being” and “able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of...the nation at large” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 2-2). Laila, another Malaysian teacher, took up responsibility and commitment discourses when describing her initial transition to teaching. Laila had been placed in a remote rural school far from family support, in a community where many people spoke limited Malay, and where English language learning was rarely a priority. She said:

I have a hard time adjusting to [the] school environment. First, I am posted far away from home, to a very different setting [than] where I came from...Secondly, my heart is not so into teaching. I am doing it because I felt responsible. Some of the days, I am so disappointed at myself and I started to feel bad about myself that I want to quit my job. Thirdly, I feel that this job is consuming me from the inside. I spend most of my time preparing for class...I don't have time to do other things.

Ball (2003, p. 221) notes that performative technologies have an “emotional status dimension”, for example, engendering “individual feelings of pride, guilt, [and] shame”. In her statement above, Laila reveals a personal, affective struggle. While articulating a sense of responsibility and commitment, she also articulates a sense of isolation, disappointment with self, and constraint. As a ‘good teacher’, Laila cannot leave her job, despite “want[ing] to quit”.

In their focus on learning outcomes, accountability measures and ‘value for money’, New Zealand and Malaysia education policy texts can be seen as fostering “judgemental” rather than “authentic social relations”, and “‘care’ about performances” rather than “care for each other” (Ball, 2003, p. 224, emphasis original). However, in our study, collegiality and enjoyment emerged in the

teachers' reflections on their early teaching experiences, alongside accountability, responsibility and performance concerns. We turn to these now.

Collegiality and enjoyment

Ball (2003, p. 226) describes the performative society as fostering “cynical compliance”, and as “leav[ing] no space of an autonomous or collective ethical self”. However, the reflections of some teachers in our study troubled this bleak assessment, revealing their appreciation of collegial relationships despite performativity requirements. Karla, a New Zealand teacher, described senior colleagues' observation of her work in terms of supportive rather than “judgemental relations” (Ball, 2003, p. 224), saying, “I have lots of people to talk to when I need help and lots of support from everyone else”. When asked what advice she would give to prospective beginning teachers, Karla drew a link between observation, support and learning, saying:

Ask lots of questions, observe as many teachers as you can, find your weaknesses and take the time to build on them and learn more about them, form positive relationships with all of the teachers...because you never know when you'll need their help.

Similarly, in his advice for prospective beginning teachers, Mike emphasised the dual need to listen to and learn from more experienced colleagues, and to recognise success as more than a matter of performance outcomes. He said:

When you get into your school, make sure you ask questions, and make sure you listen. Be prepared to feel like you know nothing...Do not compare yourself to your fellow teachers...Do what you do best, and as long as you are developing your skills, you are succeeding.

Here, Mike's definition of success contrasts with his earlier comment that defined success in terms of performance outcomes.

Collegial support is associated with positive experiences for beginning teachers (Flores, 2001; Flores & Day, 2006). The Malaysian teachers in our study identified supportive colleagues as a source of affective, professional and practical support in otherwise difficult teaching situations. For example, Serena, whose experience of being observed we described above, identified collegial support as mitigating the stress of being judged against performance targets. She said, “I realised how the support of my colleagues mean[s] so much to me and is crucial in keeping my work enjoyable and less stressful”. Gloria, who like Laila, worked in a community where English language learning was not a priority, recalled:

At one point, I almost gave up on the teaching and learning because of the language barrier and [students'] learning capability. However, my colleague... encouraged me to keep trying because that is my job as a teacher. As a result, the pupils have slowly shown some significant improvement as they begin showing some interest in learning English.

Gloria alluded to teacher responsibility, not in terms of outputs and accountability requirements, but in terms of teaching and learning. Instead of “cynical compliance” (Ball, 2003, p. 226), she revealed a commitment to promoting students' engagement and learning, based on her colleague's encouragement to see this as a teacher's professional duty.

The teachers in our study linked collegial support to enjoyment and/or their wellbeing as novice teachers. Alongside an emphasis on outputs and outcomes, teacher accountability, and the

development of responsible (Malaysia) or successful (New Zealand) citizens, the *Blueprint* and the *Statement of Intent* also refer to enjoyment (Ministry of Education, 2012, 2013). The *Statement of Intent* links enjoyment with student engagement, wellbeing and success (Ministry of Education, 2013, pp. 16, 18, 26, 39). The *Blueprint* links student enjoyment with the increased “personalisation” of students’ “educational experiences” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. E-19), and teacher enjoyment, with a “reduced administrative burden”, “faster career progression” (p. E-14), “access to mentoring” (E-17), and “performance-based rewards” (p. E-23). The teachers in our study linked enjoyment with student learning, student success and teacher-student relationships. New Zealand teachers’ comments included the following:

I enjoy seeing students achieve and it is the wee successes that are the most memorable. I enjoy the relationships that I have in the classroom and the learning conversations when students are engaged and excited about new learning. I enjoy being a part of the students’ lives. (Belinda)

[I enjoy] seeing the kids progress, making them smile, kids bringing in their parents to show them their work, ...seeing the kids responding to advice in their work. (Karla)

The students are so excited to come and learn. With younger students, the little things become such a large part of learning and I find it so refreshing. (Rachel)

The Malaysian teachers’ responses were similar:

What I enjoy the most about my current work is that I can do a lot of fun activities with my class...I believe that it is a win-win situation...as I enjoy doing my job and the students enjoy learning English from me. (Mei Lin)

I enjoy when pupils show interest in English and when my methods/teaching styles work. Their improvement and appreciation for the efforts I put in helping them, make me enjoy my work and remember why I chose this profession in the first place. (Serena)

When the kids actually understood what I taught them, I feel like I'm on cloud nine. (Laila)

These comments foreground enjoyment in terms of the learning process as well as outcomes, and highlighted the “wee successes” (Belinda) of excitement, engagement, interest and understanding, alongside children’s “progress” (Karla) in learning. They suggest that ‘good teaching’ and ‘student success’ cannot be captured solely through the use of standards, targets and performance measures.

Ballard (2004) links the language of outcomes and outputs with a market-based focus in education systems, arguing that this risks narrowing both learning and teaching and subjugating “professional knowledge” to “market demands” (p. 21). Although, in their references to collegiality and enjoyment, the teachers in our study can be seen as contesting such discourses in their respective locations, a sense of subjugation (Ballard, 2004) was also evident in their reflections. In the previous section, we highlighted the burden of feeling responsible and accountable for performance outcomes. Subjugation also appeared in some teachers’ references to enjoyment in teaching. For example, Nadia, a Malaysian teacher reflected:

Most of the times, I enjoy teaching. I enjoy looking at the pupils who are having fun while learning English. But sometimes, I feel so drained just to plan a lesson plan, because now, I have almost 30 periods to teach each week...Every day, I struggled to just create a lesson plan for each class. Also, as I am teaching a Year 6 class, I also face a major challenge, as those pupils are going to have a major exam in September. So, I really have to drill them for their English paper.

Nadia's references to enjoyment sit alongside references to the struggle of negotiating everyday 'accountability work', a heavy face-to-face teaching workload, and performance expectations. Nadia's comment problematises the *Blueprint's* linking of teacher enjoyment with performance-related rewards (see Ministry of Education, 2012, p. E-23). For Nadia, enjoyment is found in fostering her students' fun and success in English language learning, and not in "hav[ing] to drill them" for a high-stakes assessment. Meeting performance outcome requirements is an instrumental rather than an educational task, positioned in opposition to both learning and enjoyment.

DISCUSSION

In this paper we have compared and considered the discourses inherent in key vision-setting policy documents that govern schools sector education in New Zealand and Malaysia: in New Zealand, the *Statement of Intent* (Ministry of Education, 2013) and *NZC* front pages (Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 4-15), and in Malaysia, the *Blueprint* (Ministry of Education, 2012). We have highlighted both similarities and differences in these documents. Similarities include a concern with ensuring 'value for money', improving students' learning outcomes, and strengthening the teaching profession. Differences include Malaysia's concern with education as a means for fostering 'national unity' and with strengthening English language teaching and learning, and New Zealand's focus on education as a means to develop biculturally aware, successful (productive?) citizens. We also considered how the performative discourses (Ball, 2003) inherent in the policy documents both emerged and were contested in teachers' reflections on their teaching work, as they grappled with a sense of accountability and responsibility, while taking pleasure in their students' engagement with learning.

In considering the implications of our findings, we are mindful of the need to avoid reducing complex realities to simple conclusions. Policy discourses apparent in the *Blueprint*, the *Statement of Intent* and the *NZC* are complex and contradictory. Performative discourses (Ball, 2003) sit alongside equity concerns, and references to 'enjoyment' appear alongside references to outcomes, outputs and performance measures (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2012, 2013). The teachers spoke as people who were subjected to (subjugated by) policy constraints (Ball, 2003; Ballard, 2004), while simultaneously positioning learning as more than a matter of outputs and outcomes; and collegiality, relationships with students, and enjoyment as central to teaching. In some respects, the teachers' reflections reiterated common themes that emerge in other literature on beginning teachers, including the 'shock' of moving from teacher education to classroom teaching, the complexity of teachers' work, and the challenge of working to engage students. However, they also revealed the material and affective burden of carrying heavy teaching workloads, meeting performance expectations, and in some cases, working in very challenging teaching contexts. Agency and constraint were intertwined in the teachers' reflections on beginning teaching (Lather, 2006).

It would be naive (in the New Zealand case, at least) to suggest that a golden policy period existed prior to the application of performative market discourses to teaching (see Bishop, 2005).

However, we would suggest that there is value in considering what policy *does* in relation to teachers and teaching, and how teachers' reflections can reveal its contradictory, perhaps unintended consequences. For the teachers in our study, performative discourses and expectations appeared to be at odds with enjoyment, engagement and learning, in that they engendered anxiety and a sense of pressure, and limited teachers' capacity to teach in creative, fun ways. Collegiality emerged as a mitigating factor that supported teachers' capacity to keep teaching and teach well. In the Malaysian context, we wonder about the logic of the *Blueprint's* focus on enjoyment in relation to performance-related rewards that risk pitting staff against each other in small school environments (Ministry of Education, 2012). In both contexts, we worry about teachers' capacity to sustain their practice as accountability expectations increase teacher workloads, particularly, if collegial support is limited. Although our study is small in size and scope, we wonder how our participants' reflections on their transitions to teaching may have been different if they worked in policy contexts characterised by a focus on human flourishing rather than performance outputs (Walker, 2008). We suggest that policy makers in both Malaysia and New Zealand would do well to pay close attention to teachers' experiences and 'sense-making' when evaluating existing policy and considering new policy directions.

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