

# Critical Choices In School Reform

by  
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In search of sustainable systemic success, school reform programs are evolving into a distinctly different form of school reform that has been described as the “Third Age” of school reform (Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001). Proponents and commentators of the third age (Fullan, Hill & Crévola, 2006; Hill & Crévola, 2001, 2005; Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001) reflect positivist notions of knowledge and learning. From such a position third age reform programs adopt a Managerial Discourse<sup>1</sup> that gives little attention to the effects of changes in power relations and teacher identity beyond those planned and anticipated to satisfy the objectives of the program.

Fullan et al. (2006) argue that the lack of success of reform programs (stemming from earlier “ages” of reform) can be attributed to a lack of understanding concerning the effect of different combinations of the core elements of successful reform. As a result of this lack of understanding, the key ingredients to successful change are overlooked. For third age programs, this is not a case of misalignment

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<sup>1</sup> There is a distinction made in this paper concerning the use of Discourse with a “big D” and discourse with “little d”. Using Discourses (with a big D) helps explain that when language melds with non-language “stuff” specifics identities and activities are enacted (Gee, 2005). In this paper, various Discourses, constitute a particular patchworks of thoughts, words and actions and interactions that give them a unique entity. ‘Big D’ Discourses are always language *plus* ‘other stuff’ (Gee, 2005, p. 26), while “little d” discourse refers to stretches of language or stories or language in use.

but rather one of establishing dynamic connectivity among the core elements. The premise of creative recombination, according to Fullan et al. (2006), is to “re-deploy and recombine existing elements in the system into new configurations” (p. 14). These new configurations are expressed through a Managerial Discourse that defines the behaviors and actions of the institution. Many of the elements needed for large-scale reform exist in schools already and simply need to be managed more efficiently. Third age programs are characterized by their efforts to increase productivity, define and control time, eliminate waste, and exert control and surveillance (Hargreaves, 1994). Despite such programs having different names and agendas, they usually have similar components, such as a prescription of best practices, specific training of personnel, and measurable consequences such as student achievement.

### The Characteristics of the study

This paper shares the findings of a recent study that examined several primary schools involved with the Children’s Literacy Success Strategy (CLaSS) in the Victorian Catholic Education system. It is an analysis of the dominant Discourse created and perpetuated by the CLaSS documentation, principals, and classroom teachers. The study characterized the nature of that Discourse and explored its effects on the work of teachers, principals, and on school improvement. The CLaSS was used as an example of such programs. The analysis proposed in no way disparages CLaSS itself, nor does it seek to judge its objectives or critique the specific methods used to improve literacy. Rather, this argument advocates that genuine school improvement requires one to step outside the circle of Discourse engendered by reform programs such as CLaSS which promote a ‘single minded’ Discourse about themselves and that which the school is attempting.

### Context of Study and Data Background

This study places great value on the levels of Discourse located in and around school reform and identifies and interrogates discourse in order to identify the impact of the systems of rationality as demonstrated through the words of the principals and teachers. This paper accepts the precept established by Popkewitz et al. (1982) that many reform programs bring concealed values into schools, which, in turn, generate unanticipated consequences. It further attempts to move away from the positivistic approach of determining the extent to which reform ideas have been implemented or to measure the planned consequences of an initiative in terms of satisfying the anticipated outcomes such as student achievement. In other words, this paper moves toward identifying the realities of the implications of reform programs through the perceptions and testimony of teachers. Examining the perceptions and actions of people in schools is important in understanding what actually changes in schools as a result of reform. And finally, this paper is concerned with investigating the impact of underlying assumptions and social

values that are implicit in school practices and finding out how they affect the realization of reform programs.

In the Australian state of Victoria, educational authorities driven by neo-liberal philosophies have governed both Catholic and State Primary Schools. Schools have been actively encouraged to move away from centralized models of operating and at the same time are forced to be increasingly accountable to governing authorities in regard to funding allocations and student outcomes. Neo-liberal inspired education policy prompts these schools to decentralize some aspects of their operation and centralize other aspects. This paradox provides a problematic backdrop for schools and teachers as they develop an identity within this contemporary educational landscape.

As mentioned earlier, CLaSS is an example of the third age of reform. The CLaSS program was developed as a joint project between the Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of Melbourne (CEOM) and the University of Melbourne and was generated out of a newly emerging paradigm of school reform. The principal authors of the program, Peter Hill and Carmel Crévola (2001), are held in high regard within school systems. The program presents itself not just as a model for improving literacy outcomes but also as a model of whole school reform. The program is as much about school management as it is about literacy (Hill & Crévola, 2001).

### Teachers' Work Stories

The study was concerned with giving principals and teachers a chance to “speak” or to tell their stories about the effects of the introduction of a reform program. These stories were told from the perspective of the participants’ understandings and lived experiences of working in schools that engage a third age reform. The principal and two teachers from each school were interviewed about their experience with CLaSS. The documentation coming from CLaSS (Hill & Crévola, 2001) was also interrogated and constitutes a significant part of the principals’ work stories. Shacklock (1995) suggests, “Work-story research is about editing back into accounts produced from research into teaching by creating a ‘space’ in the discourse where teachers’ voices have legitimacy and can be heard in their complexity, in educational research” (p. 2).

The stories told by teachers from these schools occupy “spaces” that exist between the dominant Discourse and the lived reality of the school. These discursive spaces highlight and legitimate teachers’ accounts of what has changed in those schools as a result of engagement with a third age program. The next section of this paper examines the documentation that CLaSS presents to schools and highlights some of the themes evident in the principals’ work stories. Selections of the teachers’ work stories are then presented and interrogated.<sup>2</sup>

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2 This paper provides a demonstration of the significance of investigating the role of discourse in school reform. For a more comprehensive review of existing literature concerning discourse in school reform see Tyack and Cuban (1997).

## Characteristics of CLaSS

The Discourse emanating out of CLaSS is designed to develop a strong sense of mission and purpose in school communities about the urgency and importance of improving student outcomes in regard to literacy development in the early years of schooling. The urgency is dependent on the belief that only a “narrow window of opportunity” (Hill & Crévola, 2001) exists for students to develop acceptable levels of literacy attainment. Referring to the research of Kennedy, Birman, and Demaline (1986), Hill and Crévola (2001) claim that there is little evidence to suggest that literacy problems can be successfully addressed beyond the first two years of schooling. From a CLaSS perspective, schools need to act quickly and target literacy attainment in the early years of schooling. Hill and Crévola point to literacy (fluency using the spoken and written word) as providing a pathway to success across the curriculum and having “a huge influence over a person’s quality of life.

## Key Strategies to Facilitate Change and Growth

Hill and Crévola (2001) regard initiating changes in teachers’ behavior and growth in beliefs as inherently complex and sophisticated. They contend that teachers need a thorough understanding of the meaning of educational change before there is an acceptance and adoption of new programs and approaches. CLaSS makes use of four key strategies to facilitate change and growth:

- An off-site professional development;
- CLaSS facilitators, who work with schools;
- School- based CLaSS coordinators; and
- Professional learning teams;

CLaSS offers compulsory off-site professional development sessions designed to bring teachers to a full understanding of key instructional strategies. The sessions also emphasize the “big picture” on changing and improving schools, rather than on learning new teaching, monitoring, and assessment techniques in isolation.

With the big picture firmly established, it is then more likely that teachers are able to gain maximum value from specific training in using strategies such as guided reading and writing and the teaching of oral language. All off-site professional development sessions are planned and delivered by the CLaSS trainers in conjunction with CLaSS facilitators (Hill & Crévola, 2001).

## Getting on with Teaching

Teachers need to “get on with teaching.” In the first year of implementation of CLaSS, teachers must emphasize reading and

... can expect to spend a great deal of time establishing routines and expectations for students in small groups and with the new frameworks of classroom organization ... In many cases teachers have to make substantial changes to the physical set-up of their classrooms in order to allow the various learning centres [sic] to operate. (Hill & Crévola, 2001, p. 29)

In effect, Hill and Crévola (2001) expect that teachers will spend most of the first year getting used to the “new” framework of organization. In the second year of implementation, it is expected that the reading workshops will be operating as designed, and the emphasis will move to writing workshops. Speaking and listening are elements of literacy that are taught continuously during the implementation of CLaSS.

### The Right Mix of Pressure and Support

CLaSS has been critically responsive to the successes and failings of previous reform initiatives and attempts to develop a philosophy and a set of practices that will enable school systems and schools to develop the conditions necessary to achieve sustainable improvements of student outcomes. The main premise, or condition, of the third age of reform is to make pedagogy the central focus of reform. Issues with teaching and learning must be addressed if the aspirations of the reform are to be realized (Fullan et al., 2006; Hill & Crévola, 2001; Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001). The third age of reform also points to the importance of “building the capacity of school leadership teams to improve pedagogy and results” (Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004, p. 44). Finally the need for well-placed pressure and support from external agencies combined with internal energy is recognized as an important component of the new paradigm (Fullan, et al., 2004).

### Cultural Norms and Rules of the Third Age

Through their rigid interpretation of the CLaSS documentation, the principals established the cultural norms that defined the teachers’ behavior. Stoll and Fink (1997) define cultural norms as consisting of the “unspoken rules for what is regarded as acceptable behaviour [sic] and action within a school” (p. 120). The norms that CLaSS requires schools to adopt are listed below and are accompanied by a catchphrase that articulates the core message. The catchphrases were developed from the principals’ work stories:

1. School culture – “We can get better and better”
2. Single minded focus – “Respond to responsibility”
3. Resource intensive – “Every effort must be made”
4. Ensuring compliance – “We must work together as one”
5. Removing threats and managing people – “There is one path to success”
6. Cultivating an image of superiority – “We know where we are going”

### 7. New professional identities – “We are informed”

These statements may appear as motherhood statements because they can be interpreted as reasonable and rational guidelines to motivate a community to move harmoniously toward certainty. But they can also be used with a firmness of purpose to establish social norms and ensure conformity of teacher behavior.

### Purposeful Action and Rational Planning

Of course, all sector-endorsed programs come with powerful rhetoric to promote adoption and implementation. These powerful and self-perpetuating forms of Discourse that evoke loyalty and commitment among the members of the school community are necessary, it can be argued, to provide a focus for energy and activism, for winning people’s support, and conveying to parents and the wider school community a sense of purposeful action and rational planning. On the other hand, these dominant Discourses with their strongly held beliefs may obscure other perspectives and may disallow criticism and even prevent reflective discourse and analysis from taking place. CLaSS insists that schools are 100% committed to the beliefs and understandings it espouses. The patterns of conduct that are generated by such commitment are totally consistent with Managerial Discourse.

### Managerial Discourse: Engineering Institutional Configurations

Third age reform programs are embedded within Managerial Discourses. According to Sachs (2001), Managerial Discourses are founded on the ideology that efficient management is the key to solving complex problems. In order for institutions and individuals within them to be efficient, managers need to be given autonomy to enforce the imperatives of the initiative. Consequently, others within the institution have to accept and respond positively to the organizational structures and the authority of the principal and those deputized by the principal. Patterns of teacher behavior expected by Managerial Discourse are clearly defined and closely monitored. Managerial Discourse requires teachers to develop a professional identity that is characterized by the advanced technical abilities that have proven to be consistent with the beliefs and understandings of the initiative. Managerial Discourse sets the limits on what can be said, thought, and done in respect to the schools’ initiatives. Therefore, Managerial Discourse engineers institutional configurations that support the school as a technical enterprise. That is, tight managerial control over inputs will provide predictable and reliable outputs. Furthermore, such tight managerial control is regarded as being inherently good and many kudos are afforded to the school for adopting this tight approach from external authorities and the general public.

## Managerial Discourse and Entrepreneurial Professional Identity

Managerial Discourse points to the efficient, responsible and accountable version of service as a new model of professional identity. Menter (as cited in Sachs, 2001) refers to this new model of professional identity as the entrepreneurial identity. The implication for education is the following:

A new kind of teacher and new kinds of knowledge are “called up” by educational reform – a teacher who can maximize performance, who can set aside irrelevant principles, or out-moded social commitments, for whom excellence and improvement are the driving force of their practice. (Ball, 2003, p. 223)

Sachs (2001) argues that the result of operating from an entrepreneurial professional identity is a distinct change in the roles of, and relationship between, the principal and the individual teacher. The principal moves from being a senior colleague who guides and mentors teachers, to being an institutional manager who ensures compliance with the imperatives of the initiative at all cost. Concurrently, teachers move from being autonomous professionals to “designer teachers” who subjugate personal beliefs and understandings in order to demonstrate understandings of, and compliance with, policy imperatives and perform at specified levels of efficiency and effectiveness regardless of personal beliefs and understandings. The expectations of this new model of professional identity are expressed in the words, actions, and interactions of those involved with the school.

## CLaSS Offers Something More than Managerial Discourse

CLaSS is presented as the reasonable and logical development of the managerial view of schooling in response to educational policy and mounting public criticism. CLaSS requires that the teachers and the wider school community adopt the beliefs that CLaSS espouses. Indeed, the acceptance of CLaSS and its associated ideology is regarded as simply applying a commonsense framework to schooling. Within the “commonsense” framework of CLaSS, teachers’ classroom performance is clearly defined and presented. CLaSS and the principals are clear that only by adopting Managerial Discourses and developing entrepreneurial identities can schools hope to improve.

## Moving to Where the Action Is: What the Teachers Say

In the interviews with teachers, new levels of Discourse emerged. Sometimes teachers’ comments mirrored the public Discourse about CLaSS as set out by principals and CLaSS coordinators. At other times, teachers were able to reflect upon difficulties that they had experienced with settling into CLaSS, adapting their practice to the requirements of the CLaSS model, and maintaining the level of commitment expected of them by the principals. These practical and professional concerns form a distinct kind of Discourse that was not evident in interviews

with principals and CLaSS coordinators. One could imagine that teachers might be asked by principals to say how things were going, and teachers in turn would expect to receive support and encouragement. On the other hand, there were occasions when teachers discussed ways in which they had modified, adapted and changed CLaSS. They also discussed conflicts between the CLaSS model and their own beliefs about teaching and literacy. These are issues that are outside and beyond the thinking, speaking, and acting sanctioned by CLaSS. These required the creation of a third kind of personal Discourse. Indeed, the study identified three levels of Discourse: public, personal, and practical. These forms provided an extremely useful perspective of teachers' experience of and reflection of CLaSS.

### Three Forms of Discourse

The public Discourse presented the rational perspective of CLaSS with its own intrinsic logic. The personal Discourse showed how the practices and structures of teachers and their classroom management intersect with CLaSS and created space for teachers to express and sometimes to qualify their commitment to CLaSS. The practical Discourse highlighted those changes made by teachers to reconcile their beliefs and understandings of teaching and learning with those beliefs and understandings about teaching and learning prescribed by CLaSS.

Through subsequent analysis of the three levels of Discourse, a continuum of values and beliefs about teaching and learning that could be viewed simultaneously with the prescribed values about teaching and learning was developed. Ultimately, the study attempted to reconcile what the school sanctioned and valued about teaching and learning, as expressed through the dominant Discourse, with what teachers reported as happening in their classrooms. It also sought to understand why there were contradictions between the two. The three forms of Discourse allowed for the identification of a wide range of difference between what the school was promoting and sanctioning as good practice and what was happening in classrooms, and how teachers perceived what was happening in their classrooms and in the classrooms of other teachers.

The analysis of the teachers' Discourse confirms that two contrasting belief systems or systems of rationality operate within the school and influence the teachers' sense of professional identity. Initially, it is important to demonstrate how the teachers' public Discourse is distinguishable from the teachers' personal and practical Discourse. The teachers' public Discourse points to acceptance of the distinct organizational characteristics and specific patterns of teacher behaviors that are characterized by CLaSS. Yet, the teachers' personal and practical Discourse points to an intolerance of some of the organizational characteristics of the CLaSS schools, as well as specific patterns of teacher behavior that are clearly not consistent with CLaSS.

## Teachers' Public Discourse - We Believe

Analysis of the public Discourse demonstrates that teachers accept the definitions and limitations that CLaSS places on practices and structures. For the most part, teachers were satisfied to interpret the major and minor educational dilemmas that they and their students experienced through the dominant public Discourse of CLaSS. As demonstrated through the teachers' public Discourse, the teachers respond to the professional directions and ideology of CLaSS.

The following comments are indicative of the teachers' ideological readiness to accept CLaSS totally. The norms of conformity are expressed and the importance of common actions is highlighted.

- We all stick very religiously to our CLaSS model and language roster, whole group, small group/whole group, small group. (Teacher A2)
- The understanding I received when I first started with CLaSS is that it is non-negotiable. The literacy block is non-negotiable. I was told clearly that this is the way CLaSS runs and that was that. My understanding is this is how CLaSS runs and if people start to deviate from the model it will not be effective. (Teacher B2)
- We didn't need people doing this if they didn't believe in it. I think that I am the only one in the team now who has been in there since the conception. (Teacher C1)

The teachers willingly complied with the beliefs and understandings of CLaSS. Teachers attended the weekly meetings, engaged the prescribed teaching strategies and practices, used the correct technical language, and generally supported CLaSS. The teachers' continual demonstrations of allegiance to the imperatives of CLaSS reflect the fundamental characteristics of their new professional identity. Through the teachers' public Discourse, the teachers illustrated how they accepted and faithfully interpreted those specific patterns of behavior expressed as "non-negotiable" by CLaSS. Through the teachers' public Discourse, CLaSS is accepted as the only logical way for the school to reform and improve.

## Teachers' Personal Discourse- Limited Agency

The teachers' personal Discourse reveals some of the tensions that occur through the interplay between the teachers' own system of rationality and the public Discourse of CLaSS. The teachers talked in varying tones of quiet dissent, and point to specific aspects of the CLaSS rationality that they considered to be problematic or even flawed. The teachers' personal Discourse illustrated how the power relations within the school are interpreted and enacted. The teachers have limited agency in expressing ideas and opinions other than those sanctioned by CLaSS.

For example, teachers knew that challenging any aspect of CLaSS involved directly and simultaneously challenging the principal, the CLaSS coordinator and their peers. In effect, teachers knew that to be openly critical of CLaSS was to stand alone against the school community. Teachers demonstrated their understanding of the implications of having one “shared belief.”

To challenge the beliefs and understandings of CLaSS is to position oneself beyond or below the accepted boundaries of the new professional identity. Discussions held between principals and questioning teachers are not discussions among equals. The hierarchical, vertical relations of CLaSS systematically eroded collegial relationships between the principal and the teachers. The principals are the expert managers, and the authority of the teachers to make professional contributions to broader educational issues has been diminished. Challenging CLaSS is further complicated because individual staff members know that they are implicit in CLaSS since they agreed to be part of it. The teachers’ personal Discourse also demonstrates the levels of tolerance teachers have developed for the beliefs and understandings of CLaSS. The teachers may not always consider responses to major and minor dilemmas from the managerial framework appropriate. Yet the teachers subjugated their personal beliefs and understandings in order to “trust” CLaSS, albeit with some reservation.

The Personal Discourse model also identifies elements of putting up with CLaSS and insights into the endurance needed to maintain CLaSS. In many ways the following discourse indicates teachers’ forced acceptance of the non-negotiable aspects of CLaSS within their schools.

- I don’t think any one would openly not support it. (Teacher D1)
  
- When I first came here I think there were some people who were given the opportunity to stay or get out and moved to a different area if they didn’t feel comfortable with CLaSS. (Teacher C2)
  
- I started at the school when it started its third year of CLaSS and things were very structured. It was made pretty clear that within the CLaSS model you will do things in a certain way. We are more in control of the program now than before. We know what’s going on....The documentation has a good little diagram explaining how it all fits together? To make sure we stick to the design is really important. (Teacher B1)

While we have heard of the teachers’ loyalty and commitment to CLaSS, the Personal Discourse model refers explicitly to the overt authority of the principals. The principals have the power to affect the teachers’ commitment to CLaSS significantly:

- The understanding I received when I first started with CLaSS is that it is non-negotiable. The literacy block is non negotiable. I was told clearly that this is the way CLaSS runs and that was that. My understanding is this is how CLaSS runs and if people start to deviate from the model it will not be effective. (Teacher B2)
- I suppose I came in, this is my third year of service, so I came in not knowing any other sort of literacy reform. When I came in, they had already got things established. The reading block was well underway and it was really easy to follow, very well structured when I first arrived here. (Teacher A1)

This Personal Discourse model provides tremendous insight into the context and culture that permeates the school. The interactions that occur between individual teachers and principals are clearly not discussions among equals. The conditions for teaching are firmly in the control of the principals.

- I picked up very quickly that the school's commitment to the CLaSS program is beyond question. I was told very strongly the reasons why the school had adopted CLaSS and that the results the school has attained over the last couple of years in regard to literacy development are beyond questioning. I don't think any one would openly not support it. (Teacher D1)
- With the CLaSS program there is an expectation to operate differently to how you may have operated in the past. (Teacher D1)

The teachers' personal Discourse provides insights into how teachers used their own beliefs and understandings to identify inadequacies or "spaces" in the public Discourse and navigate through and around those spaces in order to avoid the consequences of collisions between what they believe and what they are expected to believe. In effect, the teachers' personal Discourse demonstrates that the teachers place value on their own system of rationality and beliefs and understandings above and beyond those sanctioned by the dominant Discourse of CLaSS. The personal Discourse also identifies elements of putting up with CLaSS and insights into the endurance needed to maintain CLaSS. In many ways the following discourse indicates teachers' forced acceptance of the non-negotiable aspects of CLaSS within their schools.

### Teachers' Practical Discourse - We Take Action

The teachers' practical Discourse demonstrates that the teachers' personal beliefs and values about literacy and teaching are strong enough to enable them to resist and even defy the rationality, practices and structures prescribed by CLaSS. The

conflict and collisions the teachers experienced as they navigated between two competing systems provides evidence of how teachers were willing to take action based on their own system of rationality, beliefs, and understandings as identified in the teachers' personal Discourse. In the analysis of the teachers' practical Discourse, the teachers' preparedness to allow their own system of rationality to direct their discussions and actions is evident. The teachers' professional needs and questions are not always satisfied by the response given by CLaSS. Despite the teacher's best attempts to navigate through and around the dominant public Discourse, ideological collisions do occur. The teachers' personal Discourse reveals the highly personalized adjustments made by the teachers as they struggle to reconcile their own professional beliefs and understandings with those of CLaSS. These adjustments are minor enough to go unnoticed or are sufficiently disguised to maintain an appearance of conformity and compliance. In making such adjustments it can be argued that the teachers are resisting or even rejecting some of the fundamental characteristics of the new professional identity sponsored by CLaSS. More importantly, such adjustments and associated patterns of teacher behavior indicate that the teachers have a strong sense of professional identity characterized by their own personal beliefs and understandings and the teaching and life experiences that they are not willing to compromise.

In the following discourse from the teachers, we see varying levels of resistance and non-compliance in each of the four schools. Here teachers stand their own ground. This resistance is not easy. We see varying levels of anxiety from the teachers as they attempted to cope with the requirements of CLaSS and, at the same time, assert their professional autonomy. The teachers did find the power to develop constructive responses to the demands of CLaSS. Ultimately, some teachers are not prepared to have their practice distorted any further.

#### *Making changes.*

- Ah, bits of it I leave out. I change bits around and also the teachers who have come in later, they've sort of been in Early Years and I think that we probably need a bit of that. It's mainly CLaSS. (Teacher A1)
- Yes the two-hour literacy block is very important and we changed the whole school timetable to make sure that interruptions are kept to a minimum. But there are special occasions when the literacy block happens later in the day, only when special things are on. We still do two hours but it's not the ideal time to do it. But sometimes we can't satisfy everybody and have to give a bit. (Teacher B1)

#### *Bend things a little.*

- Yes, individuals can bend things a little to suit themselves. Yes, that's right but you still have to follow the design. (Teacher B1)

- That structure, whole-small-whole, I would say is in there and I haven't strayed from that at all but I haven't felt locked into that either. Probably, as each year has gone on, I have felt more confident in becoming more flexible. Initially, I was probably very structured and I continued to say 'I've got to follow this and if I don't have my whiteboard correct today' you know those sorts of things, or the classroom won't run as well, but as you become more confident in the structure, you become a bit more flexible. (Teacher C1)

*I've got to adapt it.*

- I'd say that I'm just not following that exact CLaSS recipe, which says 'Do two focus groups' I am only doing one...I've got to adapt it. The beauty of working with Year 2 is that the previous principal and the coordinator both agreed that you've got to make the model kind of fit your view as well. You can't just change your whole mould for that. (Teacher C2)

*Disguising some aspects*

- If I wanted children to have take-home readers I had to do that at lunchtime or perhaps in the afternoon but definitely not during the literacy block. I will try to disguise some aspects of what I was doing (like guided reading or discuss with a child aspects of the book they enjoyed etc) to look like it belonged in the CLaSS design. (Teacher D1)

*I'd go crazy trying to do that...*

- The CLaSS model says that you should do two focus groups a day. I'd go crazy trying to do that at the minute. I've got to get the kids settled to working. I've got to work with my focus group, then I've got to go around and see what the other kids are doing, then I've got to start doing the next lot of activities. So at the moment, unless I had four other bodies in there circulating with the other groups, I don't think I could do it. (Teacher C2)
- "Leave out. . . change bits. . ." (Teacher A1), ". . . give a bit, bend things a little. . ." (Teacher B1), "becoming more flexible. . ." (Teacher C1), "not following the exact CLaSS recipe. . . going crazy trying to do it all adapt it. . ." (Teacher C2), ". . . disguise aspects. . ." (Teacher D1), are all sentiments that indicate that the teachers find aspects of CLaSS inconsistent with their understandings and practices. Teachers struggle to reconcile their own values with the values of CLaSS. Some teachers, like those above, are prepared to take matters into their own hands.

## Democratic Discourse: Engaging Professional Practice

Apple (2001), Apple and Beane (1999), Ball (1990), Comber (2001), Gerwitz, Ball, and Bowe (1995), and Sachs (2001) argue that overriding agendas of accountability and standardization are extremely problematic and detrimental to school improvement, they advocate Democratic Discourse has more to offer school improvement than Managerial Discourse. According to Apple and Beane (1999), Democratic Discourse, or democratic schooling, requires a belief that communities of practice have the potential to allow teachers to articulate issues of professional practice through:

1. The open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, which enables people to be as fully informed as possible
2. Individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities and solve problems
3. The use of critical reflection to evaluate ideas, policies, and problems
4. Concern for the welfare of others and ‘the common good’
5. Concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities
6. An understanding that democracy is not so much an ‘ideal’ to be pursued as an ‘idealized’ set of values that we must live with and use to guide our lives as people
7. The organization of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life. (p.7)

## Democratic Discourse and Activist Professional Identity

Democratic schooling has an emphasis on collaborative and cooperative action among teachers and other stakeholders. Democratic schooling suggests that teachers have a responsibility to the wider community that extends beyond than the single classroom and includes contributions to the school, the system, and other students (Brennan 1996). The individualistic goals of Managerial Discourse are balanced by values of compassion and civic responsibility (Sholle, 1992).

For Sachs (2001), Democratic Discourse leads to communities of practice that determine shared beliefs and understandings through community building conversations and activities. Such conversations and activities are characterized by debate and conjecture concerning educational issues, initiatives, and individual opinions. From Democratic Discourse emerges an activist professional identity. Activist professionals are not anarchist as they are cognizant of their responsibil-

ities to external authority. However, they are committed to critical analysis and pursuing equity on a number of educational and social levels. An activist professional identity allows teachers to seek to ensure that institutional barriers and arrangements that impede or deny students access to educational opportunities are identified, challenged, and eliminated. Activist professional identities are motivated by what Apple and Beane (1999) describe as a deep care for young people that requires teachers to guard and protect them from all forms of inequalities in education and society.

The Managerial Discourse of CLaSS requires schools and teachers to adopt an entrepreneurial identity. This identity is shaped by neo-liberal ideas of efficiency and accountability that lead to practices and actions that provide the school, the teachers, and the students a safe and secure future in rapidly changing times. In other words, CLaSS offers schools and teachers a particular form of salvation from the paradox of neo-liberal ideology.

## Intelligent and Reflective Action of Teachers

Democratic Discourse emphasizes the importance of teachers' initiatives and responsibilities in regard to teaching and learning. The democratic school assumes that all teachers are capable of intelligent and reflective action together with a commitment to social justice. The combination of intelligence, professional skill and commitment to social justice provides a basis from which teachers can, according to Sachs (2001), permit and promote transformative attitudes toward the future to be a key goal of the school. Democratic schools and activist teachers have a clear emancipatory aim (Sachs, 2001). Hill and Crévola (2001) question the assumption that all members of the community have the capacity, or the inclination, to be involved in emancipatory activity, and they argue that the energy required to pursue this goal will more than likely detract from the core mission of schools. In democratic schools, teachers are encouraged and expected to defend their professional rights.

Advocates of democratic schooling make the assumption that all schools have the capacity to develop Democratic Discourse. The self-narratives of teachers are acknowledged as important aspects of developing the democratic school. The stories and discussions are embedded in the social justice, values, and civic responsibility of the teachers. Sachs (2001), for example, asserts that, given the right conditions, Democratic Discourse and activist identities can develop in any school. This position is diametrically opposed to that of Hill and Crévola, who are skeptical of this goal being set before all schools. While democratic schools pay attention to the ways knowledge is created and the technical paradigm does not, Sachs (2001) and Apple and Beane (1999) have faith in the individual and collective capacity of teachers to analyze and solve problems; the managerial paradigm does not.

## Salvation Stories

Through investigation of the Discourses that surround and shape the environment in which teachers work, it becomes evident that teachers are expected to develop a professional identity from opposing ideologies. In effect, when schools take on reform programs and attempt to improve through making changes, teachers are being asked to choose a salvation story. A salvation story has been described by Popkewitz (2000) and Popkewitz and Lindbald (2000) as an interpretation of systems of rationality and configurations of beliefs which inform the cultural practices that are used to produce order and make plausible the engagement of particular behaviors and ways of thinking. Salvation stories are a narrative of the core beliefs and aspirations of specific ideologies. They govern the development of educational policies and teachers' practices and identities. Salvation stories represent different and competing pathways to "redemption" from a flawed condition. They also present a remedy to protect those who "believe" from lapsing back to their former flawed condition and provide a basis to critique alternative salvation stories. More importantly, salvation stories allow us to investigate the power and knowledge systems that divide the practices that qualify or disqualify individuals from action and participation.

## Competing Systems of Rationality and Professional Identity

The three levels of Discourse used to analyze the teachers' comments demonstrate that the teachers work out of two systems of rationality. One system of rationality is prescribed by CLaSS and is evident in the teachers' public Discourse. The other system of rationality is derived from an eclectic mix of the teachers' own beliefs and experiences and is evident in the teachers' personal and practical Discourse. The public Discourse supports the theme raised by the principals and the CLaSS Coordinators that the schools needed to be saved from a flawed culture. The flawed culture was characterized by a lack of accountability, ineffective teaching practices, and a lack of consistency. The teachers provide testimony confirming the capacity of CLaSS to save the school and themselves from the ineffective and inefficient past. The teachers inform us that since implementing CLaSS, the school is a better school, and they are now better teachers.

The personal and practical Discourse provides insights into the dualism and tensions that teachers experience on a daily basis. CLaSS deliberately sets out to define and dominate the professional identity of teachers; to varying degrees, the teachers in this study resist and even reject characteristics of the new identity. This resistance and rejection of CLaSS is indicative of the teachers' capacity to operate from a system of rationality other than that engineered by CLaSS. The competing systems of rationality and the professional identity that are sponsored through the teachers' personal and practical Discourse are consistent with Democratic Discourse and activist identities. Through examination of the Managerial and Democratic Discourse and the professional identities they sponsor, insights

into the costs involved with engaging CLaSS beyond the physical and human resource issues start to emerge.

## Actions Guided by Salvation Stories

Salvation stories are useful as they provide the opportunity to investigate and explore the complexities involved in engaging specific ideologies. They provide a framework that allows for insights into the created reality in which schools operate and teachers work. Through embodying systems of reasoning, salvation stories guide action and are used by systems' administrators, school leaders, and teachers to refute competing narratives. Within a particular salvation story, a typically "reasonable person" (Popkewitz, 2000) can be identified and seen, and, within the same salvation story, reasonable behavior and practices are classified and indicate and define success. They draw their strength from the successes that have been achieved by those sympathetic to that paradigm. Within a salvation story, there is no possibility of falsification. Salvation stories do not permit dilution, and compromise is not acceptable. Competing salvations are strictly incompatible. Salvation stories insist on 100% commitment. Through analysis of salvation stories, we can examine the effect of systemic reform in a broader global context.

## CLaSS Exists within a Salvation Story

The salvation story that underpins CLaSS helps to define and resolve complexity and disagreement about literacy, literacy attainment, and the purpose of schooling. CLaSS schools are able to disengage from complexity and disputation. Hill and Crévola (2001) see this as a necessary step to moving forward, whereas advocates of democratic schooling would be inclined to see this as a step backwards. In CLaSS schools, the place of schools and teachers is straightforward. The fundamental characteristics of schooling as a social, moral, and political enterprise have been decided. Debate, reflection, and questioning are disallowed by the paradigm from which CLaSS operates. The power arrangements remain unscrutinized, and the complexity of school reform is reduced to simple remedies.

At a second level, the notion of competing salvation stories helps to explain some of the behaviors of the principals. Principals have sometimes removed teachers who displayed reservations about CLaSS from active roles in implementing CLaSS. These principals might be seen as exercising power for power's sake or simply acting in an authoritarian manner. However, it may be more helpful to see their behavior as reasonable and necessary in terms of the particular salvation story supporting CLaSS. Schools that have taken on CLaSS are committed to upholding the values and practices of CLaSS fully and without compromise because without this kind of support, CLaSS cannot operate as a school-wide literacy program. The roles of the principal and the CLaSS coordinator are to make sure that the particular behaviors and ways of thinking endorsed by CLaSS are carried out faithfully. Teachers who are not comfortable with these beliefs and

practices are a threat to these values and beliefs and diminish the likelihood of success that CLaSS promises.

### Systems of Rationality

It is also useful to use the idea of competing salvation stories to explain the behavior of some teachers referred to in this study who have readily accommodated the specific behaviors and beliefs required by CLaSS. Some critics of CLaSS would say that these teachers have put aside their professional autonomy or subordinated their own judgements and professional beliefs in favour of CLaSS. For many of the teachers referred to in this study and in other CLaSS schools, it is possible to see their compliant behavior not as some deficit in their professional behavior but, rather, as the acceptance of the specific salvation story CLaSS advocates. Those who support a democratic model of schooling and criticize teachers in CLaSS schools may be seen as operating from within a competing Discourse or salvation story. Within the democratic salvation story, professional disagreement, and debate, individual judgement, personal responsibility, and initiative are highly valued and seen to be productive. Within CLaSS, these values, practices and procedures are always to be subordinated to the over-riding objectives of the program.

### Exclusive Nature of Salvation Stories

An important feature of salvation stories, as described by Popkewitz and Lindbald (2004), is that they are mutually exclusive and incompatible. In public Discourse, it is not possible to mix and match salvation stories without generating conflict and disagreement at a fundamental level. It can be argued that some teachers have tried to go along with CLaSS while also retaining a belief in their own capacity and professional judgement to adapt and reshape CLaSS practices. It makes good sense to argue that these teachers are attempting to hold on to values that belong to a competing salvation story—democratic schooling, for example—while at the same time appearing to go along with values and practices endorsed by CLaSS. It is not surprising, therefore, that the few teachers encountered in this study who did make changes to and departures from CLaSS in their own teaching were reluctant to discuss their changes and departures with their principal. In all cases, these teachers recognized that they were making themselves vulnerable. They had no reason to expect that the principal or CLaSS coordinator would look favourably on what they had done. Indeed, they had every reason to believe that the principal would see their adaptations and departures as expressions of dissent and as a danger to morale. More importantly, within CLaSS, there is no forum in which dissenting opinions and reservations can be made. If reservations are made within a CLaSS meeting, they are interpreted as an admission of a teacher's shortcomings and will be interpreted by colleagues as a call for help. If such help is not accepted or welcomed, a teacher's behavior is considered to be against CLaSS and the mission of the school. Continuation of such unproductive comments warrants

exclusion for the CLaSS team. This expected response can be seen as exemplifying what is likely to take place when two salvation stories collide. Salvation stories are always about belief and action. They are never about abstract propositions.

## Producing Order

When reform programs operate within a salvation story, the social relations, meanings, and assumptions of schooling are no longer problematic. The redefinition of teacher professionalism and how it is practised has a significant impact on education. In this case, the bias of these assumptions are incorporated into CLaSS and used without question. Ongoing questions, such as “How probing or searching is our definition of literacy?”; “What kind of literacy will our children need in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?”; “Are there forms of literacy we need to consider more deeply such as designing a website?”; “Who is deciding what is or is not appropriate and from what framework do we draw our conclusion?”; and “What distinguishes teachers from other workers?” are no longer central to the Discourse of CLaSS in the sense that they have already been answered. The energy needed to sustain such questions and subsequent debate, according to Hill and Crévola (2001), is better spent getting on with the work of improving children’s literacy. CLaSS sees ongoing debate about literacy and the purpose of schooling as a distraction to teachers and a luxury that the school must avoid in order to achieve its core goals. Nevertheless, it is also clear that CLaSS schools are not unsuccessful schools. For example Fullan et al. (2006) are happy for schools and teachers to incur the cost associated with narrowly redefining the school’s vision and establishing entrepreneurial teacher identities as long as all the children will be successful.

Hill and Crévola (2001) argue that it is necessary for teachers to realize that the professional freedom, professional autonomy, and criticism offered by democratic schooling do not guarantee educational achievement for all. Meanwhile, questions like “How well equipped are CLaSS schools themselves to deal with complexity?” and “What have they sacrificed?” remain unanswered. CLaSS has a single focus on continuity and efficiency, which is expressed through precisely defined approaches to teaching.

## Contemplating Reform and Redefining Situations

This paper argues for schools to redefine their situations when contemplating reform. The challenge for schools and school systems is to develop ways of anticipating and analyzing the risks that attend all educational theories, risks which significantly increase when a theory promises straightforward or “commonsense” solutions to complex problems. Schools and teachers need to identify the specific salvation story that underpins reform programs. Such risk analysis involves the critical investigation of the social and political context of reform programs, the research paradigms that support them, and the external authorities that fund them in order to assess the possible impact they will have on the school beyond the

immediate goals of the reform. This needs to be recognized as part of the core business of schools.

This paper is concerned with examining the cultural practices that are used to produce order and make plausible the acceptance and engagement of neo-liberal inspired reform programs, of which CLaSS is a pre-eminent example. The question for schools considering engaging CLaSS is not about choosing a literacy program; it is about choosing systems of rationality, choosing beliefs and understandings that define and prescribe how schools will go about the process of teaching and learning.

### The Critical Choice: Are Schools More than Sites of Learning?

The critical choice for schools is determining how to simultaneously engage the complexities involved in schooling, as expressed in this study by Democratic Discourse, and meet immediate concerns relating to achievement in literacy. The path to redemption and salvation in this context is, therefore, fraught with dangers. The intention of this study is not to discredit CLaSS or even to demonize its salvation narrative. The path to salvation is never simple. Choosing to ignore salvation narratives underpinning particular reform programs has hidden costs.

School reform is a symbolic as well as a practical endeavour. As Minow (1999) suggests:

Schools provide society with the context to determine how individual freedoms should be rendered compatible with the common good, how generations relate to each other and whether commerce and industry should govern democracy or democracy govern commerce and industry. (p. 495)

This analysis of CLaSS as an example of a third age reform program demonstrates how the values of efficiency, standardization, and accountability endorsed by a market economy are in tension with the values of democratic schooling. This study contends that these competing salvation narratives need to be kept in creative tension rather than having one set of values over-ride the other. When schools are persuaded to buy into a program like CLaSS, which has been heavily promoted by systemic authorities, they often appear unaware that they are buying into a system of rationality. If schools are to become places of authentic reform, they need to identify and interrogate the salvation story that comes with the reform program. Unless they can do this, schools are imprisoning themselves within a rationality that does not necessarily represent them. They will have lost the capacity for critical self-examination and are placing themselves in the position of waiting for the next reform program to be presented.

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