To Hell in a Handcart
Educational realities, teachers' work and neo-liberal restructuring in NSW TAFE

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Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of neo-liberal economic restructuring on teachers, specifically teachers in technical and further education. Historically, there has been limited research undertaken on teachers as workers, and even less on TAFE teachers. During the period covered by the study, TAFE was buffeted by the massive changes, social, political, cultural and economic, that were occurring on a global scale. As a result, TAFE has been a system in crisis. The consequences are addressed by an empirical study that examines NSW TAFE teachers' experience of the great changes that have occurred to their work since the late 1980s.

Forty-one teachers were interviewed in tape recorded sessions lasting around one hour each. The respondents were drawn from twenty-seven teaching sections across all the major industry areas represented in TAFE. Twenty of the teachers were from metropolitan locations, twenty-one were regional. Nine managers were also interviewed, from Head of Studies to senior management levels, covering those with local as well as state-wide responsibilities.

The changes to TAFE have been driven by a pervasive neo-liberal ideology adopted by both major parties in Australia. This study documents the experience of TAFE teachers as that ideology led to a corporatised vocational education and training system strongly oriented to the market. It also records their responses to the narrowing of curriculum that resulted from the "industry-driven" vocational education and training policies of governments. The study gives voice to their grief, frustration and anger as their working conditions deteriorated and their commitment to quality education was undermined.

The study documents the teachers' resistance to the processes of organisational fragmentation, the increasing incidence of cost-driven, rather than educational, decision-making, and the commodification of curriculum driven by a series of policy decisions taken at both national and state level.

The study compares these experiences with those of the TAFE managers, whose response to the crisis, while differing from that of the teachers, supports the teachers' commitment to public education as a social good.

The study concludes that the NSW TAFE teachers' resistance has continued to act as a brake on the excesses of neo-liberalism. Some possibilities for an alternative vision of technical and further education thus remain.

Acknowledgements

A lot of people have put up with me writing this thesis. As one of my colleagues commented, everyone knew I was doing it, particularly once I returned to full-time work and found it increasingly difficult to balance the two lives. My colleagues and my friends have been remarkably tolerant. I thank them all very sincerely.

Bob Connell, my supervisor, should get some kind of gold medal award for patience, encouragement, great psychotherapy, wonderful humour. An inspiration and a delight.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to all the people who agreed to participate in this study. There is so much more that could have been written about the experiences and insights that were shared with me. I hope that what I have managed to do might help to make a difference.

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Acronyms

ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACOTAFE	Australian Committee on Technical & Further Education
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AEC	Australian Education Council
AEU	Australian Education Union
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMWU	Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASCH	Annual Student Contact Hours
ASF	Australian Standards Framework
ATS	Australian Traineeship System
AVCTS	Australian Vocational Certificate Training System
AVTS	Australian Vocational Training System
BCA	Business Council of Australia
BVET	Board of Vocational Education & Training
CBT	Competency Based Training
DEETYA	Dept of Employment, Education, Training & Youth Affairs
DEIR	Dept of Employment & Industrial Relations
DET	Dept of Education and Training
DIRETFE	Dept of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training & Further Education
DTEC	Dept of Training & Education Coordination
EC	Establishment Control (part-time teacher pay system)
ESC	Education Services Consortium
ESD	Education Services Division
ESFC	Employment & Skills Formation Council
ESL	English as a Second Language
HOS	Head of Studies
IT	Information Technology

ITAB	Industry Training Administration Board
MAATS	Modern Apprenticeship & Traineeship System
MOVEET	Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment & Training
MUA	Maritime Union of Australia
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education & Training
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NSW	New South Wales
NTRA	National Training Reform Agenda
PSA	Public Service Association
QETO	Quality Endorsed Training Organisation
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAFETA	Technical & Further Education Teachers' Association
TCF	Textiles, Clothing and Footwear
TDC	Trade Development Council
VEETAC	Vocational Education & Training Advisory Committee
VET	Vocational Education & Training

I Introduction

Chapter 1: Introduction

> I guess one reason is that I'm not stressed because I feel things are a mess [burst of laughter] - in the hierarchy. Maybe there's a question - is it organised chaos or is it just chaos, but I'm not at the moment as stressed out as I was because I feel [searching for words] the organisation isn't efficient as it - you know, maybe people saw it as being inefficient years ago, but we had a direction. We knew what we were doing. I had pride in my management before. I haven't got that same pride in my management. I have got more pride now in *myself*, and I know I can see what has to be done, and I'm not stressed as much, because I know that I'm more efficient than a lot of the hierarchy.
> *You let go the frustration.*[1]
> Yeah - so I'm feeling better [laugh] I'm feeling better - isn't that a funny thought - when I think about that."
> [Extract from interview (14:13[2])]

When I began this study I defined it as using TAFE, and the TAFE teaching workforce, as a window into the changing world of work. I wanted to make better sense of what was happening to work: my work and that of my colleagues and thus, because our work is in vocational and further education, work in the wider society. Like my teaching colleagues, I was disturbed by what seemed to me to be a narrowing focus in TAFE. I was also questioning my complicity in enforcing management directives and imperatives that seemed to be inevitable, but which made me feel quite uneasy. I had become locked into short term, contingent responses to what seemed an ever changing agenda. I had always prided myself on my ability to adapt to change, but I wondered where the constant change was leading me and the organisation I was committed to. Most importantly, I began to wonder why I was working so hard to achieve objectives that did not fit with my sense of myself as an educator - an educator who could make a positive difference to people's lives.

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[1] Throughout, italics are used to indicate my part in the interviews.
[2] Throughout, these numbers refer to interview number:page number in transcript.

I undertook this study because I wanted to gain a better understanding of the motivating forces behind the changes that had been occurring on a broad social scale and that were impacting on TAFE and on my work. It was prompted by a desire to challenge the justification for the changes, primarily the assumption that there was a need for Australia to be competitive in the global marketplace and that the challenge could be met only by taking a very particular "economic rationalist" path. Union debates on the changes and their effect on workers, both in TAFE and the wider society, were limited by the fact that they were conducted within the framework of the dominant discourse - somehow the ideologies of the "new right" had become generally accepted common sense. To challenge the primacy of the economic was to be branded out of date, a dinosaur incapable of adapting to a rapidly changing world. We were continually reacting, at best trying to salvage some of what we regarded as important, as rapid and constant change threatened our work and our working conditions.

As a committed public servant, I was also disturbed by the prevalent view that concepts common to the private sector were good, but those that had previously driven the public sector were bad. The public sector in which I had spent my working life had pioneered many progressive employment practices that had become a model for the private sector. These were now being swept away, and both of the major Australian political parties were outbidding each other in their efforts to promote "small government". Toohey (1994) quotes Jon Stanford, a member of Keating's Prime Minister's department: "Government spending on anything is usually regarded with suspicion: even in areas such as education or provision of infrastructure, priority should be given to allowing the market to determine the outcome" (p. 147).

As the study progressed, my focus became clearer - a focus on how neo-liberal economic restructuring has impacted on teachers, specifically teachers in technical and further education. Their situation confused many of the teachers I spoke to. While they knew they were not happy with where they were being driven as workers and as educators, they were unclear about the forces that were shaping their experience. The teacher whose comment gave me the title for the thesis, who said, "I think TAFE's

going to hell in a handcart"[3] is typical. While he spoke of the increasing divisiveness he saw in society, and argued that the changes in TAFE were "political", he also said that what he saw as an approaching "cataclysm" for TAFE was more a result of poor management than any broader cause. This localising of the cause of the significant changes that have occurred on a global level is perhaps not unusual. But it can limit strategies to resist the changes. This thesis aims to contribute to an understanding of how the global changes of the past few decades affect people at a local level and thus to help overcome that limitation.

As a provider of vocational education and training, TAFE by its very nature tends to reflect changes in industry and the workforce. When industries are rationalised, lose their market share, are moved off shore, are overtaken by technological change, shrink or disappear for various other reasons, the corresponding TAFE sections are also affected, with staff being redeployed, retrained, or made redundant as are their colleagues in the wider industrial arena.

Major shifts in industrial patterns, for instance the shift in employment from manufacturing to service industries in advanced industrial nations, cause changes in emphasis in TAFE's educational offerings.

Being a publicly funded provider, TAFE is also reflective of changes in priorities which occur at a political and ideological level. As governments make decisions to invest in publicly funded education in order, for instance, to deal with youth unemployment, or to increase the country's skill levels, TAFE expands. When governments argue for small government, or believe that competition policy should be applied to public institutions, TAFE is cut back or forced to tender for funds accordingly.

As an educational organisation, TAFE is subject to theoretical and ideological changes in educational policy and delivery. Competency Based Training, flexible delivery and other similar changes reverberate throughout the organisation. The link between vocational education and training and economic priorities (Marginson, 1993,

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[3] 32:15

pp. 20-22) has most recently seen a diminished role for further education in TAFE, as it concentrates on a narrowly defined vocational role.

NSW TAFE is a large organisation and, as such, it is prone to the kinds of organisational changes that are occurring in large organisations generally, as they respond to real or perceived changes in the global marketplace. The rise of "managerialism" (Rees & Rodley, (Eds.) 1995), the displacement of staff by the introduction of new technology, the emergence of a core/periphery workforce, new methods of working, the introduction of "flexible working conditions": TAFE is reflective of many of the issues raised by those who wish to analyse the epochal changes of our times.

The study focuses on teachers as workers, within the context of educational issues and of broader social and economic changes. Substantial analysis has been undertaken in the past twenty odd years of the major shifts occurring not only in industrially developed nations but also at a global level. But the predominant discourse of "globalisation", post-industrialism, post-Fordism, and the primacy of the economic can cripple at the local level any consideration of alternatives to the forces they represent.

The predominance of market thinking in educational delivery creates a tension for educators, a shift in emphasis from "student" to "consumer" or "client", and thus a shift from concepts of the common good to injunctions to be responsive to individual "client" demands. Outcomes that cannot be easily measured disappear from management rhetoric (Murdock, 1994, p. 241).

There is no doubt that TAFE teachers, like so many other workers, are under increasing pressure and it can be difficult under those circumstances to retain a strong sense of mission. Hargreaves (1994, p. 15) refers to the "intensification" process to which teachers are being subjected and Harvey (1990, p. 284) suggests that we are going through a period of intense time-space compression. Harvey (1992) also says that "Crises of identity (where is my place in the world? what future can I have?) arise out of strong phases of time-space compression" (p. 43). It is through the

personal experience of TAFE teachers and their sense of their own identity within the vocational education and training sector that I explore some of these broader themes.

There has been little research done on TAFE teachers as workers, and what has been done generally has been as a base for the production of policy documents internal to the vocational education and training system (for example, the publication *Staffing TAFE for the 21st Century*, VEETAC Working Party on TAFE Staffing Issues, 1992). But the role of the TAFE teacher has, under the pressure of the influences outlined above, changed substantially in the past few years, from traditional face to face teaching with clearly separated preparation time, to a role that incorporates a range of activities including as consultants to industry, "brokers" of courses, training assessors, workplace advisers, and tenderers for funds.

The scope and penetration of the changes have made it increasingly difficult for teachers to "retreat into the security of the classroom" which, as Ginsburg, Kamat, Raghu and Weaver (1995) note, is likely to allow "miseducative and inequality-reinforcing aspects of the system to go unchallenged" (p.17). Many teachers find the pressure to engage with changes they only partly understand to be extremely threatening.

The teachers in my study were in the throes of change, and had been for the past decade. Some were just trying to let it wash over them, having given up trying to make sense of it. Some were trying to adapt to the new TAFE - or the sequence of new TAFEs. Many exhibited deep levels of contradiction about their working lives in just about every aspect. They spoke of being unable to meet student demand for places because of funding cuts, yet of downturns in their industry areas that meant the flow of students had "dried up". In one part of an interview, I would be told that there were no jobs for young people, yet a little later in the same interview, I would be told that young people were too demanding and that the jobs were there if they really tried to find them. Some were dismissive of the language and discourse of the new business oriented TAFE, yet would also argue that it was necessary to accept the need to "change with the times", an attitude that was prevalent amongst the managers I spoke to. These kinds of contradictions could be interpreted by management as

"denial". They certainly indicate deep confusions, not just about what to do about what is happening, but about what is happening itself.

The teachers I spoke to had already undergone massive changes in curriculum, in the kinds of students they teach and in how they teach them. They were often overworked yet fearing redundancy. Some had retrained, either because they "saw the writing on the wall" or because they were told to, yet were facing redundancy again.

They were ambivalent about the future - theirs, TAFE's, their students', society's. They had tried to regroup and forge new pathways only to have the ground shift completely under their feet once more.

They were also ambivalent about the changes in TAFE. They told horror stories of the bad old days, yet also looked back with nostalgia and regret. They spoke with pride of their achievements and of their love of their work, and yet wondered if they could "cut it" in the new world that is being forced upon them.

In Parts III, IV and V, this thesis gives a voice to teachers in NSW TAFE. It records and analyses their responses to the changes wrought by neo-liberal restructuring, and documents their resistance. As far as possible, it uses their own words, within a framework of my thematic analysis. Their words recapture the tone of the interviews and communicate the issues in a vivid and powerful way.

I Introduction

Chapter 2: Carrying out the study

> *What this is about essentially is me trying to figure out what's going on with work – I doubt if I'll ever come up with anything more than a few theories like anybody else, but what I'm interested in is the implications for TAFE and TAFE teachers, and I'm also interested because TAFE teachers reflect, or TAFE reflects what's going on in industry – possibly not as much as some people think it should, but – say if an industry area goes off shore and closes down, then that has an impact on TAFE …*
>
> Is that an H1 or is that an H2?
>
> *What do you mean?*
>
> Hypotheses.
>
> *(drawling) Nah, forget hypotheses, I'm operating in a totally new paradigm of research.*
>
> Terrific.
>
> [Extract from interview (48:1)]

Going (back) into the field

Before I began interviewing, I set out to construct a rigorous research framework - a series of questions, and a survey methodology. Every step I took was through a minefield of doubt, confusion, and a lack of clarity about exactly what I was studying, and what it was I wanted to find out. While this is not unusual in a research process, it seemed to me to be particularly strong in this case. And it was, as Marjorie Barnard[4] once said, like trying to hang a picture on a fly, because everything in the TAFE workplace changed day by day - new structures, new hopes...

In the end, I struggled back to what had prompted me to enter the research in the first place, which was to try to make sense of the changes that I and other TAFE teachers

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[4] Marjorie Barnard was one of a group of major Australian twentieth century women authors that included Eleanor Dark and Miles Franklin.

had been experiencing. So I described my method as "doing a Studs Terkel"[5] and damn the consequences. That approach allowed me to develop a research process that would, I hoped, permit me to explore just how deep the disquiet was in TAFE about the directions the organisation had been taking. But positivist frameworks continued to intrude on my thinking, making me feel uncertain about the validity of my approach. Wolcott (1995) argues that

> It is the insistent demand of outsiders … that traps researchers of all persuasions into portraying as a neat, linear, logical sequence what is, in fact, a dialectical process in which all critical judgments are made by humans (p. 162).

It was as much my own demands as those of the academic environment in which I was operating that insisted I maintain a level of rigour both in the design and in the analysis. My efforts to provide a valid piece of research required me to examine my own subjectivity and to recognise that my emotional involvement could be both a help and a hindrance in achieving that goal. As Deutscher (1983) says,

> As emotion is something we must handle and at any rate accept in any real objectivity so, too, involvement … the involvement of oneself, is necessary to any objectivity which has something to do with the best understanding and knowledge we can gain (p. 129).

Developing my understanding of the validity of my research method also helped me to better understand, and repudiate, the increasing tendency in TAFE to be concerned only with those things that are readily measurable - at great cost to valid educational decision making (see discussion in Chapter 3: *Concepts* below). I was forced to examine the strategy of standardising the interview process, of trying to neutralise "improper variables" (Djikstra & van der Zouwen quoted in Mishler, 1986, p. 15) that might interfere with a "true" response. I came to accept that the research interview is a form of discourse and as such is a joint product between interviewer and interviewee (Mishler, 1986).

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[5] Pulitzer Prize winner Studs Terkel published a series of books based on his interviews with American people about their experience of such major events as the 1930s Depression and World War II. His book *Working* (1974) was subtitled "people talk about what they do all day and how they feel about what they do", and his narrative was woven around their stories.

The interviewing process itself was wonderful. I had residual feelings of academic guilt every time I really engaged with the person I was interviewing, which was most of the time - since what we were talking about was our lives, our commitment, our faith in the future. Thus I found it emotionally impossible *not* to engage. The positive outcome of that engagement was that people who were complete strangers to me opened up in a way that I doubt would have occurred had I attempted a more positivist approach.

Unburdened by my problems, my interviewees engaged with the research in the most spectacular fashion. Many of them initially said that they would have nothing to contribute. An hour or more later, I would have to break off the interview, with both of us busting to continue our discussion. Sometimes we talked about why this outpouring happened. Partly it was because, in the frantic day to day pressure of work, they hardly had time to stop and talk about what was happening to them, in spite of their frustration, anger or despair.

Often, they surprised themselves with their ideas, their speculations, the paths the conversation had taken. And many of them thanked me for the chance to explore ideas, to think about the how and why of what was happening to them and their work.

Initially I thought that these interviews were rich because I was talking to people I knew, whose working situation I understood. But the experience was repeated, with people I had never met and whose work situations I had little understanding of, because they were from other Institutes or from teaching areas that were new to me. I had the same experience with the managers, some of whom found the interview experience a reminder of how little time they now have to consider what they are doing and why.

In a sense, this is a series of personal accounts of experience. My questions cued these accounts, but did not necessarily direct them.

The study concentrates on the teacher as worker. My broader initial interest was the major educational issue for TAFE: vocational education and training for what *kind* of

lifestyle or work? I summarised that interest by describing the study for the respondents as being about "the future of work and what it means for TAFE". As the interviews proceeded, my engagement with the issues raised, with our shared experiences, and with the changing circumstances of our common workplace, changed my way of thinking about the study.

The process of interviewing shifted the emphasis of the study from "what changes to work mean for adult vocational educators" to an exploration of the effects of the neo-liberal agenda on TAFE and its workers as revealed by the experiences of TAFE teachers. By the time I interviewed the managers, mostly towards the end of the field research, this had become the primary focus. This shift in focus impacted on the selection of material from the interviews for description and analysis.

Initially I considered focus groups, a technique I had used successfully in my Masters research, but I abandoned this form for two reasons. Firstly, the logistics of organising focus groups would have limited both the range and the depth I was looking for. Secondly, I wanted people to reveal their personal experience of the changes and this demanded a level of confidentiality that a focus group would not have allowed.

I hoped, as Paulo Freire said, that my mode of inquiry would
> … not only investigate how experience is shaped, lived and endured within particular social forms such as schools, but also how certain apparatuses of power produce forms of knowledge that legitimate a particular kind of truth and way of life (Preface to Giroux, 1988, p. xxxv).

As it turned out, the interviews provided me with a rich source for both explorations.

My earliest framing of what I wanted to know was a set of three questions:
> Who are you as a worker?
> What has happened to your working life?
> How do you feel about it?

These were the questions I was asking myself out of a deep unease that I had lost my way as an educator, and out of rebellion against the "forms of knowledge" that were legitimating "a particular kind of truth and way of life" (Freire above) that I was increasingly unhappy about.

While still operating in a fairly positivist paradigm and expecting to quantify at least some of the data I collected, my questions reflect a set of hypotheses that emerged from my reading. Or, as Wolcott (1995) would have it, they reflect my *biases* (p. 164).

Essentially, I wanted to talk to my colleagues, to find out how they experienced the changes in TAFE and in their industry areas. I wanted to use the interviews to help me find some better names to give the "forces" behind the changes and the "big picture stuff".

Sample

My aim was to interview as broad a cross section of TAFE teachers as I could manage. However, I was particularly interested in interviewing people who had experienced the changes in TAFE over a period of time. I was also particularly interested in interviewing people who taught in areas that had been most affected by workforce change, for instance, those from the manufacturing and engineering trades. Finally, I wanted to interview a small selection of senior managers, again reflective of a cross section at that level.

Fifty one people were interviewed. The first few interviews were with people I knew, people I had worked with and could easily convince to be part of my study. This was not just convenience. They were the people who had been part of the process that I had been through. They, I knew from discussions, were as confused as I was. I chose some of them because they represented specific kinds of people, and specific "problems" that I was trying to disentangle. Many of the people I interviewed, however, were not people I had previously met.

Twenty four of the people I interviewed were Head Teachers, two were Teachers-in-Charge and three were part-time. I was not worried about the preponderance of interviewees at Head Teacher level, since my interest was in people who had experienced the changes that TAFE has undergone over the years, particularly in the last decade. But I also made sure that I had a reasonable spread of teaching staff: from both metropolitan and regional campuses and from a range of teaching areas. I did not target part-time staff. The experience of part-time staff in TAFE is worthy of a study of its own. I included some part-time staff in order to have their voice in the study, and also because, while trying to get a spread across subject areas, I found that the *only* staff in some areas were part-time.

All the people I interviewed were 30 years old or more (a number have retired since I spoke to them). This not only reflects the ageing workforce in TAFE, as in teaching generally, but also the long standing requirement of years of industry experience for teaching staff. A few of the people I interviewed came into TAFE relatively young. They were either from sections that had a tradition of immediate entry after training (for example Fashion) or were notable as exceptions to the rule. Some others told of having been knocked back when they initially applied for teaching positions, on the grounds that they were too young.

While I was mainly interested in experience, I also wanted to hear what people who had been in TAFE for shorter periods had to say. I therefore specifically targeted a few people who joined TAFE after the Scott Review of 1989/90[6]. I asked Head Teachers for referrals or, in one case where I was familiar with the section, chose myself. In two instances, Head Teachers who were feeling very negative about their recent experiences in TAFE deliberately referred me to teachers who had a more optimistic view. In one of these instances the teacher turned out to be simply less enervated rather than more optimistic.

I targeted those areas in TAFE which have experienced the most pressure – the manufacturing and engineering trades, and, to a lesser extent, general education. To gain a fuller perspective, I also interviewed people in expanding areas – business

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[6] See Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE.*

services, tourism & hospitality and information technology. In all, I covered twenty seven teaching areas across all of the Education Services Divisions.

To preserve confidentiality I cannot be too precise in my reporting about the teaching areas covered, because of the "rationalisations" that have occurred in TAFE over the past decade or so. Many teaching areas that used to be represented across the state, are now confined to one or two campuses. Some have always been limited to one or two campuses. I interviewed some people in areas that were either on the brink of disappearing, or which had shrunk to a small section on one campus. To identify their teaching area even by as broad a category as industry would identify the campus and possibly the person. In reporting the interviews I have therefore only identified people in ways that will preserve their anonymity.

I interviewed nine managers. I delayed these interviews because I wanted to have a strong sense of what TAFE teaching staff were saying before I spoke to management. However one was conducted early to test the interview process, and the timing of some others was governed by distance. In the latter cases, I conducted the management interviews towards the end of the sequence for that particular Institute. I interviewed some managers at Institute level and some from central offices with state-wide responsibility. The term "managers" in the thesis will include both middle and upper management. The generic term is used to preserve anonymity. While some Head Teachers, particularly Senior Head Teachers, would also classify themselves as managers, or as "middle management," they are not included in the category in this thesis.

I also conducted one interview with a staff member who was not a teacher, a college based administrative person with many years of experience in TAFE. I chose this person because of their[7] close working relationship with teachers, familiarity with the changes in TAFE from both an administrative and educational point of view, and strongly reflective approach to TAFE and their work in it.

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[7] I choose this grammatical form throughout to avoid gender issues, which in some cases in the reporting of interviews may identify the person interviewed.

Twenty women and thirty men were interviewed. I expected that I would be interviewing many more men than women, given the gender imbalance in TAFE, particularly in the trade sections.

Roughly the same numbers of teaching staff were interviewed from metropolitan and regional areas (20 metropolitan, 21 regional). Seven of the nine managers were metropolitan; a number of these had state-wide responsibilities.

Conduct of the interviews

The interviews broadly covered the following questions: if work is changing and/or disappearing for large groups of people, how do those changes affect teachers in TAFE? How do they experience the change? How do they feel about it? What might it mean for their area of teaching? For their students? What changes in patterns of employment have they noticed - for themselves, their colleagues, their students? What changes have happened to their own work and working conditions - what do they perceive as the causes? What understanding do they have of the broader influences which are impacting on their work? How do those influences relate to how they see their own and their students' futures? Is it dependent on subject area? Has their subject area changed? Has what they are teaching or how they are teaching changed?

At the beginning of each interview, I asked each person about their work history, both inside and outside TAFE, and why they chose the path they did.

The questions were tested on three people well known to me who were able to give feedback on relevance and clarity. These pilot interviews are included in the general study. Only minimal changes were necessary, partly because the questions were broad, designed as triggers for extended responses.

The interviews were conducted over 15 months, with the first in late 1997, and the last in January 1999. Looking at the richness of the information produced by the interviews, I think I was, like Pusey (1991), lucky to have been interviewing at a

critical time – around ten years after the perceived onset of the crisis. (Many participants in the study date the beginnings of the trauma from the late 1980s - see Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE* below). The intervening period had seen restructuring, national training reforms (including competency based training), curriculum changes, changes to the composition of the student body and major downgrading of traditional trade sections in TAFE. There is no discernible difference in the tone or mood of the interviews conducted later compared to those conducted earlier.

There are eleven TAFE Institutes. I interviewed in two regional Institutes and two metropolitan Institutes. The difference between Institutes is not just geographical. The regional organisations have always felt alienated from the centre. But with decentralisation into Institutes, there remains only a residual sense of a centre. The alienation from "head office" has been replaced, for many teachers, with an alienation from management in general, and from the national agenda.

Institutes are now structured differently from each other. Some operate on a "matrix" model, some on a full faculty model, some are still predominantly college based (at the time of the interviews). Quite a few are in transition between models.

Prior to the interviews, I sought permission from each of the Institute Directors. In my approach to the Directors (see Appendix A) I outlined the study, and appended a list of the kinds of questions I would be asking. In some cases, permission was readily given. In others, there was a good deal of suspicion to be overcome. This perhaps reflects the times. The concerns expressed by the Directors (or the persons they deputised to deal with my request) ranged from whether the Institute could be identified to whether my interview process would stir up industrial relations trouble. In the end, all the Directors gave their permission.

My next step was to gain the permission of the people responsible for individual campuses or, where Institute wide faculty models existed, from the heads of the faculties. In some cases, the management structures are quite complicated at Institute and college level. Because of these complications, and armed with permission at the

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Institute Director level, I sought permission at a local level from the people I felt were owed the courtesy of consultation. At this level, I met with no barriers, and in fact a good deal of interest.

Finally I came down to Head Teacher level. At this level, my difficulties were of a different kind. Although I asked for access to staff, in many cases it was the Head Teachers themselves who wanted to be interviewed. I detected a number of reasons for this. Some simply misunderstood my request. Some felt they owed it to their staff to act as gatekeeper, both in terms of what they were subjecting their staff to, and because they were reluctant to ask very busy staff to make time for my study. Some were just very interested in contributing.

In some cases, there was only one full-time person in the section, because of the dramatic casualisation of TAFE staff in recent years.

When I made initial contact (by phone or email) with the people I wanted to interview, I sent them a letter outlining my study and assuring confidentiality. I also sent them an outline of the questions I wanted to ask (Appendix B). It was not until they had read these that many agreed to participate. Often, they would say "I probably won't be able to help you much, but…" I had only two refusals. These took the form of a lack of response to my attempt to follow up initial contact. This could be read either as outright refusal, or a judgement that my study was not a priority in very busy working lives.

I asked for about an hour of their time. In a few cases, less time was available. I began these truncated interviews reiterating the ground I wanted to cover and inviting respondents to give a bit of their own background, then comment on those areas they most wanted to emphasise. No interview was less than half an hour.

As well as the consent form, each person was given a sheet to fill in. The sheet was entitled "Subject details" (Appendix C) and asked for some personal details: age, sex, full-time or part-time (see Appendix D for summary of data). It also asked about union membership and activity (both the teaching union, TAFETA, and other unions,

as some trade teachers maintain membership of the relevant industry trade union) and membership of professional associations. In the middle of the page was a different set of questions, asking them to use a few words to describe themselves at work, at home and in the community.

On later reflection, this sheet exhibits the contradictions in my approach to the research. While it referred to the people I wanted to interview as "subjects", a term I became less and less comfortable with, I included the self-description questions because I wanted to change the shape of the interviews from a researcher/subject situation to one that demanded some *personal* engagement.

It actually worked very well. Many people stopped dead when they came to these questions. Some passed over them, filled in the rest, then asked exactly what I wanted. A very few did not respond to them at all. More than a few paused, smiled, then wrote quite revealing comments[8]. When asked, I explained that I wanted a conversation, and those questions were included to break the expectation of a "standard" interview. I wanted them to really discuss the issues with me, rather than just to have a question/answer interview, with standard questions and answers framed according to expectations.

Most of the interviews were extremely successful from my point of view. They were generally well focused and full of wonderfully rich information. In some cases I found it difficult to control the direction. This was partly because I tried to make the interviews as conversational as possible. At the same time, I wanted to maintain control. I did not have the time luxury of being able to explore in a very open ended way what people's experiences had been. Nor do I think the study would have been manageable without thought-through processes, including a commitment to controlling the interview process. The study was, in fact, a result of my attempt to *distance* myself from what I had been immersed in – the experience of change in

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[8] Many were expressive of the stress they are under at work, with "overburdened", "bored, frustrated, deskilled", "frantic" being indicative comments about their work lives and "stretched", "no time to enjoy it", "tired", "stressed" appearing in their description of themselves at home. Some just described themselves in terms of their position, as teacher or manager at work, and relationally at home as husband, father, mother. Even those with more positive self-descriptions at work, for instance "energetic, task focussed" sometimes also added a negative, for instance, "frustrated," or: "involved, committed to teaching" but "suspicious of management", or even more succinctly: "efficient hard working idiot".

TAFE – in order to better understand it. So my interviews were to some extent an attempt by an insider to see as an outsider would, the reverse of the situation of many academic interviewers.

In a few cases, people had been so badly damaged by their experience that they were fixated on one particular aspect of that experience. It was not possible to move them in the direction I wanted to go. I *personally* was unable to. Given their anger, grief or simply a deep sense of injustice, it would have been grossly discourteous not to listen once I had asked them to tell me about their experience. In other cases (perhaps because of similar damage) people were simply too parochial in their concerns, or I was not the right person to elicit the responses that would help me in my study. On the whole, though, I was able to engage with the people I was interviewing and canvass the range of questions in the time frame I had set.

Once the interviews were well under way, people often surprised themselves by how much they had to say. Sometimes even those who had said they did not have much time to spare for me, dismissed my time concerns and carried on the interview well past the time set. Some interviews were terminated simply because the 90 minute tape ran out. Many people said that the interview was the first time that they had really *talked* about the issues I raised; they had obviously *thought* quite extensively about them.

Another problem I faced in the interviewing was my own response to the processes of change. Generally I tried to be a "disinterested observer", or at least to stay relatively neutral. But my own anger, grief and frustration sometimes welled up in response during the interviews. My "insider status" and empathy probably contributed to the openness that I was gifted with by the people I interviewed, but in one or two instances the interview veered toward argument over issues.

This happened primarily with the management interviews. It was prompted in every case by their recognition of the "hypothesis behind the question", to paraphrase Wolcott (1995, p. 115). On reflection, I do not believe that this caused damage to the study. The very direction of my questions, the essence of my study, was sufficiently

challenging to TAFE management at the time to make some Institutes, as noted above, feel cautious about giving me permission to undertake the interviews in the first place.

After the interviews

I transcribed the interviews myself. This was a long and painful process, but gave me a close familiarity with the material. Two tapes failed to record properly. One was impossible to decipher and that interview has not been included, reducing the overall number to fifty. The other was a malfunction picked up at the time and for some part of the interview I made notes instead.

The transcriptions are effectively verbatim. Generally, I left out excessive repetition, for example, six repetitions of "no" I reduced to three or four. Fillers like "ah", "um", "actually", "basically", "you know" were left out unless they were integral to the meaning, for instance indicating hesitancy. I recorded long pauses, some tonal changes, and laughter.

In the few cases where the tape was unclear, if the matter was not very relevant, I summarised, eg: "[something about…]". If the material was possibly relevant, but I could not decipher exact words, I approximated, and left these notes also in square brackets. I also summarised in square brackets off-topic exchanges, for example about my past working relationship with the person I was interviewing. Where extracts have been used in the text, I have also used square brackets for interpolations to clarify ambiguity or correct grammatical constructions.

I also generally changed misuse of language, for example "me bag" to "my bag", "I done" to "I did", although I made a note that the person favoured this usage. I made these changes because the transcriptions would otherwise have looked in some cases like a false rendition of working class language, and because this kind of usage is common and deliberate in a number of the trade areas, a kind of "patois" which emphasises the work based culture. The existence of that "patois" is interesting sociologically, but I made the decision not to incorporate it into the transcripts, because it can act as a distraction from what is being said. I did not change

malapropisms or evident misunderstandings of terms. These were of particular interest where terms from the "new TAFE" were misused, giving an indication of how unfamiliar the teachers were with the language.

Raw interview transcripts have been retained for research accounting purposes, but as I have quoted extensively, samples are not appended. This should ensure that respondents cannot be identified.

As I transcribed, I made notes of major themes or particularly interesting viewpoints. Where themes or viewpoints were repeated, I went backwards and forwards through the transcriptions looking for further repetitions. This helped to formulate a basis for the thematic analysis of the interviews. The transcriptions informed my reading and my reading informed my annotations of the transcriptions.

I then summarised the interviews, keeping in mind the general themes that appeared to be emerging and looking for new ones. I also tried to summarise each person's response to the crisis – in TAFE generally, in their industry, in their life as workers as well as their personal emotional response.

At the summary stage, I gave pseudonyms to each of the people I had interviewed, retaining gender, but using all Anglo names, although a number of the participants were of non English speaking background. Having the summary and the alias helped me to distance myself from my background knowledge of the people and their circumstances, which was helpful in trying to identify themes. It reduced the "shadow" effect of my own interpretation and allowed a level of abstraction. To regain understanding and depth, I found myself later reverting to the original transcript so I could identify the person again.

The themes of the interviews produced (and continued to develop) the outline of the thesis. The reading, writing and analysis of the interviews were integrated in an ongoing process. I am relieved to discover that this is a common experience. With more recent discussions of qualitative research method, it has come out of the closet, so to speak (eg Hammersley, 1992). As Waterhouse (1994) argues,

Through the dynamic processes of writing, reflection, and reflective-writing the researcher constructs an understanding of lived experience (p. 72).

Validity issues

My purpose was to understand the processes of change in TAFE and how those processes have been experienced by TAFE teachers as workers. How then to test the validity of this understanding?

I have attempted to establish the study's validity in terms of Lather's (1986) model of "catalytic validity", a process similar to Freire's conscientisation. "Catalytic validity", Lather writes, "represents the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it" (p. 272). In the case of this study, "participants" was broadened beyond the people I interviewed to all of my TAFE co-workers. I wanted my research to be useful, not just after completion, but throughout the process.

In the first two years of my study, I was able to regularly attend union meetings, and I proposed that we should run a forum to discuss the kinds of issues that I was exploring. There was great interest in the idea, so I began to organise it. Initially, we decided on a half day. TAFETA at that time met eight times a year on a Friday, with delegates from across the state attending. Meeting time had been extended from the morning into the afternoon, with the idea that once the business of the meeting was dealt with, the afternoon would be given over to just the kind of discussion that I was proposing.

We set a date. I organised the speakers on the basis of a half day. This was in February, 1998. The business agenda for the regular meeting expanded, eliminating the discussion session. Another date was set. In late April, I sent off information to the union journal *Education* inviting people to participate. We ended up with one hurried hour, late in the afternoon, in June.

Notwithstanding the limitations, people were energised and engaged. Proposals were made for further meetings. In spite of my best efforts, these proved impossible to

organise. Nobody, including me, could find the time and energy required to drive the process.

My next attempt at establishing catalytic validity was by invitation from a manager. I had returned to full-time work and was asked to give an overview of my study in an hour long section of a two day meeting of colleagues. Again, people were energised and there was lively debate. There was, in fact, an explosion of energy which surprised all of us. To me, it appeared reminiscent of the response I had got in the interviews. People desperately wanted to talk about these issues. They were relieved to have them come to the forefront. They wanted to explore them further, and wanted the analysis to colour the agenda we were meeting to address. To some extent it did, in providing the impetus for some creative responses (to the cost cutting and "accountability" systems). But again, the energy, the commitment, the organising, that were needed to sustain the process were not forthcoming.

Since then, I have fed what material I could into various union review processes and submissions, including my local branch's submission to the Vinson Inquiry[9].

I believe the validity of my analysis has to some extent been shown by the initial responses to these attempts. I hope that this research will continue to be a tool to support transformative action.

I had also hoped to test my reporting on the interviews by providing each of the people I interviewed with a summary of my thesis. Many asked that I let them know what I would "make of all this", and their responses would have made the thesis richer. This is not going to be possible prior to submission, primarily due to time constraints. Also, quite a number of the people I interviewed have retired, resigned or accepted "voluntary" redundancy since the interviews were conducted, and may be difficult to track down. (As a gesture of thanks for their participation, I do intend to provide them all with a summary as soon as I can manage it).

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[9] *Inquiry into the provision of public education in NSW* (2002)

II The Great Change

Chapter 3: Concepts

> … never before has ideology become so embedded in material life or so inscribed in the division of labour (O'Connor, 1984, p vii).

Working in TAFE over the last decade or so has meant working in a system in crisis. There has been a continual threat of disintegration, with massive and frequent restructuring, persistent funding "crises", administrative systems struggling to cope with constant change (including ever increasing amounts of documentation to "ensure accountability") and teachers struggling to cope with major changes in curriculum and delivery methods, about many of which they have deep reservations.

This chapter outlines some of the influences that have created the crisis in TAFE, and that inform my interpretation of this study.

O'Connor (1987) argues that "crisis" is not just an objective historical process, like the turning point in an illness, but is also

> a "subjective" historical process - a time when it is not possible to take for granted "normal" economic, social, and other relationships; a time for decision; and a time when what individuals actually do counts for something (p.3).

In 1998, at a time when I was completing the last of my interviews with TAFE staff, Connell (1998) argued for public education in general:

> We are … at a moment of danger for public education, where this imperfect system might be replaced by something very toxic indeed (p. 10).

For TAFE it may well be that the toxic point has been reached and that all individuals within the system can do, in O'Connor's sense, is try to survive, or at best limit the effects of the poison in their own small areas. Certainly, this was the sense I gained from talking to the people I interviewed.

Like so many other workers in this era, teachers in TAFE are subject to severe time pressures. Many consider they can barely continue to function as educators, let alone engage in the kind of discussion and debate that might lead to effective resistance to the dominant neo-liberal ideologies. As Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) say,

> The worker's "freedom" is fixed within the margins of the goals, ends, and vision set by the new capitalism and its theoreticians. … real commitment and belief, as well as real learning, require that learners be able to engage in genuine dialogue and contestation with viewpoints, but such genuine contestation is ultimately problematic in a business setting where, in the end, profit is the goal and the competition is at one's heels (p. xvii).

The changes that have upended TAFE and produced an unprecedented level of despair in many of its workers are part of broader changes that have swept the Western world and have increasingly impacted on non Western nations. These processes have come to be encapsulated in the term "globalisation".

Globalising capital

The closing years of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of theories about transformative changes occurring on a global level. There is a general acceptance that the long postwar boom in industrialised nations ended in the early 1970s, its end exacerbated by the OPEC oil "price shocks" (Harvey, 1990 p. 124). The thirty years since has been a period of transformation: socially, politically, culturally and economically - and on a global scale. There is a sense that the transformation is so vast and so total that no one "narrative" can encapsulate a theoretical response to it.

Globalisation is variously defined as encompassing economic, political and cultural changes that have a global scope. Marginson (1997) discusses the rise of the "new right" theories of Hayek and others of the "Austrian" and "Chicago" schools of neo-classical economists. He refers to the "world-as-market" as the gospel of the market liberals (p. 57) and comments that "[market liberalism] defined globalisation as 'global market' and 'new world order', positioning itself as ultra-modern, and the interpreter of historical necessity" (p. 58).

Probert (1996) quotes Castells' three elements in a new model of capitalism: firstly, "that capital has succeeded in appropriating a significantly higher share of profits by using a number of different strategies to weaken labour"; secondly, "that state intervention has shifted away from political legitimation and social redistribution towards what Castells calls 'political domination' and capital accumulation"; and thirdly, "'accelerated internationalisations of all economic processes to increase profitability and open up markets through the expansion of the system'" (p. 260). New information and communication technologies allowed the global systems of production to be centrally controlled from the "core" metropoles.

The growing internationalisation of education (Brown & Lauder, 1997; Lingard & Rizvi, 1998; Marginson, 1997) and the extended reach of telecommunications (Marginson, 1997) have contributed to an increasingly globalised culture.

It is argued that globalising influences led to a decline of the nation state (Held, 1989; Marginson, 1997; Welch, 1996). There is, however, debate about this. Marginson (1997) notes that while circumscribed, national policies remain significant (p. 59).

Epochal changes?

Harvey (1990) refers to a "sea-change in cultural as well as in political-economic practices since around 1972" (p. vii) and goes on to say:

> The transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation has, in fact, posed serious difficulties for theories of any sort. Keynesians, monetarists, neo-classical partial equilibrium theorists, appear just as befuddled as everyone else. The transition has also posed serious dilemmas for Marxists. In the face of such difficulties, many commentators have abandoned any pretence of theory, and simply resorted to data-chasing to keep pace with the rapid shifts. But here too there are problems - what data are key indicators rather than contingent series? The only general point of agreement is that something significant has changed in the way capitalism has been working since about 1970 (p. 173).

Although Wallerstein (1999) says that "we are once again seeing the demise of a historical system, parallel to the demise of Europe's feudal system five to six hundred years ago", he also says that *structurally*, we cannot say that we are in the midst of fundamental change. What might replace the present historical system might be another structure that is basically similar (p. 132).

Seccombe argues that trends like the growth of transnational corporations, competing globally for market share, extending the international division of labour, spreading new technologies and eroding regional political autonomy, can be traced back to mercantile capitalism (introduction to Corman, Luxton, Livingstone & Seccombe, 1993 p. 2). He does, however acknowledge the sense of time compression that Harvey sees as integral to this current phase:

> What is perpetually novel is that each generation is swept further down the path of competitive integration and thrust headlong into an unpredictable future much further and faster than our grandparents could have imagined or our parents could have foreseen. In trying to impose a mental order on this kaleidoscope of change, where distance and time are constantly being shortened, it is tempting but always rather arbitrary to designate the most recent changes as constituting yet another "new stage" in the history of capitalism. So let us not say "new" in this historically oblivious sense. However, it does seem that we have entered a *further* phase in the process of global "commodification" and market integration (p. 2).

"New Times"?

In Australia, as elsewhere, the political Left has traditionally provided the most cogent oppositional analysis of capitalist society. But with market liberalism dominating the ideological debate under the mantle of "historical necessity" (Marginson, 1997, p. 58) and relegating its opposition to dinosaur status, the Left was itself in crisis.

The post-Fordist thesis formed the basis of the British Left's response to the theories of the "New Right" which portrayed "the growth of services as a portent of a post-industrial society with growing individualism, a weakened state and a multiplicity of

markets" (Murray, 1996, p. 264). The "neo-Marxist" Left argued that the economic recession of the early 1970s broke the nexus on which the Fordist production system was based: mass production, mass consumption, "the semi-skilled worker and collective bargaining, of a managed national market and centralised organisation" (Murray, 1996, p 265).

In 1988, in an attempt to revive the Left from the crisis into which it had slumped, the British journal *Marxism Today* launched the "New Times project" (Hall & Jacques, (Eds.) 1989, p. 9) - an attempt to "realign the Left with [the] new world" (p. 11). The New Times thesis argued that an epochal transition, a qualitative change, was occurring: to post-Fordism, a central aspect of which was the rise of "flexible specialisation" in production, and to new cultural forms (p. 12-13), including the "ambiguous and treacherous reaches of post modernism" (p. 15). The project aimed to "prise Thatcherism and [the new] world apart", arguing that Thatcherism had "sought to appropriate [the] new world for itself, ideologically…, materially …, and culturally…" (p. 15).

In a special issue of *Socialist Review* in 1991, Kauffman, Robinson and Rosenthal refer to a "variety of axes and dimensions" of the transformation: "in the realm of production" - shifts in systems of production, shifts in the structure of the workforce and internationalisation of production; "in the realm of exchange" - "stunning" growth in the financial sector globally; "in the sphere of consumption" - growing "commoditization" of everyday life, increasing importance of marketing[10] and thus influence of semiotics; and at the political level - "authoritarian populism" of Thatcher and Reagan, postmodern politics of fragmentation, and a "hoped-for progressive renewal" (pp. 54-55).

The tentative nature of the Left's theorising is evident in Hall and Jacques' introduction to the compilation of the New Times debates in *Marxism Today* (Hall & Jacques, (Eds.) 1989), as it is in Harvey's 1990 statement:

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[10] An extraordinary example was the report in the Sydney Morning Herald in late January 2003 that the Bush administration had hired a marketer to improve the image of "Brand USA" in Britain, in order to garner support for the war on Iraq.

Whether or not the new systems of production and marketing, characterized by more flexible labour processes and markets, of geographical mobility and rapid shifts in consumption practices, warrant the title of a new regime of accumulation, and whether the revival of entrepreneurialism and of neo-conservatism, coupled with the cultural turn to postmodernism, warrant the title of a new mode of regulation, is by no means clear (p. 124).

There was much cogent criticism from the Left about the general applicability of a post-Fordist thesis. Rustin (1989) allows that something had ended, and that the sense of that ending helped to clarify the social relations of what was said to be past. That is to say, Fordism, with its

link between the systems of mass production and mass consumption, the role of Keynesianism and the welfare state in underwriting long-term growth and profitability, and the integration of trade unions, on an industrial and later national-corporatist basis, in the management of the postwar Fordist economy (pp. 303-304).

Rustin concedes that the post-Fordist model is valuable in offering an historical materialist explanation. Without such an explanation, only neo-classical explanations were possible, arguing the market as the norm which should be free as possible of government interventions. At best, lacking an historical materialist position, the debate would be confined to liberal/social-democratic arguments about the ethics of redistribution (pp. 304-305).

However, Rustin questions how generally the post-Fordist model can be applied, given that so much of the economic system still operates in mass production mode or "by still more technologically-backward methods dependent on unskilled labour [like the] hotel and catering trades". Further, he offers the criticism that:

For exponents of the new paradigm, socialists must be persuaded that to defend 'mass' Fordist patterns of welfare, politics and resistance is to remain locked into obsolete and discredited structures. Forms of resistance that were appropriate in the old system are deemed to be mainly an obstacle to progress and fresh thinking in the new (p. 306).

Bögenhold (1995) goes further in questioning the idea of post-Fordism, given that so much production in the 20th century was never "mass". "It makes little sense analytically," he argues, "to describe one or two per cent of all enterprises as the nucleus and the other 95 per cent as the 'periphery' of the economy" (p. 222). The major theme of the twentieth century, he argues, was proletarianisation - the move from self employment to wage dependency (p. 217).

"Structural unemployment" and the proposition of a new underclass

With the "globalization of the capitalist work force" (Kauffman, Robinson & Rosenthal, 1991 p. 55) and the new international division of labour (Corman, Luxton, Livingstone & Seccombe, 1993; Harvey, 1990; Kern & Schumann, 1987, 1992; Mies, 1986) unemployment became endemic in the industrialised nations. The introduction of new technology also played a part. Bellah (1996) comments on the US experience:

> A dozen years ago, when steel and auto makers were announcing layoffs, Americans could explain away the loss of jobs as the death throes of badly managed, out-of-date industries. Now the most modern industries are the ones losing workers fastest. The very companies most closely associated with building the Information Highway have been among those shedding jobs in the biggest numbers. … As the rate of new wealth creation fueled by digital technology rises, the number of people required to produce it decreases (p. 755).

The persistence of high unemployment in the face of increased productivity and economic growth, gave rise to a range of theories about "the end of work" (Rifkin, 1995) and the possibility of structural unemployment giving way to entirely new forms of income generation outside the traditional labour market (Handy, 1984; Neuhoff, 1997; Offe, 1984; Offe & Heinze, 1992). There was also a considerable literature devoted to the subsequent unequal distribution of wealth and the development of a new "underclass". As Reed (1990) comments, the idea of an urban "underclass" became accepted across the ideological spectrum as "deeply entrenched common sense" (p. 21).

While arguably prejudicial to poor people, and used primarily to enhance negative opinions about "welfare dependency" (Reed, 1990, p. 22), the idea of the underclass also expressed a concern that has always been a problem for social elites - how to control the masses (Bellah, 1996). It certainly lent urgency to debates about access to education and skill formation as an answer to the recalcitrant issue of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment (see below and Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE*). While less prevalent in current debates, it remains an undercurrent in the populist electioneering "law and order" debates in Australia, and in the current prevalence of "youth at risk" educational programs. The threat of a burgeoning, dispossessed "underclass" is also raised by a number of my interviewees as they outline their bleak views of the future.

As unemployment or the threat of it helped to weaken the union movement, resistance to the expansion of casualised forms of employment also lessened. Temporary, part time work began to dominate, particularly in the growing service sectors of the economy. Initially, this contingent workforce was primarily made up of women. But men's jobs have also become increasingly casualised in the new "flexible" workforce. New terms entered the lexicon: "underemployment" and "the working poor".

The rise of the service sector is usually juxtaposed with a decline in manufacturing, and this argument has had a substantial impact on resource allocation and planning of course delivery in TAFE. But as Probert (1996) argues, "it is not helpful to think of manufacturing and services as separate, or of service employment as replacing manufacturing in some sort of evolutionary process. On the contrary, the growth of services is intimately connected to the growth of reshaping manufacturing on a global level" (p. 261)[11].

Education and the rise of neo-liberalism

The forces of globalisation gave an impetus and a rationale to the abandonment of post war Keynesian economic policies of state intervention. These forces favoured the

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[11] Buchanan, in a draft discussion paper for workshops conducted by the RCVET for ANTA (Hawke, 2000), makes a similar point: "The relative growth in the service sector … also involves a reconfiguration of traditional sectoral boundaries… a great many of the role and functions within firms traditionally classified as belonging to the Manufacturing sector are now service sector functions" (Hawke, 2000, p. 25).

"new right" policies of competitive individualism and market essentialism, where the role of the state was to create conditions favourable to markets. In Australia, as Marginson (1997) comments,

> the fact that the Labor party played the main role in deregulation and marketisation, and opened the national economy to global markets, was contingent: Labor was in power when these policies came to the fore all over the world (p. 57).

Connell (2002) refers to the "truly stunning transition" in which "the cure and the disease became one. The preferred solution to the threat of global competition was to embrace the global competitive forces" (p. 5).

In 1982, Barry Jones, then ALP Shadow Minister for Science and Technology, charted the structural changes occurring in the workplace under the influence of new technologies and a global economy. He warned of the need for action to ensure that the advent of the "post-service society", which "could be a golden age of leisure and personal development based on the co-operative use of resources" (1983, p. 6), did not instead produce a sharply divided society. He argued for a strongly interventionist, political strategy by government to combat "technological determinism". But when Labor came to power, *market* determinism held sway and the ideology of the competition imperative dominated the new government's thinking.

Far from resisting the deregulatory policies of the Hawke/Keating governments that threatened the jobs and industries of its members, the ACTU adopted a kind of *carpe diem* response - a peculiar integration of the British Left's economic and cultural theories and the economic determinism of the new right. "Award restructuring" and "skills formation" were seen as the ways forward into the "new times" of the new industrial order in a globalised economy.

In a remarkably optimistic book published in 1989, unionist John Mathews articulated this *carpe diem* response, arguing that "the militant posturings of yesterday are giving way to more sophisticated, and more effective, strategies of intervention" (1989, p. viii). These strategies required a "strategic accommodation" (p. 38) between

employers and unions. Mathews called it "a post-Fordist strategy" (p. 39) and argued that democratisation of the workplace in a flexible production system was within the grasp of the union movement. A major aspect of his strategy was skills formation, which he argued "ought to be a central object of trade unions" (p. 122).

In 1987, in the introduction to *Australia Reconstructed*, ACTU leader Bill Kelty had said,

> The task of restructuring Australia is not simply a task for Government. … Structural change and the promotion of a productive culture are necessary to enhance our international competitiveness … We are about nothing less than the reconstruction of Australia. These are historic times (ACTU/TDC Mission to Western Europe, 1987, p. v).

Thomson (1998) argues that *Australia Reconstructed* signified in education and training the "abandonment of the postwar settlement" (p. 39) between capital and labour as mediated by the state.

Australia Reconstructed was a seminal report in the development of a National Training Reform Agenda that assumed a post-Fordist world and was imbued with human capital theory. Marginson (1995, 1997) discusses the emergence of human capital theory and its application to the economics of education. The theory arose in the 17th century and was developed in the 18th century by Adam Smith, who saw the attributes and skills of the individual as acquired through education or apprenticeship as part of the "fixed capital" of a nation. The modern version arose with the Chicago school of economics in the 1950s, and provided the political rationale for the educational modernisation programs of the 1960s sparked by the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite. The rapid take up of the theory was supported globally by institutions like the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank.

Human capital theory lends itself to the notion of "investment in" and "returns from" education, thus commodifying human beings and their marketable skills. Locating economic capacities within the individual, it provides the basis for perceptions of education as a private investment, rather than a public good.

The New Right's fundamentalist belief in market mechanisms assumed that, given the urge of self-interest, employers and workers alike would bear the cost of training. The Labor Party, transitionally, saw skill formation as a collective good, and thus one to which the state would contribute. Yet the competition policy which was given impetus in Australia by the Hilmer Report, commissioned by the Keating government, paved the way for the Howard government's introduction of "user choice" and "user pays" policies in vocational education and training. This had a devastating effect on what had been a state funded, public education system.

Brown and Lauder (1997) argue that "in an employer-led training system the pressure will always exist for training to meet employers' specific and immediate needs. The consequence is that such a training system is likely to be too narrowly focused to meet rapidly changing demand conditions" (p. 178). This consequence was raised frequently in the interviews I conducted for this study by teachers bemoaning the narrowing of curriculum. In Australia, employers - or at least the large employers - were given the advantages of an employer-led training system, without having to bear the cost of it.

Apart from the narrowing focus of the new "industry driven" skill formation policy, the commitment to competency based education that formed its basis was unlikely to advance the post-Fordist vision of the Labor movement. Brown (1991) was one of the earliest in Australia to point out that the presumed connection between skill formation in the broadest sense, with its hope for lifelong learning and recognition of experiential learning, and competency based training is flawed (p. 16). He argues that the instrumental, behaviourist nature of competency based education leads to "classroom Taylorism". He locates the impetus for its introduction in the industrial agenda of the late 1980s (p. 34; see also Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE*).

Competency based training also lends itself to the further "commodification" of education, where competencies become a product to be traded (Marginson, 1992/93, p. 24). Seddon, Angus and Brown (1998) comment on TAFE's "cutting edge" role in

the "marketisation" of education. Vocational education and training has become a market, and TAFE is just one of many competitors in that market. Nowhere is this clearer than in the latest major commissioned document which is forming the basis for current changes to policy in TAFE NSW, the *Review of product research and development within TAFE NSW* (2001), the "Schofield Report".

The language of the Schofield Report is entirely in terms of the market. The very fact that the Committee was asked to review TAFE's "product" is significant in itself. Once again, there is a plea to historical necessity, and a warning:

> Any training organisation that fails to continuously adjust its strategy, systems and processes to changing circumstances will not have a secure future and those that continue with approaches tailored to outdated modes of operation will suffer most (NSW TAFE Commission Review Committee, 2001, p. 5).

The Review contains a number of break-out boxes with quotes from the likes of Dee Hock, "founder of Visa Card" (p. 11), *The Economist* (p. 13) and Peter Drucker:

> In the social sector, as in business and government, performance is the ultimate test of an organisation (p. 55).

The Review also says "teaching and learning processes and outcomes now matter more than ever before" (p. 5), and that there is a choice between using "technology … as a value-adding function to help users meet customer needs or a covert system for centralised bureaucratic control" (p. 54). These are hopeful signs, perhaps, as some of the more optimistic interviewees in my study contended, that the neo-liberal pendulum is swinging back a bit. However, the dominance of market essentialism and corporatisation remains. The language is all of "product roll out", "quality processes", "product value chains", "customers" and "brand recognition", and, critically, "the value of the current investment in product is not being fully realised" (p. 6).

The Report is also important in showing a shift of focus, from TAFE as a provider of skills to meet the economic needs of the nation, to TAFE as a "catalyst for regional renewal and economic progress" (p. 5). TAFE is being asked to take a major role in the attempt to dampen negative community response to the neo-liberal policies of the

last two decades, by helping to improve "community capital". While the language remains within neo-liberal orthodoxy, the argument at least brings to the forefront TAFE's community service role, which Seddon, Angus and Brown (1998, p. 78) argued had taken a back seat in the marketisation processes.

The working lives of teachers

While the impact of technological change and the new international division of labour devastated Australian employment in manufacturing, and thus the student population in manufacturing-related sections in TAFE[12], the neo-liberal agenda also transformed the working lives of teachers.

Naschold (1997) refers to surveys conducted in 1990 and 1993 of public sector "modernization" initiatives implemented in OECD countries and says, "The picture that emerges is of highly politicized corporatization rather than simply the turning over of the work of government to the market" as advocated by the OECD (Naschold, 1997, p. 157; Marginson, 1997, p. 60). The politics of the "corporatization" processes that have been imposed on the Australian public sector are clearly based on an assumption, particularly since the election of the Howard government in 1996, that "wealth creation" relies on self-interest and that the market process should be paramount to ensure the efficient operation of the economic system.

Thomson (1998), in reviewing the effects of public sector reform on public education, documents the move from "Progressive Public Administration" - the professionalised, centralised public service that was the backbone of the Welfare state and thus of the post-war compact between capital and labour - to "New Public Management" (du Gay, 1996, p. 186) based on the "dominance of neo-liberalism, with its radical politics of markets, choice and individualisation" (Thomson, 1998, p. 39). The shift was accomplished in two phases - firstly "corporatisation" which Thomson describes as

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[12] Between 1984 and 1994, the industry areas with the greatest job losses were Electricity, Gas & Water (59,600), Manufacturing (23,900), Mining (10,900) (ABS Labour Force Surveys quoted by Heiler, 1998). All three areas were major trade training areas in TAFE. In 1966, manufacturing accounted for 26% of jobs. In 2001, it accounted for only 12% of jobs (Nixon, 2003). TAFE NSW enrolments in the manufacturing and engineering trades dropped by 35% between 1994 and 2002 (Wright, 2002, p. 24)

the adoption of business practices such as 'strategic planning', with its requirements for a common mission, performance indicators and annual reporting through aggregated data collection; 'divisional structures' that broke up the large public sector structures into smaller units able to be individually managed and monitored; emphasis on 'hands-on top management' …; 'merit-based selection procedures'….; and the introduction of evaluation, 'quality assurance' and 'review' processes that enabled a focus on results and not on diminishing or additional financial resources (p. 40).

The second, and overlapping, phase is the move to an emphasis on competition, privatisation, individual, unit and institutional "performance" and new audit and "accrual accounting" tools. The result is a managerialism that focuses on "objective measures" rather than a reliance on professional judgement (p. 41).

Unfortunately, as Connell (1985) notes, "Teaching is a labour process without an object … The 'outcomes of teaching' … are notoriously difficult to measure" (p. 70). For the teachers I interviewed, the processes that Thomson describes have led to very high levels of frustration with the attempts by management to measure and report on the teachers' work. Often, they just dismissed it as "all this paperwork" that interfered with their teaching.

Hargeaves (1994) argues that

> Many of our schools and teachers are still geared to the age of heavy mechanical industry … while society moves into a postindustrial, postmodern age, our schools and teachers continue to cling to crumbling edifices of bureaucracy and modernity; to rigid hierarchies, isolated classrooms, segregated departments and outdated career structures. … [as a result] Teachers become overloaded, they experience intolerable guilt, their work intensifies, and they are remorselessly pressed for time (p. x).

But far from being a result of "clinging to modernity", the intensification of work and time compression experienced by teachers have become very widespread experiences for workers in the "new work order" (Gee, Hull & Lankshear, 1996; Corman, Luxton,

Livingstone & Seccombe, 1993; Harvey, 1990; Cambone, 1994; O'Brien & Down, 2002).

The new "political rationality" (Beeson & Firth, 1998) of market liberalism reconstituted students as customers. The accountability of teachers to the collective good that education had hitherto represented became an accountability mediated "through client relations" (Marginson, 1997, p. 65).

"Customer responsiveness" was only one aspect of the reason given for accountability processes in TAFE, however. A more commonly used rationale for the increasingly rigid managerial control of all aspects of teachers' working lives has been accountability to the "public purse". Since the late 1980s, the public purse has consistently shrunk as far as TAFE is concerned (see Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE*). Indeed Marginson (1997) argues that social spending began dropping drastically under the Fraser governments of the mid 1970s and early 1980s (p. 61). As Hawke (2000) noted,

> It has become popular to assert that government resources are not infinite and that, therefore, publicly supported systems must be restrained in the funding they require. However, government revenues are higher than at any previous time in Australian history and public expenditures at their lowest proportion relative to GDP (p. 66).

Watkins (1992) reviewed the changes in educational administration first introduced by the Labor Party when it came to power in Victoria in 1982. He argues that even while the Labor government experimented with "more democratic, consensual forms of administration, the traditional, authoritarian approaches persisted". So when a more corporate management approach was instituted in the late 1980s, the ideology of scientific management "loom[ed] large" (p. 237).

Watkins describes a process that is familiar to those who work in NSW TAFE, where a process of devolution, rationalised as taking administration closer to the coal face, in fact is a process where a central elite makes decisions (see also Buchanan, 1995;

Welch, 1996, p. 11). The implementation of these decisions is scrutinised closely by line managers at a local level. Further,

> The activities of the managers in the line are fragmented or broken down into limited areas of responsibility, but are integrated and recomposed through a rigid system of accountability. …. education is perceived as being a means through which national, economic priorities might be achieved [and] educational administration … takes on the mantle of a business enterprise (Watkins, 1992, p. 243).

Along with managerialist restructurings of educational administration, came new accounting procedures which introduced practices and a language that were seen to be not only an historical necessity, but also "neutral and objective" (Watkins, 1992, p. 251). Watkins explores how the Gramscian notions of the "hegemony of consent" and the "hegemony of coercion" help to explain how the move to more coercive forms of management in the public sector has "gained credence and acceptability because the management and accounting procedures dominant in the industrial sector seem, to many people, to be normal and natural, instead of being historically and socially constructed" (p. 256).

Muetzelfeldt (1995) also comments on the perceived neutrality of the language of accountability and efficiency. But, he says, the attempt to measure efficiency "leaves important value questions unanswered". And the emphasis on measurability means that "complex, subtle and important issues", including social justice outcomes, are minimised or ignored purely because they are difficult to measure (p. 97). Further, he argues, such managerialist practices displace costs, onto "clients" and their communities, and onto employees. This leads in the latter case to an intensification of work (pp. 98-99, 103) and in the former case to reduced social effectiveness.

As Bates (1996) puts it,

> Managerialism is not … simply a technology, but also a set of practices which carry heavy ideological baggage and which undertake significant work in the diminishing of structural and social practices which have historically served purposes of cultural and social integration (p. 2).

As noted elsewhere (see Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE*) most of the teachers I spoke to were committed to the TAFE of the Kangan era. They were imbued with a very different ideological commitment that informed their practice as teachers as well as their sense of self-worth.

Buchanan (1995, p. 55) makes the point that "one of the hallmarks of contemporary managerialist discourse is its tendency to define social, economic or political issues as management problems" (see also others, including Gee, Hull & Lankshear, 1996). Thus industrial relations issues become a matter of managing "human resources". When combined with the kind of resource squeeze that successive governments have subjected TAFE to, managers have tackled the "problem" that the most significant ongoing cost is teachers' salaries by adopting policies of casualisation. They have justified this move by arguing the need for "flexibility" in the TAFE workforce, and the need for "industry currency" in teachers' skills.

Harvey (1991) points out that flexibility is something that capitalists have always sought. What has changed since the 1970s, however, is that "the objective of increased flexibility … has come to be seen as the cutting edge of capital accumulation" (p. 73). For teachers, as for so many workers in the "new work order", "flexibility" not only supports casualisation, but also adds to the intensification of their work. Recently this has reached the point where the problem of limiting parental and student access to teachers via email seems set to become an industrial issue in the upcoming award negotiations. As Seddon (1991) notes, "the lack of clear boundaries in the labour process [of teachers] is a fruitful source of industrial conflict" (p. 50).

Where teachers may once have held "a position of dignity as people who labour for the common good" (Connell, 1997b, p. 3), Smyth (2001) argues that with education "becoming little more than a training arm to industry" (p. 21), the work of teachers is becoming deprofessionalised and deskilled to the role of "pedagogical technician" and "testers" (p. 37).

Smyth comments:

> Like manual workers in the industrial revolution who lost control of their craft skills through the move into factory modes of production, teachers in all Western countries are losing control of their work in precisely the same way (p. 50).

Teachers in TAFE are experiencing a loss of control and autonomy that is very difficult to fight against as curriculum has been fragmented and nationalised and as the devolution of hierarchical relationships has personalised and localised conflicts over their work (Seddon, 1991, p. 63).

My study explores the way TAFE teachers have experienced these changes and what it has meant for them as educators and as workers.

II The Great change

Chapter 4: From Tech to VET: the transformations of TAFE

> *In large and complex organisations major change is rarely sudden and dramatic. It occurs over a period, in a number of relatively small and discrete steps, as attitudes slowly change and as resources are progressively redirected.*

So said Dr Allan Pattison, Director-General of the NSW Department of TAFE in an address delivered to a conference of Heads of School, Metropolitan Principals and Regional Directors in April 1987. Within three years, Allan Pattison was gone, so was the Department of TAFE, and the positions of Head of School and Regional Director no longer existed. Principals lingered a little longer.

The changes in NSW TAFE that began in the late 1980s were indeed sudden and dramatic, and they occurred on both the national and state fronts. Initially, the national changes primarily affected educational directions. But it was with the election of the Greiner Liberal government in March 1988 that the real impact of neo-liberal ideology was felt in NSW TAFE's structures and operations.

TAFE in the 1970s and 1980s

The national agenda

Writing of the national training reform agenda in late 1992, Seddon et al. refer to being "overwhelmed by the immensity" of the sector and "the avalanche of policy documents on training reform" (1992/93, p. 4)[13]. Ten years later the avalanche continues, although perhaps it has now eased a little.

Most of the people I interviewed joined TAFE after 1975 - that is, after the Kangan Report, which was tabled in Federal Parliament in 1974. The national training reform agenda of the late 1980s swept away the precepts of the Kangan era, replacing them

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[13] The Finn Review of 1991 also spoke of its report being part of "an extraordinary avalanche of policy development and implementation" (AEC Review Committee, 1991, p. 11).

with vocational education and training (VET) as a tool of industrial relations and economic reform.

The Kangan Report (ACOTAFE, 1974) was a major break in the history of technical education in Australia. It gave "tech ed" the acronym TAFE (Technical and Further Education), an acronym with a wealth of symbolic meaning for many workers over the ensuing twenty years. The report's preparation exposed Myer Kangan and his colleagues to a system that was Dickensian in its facilities. Peter Fleming, a member of the Kangan Committee, recalls the technical education system as being a "mixture of Cinderella and Oliver Twist" (Fleming, 1994, p. 45). The Committee's report was the impetus for the system to be rescued from its Cinderella status and turned into a system that would be "one of the best vocational education systems in the world" as one of the teachers I interviewed called it.

The Whitlam government established the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (ACOTAFE), with Myer Kangan as its chair, in 1973. Kim Beazley (Senior) was the Minister for Education and the committee was to report not only on the development of technical and further education, but on the provision of "financial assistance to the States" (Kearns & Hall, 1994, p. 1) to support that development. In the event, the two ACOTAFE reports (the first chaired by Kangan tabled in April 1974, the second chaired by Coughlan & Richardson released May 1975) ran into a double dissolution of parliament in 1974 (the first report) and the onset of an economic recession (the second). The amount of funding recommended was cut (Goozee, 1993, p. 24).

Aside from funding recommendations, however, what was important about the Kangan Report was that it gave a philosophical underpinning to technical and further education in Australia. That underpinning included the principle of access and opportunity for all.

The Kangan Report also gave TAFE a status in the overall education system that it had hitherto lacked – as an alternative, not an inferior choice. It shifted the focus from a "manpower" (sic) orientation to an "educational and social emphasis", seeing the

latter as "more appropriate, without overlooking TAFE's vital manpower role" (ACOTAFE, 1974, v.1 p. xxvii). The Committee wrote that its central concept was "the provision of unrestricted access to post school education through government maintained or administered institutions" (ACOTAFE, 1974, v. 1 p. xxvi). As Beazley said in his tabling speech, "The Report takes a long step in the direction of lifelong education and of opportunities for re-entry to education" (quoted in Goozee, 1993, p 24). In doing so, it "won the hearts and minds of a generation of TAFE teachers" (Peoples, 1994, p. 2) - the teachers who were the majority of my interviewees.

In 1983 the Hawke Labor government was elected. With that election, the union movement, and particularly the manufacturing sector, gained a strong voice in national economic policy. Reflecting on union involvement in the early years of the national training reform agenda, Ewer (1997) comments that the agenda was "not just one of the Hawke and Keating Labor Governments' market-based panaceas" but rather an attempt by Left unions to use vocational education as "an instrument of social and economic change" (p. 28). As such, it was very much part of the social contract - the Accord - between the ACTU and the Labor governments of the 1980s and early 90s. In return for wage "restraint", the union movement would have a role in formulating interventionist strategies, particularly in industry policy (Ewer, 1997, p. 28).

By the mid 1980s, the growing dominance of neo-liberalism, including belief in the need to be "internationally competitive," had captured both the Labor government and the unions. Peak union bodies like the ACTU came to act as "little more than collaborators with business and the state" (Ryan, 1994, p. 147). The Accord allowed the Labor government to introduce wide ranging "micro-economic" reform including a process of award restructuring aimed at breaking down traditional barriers between jobs, particularly in the manufacturing workplaces.

In 1985, the Kirby Report reformed Labour Market Programs, introducing the Australian Traineeship System (ATS), a new structured training system for young people (Goozee, 1993, p. 85). In one sense, the ATS was aimed at breaking down the rigidity of the apprenticeship system (Sweet, 1994a, p. 59). But Anderson (1997)

called the Kirby Report "the first manifestation of the rising tide of economic rationalism which permeated the Labor government and key sectors of the Commonwealth bureaucracy during the early 1980s" (p. 9). As Goozee (1993) notes, there were basic differences in the philosophy of TAFE and the Commonwealth's Dept. of Employment and Industrial Relations:

> On the one hand, TAFE saw its function as delivering a broad vocational education which provided the skills and knowledge required to allow mobility between enterprises … and which would provide a recognised credential [whereas] DEIR had a strong employment focus which emphasised short, intensive courses to provide a narrow range of vocationally-specific skills (p. 87).

The effects of economic and industrial deregulation impacted heavily on Australian manufacturing, where the ACTU's membership base predominantly lay. In an effort to maintain a union perspective in the increasingly employer oriented changes being put in place in the reform process (Ewer, 1997, p. 28), a "Mission" consisting of members of the union movement and the Trade Development Council Secretariat set out for Europe. The product of that mission, *Australia Reconstructed* (ACTU/TDC Mission to Western Europe, 1987) was to have a major impact on VET in Australia. It is interesting in retrospect to note that one of the twelve members of the mission was the National Secretary of the TAFE Teachers' Association, and another was Laurie Carmichael who was later to propose a complete reconstruction of vocational training in Australia (ESFC, 1992).

Australia Reconstructed heralded the linking of labour market flexibility to skill formation. Training reform "became pivotal" to Labor's micro-economic reform agenda (Anderson, 1997, p. 9). Linked with the award restructuring, and to solve industrial relations, not pedagogical, issues (Ewer, 1996, p. 13), was a process of reform of VET. In 1987, Labor launched the national training reform agenda (NTRA) with the release of *Skills for Australia*.

While the intellectual framework for the reforms was neo-liberal, they were strongly supported by the Left in both the union movement and in VET. There was an

invigorating sense of possibility in the prominence given to the union viewpoint. The potential for recognition of experiential learning in a competency based system would allow recognition of the skills of those previously largely excluded from the Australian apprenticeship system: women, migrants, production workers, workers in the service industries (Anderson, 1997, p. 9).

However, even as *Australia Reconstructed* was being circulated Alan Jones, Special Assistant to the Director-General of NSW TAFE, sounded a warning in his "reaction" to the report:

> a number of sub-themes which directly affect TAFE are certain to be negotiated between individual companies and unions. TAFE may then be involved in providing service outside of its planned and financed programs, probably in competition with private suppliers and under pressure to dilute educational quality in favour of specific skill development ([1987], p. 1).

And even more presciently:

> There is no commitment to public TAFE, there is only a firm commitment to improving skill levels at minimum cost. This involves a serious internal debate for TAFE, given its solid policy of breadth in education … The future of public TAFE is in the balance (p. 11).

While many histories of the training reforms that transformed vocational education and training in Australia place the genesis of those reforms with the union movement, particularly with *Australia Reconstructed* (Ewer, 1997; Seddon, 1992/93; Sweet, 1994a) and regard the reforms as tied to the tripartite bargaining of the Accord, Marginson (1992/93, p. 23) points out that there was little difference between Carmichael's and Thatcher's versions of competency based training (CBT). He argues that it was the 1988 OECD Ministerial-level conference, chaired by John Dawkins who had replaced Susan Ryan as Minister for Employment, Education and Training in 1987, that "broadcast" the OECD's argument "about the role of education in economic competitiveness, including the claim about 'convergence' of work and education, and the 'need' for a privatised training market based on competency standards" (p. 23). Smyth (2001) refers to the "reification of the relationship between

a flexible education and training system and competitiveness in the global economy"
as being "a characteristic of federal government policy in Australia since the early
1980s" (p. 89).

As early as 1981, Sweet was warning of the possibility that the 1970s Kangan ethos
was under threat. In a paper presented to a national TAFETA conference he said:

> There is a very real danger that pressure arising from the resource boom will
> divert TAFE more and more from a belief that a flexible and adaptable
> workforce capable of coping with the challenges of rapid change is a
> workforce that has received a broad based vocational education, a workforce
> which sees recurrent education as both a reality and a right, and a workforce
> which sees work and learning as being inextricably intertwined. The
> alternative is a TAFE which, through its involvement in narrow skills training
> and its concentration on cheap quick solutions collaborates in locking workers
> into short lived semi-skilled jobs without the skills or personal resources to
> adapt when technological change, fluctuations in overseas markets or the end
> of the resources boom makes their jobs redundant (p. 5).

Dawkins' release of *Skills for Australia* in 1987 made the government's new agenda
clear. In its foreword, it said that "the Government is determined that our education
and training systems should play an active role in responding to the major economic
challenges now facing Australia" and presaged the concept of an "open training
market" (Goozee, 1993, pp. 106, 107).

In spite of the critical role of TAFE in the new "skills formation" agenda, when the
National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) was set up in 1988
(including the Employment and Skills Formation Council which was to play a
significant part in the reform of VET) there was no TAFE representative on NBEET
and only one on the Employment and Skills Formation Council. TAFE "no longer
had any input to the major national advisory process" (Goozee, 1993, p. 111).

In August 1988 the Federal Industrial Relations Commission determined that wage
increases should be conditional upon unions agreeing to participate in a review of

industrial awards "to improve efficiency of industry and provide workers with access to more varied, fulfilling and better paid jobs" (quoted in Goozee, 1993, p. 114). The new wages system was to be based on the "Structural Efficiency Principle" which linked wage increases to skill levels. Award restructuring not only presaged a move from the time serving of apprenticeships to competency based training, it also introduced recognition for formal, industry based training provision.

Chappell (1996) says the move to competency based training was "painted by governments as a 'silver bullet' solution" to the development of a "highly skilled, flexible workforce" while at the same time "increasing the efficiency, accountability and productivity of Australia's post-compulsory education and training systems" (p. 71). Sweet (1993b, p. 84) argues that this policy shift in VET was a "research free" zone. The theory of curriculum and assessment it embodies, based in behavioural psychology (Chappell, 1996, p. 73), was generally implicit in the documentation, not explicit.

In 1991, still early days for the introduction of CBT in Australia, Brown argued that far from contributing to a shift away from Taylorist to more flexible models of production, CBT as a model of training "is itself an example of classroom Taylorism and educational engineering" (Brown, 1991, p. 3). He points out that relying on observable behaviour, as CBT does, ignores the underpinning values and goals on which the behaviour is based. He argues that the method is very mechanical and is "more suitable aligned to military training where control and not the development of agency is the desired intention" (p. 29).

A decade after the introduction of CBT into VET, Brady (1999) commented on how it had affected vocational education in the aircraft maintenance area. In 1990, there were three trade qualifications. Industry-created competency standards had increased the number to six by 1994. With the introduction of the Aeroskills Training Package, by 1999 there were eight qualifications. He commented that this "narrow focus is clearly consistent with the characteristics of a Fordist workplace (ie demarcated jobs)" (p. 5).

Brown (1991) queries why, given the ideology implicit in CBT, it was being championed by the union movement. His answer, as others have noted (Chappell, 1996; Cornford, 2000; Ewer, 1997), was that the introduction of CBT to vocational education and training in Australia was more about an industrial agenda than an educational one and, he says, "both employers and unions end up supporting a model of training based on control, sacrificing the empowerment of the learner in order to accommodate continued industrial agreement" (p. 34).

However, it is also true that measuring competency, and defining the skills required in the workplace as a necessary precursor to that measurement, was seen by many as a way of finally giving recognition to those skills which had hitherto been undervalued, including many of the skills exercised by "unskilled" women workers. The particular problem was that the industrial agenda overrode educational expertise. Byrne, reflecting in 2001 on her long career in TAFE, acknowledged that competency standards can be useful in describing work and organising training, yet added, "They are, by definition, a description of the present and in some cases of the past". If industry-set competency standards determine policy on how training is delivered, it is a "denigration of educators" and fails to acknowledge that "there's a body of knowledge in educational delivery and assessment that might have some relevance to VET" (Byrne, 2001, p. 19).

It is interesting that, in spite of some fervent efforts, the extension of competency based approaches into higher education, and into schools was strongly resisted. In effect, competency based training is seen to be appropriate for the working class, but not for the professions, or for a general education that is to lead to university entrance. (However in New South Wales, with the increasing emphasis on vocational education in schools, it has now crept into the Higher School Certificate).

Sweet (1993b) argues that this bias is a result of Australia inheriting its educational tradition from Britain - "a tradition of confining access to powerful knowledge to a minority, and a tradition of segmenting knowledge by level and by type" - which links with a Taylorist approach in the workplace of managerial prerogative and deskilled workers (p. 85). He contrasts the Australian academic world's lack of

engagement with vocational education for the majority of the workforce with the very different situation in Europe (p. 80). He also points out that "almost none of the literature on class, inequality and education has paid serious attention to vocational education, despite TAFE's deliberate focus on the educational needs of the disadvantaged" (p. 83).

The result of the separation of vocational education from "the world of ideas" is that what research is conducted on vocational education in Australia is "essentially utilitarian and pragmatic" (p. 83). Thus, he argues, there has been an "intellectual weakening" in the national reform agenda leading to a "domination of the key competency debate by those concerned to classify, measure and report achievement rather than by those interested in how to develop and use competence" (p. 84).

Supporting such concerns, Kell (2001a) refers to the "instrumental and rationalist nature of publicly funded research" (¶ 25). He says:

> There is … a prevailing view that unless research is immediately 'useful' in addressing the needs of government, it lacks legitimacy. … [This is] an attitude that does little to encourage a diversity of viewpoints on the purpose and rationale of research in a democratic society (¶ 28).

On the state front

In New South Wales, the late 1980s were a watershed for TAFE. For those of us who entered TAFE after 1974, Kangan's TAFE had been an inspiring place to work. "TAFE was more than a job, it was a vocation" (Schofield, 1994, p. 75). The development of the national training reform agenda and the centrality that the award restructuring process assigned to skills formation, gave TAFE a profile it hadn't had for a long time. The progressive aspects of the national agenda were seized on as a way to improve access and equity, including redressing the gender inequities that were deeply embedded in the NSW TAFE system.

TAFE in New South Wales was in a growth period. In 1987, TAFE's Director-General, Dr Allan Pattison, confidently referred to "the willingness of governments to fund TAFE's growth and quality improvement" (Pattison, 1987a, p. 3). Between 1981

and 1986 enrolments grew by 33% to over 400,000. In those same five years, fourteen new colleges opened (p. 2). In another conference address in the same year, Pattison said:

> Both State and Commonwealth governments have made it clear that there are two broad purposes which they expect TAFE to serve. These are first to contribute to economic growth through the development of vocational skills and second, to contribute to social equity through broadening access to educational and training opportunities, to those sections of the community deemed to be socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged (1987b, p. 2).

Then, in March 1988, the Labor government was defeated by the Liberal/National coalition under Nick Greiner. The shock of the Greiner government's "new right" and very activist agenda galvanised the union movement. In TAFE, joint union "workplace groups" were set up. A meeting in TAFE's Head Office in June 1988 condemned the government's cuts to the Equal Employment Opportunity Unit and women's educational programs, the repeal of the Public Service Act and the introduction of the Public Sector Management Bill, and the introduction of the Essential Services legislation. Even some of the TAFE Directors went out on strike. There were mass demonstrations in the streets of Sydney against the Education Minister, Terry Metherell.

By July 1988, the Public Service Association's *Industrial Bulletin* outlined the cuts to the education budget, including "rationalising" of positions and job losses and the proposed introduction of fees to TAFE. By August, a coalition of unions (including the NSW Teachers' Federation) had set up the Campaign for a Just Society and were publishing pamphlets urging working people to join demonstrations against the government's attacks on "your family", "on unions" and "on education and welfare"[14].

The debate over the educational implications of the National Training Reform Agenda gave way to a battle to preserve working conditions, equity programs and jobs. In 1989, the Administrative Charge was introduced - a charge for TAFE courses

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[14] *Halt Greiner's Attacks* pamphlet published by the Campaign for a Just Society, August 1988.

that we were not allowed to call a "fee", Allan Pattison was replaced as Director-General by Michael Brinsden - a businessman who had no background in education, and Brian Scott released the recommendations of his "management review" of TAFE.

Goozee summarises the impact of the first Scott Report, released on 15 September, 1989[15]:

> as well as making a fairly vicious attack on the senior management of TAFE [the Report] recommended that TAFE become a statutory authority to be called the TAFE Commission (TAFECOM); TAFE colleges to be divided into 24 networks …; the size of the central administration be reduced to less than one-third of its current level and ten Industry Training Divisions replace the 25 teaching schools … The Report also recommended that the new TAFECOM seek to become 50 per cent self-funding by the end of the century and a subsidiary corporation, to be known as TAFECORP, be established to enable managers to pursue commercial, financial and other direct links with industry. Simultaneously with the release of the recommendations, the minister announced the spill of all senior management positions and the new positions appeared in newspaper advertisements the following day (Goozee, 1993, p. 136).

The Scott Review underlined the basic conceptual shift from a public educational institution to a marketised institution with a product to sell:

> The essential requirement is for TAFE to change from being an education *administration* to become an education and training *enterprise* (emphasis in original) (Management Review. NSW Education Portfolio, 1990, p. 105).

As with so many of the VET policy documents of the time, the review was narrow in its focus. As Scott said, the Review's "task did not encompass specific analysis of curriculum or educational philosophy" although "inevitably … [the] administrative consequences of different educational approaches were important considerations" (1990, p. 3). From the tenor of his report it is clear that Scott regarded the existing TAFE educational approach, informed by the Kangan era, as being hopelessly

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[15] The full report was released in 1990

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outdated. In the foreword to his full report, released in 1990, he argued that TAFE was at a crossroads and the reasons he gave in support of that argument placed the economic to the fore, speaking of industry's demands for customised training and of technical and vocational education as a "fast-growth business" (1990, p. xiii).

The Kangan Report, he said,

> spawned two themes which have, to a large extent, dictated the direction of TAFE's subsequent development:
> - an ethos of TAFE becoming "all things to all people" - emphasising the importance of individual skill development - to the detriment, arguably of industry and national needs; and
> - an emphasis on "open access", and therefore, on *numbers* of enrolments. This has led to natural organisation growth becoming the primary focus, rather than consideration of appropriateness of provision (Management Review. NSW Education Portfolio, 1990, p. 4).

The Review continues at some length in its swingeing criticism of the Kangan influence, frequently in a tone of some amazement that such a strong "emphasis on open access and individualised learning" should have been allowed and remarking that the Kangan influence "seems to have been stamped on the canon of technical education in New South Wales more than in any other state" (p. 8).

The Review also presaged a halt to the government's financial support for TAFE, arguing that the target of 50% self funding by 1999 was a necessity because of "national economic constraints", and that there were "abundant" productivity improvement "opportunities" including the "removal of a whole series of deleterious work practices," as well as 66% of the Central Office workforce (p. xiv).

While Scott found fertile ground in TAFE for the prospect of change - amongst both managers and front line teaching staff, the final results of his deliberations were shocking to most. His proposals were greeted with disbelief and anger. And, while some consolation might be found for the cynics in his admission that

Before undertaking this Management Review I had no idea how big, how

complicated and how diversified the NSW Department of TAFE had become

(p. xi),

which seemed all of a piece with Michael Brinsden's oft quoted ignorance, the Scott

Review became another powerful part of the wave of change which overwhelmed

opposition with its immensity and speed and was to leave the TAFE workforce

demoralised and exhausted. In August 1990, the TAFE Teachers' Association

(TAFETA) examined the resignation rates of full-time TAFE teachers over the

previous decade. From 1981 to July 1990 1633 full-time teachers resigned. Of those,

597 or 36% resigned in the 18 months 1989 to July 1990. And the resignations were

in areas that the new "entrepreneurial" TAFE could ill afford to lose. One of the

highest rates (81%) was in Computing and Information Services[16].

The feeling of threat that the escalation of national and state changes had engendered

in the TAFE workforce is illustrated in the discussions held at the time in TAFETA.

In May 1989, a forum was held by TAFETA to discuss the future of TAFE. The

forum included representatives from TAFE, various unions, employers, community

organisations, government departments, students and teachers. The introduction to the

forum report: *Jobs and Training: the future of TAFE in the climate of award

restructuring* captures the Damoclean sword mood of the time:

Throughout virtually every sector of the economy, processes are underway

which will… transform the structures, organisation and content of work. …

Government has [adopted] policies designed to aid the shift from a

commodity exporting economy to one based substantially on the production of

high value added, skill intensive products and services. *The maintenance of

our post-war living standards depends on the successful accomplishment of

this transition* (emphasis added) (Heys & McLeod, (Eds.), 1989, p. 4).

Phil Cross, the National President of TAFETA at the time, warned in his address to

the forum that TAFE needed to handle the demands that were being made on it

"effectively and efficiently", that "we cannot afford to be negative or slow in

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[16] NSW Teachers' Federation Documents File 92/184

response" and that if TAFE failed to "deliver a quality product to major industry restructurers" it would "damage TAFE for decades" (Cross, 1989, p. 11).

The pressure, in other words, was on.

Upping the ante - the early 90s

On the national front, the Deveson Report of 1990 reviewed the training costs of award restructuring. The recommendations of the report put the idea of a "national training market" firmly on the agenda. The idea of a training market, as Marginson (1992/93) says, drew "much of its impetus from the bi-partisan commitment in Canberra to deregulation and market forms of production". He goes on:

> It is in a developed training market that the full economic implication of the notion of competencies becomes apparent. Competencies would act as an economic commodity capable of market exchange (p. 24).

The Ministerial Conference convened by Dawkins in November 1990 to discuss the Deveson Report established the Vocational Education and Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC) to replace the Commonwealth State Training Advisory Committee and to report to the ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET) (Goozee, 1993, p. 148).

Kinsman (1992) comments that by combining the Australian Conference of TAFE Directors and the Commonwealth State Training Advisory Committee (which had responsibility for administering apprenticeship contracts of employment) VEETAC provided "the required legitimisation of an education and training system which deliberately makes no distinction in the curriculum appropriate for 'off-the-job' vocational education and 'on-the-job training'" (p. 55).

The next major document in the "avalanche" of policy documents was the Finn Review of 1991. The review, chaired by Brian Finn of the IBM Corporation, was to investigate young people's participation in post compulsory education, its attention directed to "the immediate post-compulsory school period and the transition from education to employment" (AEC Review Committee, 1991, p. 10).

At the time, retention rates for young people in schooling to Year 12 had reached record highs (AEC Review Committee, 1991, p.15). One contemporary commentator linked those retention rates to the withdrawal of unemployment benefits for 15 to 17 year olds and suggested that

> From the outside, [it] looks like the achievement of a national schooling retention target. On the inside, in many places … it looks like a herding operation of the most manipulative kind in which those to whom the dole has been refused must have their attendance at a place of incarceration recorded in order to receive the financial means to survive (Collins, 1991, p. 5).

But the Committee's focus was "those young people who have left school and are not participating in a formal education or training program" (AEC Review Committee, 1991, p.11). In 1990, this was 30.8% of 15-19 year olds (although this included those in full-time work).

The Committee set targets for the participation of young people in post compulsory education and established a set of work-related "key competencies" to be included in schooling. It also recommended expanded funding for TAFE in order to guarantee young people a place. The Committee also argued that "both individual and industry needs are leading towards a convergence of general and vocational education" (AEC Review Committee, 1991, p. ix). In reality, this came to mean an emphasis on education for employment which many critics saw as a narrowing of education in both schools and TAFE.

The next year, the Employment and Skills Formation Council, headed by Laurie Carmichael, released a report which built on the Finn Review. *The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System* (known as the Carmichael Report) outlined a "new integrated entry level training system for Australia" (ESFC, 1992, p. i). Within the contemporary frame of reference, on the surface the AVCTS appeared laudable in its aim to extend entry level training to those who would otherwise miss out, and it argued for substantial resources to be committed to achieve its recommendations. But it extended and entrenched the neo-liberal ideology which had overtaken the VET

policy framework in Australia. It also "failed to address the implications of its recommended expansion in work-based training of the significant long-term decline … in youth employment" (Sweet, 1994a, p. 68). In May 1991 the teenage unemployment rate was 26.8% whereas the total labour force rate was 10.1% (AEC Review Committee, 1991, p. 27).

As Goozee (1993) notes, whether the system would prove feasible would depend on industry support and whether the ACTU would agree to a "training wage". She goes on, quite pointedly: "The proposed Australian Vocational Certificate System is not an educational program but an economic and industrial relations strategy" (p. 156), a criticism which had by this stage become fairly widespread with reference to the entire national reform agenda in VET.

John Dawkins had proposed in 1991 that the Commonwealth should take over full financial and policy control of TAFE, and this proposal was included in the Prime Minister's "One Nation" statement of February 1992 (Keating, 1992, p. 55), in which he also announced increased expenditure on TAFE (p. 57). There was a negative reaction from the States, and much debate in the ensuing Premiers' Conference in June (Goozee, 1993, pp. 158-9). The compromise solution was that the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) was established in July 1992. As Peoples (1995a) said:

> The ANTA agreement was a last minute compromise by which the States staved off the transfer of the VET sector to the Commonwealth (p. 2).

ANTA became operational in January 1994. It was initially set up primarily as an advisory body, but through the State/Commonwealth funding agreements, it came to have a powerful role in funding allocations to state TAFE systems. "Outcomes" funding was to replace "input" funding and a measurement tool known as "ASCH" (Annual Student Contact Hours) determined course offerings down to the individual section level in TAFE colleges. The composition of the ANTA Board began, and remains, "industry-based" with no TAFE representative included on it. In 1994, the composition of the Board was: the Chief Executive of IBM Australia, the CEO of Tourism Training Australia, The Chairman of North Broken Hill Peko Ltd, the

Chairman and CEO of Lend Lease Corp; and Bill Mansfield, Assistant Secretary ACTU[17].

Meantime in NSW

In 1990 Metherell resigned over his failure to fill in his tax properly and TAFE was moved out of the Education portfolio and into a new Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training and Further Education (DIRETFE). Late in 1990, Gregor Ramsey, chairman of NBEET, became managing director of TAFE, Michael Brinsden having been declared an "unattached officer" on the 24th August.

More restructuring followed. In August 1991 Ramsey issued proposals for change that were consolidated into the establishment in January 1992 of a new system of 11 Institutes replacing the 24 Networks of the Brinsden era and with "the Training Divisions as essential components of those Institutes" (NSW TAFE Commission, 1992, [p.3]). Again, the imperative was the "changes to Australia's industrial and economic base" (p. 7).

Over the next few years, the Institutes restructured themselves in different formats, often over and over again. Teachers began to lose track of who their bosses were - and the responsibility for making sure the educational system actually kept functioning was pushed down to Head Teacher level.

The emphasis of the Scott and Ramsey structural reforms was devolution - the replacement of a "centralised, sluggishly bureaucratic education administration" with a "more responsive, high quality education enterprise" (Management Review. NSW Education Portfolio, 1990, p. xiv). But Kell (1992/93) argues that the reforms instead

> featured increased control by a remote managerial elite at [sic] the detriment of wider participatory processes. The critical policy directions have been taken in isolation in "weekend retreats" described as "management lockups" (p. 26).

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[17] In 1999, the Board included the Chief Executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the President of the NSW Council of the Australian Industry Group (formerly the Metal Trades Industry Association). By 2002, the ACTU representation was dropped when Bill Mansfield resigned and there was Aboriginal representation on the Board for the first time with the appointment of Dr Evelyn Scott. The Board no longer had high powered industry representatives to the extent it did previously.

With the burgeoning "corporate plans" and "management plans", top down management models were reinforced, with the lower levels expected to conform to "corporate objectives". As Kell points out, with the reforms in full swing, student numbers actually fell and yet the TAFE budget was overspent by $30 million dollars (p. 26).

In September 1991 a bitter salaries and award campaign saw the Teachers' Federation threatened with deregistration unless TAFE teachers called off a threatened 48 hour industrial stoppage. In a speech to a mass meeting of TAFE teachers at Wentworth Park in September, Phil Cross, the President of the Teachers' Federation, warned that John Fahey (the Minister for Industrial Relations and TAFE) and Nick Greiner (the leader of the minority government elected in March) would love to have a political fight with the Federation. The angry and militant TAFE teachers were confronted with a union leadership that effectively told them that if they were to continue their industrial action against the restructures, the proposed redundancies and the proposed award, they would be placing the entire Federation, of which TAFETA is only a small part, at risk. The stoppage was called off.[18]

By 1992 morale in TAFE had plummeted. TAFETA conducted a random survey of 10% of its members. 90% of teachers said their workload had increased since 1988, 81% said that management did not consult enough with teachers about restructuring proposals, 85% disagreed that the TAFE Senior Executive Service inspired confidence (65% strongly disagreed). In general, the teachers thought that their working conditions had deteriorated, that the quality of education for students was threatened and that the new structures in TAFE were likely to be less efficient than the pre 1988 structures were (Bradley, 1992, p. 20).

On the national front

Goozee (1993) commented on the significant changes occurring to TAFE systems in Australia as being reflective of "the political and economic environments operating at

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[18] A video of the mass meeting is available at the Teachers' Federation library.

both State and national level rather than specific management or administrative problems requiring resolution" (p. 142).

By the early 90s, Australia was in the "recession we had to have". Cracks were appearing in the national training reform agenda, with both teachers and employers reporting bewilderment in trying to deal with the "plethora of committees and reports" (Sweet, 1993a, p. 63; ANTA, 1994a, p. 1).

Sweet (1993a) questions just how far the agenda was really being "industry driven" at least in the broad sense of the term, a question that was raised consistently in my interviews. While major committees (Deveson, Finn and Mayer) were chaired by business leaders, it was Commonwealth public servants who were the primary developers of the findings of the inquiries, and it was primarily the peak employer bodies, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) they were consulting with. As Sweet notes,

> the number of employer representatives with the time to keep up with or become involved in a national agenda driven by reports and committees is limited. (Nevertheless it is probably larger than the number of union representatives in a position to do so) (p. 65).

Nonetheless, the reports kept flowing with titles like *Towards a skilled Australia* (ANTA, 1994b); *Making the future work* (ESFC, 1994a); *Staffing TAFE for the 21st Century* (VEETAC Working Party on TAFE Staffing Issues, 1992); and *Raising the Standard* (ESFC, 1994b).

The language became more strongly that of the corporate world: "mission statements", "best practice" and "quality assurance" (ANTA, 1994b), and the "training market" had become a reality which, through funding pressure, was forcing TAFE systems around Australia to comply with the new directions.

In 1995, Kevin Peoples, President of TAFETA nationally, commented:

> many of us fail to understand why Labor policies have brought us to the point where we ponder the very future of public vocational education (1995a, p. 2).

He wrote of the high level of casualisation that was occurring in the TAFE teaching workforce as TAFE managers "opted for a low cost, low skills model to compete in the new training market," of "the shift of public funds from the public provider to private providers and industry" and commented that while

> Most of us now appreciate the importance of an industry focus for TAFE ... the current model fails to reflect the reality of the student profile in any TAFE college. Only a small minority of TAFE students might be defined as 'industry students'. Many in fact are students developing new careers to 'escape' from their current industry (p. 2).[19]

But things were to get worse. In 1996 John Howard's Liberal/National coalition government was elected. The foundations that had been laid by the Labor government were now built on by a government that, far from being willing to work with the union movement, was bent on destroying its influence. This government took the idea of a training market even further than Labor had done.

The deregulation of vocational education took a new step with the introduction of MAATS (Modern Apprenticeship and Traineeship System) - later to become New Apprenticeships. Even though the implications of the MAATS implementation for TAFE were considerable, for once the deluge of policy documents had dried up. A NSW TAFE Commission briefing paper to the AVTS Steering Committee noted that the "available documentation on MAATS is sketchy". What information TAFE NSW had was gleaned from ANTA and DEETYA[20] documents, the "status and source" of which were "not clear".

The six key principles of MAATS gave a good indication of the new government's agenda on VET. They included a determination that delivery should be directly relevant to employers' requirements, that enterprises should be able to drive the provision of training and develop their own training packages. Regulation was to be used only as far as necessary for funding arrangements and to protect the parties to

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[19] The 1993 National client follow-up survey of vocational education graduates conducted by NCVER found there was no direct employer-student relationship for nearly 50% of TAFE students who were undertaking studies directly relevant to industry (quoted in Byrne, 1994 p. 55)
[20] Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (Commonwealth).

training (including apprentices and trainees). Schools were to be brought further into the VET nexus, and the almost obligatory reference was made, in general terms, to ensuring access and equity. From 1997, all public funding of apprenticeships and traineeships would be subject to user choice principles where the "client" nominates a preferred provider. Significantly, the briefing paper notes "the documentation received to date makes no mention of TAFE although it does mention VET in schools."[21]

ANTA had introduced "user choice" pilots in 1995 and the effects were being felt already at campus level by 1996, with employers expecting to be able to put together the modules of their choice for their trainees (NSW retained the system of declared vocations, which buffered apprenticeships at least to some extent from the very enterprise specific training that traineeships and "New Apprenticeships" are prone to). But from 1996, under the more hard line ideology of the Howard government, "user choice" became entrenched. The consequence was that in many cases trainees found themselves being used as cheap labour and with inadequate, or in some cases, no training. In some cases, the new apprenticeship/traineeship schemes led to outright fraud[22] (Schofield, 1999).

In NSW

Meanwhile in NSW a Labor government under Bob Carr was elected in 1995. There was to be no relief for TAFE, however. Soon after the election, TAFE was restructured again. To a demoralised workforce, this restructure was an extraordinary insult. TAFE was subsumed into a tiny department - the Department of Training and Education Coordination (DTEC), a department that had been set up in April 1995 with a specific responsibility to expand the training market. The minnow swallowed the whale.

In March 1995, while he was still Leader of the Opposition, and with his Shadow Minister for Education, John Aquilina, Bob Carr released *The TAFE Path to jobs:*

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[21] These notes are from the briefing paper, which was written by Gillian Goozee who was employed by TAFE's Planning Division. The paper was written in July 1996.
[22] Indications of fraud were not confined to Queensland, as canvassed in Schofield's report. A number of my interviewees gave anecdotes of fraudulent practices, and at least one scheme, in Victoria, led to police investigations of large scale embezzlement (*Campus Review* Nov 3-9, 1999, p. 9)

Labor's TAFE Policy. It should, perhaps, have been seen as a warning of what was to come. In the introduction, they wrote:

> As we approach the 21st century New South Wales requires a world class vocational education and training system. Nationally, there has been increased recognition of the importance of TAFE. The establishment of the Australian National Training Authority, bringing increased Federal Government resources for TAFE, is an important start. *New South Wales TAFE is, however, the least flexible, most unresponsive of any state* (emphasis added).

There is no reference to support the assertion that TAFE NSW was the "most bureaucratic and unresponsive" (p. 3), but TAFE NSW had developed by this stage a reputation at the national level for challenging some of the more extreme measures of the national training reform agenda. Carr and Aquilina castigated TAFE's "sluggish" bureaucracy for its "failure to capture a reasonable share of Australia's education exports" (p. 7), and its failure to recognise on the job training (p. 14). Given this was an election policy, many of the criticisms were aimed at the incumbent government and were hardly things that TAFE had much control over, including TAFE's "second best image" with school students or the fact that TAFE fees had increased "by around twice the inflation rate" since 1988. Carr and Aquilina were however, able to also point to the waste of resources that the massive administrative restructures had caused, and to the 40% increase in the number of "TAFE staff who perform no teaching" under those restructures, particularly with the decentralisation into TAFE Institutes.

In the event, under the Carr government, the Institute structures remain, and many of the members of the "burgeoning bureaucracy" whose positions have disappeared were in fact those of most importance in supporting class delivery, like section clerical support and local course information officers. The central policy and curriculum functions have also decreased significantly.

There was much in the policy that was also encouraging for TAFE teachers, although many of the promises did not come to pass or were substantially watered down as funding continued to reduce over the ensuing years.

But the relationship between TAFE's teaching workforce and the Carr government would take a long time to heal after the shock of the decision to subsume TAFE into DTEC. The Teachers' Federation had met with the new Education Minister, John Aquilina, in May, soon after the election. They were "encouraged by the Minister's attitude", expecting that any changes to be made to TAFE under the new government would involve consultation (Turnbull, 1995, p. 12). Instead, as under the previous coalition government, TAFE teachers were informed of sweeping changes through the media. On June 7, 1995, Aquilina issued the press release offering 5000 extra student places but a reduction of 310 non teaching positions. In the ensuing days, announcements were made that the TAFE Commission Board was to be absorbed by the Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET), the Managing Director of TAFE, Gregor Ramsey, was removed and the Director-General of DTEC, Jane Diplock was to become the Managing Director of the NSW TAFE Commission.

The two major TAFE unions, TAFETA and the Public Service Association (PSA) joined forces. Under pressure, the government put a moratorium on some of the changes, although placing TAFE under DTEC was "non-negotiable" and a "Change Management Team" was set up to work out the new structures. A group of angry TAFE employees wrote in the Federation journal:

> It is a sad day for vocational education in NSW when the Government substitutes empty media posturing for a genuine commitment to quality training. … where is the evidence that yet another restructure was needed? Where in the ALP's TAFE policy was it foreshadowed that DTEC would subsume TAFE NSW? Where are the well-considered policy statements as to the educational need for a restructure? (Ball, Booth & Crawford, 1995, pp. 12-13).

Many of my interviews were conducted in the DTEC era and they are redolent with a sense of despair and humiliation.

Adele Horin, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald at the time, commented:

> Who among the best and brightest would aspire to make their brilliant career in the NSW Public Service … ? The TAFE bureaucrats had faced the third

restructuring of their organisation and their fifth chief executive in seven years. And the strong feeling was that ideology rather than an individual's performance had been the basis for yet another purge…. [With each restructure] it has meant having to apply for jobs, being relocated, moving out or into the centre depending on which model was in favour, agonising over redundancy offers, accepting jobs they didn't really want. It had meant fear, confusion, insecurity and the sense that their work was totally devalued. People had told me they had felt as if they were "baggage" or "waste", and all the effort they had devoted to radically changing TAFE had been rewarded with a "slap in the face" by the Labor Government (Horin, 1995, p. 2).

Questions were raised about DTEC's potential conflict of interest, given its responsibility for expanding the competitive training market. Jane Diplock's management style rubbed salt into the wounds. In an attempt to appear consultative, she took to sending out "chatty" messages to staff. These were lampooned through letters circulated over her signature and the signature of Perce Butterworth, the Chair of the Change Management Team. The humour in the letters was bitter and vicious, yet so close to the tone and intent of the genuine letters that many staff believed them to be authentic.

The next two years saw the spilling of many TAFE positions, in curriculum development, in policy, and at campus level. Administration staff in colleges were forced to reapply for their own restructured positions. Morale sank even lower.

Then, in 1997, TAFE NSW was amalgamated, with DTEC and the Department of School Education, into the Department of Education and Training, where it has remained until the time of writing. Many TAFE employees greeted this move with some relief, if only because they took heart from being placed with a Department whose direction was clearly *educational*[23]. But it has meant that TAFE as a state-wide entity has been dominated by the priorities of the school system. The Institutes remain fragmented from one another.

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[23] In March 1998, Ken Boston said in a speech: "the pall of economic rationalist language enveloping the VET sector has paralysed us and left the field open to our opponents" (Boston, 1998a, p. 14), which was a heartening statement for TAFE staff.

In the past seven years (1995 to 2002), the restructuring has continued, albeit on a lesser scale. Training Divisions became Consortia (under the DTEC regime) then Educational Services Divisions, then just Divisions. Specialist units were placed with the Divisions, then absorbed into the schools units. The Institutes continued to play with various management prototypes, each Institute working to a different model, some based on Faculties, some on management "matrixes," some with College Directors, others with no campus based educational leader[24]. The fragmentation of the TAFE identity meant that even at senior levels managers no longer knew who was who.[25]

TAFE teachers' relations with the State Labor government have continued to be fraught. TAFE funding has been consistently cut (or has not grown to meet even low levels of inflation) - by 2.8% in 1999[26], by 10.55% in "real" terms in 2000/01,[27] and by 2.66% in "real" terms in 2002/03 (in the latter budget there was a 1.6% increase, which according to the Teachers' Federation translated into the 2.66% cut)[28]. Generally, the Carr government has been able to point to the Federal government cuts in justification, but this is small consolation to teachers dealing with increasing enrolments and workloads.

The 1999/2000 salaries campaign was bitter. Ken Boston, the Managing Director of TAFE and Director-General of DET, tried to bypass the union and distributed copies of the proposed award directly to teachers. In the end, and after much strike action over a protracted period, many of the Department's proposals were dropped. But the anger remained across the State education sector, compounded by the Government's proposals to close a number of inner city schools. Eventually, in the lead up to the

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[24] Richard Sweet commented in 1994 that the Institute model "whilst fashionable … seems to have more to do with increasing the degree of control exerted over TAFE colleges … [particularly] costs - than it does with increasing the system's responsiveness to clients, as it removes from some campuses anybody with overall educational responsibility for a college's educational programs" (Sweet, 1994b, p. 79-80). Recently in my own work, I have had trouble trying to find someone with state-wide responsibility who is able to maintain a relationship with a rural women's organisation eager to use TAFE as a trainer for their members across the state. Instead, each time they want to run a program (paid for by them) they contact me, even though it has nothing to do with my current position or with the Institute I am located in, and I must try to find them a relevant person in another Institute.
[25] See quote from manager interview, 51:9 in Chapter 12: *What the managers said*
[26] *Education* June 28, 1999, p. 1
[27] NSW Teachers' Federation fax to TAFE campuses May 26, 2000.
[28] www.nswtf.org.au/edu_online/34/tafe.html accessed 20/09/02.

2003 state election, the controversial John Aquilina was moved from the Education portfolio to be replaced by a more conciliatory John Watkins.

Nationally, the first ANTA agreement, struck under the Labor government, provided an initial $100 million in growth funds and $70 million per year thereafter. With the advent of the Liberal/National government in 1996, however, funding was reduced on previous projections by $84 million and a further "benchmarking efficiency" cut was made in 1997 (Kronemann, 2000, p. 11). The 1998 ANTA Agreement froze funding, promoting "growth through efficiencies" and demanded that states implement efficiency measures and user choice policies. TAFE is experiencing a "funding crisis", which led in the ANTA funding agreement's 2000 - 2003 negotiations to state ministers initially refusing to sign the agreement[29].

Apart from the base funding cuts, significant amounts of both Commonwealth and State VET dollars have been devoted to "contestable"[30] funding. Commonwealth funding that was "contestable" was $21 million in 1995, increasing to $402 million in 1999. By 1998 funding for non TAFE providers had increased from $58.6 million in 1995 to $243.1 million (Kronemann, 2000, p. 11). The 10.9% fall in cost per Annual Hour Curriculum between 1997 and 2000 was described by ANTA as an improvement in "efficiency"[31] but the funding cuts led to decreasing student services and increasing teacher workloads. Between 1997 and 2001, in spite of the funding cuts, the number of TAFE students increased by 153,700 or 13.5% and annual delivery hours increased by 26.9 million or 9.6%[32].

In September 1997, the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Amanda Vanstone, asked the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training to inquire into and report on:
- the appropriate roles of institutes of technical and further education; and
- the extent to which those roles should overlap with universities (Australia. Parliament. House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1998, p. iii).

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[29] *Campus Review* January 17-23, 2001, p. 6
[30] "Contestable" is the term given to funding that is no longer allocated directly to public education providers like TAFE, but is open to tender by any Registered Training Organisation.
[31] Australian Education Union *TAFE Works* fact sheet no. 9 December 2001
[32] Australian Education Union *TAFE Works* fact sheet no. 10 August 2002.

It is hard to gauge the effect of the Standing Committee's report: *Today's Training.*
Tomorrow's Skills, as it is of the 2000 Senate Inquiry *Aspiring to Excellence*
(Australia. Parliament. Senate. Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business
and Education References Committee. [2000]). Certainly neither report produced the
flurry of critique, comment or indeed action that policy documents in the Labor
government era had. This may be a result of the recommendations of the reports
themselves (which suggest as much as demand, partly perhaps because of the state
responsibility for TAFE), or because of the growing number of states led by Labor
governments who were less willing to cooperate with the Federal Coalition
government, or perhaps because by this stage sector fatigue, exacerbated by the
funding crisis means that unless a national policy document demands immediate
pragmatic action nothing very much happens.

In the case of the Senate Inquiry, there was sufficient disagreement amongst members
of the committee that there was a majority report of the ALP and Democrat members
and a minority report from the Coalition members disagreeing with much of the
Report's findings and recommendations. It is not, therefore, surprising that the report
effectively disappeared.

Certainly in NSW TAFE libraries, there are more copies of the 1998 report, even if
only in Executive Summary form, than there are of the Senate Inquiry, which is held
in only one campus library and in the central executive library.

The Chair of the 1998 House of Representatives Inquiry, Brendan Nelson, now
Federal Minister for Education, Employment and Training sounded an interesting
note in his Preface, apparently suggesting a softening of the instrumentalism that has
ruled TAFE policy for so long:

> On the one hand education is increasingly seen as having a utilitarian purpose
> - training which leads to employment. Others however, see post secondary
> and higher education as being about knowledge, research, cognitive thinking
> and the inculcation of values deeply rooted in an understanding of the past…
> Is education and training to have a role other than the sole objective of

preparation for work? (Australia. Parliament. House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1998, p. vii).

One notable recommendation of the Inquiry was:

> The Committee recommends that membership of the ANTA Board be amended so that:
>
> - one of the current number of Board Members be chosen, in future, from serving industry members or Presidents of TAFE Institute Councils, or their nearest equivalent according to the jurisdiction; and
> - an additional Board member be chosen as soon as practicable from currently serving Directors of TAFE institutes (Recommendation 2.1, paragraph 2.26).

In 2002, that recommendation had not yet been acted upon.

By the beginning of the 21st century, TAFE systems Australia-wide were to a large extent trying to consolidate in order to continue to function effectively. The election of Labor governments in some of the states where TAFE was most hard pressed, like Victoria and Queensland, seems to have had an ameliorating effect, particularly where it was helped with an injection of funds (Victoria's Labor government had to "bail out" TAFE institutions that had been driven to the verge of bankruptcy).

The Damoclean sword still hovers. In NSW TAFE the speculation now is of the possible disappearance of TAFE into an arm of school VET provision[33], with an adjunct role of employment training based on contestable funding and fee for service delivery. But politicians and senior managers alike appear to have taken note of the damage that dramatic and constant change has done to the system. The introduction of the recommendations of the Schofield Report has been proceeding so slowly as to be almost unnoticeable (indeed it could be said that apart from periodic reference to it, little notice is being taken of the recommendations at Institute level).

But TAFE has been irrevocably changed.

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[33] In June 2003, the re-elected Carr government has once again restructured TAFE, as part of a total restructure of the Department of Education and Training. The proposed structure seems to bear out this earlier speculation.

Conclusion - where we are now

There were some positive outcomes of the upheavals in TAFE, both in New South Wales and on a national level. An integrated skills recognition system now facilitates both greater portability of VET qualifications (Anderson, 1997, p. 10) and better recognition for students' skills, whether gained on the job or through life experience. The examination of what skills are recognised has also broken down some of the barriers that trades people with overseas qualifications had experienced in the past. Apprenticeships and traineeships are now available in a far wider range of occupations. The participation rates of young people in TAFE and school-based VET programs have steadily risen (Anderson, 1997, p. 10).

But in the workplace, people of non English speaking background lost ground. As Mawer & Field (1995) argue,

> Despite the broad definition of competence in National Training Board guidelines, most standards have so far focussed on task skills, and taken a narrow, monocultural view …. [There] has tended to be [a] perpetuation of existing patterns of discrimination and of narrow approaches to skill formation (p. 3).

The result, they say, is a "one-size-fits-all system" that "advantages particular members of society - those who are young, male, highly educated and who have sound English language skills" (p. 1).

The push to make VET more "industry driven" and for TAFE to be more responsive to industry has resulted in a win for some parts of industry, but particularly for big business and corporate interests (Anderson, 1996, p. 36). But industry has yet to show its commitment to training beyond demanding a controlling hand in the reform of VET.

In spite of all the arguments about the need for "underpinning knowledge", the advent of "Training Packages" - a concept designed to directly link training outcomes with industry skill needs - has even further narrowed the options for TAFE provision. Hunter (2001) points out that Training Packages link vocational education and

training even more closely with Taylorism. He argues that they have little to contribute to the learning process, being nothing more than highly detailed job descriptions.

In 1998, Jozefa Sobski, the Deputy Director-General, Development and Support in DET, presaged the death of curriculum under the National Training Framework. She quoted the *Guidelines for Training Package Developers* and the *Australian Qualifications Framework Implementation Handbook* which demand a one-to-one matching of modular training and competency units and said,

> Competency standards are a description of what a competent worker can do in the workplace. Competency-based curriculum is based on these standards. The curriculum is a strategic, structured, sequenced learning plan. So the way in which skills and knowledge are grouped in the standards - where the purpose is to describe what people must be able to do - will be different from the way in which skills and knowledge are grouped and sequenced in the curriculum - where the aim is to enable cost-effective learning, based on the substantial body of research about the way people learn (1998, p. 12).

As she points out, the training reform agenda has produced a substantial shift in focus from curriculum and accredited courses as a "critical quality assurance mechanism" to "provider registration and auditing" (p. 14). Further, she notes the imbalance between the emphasis given to (and funding provided for) the "endorsed" components of Training Packages which is far greater than to the "non-endorsed" components. "Endorsed" components include competency standards, assessment guidelines and qualifications. "Non-endorsed" components are learning strategies, assessment resources and professional development materials (pp. 12-13).

The organisation TAFE Directors Australia echoed Sobski's concerns in 2001, including her concern for those students who are not employed in the particular industry area or who do not have workplace access (Sobski, 1998, p. 13; TAFE Directors Australia, 2001, p.4). The fears of "assessment only" training and the narrowing of delivery expressed by my interviewees have been realised.

The "training market" has made VET a commodity and has led to fraudulent practices in a number of states. At least in Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland, with the introduction of "user choice", TAFE has lost market share in traineeships and apprenticeships to private providers, although overall numbers have grown (Schofield, 2000, p. 5). While the focus of the new scheme was to increase young people's access to entry level training, at least in the earlier years employers used the traineeships to subsidise the employment of existing workers (p. 4). And, as Schofield notes,

> In the reforms of recent years, the focus has been on the national interest, the system, funding, the market and the needs of industry. The individual needs of individual learners have been neglected (p. 10).

The concerns of the teachers I interviewed that an on-the-job training emphasis would lead to inadequate or non existent training and "tick and flick" assessment have been borne out according to Schofield, who says, "Negligible, inadequate or non-existent training is accompanied by deficient assessment practices" which in turn has led to "market perceptions of the value of vocational qualifications … being damaged" (p. 11).

Schofield also found "national delivery standards are virtually non-existent because of their dependence on non-existing standards in Training Packages" (p. 11), "ample evidence that in too many instances, the structure of incentive payments is driving the selection of qualifications" (p. 10) and that as Training Agreements "have become tradeable commodities" (p. 12)

> The central issue is that through the payment of … brokerage and spotters' fees, through significantly increased costs of marketing activities by RTOs[34] in particular and the administrative costs associated with managing flexible apprenticeship and traineeship training, more and more of the training dollar is being diverted away from actual training delivery (p. 13).

Forced to compete for scarce funding, TAFE has responded by reducing staff costs, leading to loss of support staff positions and massive casualisation (Peoples, 1995b,

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[34] Registered Training Organisations

p. 31). While "transparency" and "accountability" are buzz words, TAFE NSW has become less transparent when it comes to statistics like how many part-time teachers are now employed compared to full-time teachers. The Vinson Inquiry was unable to get a clear picture. TAFE gave an estimate to the Inquiry that there is "an almost even 50/50 split between course hours delivered by full-time permanent teachers and course hours delivered by part-time casual teachers."[35] Yet the TAFE NSW Managers' Association submission to the Inquiry says that approximately 70% of teaching positions are now casual.[36]

Along with casualisation has come the deprofessionalisation of the TAFE workforce. Full-time TAFE teachers are required to have a degree in education. Those who do not have a degree on entering are given leave in their first years to complete one. The minimum qualification for many part-time teachers is the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. Because this has become the minimum qualification across Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), TAFE full-time teachers are also being pressured to undertake the Certificate IV - a bizarre requirement for teachers who have at least graduate and, in many cases, post graduate qualifications in adult vocational education.

The jargon of business is firmly entrenched in all aspects of the organisation. Watkins (1992) comments:

> the use of terms such as "corporate management" reassure [sic] the populace
> that education is not being run on airy-fairy principles but rather on a similar
> basis to the hard, real-world methods of the business sector (p. 255).

Students become "customers," Institutes and teaching "teams" compete for "Quality Awards". The way TAFE operates is defined, in extreme detail, by the requirements of RTO registration, and more recently, QETO (Quality Endorsed Training Organisation) accreditation. Paperwork to meet the documentary requirements of such registration has blossomed, as have the computer systems that TAFE teachers

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[35] *Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW* Ch 10 p. 75
[36] TAFE NSW Managers' Association submission to the *Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW* p. 4. This more dire assessment would seem to be supported by the TAFE staffing agreement between TAFETA and the Education & Training Minister in late 2002 which commits NSW TAFE Institutes to work towards *increasing* the proportion of permanent teaching hours to 55% over a three year period to June 30, 2006.

must contend with so that management can "capture the data". TAFE has, as Anderson (1996) notes, been "corporatised and commercialised" (p. 35).

III The teachers' work and working conditions

Chapter 5: When the numbers are dropping…

There is a line often used in TAFE that if it were not for the "tradies" trying to hold onto their positions, facilities and resources would be freed up for the new and expanding areas. The perception doesn't entirely match the reality, given the massive shrinkage that has occurred in the last decade in the manufacturing and engineering trade areas[37], but it has become a "given" in the discourse and has turned some staff in the newer sections like Tourism and Hospitality and Information Technology against their colleagues in the trade areas. In an increasingly casualised TAFE it is also sometimes used by management as a reason why they cannot employ full-time staff. As one long term part-time teacher told me, "there's all these underprogrammed welders at [another college], you know?" (36:18).

In turn, trade sections under pressure resent the support some of the newer areas are getting:

> Tourism and Hospitality, they're all gung ho because they're getting all the money and all the unemployed students and all that sort of thing, and all the money and all the direction seems to go there. Whereas the traditional trade areas have been fairly - ah - downtrodden (35:15).

The division is fuelled by the traditional union strength of the manufacturing trade areas when compared with many of the service areas which have a very different tradition - of casualised labour and short term jobs. That division is translated into the TAFETA membership. The manufacturing trade areas, more militant by tradition, are perceived by some to have a stranglehold on local branches and the union as a whole:

> See, the Federation at [local branch area] is dominated by about a dozen people who are very much back in the past. Whereas I know a lot of the

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[37] In March 1998, the Manufacturing Engineering Related Service ITAB raised concerns about the closure of engineering workshops in TAFE. As a result a review was undertaken and found that at least in metropolitan areas, the level of demand for courses in mechanical engineering and metal fabrication had declined significantly and that usage rates for workshops averaged around 32% for mechanical engineering and 53% for fabrication (Audit Office of NSW, [2001] pp.42-43). TAFE NSW enrolments in the manufacturing and engineering trades dropped 35% in the eight years prior to 2002 (Wright, 2002, p. 24).

teachers there, whilst they're Federation members, are very strongly opposed to those old directions. But they never get a voice.

Can you be a bit more specific about what you're talking about in terms of those directions? What you mean by [back in the past?]

Well, very much the sort of trade based unionism.

But what, for example?

Well, it seems to me - there are examples over the years that the Federation in this Institute hasn't taken much heed or support of those sections that are dominated by female TAFE staff, and the newer areas. I think they're very much based in the old traditional trades view (50:14-15).

The newer service areas, with a highly casualised workforce within TAFE, as well as in their industry areas, are less likely to join unions. Although they may join TAFETA (particularly in recent years since the union has taken up the cause of part-time workers industrially), they are often not active.

The newer areas, under severe pressure to expand provision with limited facilities and staff, see manufacturing trade teachers still enjoying their set tea breaks and lunch breaks. Staff from new areas walk past huge workshops where there may be only a few students bent over the workbenches. They sometimes have little patience, and perhaps little sympathy, for the devastating effect the changes have had on the teachers in those workshops and tea rooms. But in many cases, the mood in those tea rooms and workshops is sombre.

The teachers in some of those workshops are "just running for that time you're on, you are *running*" (6:23). Many of them have tried to adapt, to implement new courses with minimal resources and support, to retrain in new "service" areas, to forge stronger links with industry in an effort to "get the students in the door", to become "flexible" to "meet the demands of industry". They have taken on project work, always with the hope that a new career path will open up for them, only to find that the work didn't lead anywhere. And some - because of the lack of support, the lack of success no matter what they tried, or simply the loss of hope in the future - *are* just

sitting there, doing little, "seat warming" and hoping for a decent redundancy package, or to last it out until retirement age.

> I know one particular section here that have had teachers with no program for three years, and they still haven't claimed redundancy. Now, I don't know how those - and this is what worries me - not the fact that I'd … be made redundant soon, but just the fact that I'd have to come in here every day and not do anything. Just for your own self esteem, that you're not contributing anything (28:11-12).

The trouble, some of them say, is, "you get sick of bloody trying things that don't work … you sort of get to the stage where you say, stuff it, I'll just bowl along, collect my wages. … It is a disappointing way to end a career" (35:15).

Why the numbers are dropping

"Students have evaporated. Completely evaporated … We're not quite sure why they've gone, and nobody else is either" (32: 8-9).

The reasons behind the drop in student numbers in the trade areas are predominantly external to TAFE. Large cuts to TAFE's budget by both State and Federal governments[38] have hit the trade areas hard. They are expensive to run, sometimes very expensive. Rises in the cost of, for instance, steel or timber in a twelve month period can blow out a college or Faculty budget very quickly. Apart from some Tourism and Hospitality and Information Technology courses, service industry areas are generally much cheaper to deliver. The student:teacher ratio is generally higher, since there are not the same issues of occupational health and safety requiring close supervision. Equipment and material costs can be much lower, and "theory" class rooms are much cheaper than workshops.

There is also increasing demand for education in the service and "knowledge" industry areas, as skills that were previously self taught or learned on the job are now an entry level requirement. So, while some of the trade areas may have waiting lists, the waiting lists for courses like Information Technology, or even Child Studies, are

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[38] See Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE* for overview of funding cuts to TAFE.

usually much longer. The trade sections have been used to a class place being available for every student, because of the way that industrial legislation covering apprenticeships was intertwined with TAFE provision. But when apprentice numbers drop, their classes of non-apprenticed students become like any other - subject to budget cuts.

TAFE has an obligation to accept trade apprentices as a priority. But:

> people are not training for apprentices - what's happened is there's a shift to traineeships. And we're running a lot of trainees here. What we feel with the trainees is they're being used as a vehicle to gain some money. Admittedly, it gives the guy, the student, a chance to impress their employer. And at the end of twelve months traineeship they may then get an extension into a full traineeship or an apprenticeship. But we find a lot of them do not continue on, they part company with the employer (34:5).

The Federal government strongly promoted traineeships, although more recently there has been a substantial campaign to encourage employers to take on people under the New Apprenticeship Scheme. The NSW State government, however, has maintained the system of declared vocations (the traditional, industrially regulated system of apprenticeships and trade registration). Because of the differences in award coverage, trainees can cost employers more than apprentices, and it is to their TAFE college trade sections that local employers frequently turn to get advice, when they see the government advertisements exhorting them to take on a trainee. The teachers I spoke to had many examples of employers reconsidering traineeships in favour of apprenticeships, once the cost differences were explained to them.

So a number of the sections I spoke to were finding that the shift away from apprenticeship was not as marked as policy planners were arguing:

> I've been told now for I don't know how many years that the traineeship's going to be the be all and end all. In my experience, say the last seven years approximately, I've had three trainees in [the trade area] - three. In that same time, I've probably had 300 apprentices. I've been told time and time again by the system that traineeships are going to take over. The three trainees that I've

put through in the last seven years have been turned into apprentices [laughing] so as far as I'm concerned, it's really shit. Look, what traineeship is - seen by industry where I am - is nothing more than a probationary apprenticeship. When they're not 100% sure about a person, and it's only occurred in three instances out of 300, when they're not 100% sure about a person, they say, well I won't put them on as an apprentice, I'll put them on as a trainee, and then when they are sure, they change over. An absolute fizzer (30:9).

There is no doubt, however, that overall numbers in traditional apprenticeships are dropping. As Ryan (1997, p. 8) says, the "collapse of apprentice numbers has been spectacular." The figures have been somewhat muddied by the Federal government's introduction of "New Apprenticeships" which can be a one year on-the-job traineeship. There was an "historic high" of apprentices in 1988-1990, followed by a significant drop off. Apprenticeships, defined since 1995 as "those contracts at AQF[39] level III or higher with an expected duration of over two years" had not, at 1999, recovered their 1988 level even in numerical terms (NCVER/ANTA *At a glance: Apprentices and Trainees in Australia 1985 to 1999*). The apprenticeship and traineeship figures are now generally conflated, which allows the claim to be made that numbers are increasing. Tighe (2001) challenges what he calls the NCVER's spin-doctoring in attempting to "hide the continuing declining numbers" in apprenticeships (p. 17).

One of the trade teachers told me:

We were talking about it yesterday, how we're sitting back there writing names on the wall, like we do every year, of companies that have rung us and said 'we're going to send an apprentice this year' and that number's getting smaller and smaller and smaller (6:12).

Some of the teachers talk about the disappearance of students in their trade area happening almost over night. Many of the people I interviewed pinpoint the late

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[39] Australian Qualifications Framework

1980s and early 1990s as the time when apprenticeships started to drop, particularly with the big players like BHP.

> Yeah, well, in [one year in] the early 80s … [BHP] started 126 … fitting and machining apprentices, about 86 electrical apprentices - that was just one company in one year. In the past five years, BHP … would be lucky if they started twenty apprentices in five years. That's the trend. The change (34:2).

The trade teachers often have an encyclopaedic knowledge of their industry: companies that were once household names in Australia that have disappeared, those that have moved offshore, those that have been taken over and downsized. And there is sometimes a patriotic anger that manufacturing in Australia has declined.

> Keating. He was the dickhead that said we don't need to have a manufacturing industry in Australia. I mean, the guy was such a wanker he didn't know whether he was coming or going. We cannot [afford] not to be a manufacturer. And I believe that with all my heart (20:14).

Others talk of the technological change which has stripped their industries bare of employees - sometimes with approval of the incredible capacity of the machinery, sometimes with regret at the loss of the trade skills. The loss of jobs in some areas has been dramatic:

> You used to have [professionals, para-professionals, tradesmen, assistants] fairly top heavy … OK even if that wasn't so, you still needed someone to fill some of those positions, maybe you just didn't need so many. So rather than a workforce of 10 … they probably could have done with 5. Well, now there's none, because the equipment is computerised. There's no moving parts. Before it was moving parts. I mean, it's just technology in general. The stuff lasts for ever basically. If there's a fault, it will come up on a central computer, anywhere, any state in Australia, doesn't have to be in Sydney. Then someone in bed, their beeper will ring and they'll get in their truck on some overtime penalty rate, [and go and replace the faulty component part with a new one] (7:8).

They are sometimes cynical about the real reason behind the changes:

so really, the computer industry has cut a swathe through the workforce, where a lot of skilled people, and also unskilled people have been displaced by the computer. Because the computers can work 24 hours a day, not ask for a pay rise, they don't get sick - well, they do get sick, don't they [laugh] (40:8).

And sometimes they argue that it is impossible for them to be replaced by a machine:

[Industry] can't do anything without us. But they don't want us, because they can't beat us. … All right, they tell me that they can get computers. There is not a computer made - they can't afford a computer or a robot that can imitate me. It can't do what I can do. … It takes longer to program that thing to do it than it does to [do] it. So I can have it done and finished, because I'm thinking. I'm not a computer (34:12).

Technological change in industry has also made it hard for TAFE to keep up. "TAFE can't provide that machinery. We haven't got suitable accommodation for it, we haven't got the funding for it" (6:11). One piece of modern computerised equipment can cost far more than the annual budget of a trade section:

We used to have two full-time trade classes running a week, and we could barely fit the students in, but as technology improved in industry, we're so far behind - we would be about 1960s vintage[40] now, the machinery - we still teach the processes. So we can still teach … but the machinery is so far out of date, there's no point in sending [students] down here any more (29:5).

The recession of the early 1990s had an impact too, one that has continued particularly in regional areas. Tradesmen operating small businesses used to take on an apprentice or two almost as a matter of course, many of them being father and son. But now,

they haven't got the continuity - they've got work this week and next week - they might have it for three months and then they don't know what they're doing for another three months or six months and they're just hanging on

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[40] It should be noted here that this is a very specific trade area which has been reduced to a "niche" area. But a number of other sections spoke of the difficulty of providing up to date machinery because it is so costly.

threads or putting tenders in and not winning them, because there's so many competing for the work (11:4).

And there are "so many tradesmen walking around without jobs" that:
the wages are screwed down so low that there's no real financial benefit in employing an apprentice, as opposed to a tradesman. Not in real terms. I mean sure there's monetary difference, but the experience a tradesman can provide and the job that a tradesman can do doesn't allow you to employ an apprentice as a preference … like I helped build [local major building] here, was one of the head [tradesmen] and I noticed there - this is - was unheard of years ago - we had 15 [tradesmen] on that site and not *one* [trade] apprentice. What happened? Why is that? I ask myself why is it that there's fifteen of us and there's not one apprentice, no labourers, nothing (15:7).

Instead, employers are looking to avoid the commitment to indentured apprentices:
[N]obody's putting apprentices on. They continually ring us in there, employers, asking for people that are getting towards the end of their training, and unemployed, to put them on.
So, basically they want the system to train people and then take them on.
Yes. They'd love that, dearly love that. For us to train people and then just take from a pool, you know, which is not a bad idea either. That would work very well. You can get people straight from school, train them, and they go into a pool. That's what those Training [unclear word] do. And, um, that's why there's a downturn in students, actual real live students. We've got night classes going that are self employed people, not apprentices. The old apprenticeship system's on the way out too. It's just about gone (6:8).

It is not just the trade areas that are losing students. Some of the general education and service industry areas believe that they are facing increasing competition from universities:
universities used to take the 8 or 10% - the best students - now they take the best 70%. …we used to get some wonderful students below that top level - students who were actually on their way … to a brilliant academic career, but

they saw it as appropriate to come here for particular courses - a sort of half way (24:8).

And with the budget cuts, these sections can find it difficult to offer courses that can compete:

we were up to over 110 [hours a week] when I came here, and the hours have just slowly been eroded. Not necessarily by the Uni, but the fact that we can't offer all the courses that we want to offer because of the profile of the Institute (42:5).

In some areas, TAFE is actually picking up university graduates, but this "reverse" flow does not always compensate for the decline in the traditional TAFE clientele:

there's been some kind of a change, and we're still trying to grasp it, because we're down in student numbers this year, and I was thinking that when I started teaching, you used to get people who had been in trades, served their time just like I had and they wanted to get a job - they wanted the boss's job, so they'd do a Certificate as it was then, an Associate Diploma as it later became, but I don't think we get those people any more. The proportion of people with trades in this teaching section - students in this teaching section - is very low. It's quite unusual for a student to have served their time. It's much more usual these days for them to have done a degree, or an Associate Diploma in some unrelated field. [One?] student [unclear] Associate Diploma in Pathology, another student has got a Bachelor of Applied Science in Food Tech, all those sorts of things. So I think there's been a vast change in destination of kids from school, what they do and where they go, and that's reflected in the sort of students I get. For a few years, until about three years ago we were running full-time classes - you just can't get students for full-time any more[41], they've disappeared (32:5).

Another source of competition is private provision and on the job training. Some of the on the job training occurs because of TAFE's lack of up to date equipment:

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[41] This varies from section to section. Teachers reported increases in full-time student numbers in some areas of Business Services, for instance.

> [one of Australia's largest companies in the industry is] currently doing in-house, their own in-house training. They're looking for us to train their personnel but they don't think our plant and our machinery is suitable for what they require. It doesn't meet their requirements and there'd have to be a big upturn before we can train their people, because their people operate *much* more sophisticated machinery than we have (6:11).

But Federal government policy, which has encouraged assessment on the job, with a workplace assessor being able to "tick the boxes", is also biting in some of the trade areas, particularly where companies are training people on their own very specialised equipment (eg 16:8).

There is much scathing criticism of the "cherry picking" of private vocational education and training providers - competing and winning tenders for training in the cheaper areas, and leaving TAFE with the courses that require greater support or more expensive equipment.

> The private providers are semi skilled operators … I'm running a course now under the [competitively tendered] Program - they wanted a course that was meaningful to the students so that when a student left here, he'd be better skilled and has got a better chance of getting a job. Now, I won the quote. And two of the subjects I'm teaching are two teacher loaded[42], which damaged my costing, so I'm only giving these guys six modules, whereas somebody like [private provider] would eliminate [key trade skills modules] because they're costly subjects, costly equipment, and they'll put in - they could put in Materials Science, OH&S, Communication & Industrial Relations … Geography, and how Hitler won the bloody war - … and when these people [unclear] see oh, [TAFE's] giving them six modules, this [private provider's] going to give them 12, for the same time, what's - oh - they're not looking at what good it's going to do (34:7).

And finally, many spoke of how the courses that are being imposed on them by the National Training Reform Agenda are not appropriate for local needs. While many

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[42] That is, half the usual student:teacher ratio because, for example, of the need for close supervision around hazardous equipment.

recognised that TAFE had become complacent about its provision, deciding what industry needed rather than being responsive, they feel that the "industry" that is now being listened to is not the industry that they are dealing with at a local level (see Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE* and Chapter 7: *Educational Issues in the Change*).

I tried[43]…

A number of the people I interviewed had either retrained into a different teaching area or had at least temporarily moved out of teaching into educational or other project work. Teachers from some teaching areas had no option but to retrain or accept "voluntary" redundancy. Fashion teachers were probably the largest single group to be displaced and Textiles was another from this industry area, although a smaller number were affected.

Fashion was partly a victim of the decision that "Stream 1000" courses were hobby courses and not the proper province of TAFE colleges:

> we used to be given permission to run courses that students could operate small businesses from home, as in making craft items, some of them used to sell them in craft shops, some set up their own craft shops, some of them are teaching in private providers, or just craft shops, where you can get these little classes, we've got a lot of them doing that. Or doing private dressmaking from home. But Head Office, in their wisdom, have said, no. All courses that are hobby - they're hobby courses, because there is no actual industry out there that employs people to do that, and we're meant to have TAFE tie in with industry. So over the years, all of our courses that they say are purely hobby courses have all been phased out. Commercial Needlecraft went at the end of last semester. And it's real sad. Because a lot of people are earning money at home by making and selling - private dressmaking for school uniforms, all this sort of thing (37:4).

Many of these Stream 1000 courses were the mainstay of rural and regional colleges, and made TAFE a strong presence in local communities. The TAFE college was the

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[43] 6:7

place people went to if they wanted to pick up skills like welding for weekend hobbies, or for their small businesses or farms. Evening woodworking and furniture making classes provided full teaching programs for teachers in the carpentry sections of small campuses, and gave local people the chance to learn skills which sometimes became income generating. People in country towns used to approach the "tech" when they decided to use their spare time to do a course. "I used to get a lot of people would ring up and say, oh, I've got nothing to do on a Tuesday night - whattaya got [in mocking tone] … But they don't do that so much any more" (17:15). Not since the demise of Kangan's TAFE.

But the major reason for the transformation of fashion courses and the closure of so many Fashion sections across the state was the impact on the Textile, Clothing and Footwear industry in Australia of tariff reductions, deregulation, and the move offshore of many manufacturers.

In May 1993, TAFE set up a Textiles and Clothing Steering Group to consider the future of fashion courses. The picture that emerged through the Group's inquiry process was of a massive decline in enrolments from 1988 to 1992. Falls in enrolments ranged from 27% in Northern Sydney Institute to 48.6% in Southern Sydney. Country areas showed similar declines. In country areas, there was a noticeable drop in enrolments in the 20-29 year age bracket, and an increase in the 40-50+ age group. A "comment" attached to the statistical information says:

> The increase in the average age of students in country areas may indicate an interest in the home dressmaking area among these people and a potential to increase their income through the rising number of 'market' outlets.

Most (74%) of the fashion teaching positions were in the country.[44]

There was recognition given by the Steering Group that

> There needs to be an attitudinal change in the perception of the fashion skills area. A current bias exists towards the traditional male occupations. Female skill areas have not been properly recognised nor accredited. … For many

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[44] These figures taken from an unidentified, undated extract from what was presumably a briefing paper for the Steering Group. The extract is headed: *TAFE Statistics on enrolments, demographic and geographic distribution of TAFE NSW Fashion enrolments over the past five years.*

women fashion courses can be a means whereby they may build on existing skills learnt informally, seek recognition of those skills … and be granted advanced status in further education (*Textiles & Clothing Steering Group Position Paper,* no date).

But, as a Briefing Paper to the Steering Group said,

[I]t needs to be clearly understood that the focus of TAFE NSW has changed, with the National Training Reform Agenda and with TAFE's own restructures. The Fashion Industry that was served by the old 'School of Fashion' is not synonymous with the TCF Industry now served by the Manufacturing Training Division (TAFE NSW. Manufacturing Training Division[45], 1993, p. 5).

The Briefing Paper went on to point out that TAFE Fashion enrolments in 1992 were "more than the total employment in the organised Clothing Industry" (p. 5) and, arguably more damning in the new climate in TAFE, "many of the apparently TCF related enrolments are, in fact, from people whose training needs relate more to the arts/craft industries, or are non vocational" (p. 6).

There were at the time 370 Fashion teachers in TAFE. The Briefing Paper estimated that "the needs of the structured textiles and clothing industries … could probably be serviced by a teaching workforce of about 70-80 people" (p. 3). Of those, the paper estimated that "it is unlikely that more than about 40 of the current 'fashion' teachers would be fully employed in areas with which they are now familiar" (p. 26).

The Briefing Paper did not "draw conclusions", however it made a number of "salient points" which included statements that while student satisfaction survey results indicated that TAFE was doing "a very good job of meeting community and individual needs", TAFE was not meeting the training needs of the TCF industries[46] in "any focussed and structured way". It also pointed out that the Manufacturing Training Division was in the process of "actively contributing to the development of

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[45] Fashion was placed with the Manufacturing Training Division when TAFE restructured from the Schools. This was, and remains, a heavily male dominated area.
[46] The industry, according to the Briefing Paper, did 80%-90% of its own training.

courses" to meet the needs of the TCF industries and if it was to deliver the modules, then "resources will need to be found to support them" (p. 25).

The embroidery, dressmaking, pattern making courses were replaced with the Clothing Production Certificate - a syllabus patterned on factory based clothing production, not on the traditional skills that local dressmakers learnt to supplement family incomes, or to save a few housekeeping dollars by making the family's clothes: "A few people … they'd just come back to finish off things … sewing for clients and trying to build up a small business from home … that's what a lot of them do" (13:5).

The fight over Fashion was bitter and protracted. Fashion teachers could not believe that courses that were in demand, particularly in country areas, were to be closed and replaced with a certificate that was irrelevant to many of their students. "I guess feeling frustrated is a feeling you get. Feeling not wanted. Feeling that you've been used in a lot of ways" (13:10). But in spite of their fierce campaign, the axe eventually fell: "…no matter what arguments you came up with or what support you got from other people, it didn't seem to make any difference" (13:3).

The teachers were also angry that their courses were denigrated as simply "hobby" courses. For some of their students they were, but for women in country areas, it was their entry level post-school education:

> back when we had 16 year old students, the only other thing that was offered
> in [the college] was really Office Admin, for females anyway … so if you left
> school and you didn't have anything else to do, that's what you came and did.
> Either of those (13:4).

Fashion teachers were able to come into TAFE straight from their training. "I finished school three years prior to coming into TAFE, and then I did my Fashion Certificate and Teaching Certificate, paid for myself, and applied for a job and got a job when I was 21" (13:1). Would-be teachers like Sally had to move to Sydney for three years for their training, and bore the cost themselves. As that basic qualification became

inadequate, and with the threat of their industry shrinking in the 1980s, most of the teachers upgraded, perhaps first to a Diploma, and then to a Degree. To little avail.

> When I first came here there was eight of us. Last year [colleague] took a redundancy. The year before that, [another colleague] took one.
>
> *So who's left?*
>
> [Another colleague] and I
>
> *But there's only one position?*
>
> There's no positions … we've got four weeks to go (13:2).

Sally had retrained. She had done a General Education subject in her degree, and paid an extra $1800 to do some extra units to qualify to teach in that area. At the time I spoke to her, she was doing bits and pieces of coordination and teaching. Hers is a kind of bleak acceptance. She is the primary income earner in her family and she is trying to hang on to her job. She is doing unpaid overtime to cover the work.

> I'd like my job for another ten [years]. [Age] Fifty will do me. I can cope with fifty. I can't cope with forty … Even in eight years' time I guess I could cope with not having a full-time job, but I don't think emotionally anyone could cope with doing bits and pieces all over the place for - knowing it was going to happen for a long period of time (13:9).

Another teacher who couldn't cope with the idea of doing bits and pieces for a long period of time was Dan. Dan found his name was effectively pulled out of a hat when two positions in his section were earmarked to go. There had been a downturn in his industry area in the early 1990s recession,

> which caused us to have an enormous downturn in students, which meant we were under-programmed, by at least two full-time teachers. We could hide that for a while [by] doing other types of training … but they were deemed not to be vocational and they wanted to get rid of those courses (6:1).

The teachers were asked to volunteer for unspecified "other duties".

> We talked about it in our section, the whole nine of us, and we all agreed that none of us would volunteer because we were told they would not be on

teaching conditions, so we knew that … they would be administrative

positions somewhere in the Institute - unknown - unspecified (6:2).

They replied to management that they would all do it on a rotational basis, and wanted to keep their teaching conditions. They were told that was not an option. When Dan got back to work after the mid year holiday, he says he and a colleague found letters on their desks telling them they were no longer teachers, but project officers. He still has no idea why he was chosen, or who made the decision.

Dan and his colleague were "pissed off" and "pretty downhearted" but they fought. They "brought the union in" and the case went to the Industrial Commission. They regained their teaching conditions but "it was a hollow victory - it's not a victory that I wanted, and it's not a situation that I wanted" (6:3). He wanted to teach, not to become a project officer. But he was encouraged by his new boss to stay on. He was told "it could lead to a much better job for me" (6:3). He was to be told this again and again over the next few years as he was moved to various positions. He was told there was no future in his trade area and that if he kept on with the project work, "you'll work yourself into a very good position" (6:3). He said,

I tried. Because I was *learning*, see. I was learning. It's a hard learning curve

for a teacher of a trade situation to come out and suddenly move in that circle

… I thought I did alright. I thought I did a fair [job?] (6:7).

At the same time, by the mid 1990s, "every time I went back [to visit the section], there was two part-time teachers working there, and they were all on programmed overtime" (6:3). When he challenged the management, he was told again that there was no growth in the area and that he couldn't go back. But

I couldn't see any future where I was going and the jobs that I was doing were

really - limited - endless jobs. There was no future in the jobs. They were just

project, project positions and they were only designed for a period of six

months or twelve months at the most. … [I] thought it was actually going to

lead somewhere, but in the end it really didn't (6:4).

Dan questions himself now. Was it his own fault, his own inadequacy, "lack of initiative on my part…?" (6:6).

Dan is now back teaching. He acknowledges he learned a lot from some of the work he did, but,

> they say to me why do you want to come back and be a teacher? Why do you want to go back to that for? And it's - it's *good* being a teacher. You feel like you're doing something when you're a teacher. You feel like you *are* an important person, being a teacher. Whereas if you're sitting in a job, doing a clerk's job, organising, shuffling [papers] around with people, you say why am I doing this for? This is not doing anything for me. Whereas [as a teacher] you're seeing younger people coming through and you're seeing them working in this system, you see how they're basically enjoying it. Not all the time, it's not a utopia. And you say to yourself, well, it's not a bad system, you know? And it's working. It's got some rough edges. It *could* work. It could work real good (6:20).

Dan was lucky to be able to return to teaching in his trade area. He acknowledges it was a steep learning curve coming back to teaching, so much had changed in the few intervening years. His colleagues were resentful. They felt that he had been off doing other things while they struggled to implement new curriculum with no support. Then when it was set up, he returned. In other sections, teachers who have retrained, particularly in General Education areas, would not be welcome back at all. As was said of a trade teacher who retrained as a communication teacher: "We can't have him back here now, because he doesn't have enough skills now for the courses we run..."(29:4).

In those sections where student numbers have dropped, and/or the budgets have been cut because the planners have decided there needs to be a change of direction, morale is terribly low.

> You're fighting to hang onto your teaching hours. You're basically fighting to hang onto your jobs. Where before you had plenty of students - I go back to when I started - you had four groups in each stage [of the apprenticeship], so there were twelve groups … and you were really busy teaching and it was a buzz. But now, you're fighting with the bureaucracy to hang onto your hours

and every time they open their mouth, you're going to drop. You're going to drop funds, you're going to drop hours. … Where we used to look long term into the future, we're basically running semester by semester now. … if we can make it through this semester, great. You know? Let's hope we make it through the next one. Because they're always talking about voluntary redundancy and we had one round last November. There's supposed to be more on the way (31:8-9).

Some of them consider the retraining options.

We've been told that if you reject it [redundancy offer] three times then they can retrain you into another area. And you think, hey, I come in here because I love [the trade]. I want to be with the kids and I want to pass my skills on to these students. And all of a sudden they're saying, well, there's no work for you. … but we're going to retrain you into - um - in the computer area or English as a Second Language. Well, you know, a bloke like me struggles with English as a *first* language [laughter] … Some people can cope with ESL, computers and that - one of our fellows wouldn't have a drama about that. I look at the rest of us, and we - we're tradesmen at heart (31:9).

These conversations sometimes took place in new purpose built facilities[47]. Understandably, the teachers could not understand how management could have decided one year to invest so hugely in their trade area and soon after to declare them redundant. Conspiracy theories abound, with apocryphal (and some possibly true) horror stories of plans for privatisation - that these new buildings built with public money will now be made available to government subsidised private providers.

TAFE is getting raped. It's getting pillaged and plundered. And in my life time, I can see where TAFE will no longer - I don't know whether I'm right or not, it doesn't exist as it was, now, anyway. They're offloading to private providers … they're setting up in opposition to us another education system … if they take half the TAFE empire away, they can close this college and get everybody back to [another centre]. They might give the [private provider]

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[47] It is difficult to be specific here because of problems of confidentiality. However, without looking for such situations, I came across at least two quite graphic instances of this - one in the Construction & Transport area and one in the Manufacturing/Engineering area.

mob this college and say, right, now, we've set you up, you run it as a business. So then, everyday people outside - my sons and daughters and yours, and grand daughters, they come in here, they've got to *pay* to get education (34:18).

The teachers are doing everything they know how to keep their sections afloat. Part of this is self interest, of course, but there is also the deep and over-riding commitment to their teaching areas. They see the decisions being made as misguided at best. Some have done what they see as moving with the times, listening to student and industry demands and tailoring their course offerings to suit.

They said, if numbers improve great, if they don't, you're out. That was the bottom line. … We got our courses up and running ourselves, using our own initiative, and we found that giving people what they wanted, and private industry, we went a little way from the TAFE system, we just gave people what they wanted. And we found that we hit the right thing. We [got?] the magic formula (29:8).

But the section is still under threat of closure.

Where apprenticeships have fallen and large manufacturers have closed up or moved offshore, some sections have targeted small businesses and crafts people wanting to work in niche markets. They developed new curriculum, often in their own time. They are furious and frustrated that the specialist hand skills of which they are so proud are then dismissed as "hobby" skills, not appropriate for the new TAFE. "They're mainly looking at the things that seem to shine like Computer Studies and things like that. They're not looking at trades, and our industry is badly lacking in tradespeople at the moment" (29:5).

They say that the student base has changed. Where they used to have young boys "and we had a lot of discipline problems… Now with the courses changed we're getting more intelligence." In some cases "We're getting a lot more women involved - younger women … we've had a lot of university people" (29:8). In the interviews, with a willing listener, they bring out samples of the students' work. They proudly

cite major state and national awards won. They do not understand how it can be that management can dismiss these achievements.

> But we've been successful. So what? Industry thinks we're terrific. So what? So it doesn't matter what we say. They will do what they want to do. There is no point (23:16).

III The teachers' work and working conditions

Chapter 6: Doing more with less…

> There's this big axe - nobody knows what the axe is, but they know it's there, and if you don't meet the budget, well, you know - fire and brimstone - something awful is going to happen (28:15).

The application of business principles and competition policy to public education, as to other areas of the public sector, was a powerful tenet of economic management in Western economies in the late 20th century. Belman, Gunderson and Hyatt (1996), commenting on the US experience, suggested that two main strategies were being followed in relation to the public sector. One emphasised new practices intended to move away from the " bureaucratic, civil service model", the other, more sweeping, strategy emphasised cost cutting. The cost cutting, they argue, is an end in itself, rather than just an attempt to improve efficiency. The goals of such cost cutting, they suggest, are ideological, aimed at "downsizing" government and privatisation of public services, even if this *creates* inefficiencies in service provision (p. 2).

The cost cutting in TAFE has led to changes both in educational delivery and in teachers' working conditions. Certainly the teachers' experience as reported to me has been that the cost cutting has indeed become an end in itself.

Work intensification

The 1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey found that a high proportion of education workers (63%) reported "increases in effort" and "increases in stress" - one of the highest levels of all occupational categories (Morehead, Steele, Alexander, Stephen & Duffin, 1997, p. 274). The education sector had the highest frequency score (35%) of all industries on the work intensification index (p. 275). A survey of TAFE teachers conducted by the Australian Education Union in late 2000 indicated an even higher level of work intensification than indicated in the more general 1995 survey. In the AEU survey, around 86% of TAFE teachers (Australia

wide) said their workload had increased and that stress at work had increased (Kronemann, 2001, p. 24).

One of the teachers I spoke to commented:

> I'm just finding now that we seem to be getting more and more responsibility and being required to do more and more things, and I just don't stop. I work here four days, on my day off and on the Saturday I take boxes like that [pointing] home with me and I work all day Friday, all day Saturday, just trying to catch up on the week's admin stuff, on lesson prep - a whole host of things. And I don't begrudge that. I think in lots of ways that's part of the deal. I know some people don't do that, but I'm - I like everything to be spot on, so I will put in that time and that effort. And before, I didn't really have to spend as much time doing that (44:3).

TAFE teachers have good working conditions. Many of the people I spoke to said that they came into TAFE partly for the conditions. But the conditions are on paper, and the reality, particularly for Head Teachers, is that those conditions are being eroded:

> the 30 hour week is a farce, you know - it takes me 42 hours to do the job. And I don't mind that, I've got no problem with that, I mean the fact that I work twelve hours unpaid overtime is irrelevant for me. If I'm prepared to do the job, that's the time it takes. So I put up with it. And I find it very difficult to cut that down (21:4).

Some of the people I interviewed compared the conditions they experienced in private industry with their experience in TAFE:

> everybody says oh, it's good hours, good holidays, fine, that's part of the job, but I challenge, we challenge anybody to come and teach a job 48 weeks a year and then have four off - it's not that sort of job, it's a totally different concept. … In industry - the last three months I worked in industry, I worked 18 hours a day, seven days a week for three months straight. There is no way - and that was just my normal job, and I could handle it, and I don't think I was cracking up, or anything. There's just no - that's just an impossible thought in

TAFE, because to - we're teaching at the moment more than 30 [hours] … we teach, oh, eight hours overtime in a week, and by the time you get to Friday or Saturday, you know you've done it, and something somewhere along the way suffers (34:2).

The majority of TAFE teachers are committed to their work and to their students. They have always put in extra time and effort to make things run smoothly or to get new initiatives off the ground. But they are feeling that their goodwill is being exploited and they spoke of their resentment of the demands being made on them:

[T]eachers are very guarded. If you give an inch, TAFE will take a mile. You're between a rock and a hard place … I mean, you can be 100% committed to the students, but as soon as someone comes in and says, oh, you can do that all the time, you say, oh no I can't (6:21).

Head Teachers resent the way the paperwork takes away from the time they can spend on their teaching.

That's the thing that kills this job more than anything is the fact that once upon a time, when I was just working for a boss, I was just sort of teaching, and it was great. But now I'm probably doing - well, I'm doing my 17 hours teaching, but I'm probably doing, oh, ten, twelve hours of bloody administration[48] (35:6-7).

As Ginsburg et al. (1995) argue, power relations between teachers and managers reflect "the struggle over the educational labour process" (p. 19). The proliferation of paperwork is indicative of the move in the labour process of teachers from "licensed autonomy" to "regulated autonomy" (Dale, quoted in Apple, 1995, p. xix). Some of the demands are for information that the teachers find it almost impossible to give, like future projections that become particularly difficult in times of rapid change:

and projecting into the year 2001 for courses that we're going to do. I mean, really, why can't we just say well, I'll probably follow a similar pattern, but courses change, and demands change, and we've got no way of seeing into the

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[48] A full-time teaching load is 20 hours face to face teaching, with another 10 hours "incidental" for preparation, liaison with students, industry etc. Head Teachers receive a release from face to face teaching for administration.

future that far ahead, two or three years down the track, as to what our needs will be or what the community's needs will be, too. Because our community's changing dramatically and the courses are changing. Which is great. Change to me is fine. I've got no problems with change. But provided I can see a purpose in what we're doing (44:5).

It is particularly galling when sections spend hours working on their predictions to make them as accurate as possible, only to find that the courses (and the hours per course) that they have carefully planned into their section profiles, are changed without warning:

> I *try* and fill that [planning sheets] in to the best of my ability … I don't want to put bullshit in there. What I want to do is try - and it's what I do normally anyway. I try to project what's needed in the area, what we should run, what we will run, and what we need to fill our programs and what I've got to turn down and all that. But here, look, this has gone in early this year for Semester 2 – [course number] there's a lot of students in there, 20, 50, nearly 150 students. This was put in probably the end of May, something like that? When we drew up the enrolment forms for this, [that course] no longer exists. It's been closed. Right? They've got to have known that. Because they're the people that's making these decisions, and yet they're still asking us for - all of those sort of things are the things that are making the job a lot heavier and a lot harder than it should actually be (34:6).

And the constant demands for information, under the rubric of "accountability", lead to a sense that they are under surveillance, that their professionalism is being questioned:

> things that I've known all the way through my teaching career, or career as a Head Teacher, about my class sizes and the safety of my work, and all of those sort of things - that to me was why I was made a middle line manager - why I was made a Head Teacher - that's my responsibility. Now everybody wants me to justify it, or clarify it, or why should this be (34:13).

As Apple (1995, p. xx) says, monitoring and policing replace trust and self-regulation.

TAFE is increasingly relying on computer systems to capture data centrally, data required for reporting to ANTA and for giving managers an overview of what is happening. But there is a decreasing level of clerical support as administrative staff are cut back across the organisation. Some of the teachers are struggling with computing at quite basic skill levels:

> we're supposed to be able to email, we're supposed to be able to Internet, we're supposed to be able to get on the Student Information Services and that sort of thing, and when the lady was down here the other week putting all this stuff on my computer, I said, I don't want that shit. If I can get somebody else to do that - that's something I don't have to do, and they'll do it a bloody sight better and a hell of a lot quicker than I will. It's useless. I've been doing some flexible delivery stuff - I had a contract last term and I had a lady doing the clerical[49] and it's just - she does it ten times quicker than I do it, and does it better. Why do they pay me $35 an hour to bloody plug a typewriter when she does it for twelve or fifteen. It's ridiculous (35:10).

The systems are sold to the staff as being more efficient (and with good computing skills, they sometimes are). But many of the teachers have what they regard as very good systems in place, and don't see why they should be pressured into using computerised systems:

> I think - my own work is becoming a lot more stressed. High pressure. This job is something I've done for a long time, and easily - it's not a chore - or hasn't been. It's becoming a chore to me at the moment. I'm not enjoying it. And it's not because I'm getting older. … I'm struggling with the computer. Everybody thinks it's the answer to all, and time and time again, people ring up and say, well this isn't on there and I can go [pulls out lever arch file] what's his name? What year? Yes, yes, he passed it. So I reckon I'm still better than a computer. I still think the old system is better. I'm not stupid. I know it's going to go to that, and it's going to go all on disk. They've been telling me -

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[49] Contracted training, that is, money won for special programs through tender processes, can sometimes have short term clerical support attached to it.

ten years ago I remember somebody saying, you can get rid of all that
[pointing to his files] and we'll put it on this little disk … But it doesn't
happen. But I'm finding everything that I do is triplicated. There's too much
[paperwork] (34:6).

But of course a manager at his or her desk cannot get access to those manual files,
whereas they can get access to networked computer records.[50]

Head Teachers, and increasingly teachers, are expected to use these systems whether
or not they have been trained in them:

before when new things came in, you were taken to a staff development, taken
by the hand and taken through. Even when the EC[51] system came in nineteen
eighty something, I went to a seminar - they gave me things to pre-read, and I
went to a seminar and I cottoned on to it pretty quick, and I would have been
on the barnstorming tour of the state because I picked up that well, but we
were *taught* and now it just comes down - umpteen pages of new regulations
or things like that and it makes it much harder (42:9).

Where training is offered, it can be difficult to get away. Staff development for full-
time teachers is notionally possible with payment being made for replacement
teaching hours. But with budget cuts, replacement teaching hours are hard to get, and
the expectation is that teachers will do the training in their "incidental" or class
preparation time. (It is very difficult to get replacement teaching hours for part-time
teachers to be trained). As one teacher pointed out, with flexible delivery and
competency based assessments as well as class preparation, the ten hours that a
teacher has when they are not face to face teaching doesn't leave much time to spend
on training courses, even if the training is offered at a time when you are not actually
teaching (6:13).

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[50] Recently I was in a heated debate in a meeting with an Institute manager over a computerised class
management system. For various practical reasons, I was voicing resistance to my section using it, but
I also pointed out that the primary purpose for it was not to make the sections' work easier, but to allow
managers to have access to data, including student attendances and teacher programs. I argued that
they would then use the numbers to make assessments and decisions that needed more, educationally
based, information than would be available from the system. The manager agreed that the primary
purpose was to allow managers to have access to the numbers, but he questioned why I should have a
problem with being more "transparently accountable".
[51] Establishment Control - the system of keeping a record of teachers' programs. It is paper based at
section level, although some Head Teachers use a computer based system, and there is increasing
pressure in some Institutes to make it entirely computer based.

There is pressure in the classroom, too:

> so I had a program yesterday where I was teaching from 8 to 12, and then I was back there on incidental from 12.30 to 4.30 and then I had a class from 5.30 to 9.30 - that's a fairly long day. … today I go in there at lunchtime and I go till 4.30 and then I've got a class from 5.30 to 9.30 tonight. That's not a bad day. That's only 8 hours, 9 hours, but when you've got 13 hour days, they're long. And they're hard to come to grips with, and in a competency based situation, you're go, go, go (6:18).

They are the words of a teacher in a section which has been defined as a "no growth" area. He goes on to describe the demands of flexible delivery and competency based training on the classroom teacher. I had asked him how difficult it is to program teachers for the new forms of delivery:

> It's a nightmare. It's a nightmare. You've got a situation where we're still in the old fashioned teacher hour situation where you've got your face to face hours and your incidental hours and then your teaching hours have got to be worked out to someone to be on the class at certain times. Well, a student might have, on one day, three teachers and in a competency based situation, that's difficult, because we don't have identified subjects any more. You don't have the old fashioned theory class and you don't have the old fashioned drawing class where you had them for two hours and you'd say everyone do this drawing and you don't have the old fashioned lesson where you go out to the practical workshop and say today we're going to make this widget, follow me, this is how we do it. That's gone. You pick up a [roll] book that's got eight students, it's reduced our ratio down to 8:1 and other people say, that's fantastic, how do you get that? But those eight students are doing eight different things and they're in eight different parts of the complex. That's your worst possible scenario. You could be lucky and have two doing the one thing at different stages. So you might have two out on the workshop area working machinery, one in the room doing his theory content, which is a matter of self study and the [rest?] an assessment sheet, which we're trying to get onto the computer at the moment, but are having difficulty doing that, with funding … (6:23).

The pressure is exacerbated by the constant changes to curriculum. Teachers of technical skills have had to learn to deliver classes in a much broader range of skill areas, including computing which is becoming basic to many of the teaching areas. Again, this is a two fold problem: the teachers have to find the time (and sometimes the money) to educate themselves in the new areas, and they are stretched thin because of a lack of available staff. As one teacher from a small regional Arts and Media section said:

> [the courses] are designed to be run in big art schools, where they have a whole range of talent to call on from every section, but I find I'm teaching cultural practices, professional art practice, art history, art theory, ceramics, ceramic technology, drawing, life drawing and all sorts of drawing and coordinating. … oh! and also we run computer graphics so we've got to be tutors in computer graphics programs as well as basic computer skills, because the syllabuses have forgotten to write in basic computer modules prior to throwing them into computer graphics … Eight years ago I was required to come in and organise a small department and to teach ceramics and ceramic related areas, technology and so on and so forth, and it was nice. It was creative, and it was restful … computers weren't even in vogue. And from then, the skills that I'm expected to teach have multiplied by ten. There's been no training in any of those areas. We're expected to be computer literate at all levels, and what happens is the decree comes down, you're expected to do this, you never have the equipment, you don't have the training for that sort of equipment (39:8, 11).

And with increasing casualisation, there is little backup:

> one of the problems here is that the hundred hours a week that are done by part-time teachers, put five full-time teachers in, and I get 50 hours a week incidental time from those people, that I can call on - even if I only get a couple of hours a week out of each of them, it's that amount of time that's being lost at the college to be able to build up resources and so on. I mean, we've got the expertise to do lots of stuff here. We've got the desire to do it. But we just haven't got the bloody time (38:19).

Not that part-timers escape the paperwork. One part-time teacher told me:

> the workload is the other thing I've noticed - I mean, I now do administrative stuff - I didn't notice that before, but there's an awful lot of administrative trivia that has to - the *paperwork*, pieces of paper that have to be done. I always laugh and say to the students, if you come in and find us buried under a pile of paper, gently extract us, you know? (36:11).

Many of the teachers are stressed and tired. But they are still committed to their teaching areas, and still make efforts to be innovative in their teaching. I asked one of the people I interviewed, who was piloting some interesting multi media delivery techniques, how they managed to fit it in: "I work a lot. Well, I mean, basically I just work - that's my choice. That's what I do. … I work weekends - I've still got a four day week, but a rostered day off is just a day - I work at home" (32:19). But the pressure can take a heavy toll. One teacher spoke of her Head Teacher, who was off on sick leave:

> before she fell apart the second time - she would, I would say, do 50 hours[52] here - she was so sick that she couldn't even lift a phone book. She couldn't lift a heavy book, and she couldn't even hold the phone to her ear because her arms and shoulders were so bad. So that means she wasn't teaching. She was doing 50 hours clerical work … they've lost her now … she's worse now than when she left. And I keep thinking, what's the good of that? (41:18).

For those who have family commitments, it can be almost impossible:

> I'm aware that, with a little baby, I can't do as much at home for work as I used to. And I'm finding an extraordinary level of pressure over - I'm paid for 30 hours a week. I probably do 35 to 40 and I'm quite happy to do that, because of the expectations of teaching, but I'm still not getting through the work, and I'm finding that the structure of the system is quite unsupportive (43:9).

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[52] Award hours are 30

She says her first year was a "living hell" - she was the only full-time teacher, still is, and managed the section, recruitment, timetabling, everything, but got no release. Now the section has expanded and she gets release.

Everything's measured in dollars and cents[53]…

> The emphasis [is] basically on cut, cut, cut - they don't seem to have any vision for the future (22:13).

When I returned to my full-time position in Southern Sydney Institute at the beginning of 2000, I was greeted with a three page document called "The ASCH Game, or 'ASCH is KASCH.'" ASCH, Annual Student Contact Hours, is the basis of ANTA funding to TAFE. The document warned teachers of making errors in roll books that might be picked up by ANTA audits and lead to penalisation in the form of reduced funding to the Institute. It also offered "tips" in "the ASCH game" - how to maximise ASCH in the way information is recorded.

While the document made it clear that the tips were only to ensure that "anywhere ASCH can be legitimately claimed it should be," because of the way ASCH is calculated, on the basis of the nominal hours given for a subject in the curriculum documents, rather than on how many hours are actually used to deliver a subject, the pressure has continued to maximise ASCH in any way possible:

> at the moment I'm finding a conflict between the focus on ASCH hours as a management tool, versus the focus on delivering what the community needs. … I think an emphasis on ASCH hours is being misused [searching for right words here] in that decisions about course offerings are often being made - and I resist it, but there is pressure - and it's not pressure from any one person, it's pressure from the process - there's a pressure to run courses which provide the greatest number of ASCH hours. … It's also about how much it costs. So for some courses, say with an 8 to 1 or 15 to 1 student teacher ratio, you don't get more ASCH hours for the split classes. You get the same number of ASCH hours as a measurement - as a measuring tool, but you have to employ twice the number of teachers, and it's those kind of things that I think are

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[53] 31:2

driving a lot of decisions, and you hear some really difficult stories about people making - saying this course has high ASCH hours, so we'll run that, even though the community needs such and such a course (43:4).

By the end of 2000, we were being exhorted to enrol students in any possible subject. We were given lists of subjects in which we might enrol students that would cover the kind of work that had previously been allowed for under "coordination" release hours. We were told that we should no longer provide (non ASCH generating) coordination hours for our access courses, but should instead enrol the students in catch-all subjects that would account for those coordination hours. When questioned about the ethics of doing this, not to mention the educational validity of it, managers argued that all we would be doing was "capturing your effort."

It is situations like this that make TAFE teachers say that TAFE is being run by "bean counters." Bean counters who only understand "numbers in boxes," not educational processes.

> The budget is all important - you know, big stick up there - you have to meet your budget. … me, I couldn't give a shit about these ASCH hours. Why should we have to worry about that? I'm teaching. I'll run my section as I like. … I'm just spending what I need to, and if I find that I need a tutorial class for the students, well then I say, OK, I'll approve it, just put it on the forms. I feel it's bloody educationally necessary. I'm an education person. I make education decisions … I don't give a stuff about counting beans, really. Because that's [ie education is] my prime job. That's why I'm in TAFE.
> *But the bean counters are winning, aren't they?*
> Oh, they're winning because they control your beans (40:23).

Teachers say that they are being asked to make decisions not on an educational basis, not even just on a basis of how much money things will cost, but also on the basis of how much money it might generate for TAFE. They are pushed into running courses based on where the funds are available:

And the funding at the moment is in traineeships. That's where the Commonwealth funding is and that's of course how we're directed. We need the money. Everybody needs the money. Everyone's on the band wagon.

Is it a problem? Educationally?

Yes. It definitely has its downside.

Like?

Rushed training. Yeah. Everything seems to be rushed, these days [laugh] (14:10).

Over and over again in the interviews I conducted, people sighed about the measurement of everything in terms of dollars:

who would imagine [this] area not being expensive to run? We're not overly expensive. They're not saying we're overly expensive. Talking about university, we're very cheap. So it seems a silly comment … it's not tied to any sort of value judgement (9:11).

The funding cuts have been a dramatic turnaround from the 1980s. In his 1987 address to a conference of senior TAFE staff, the then Director-General of the Department of TAFE, Dr Allan Pattison, spoke of how TAFE's effectiveness had gained the confidence of governments, both state and federal, and of how that confidence led to governments' willingness to fund TAFE's growth:

In 1981-82 TAFE accounted for 14.1 per cent of the State's expenditure on education. In the 1986-87 State budget TAFE's share of funds allocated to the Minister for Education had grown to 18.1 per cent. In 1980, Commonwealth grants to TAFE represented 10.8 per cent of total Commonwealth grants for tertiary education. This had grown to 12.1 per cent in 1987, having peaked at 12.9 per cent in 1984 (1987a, pp. 3-4).

In spite of increasing enrolments and teaching hours[54], TAFE has been on a "starvation diet" since then, with "more than $240 m being cut from the Federal VET budget" (Hewett, 2001, p. 26) alone in the four years prior to 2001.

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[54] Kell (2001b, p. 22) quotes a paper by Gerald Burke of the Monash Centre for the Economics of Education and Training which identifies "a national drop in government expenditure per student contact hour between 1997-1999, at a time when total teaching hours have risen by 12%".

The result of the funding cuts from the TAFE staff's point of view is that:

> everything seems to be knee jerk - nothing seems to be planned - like they cut funding - state funding - and they don't cut it by taking it back, they cut it by not giving you any more. … and to run a TAFE course … you've got B4 [equipment and materials budget], you've got to buy things - you've got to pay the electricity, the telephone and all the other things that are going up … salaries are going up, another thing. If you're not getting any more money but you're still paying those bills, then obviously the bottom line is - you don't have enough left for courses [in a stating-the-obvious tone] (17:6).

Some of the teachers commented that they could see that TAFE needed to become less spendthrift, but that things have gone too far:

> I found TAFE very wasteful when I came in , but I know that we have turned that around many, many times. And I think we are running fairly lean. I think we're doing a good job for what we're here for, but I doubt very much that we're able to get on with it. … [T]hey said, hm, TAFE's too expensive, we've got to do something about it. And so moves were made to reduce the costs of TAFE, but they were still asking us to take in more students, so we were [hounded?]. So we had to become more efficient. And I believe the pressure's got to be on before you'll become efficient. But you can only go so far and then you start to lose - you reach a peak of efficiency and then you start to lose efficiency. It might cost less, but your efficiency goes down too, so what you're producing is not worth having (16:16).

In a climate where "quality" is the buzz word, where Institutes, colleges, and staff are expected to compete for quality awards, to become "quality endorsed training organisations", it is precisely that *loss* of quality that disturbs teachers:

> Most of the things that I love have gone. Lawrence said - what did he say about the - he said industry was encroaching on the country and his beloved fields were being taken from him - that's really how I feel. I feel the machine is just ploughing on, the curriculum's changing to suit some farcical economic

rationalist objectives. Everything's being decided by people who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. That's the problem.

What do you think the impetus is for those sorts of changes?

I think saving money, minimising government costs, trying to create this pathetic concept of competition.

Do you think it's real? Is there any reality in it anywhere?

Well, I don't think education's a product. I think education's a process … You can't value dignity - what price do you put on dignity? What price do you put on creative opportunities, and seeing alternatives? (24:10-11).

Part of the problem is that Head Teachers see themselves as educators. TAFE is expecting them to be managers of business units:

See, I'm still an educator, first and foremost. I'm not interested about making money or saving money. Money doesn't concern me. If I can educate a student on a shoestring budget and do it properly, fine. But if it takes me five shoestring budgets to get him to the level that's needed, that's what I'll take (34:16).

Each side is getting frustrated with the other.

TAFE is now a business with a product. Head Teachers are expected to write business plans, are expected to not only maximise the "utilisation of resources", but also to market the product - that is, to become entrepreneurs:

I look at the job - you're running a small business - balance sheets, the works now. Finances, you do all that. The only thing you don't pay is the wages and even then they want you to have control over the wages. They say your overtime bill's up, you can't afford it. You're going to have to look at other avenues to sort that out. Well, if people are crook, you've got to replace them. So that makes it tough from that point of view (31:2).

But even where they bow to the inevitable, or get inspired to move into new areas of fee for service or flexible delivery, their efforts are sometimes met with barriers that they find confusing at best. One of a number of examples was given by a teacher who was quite excited by the prospect of TAFE competing both nationally and

internationally, who sees commercialisation as an imperative and says "I think we've got a great product to sell" (2:9). Their attempt at developing a commercial course came to an abrupt halt:

> There's no doubt that, and I don't see any problem with this, either, that a lot of those [skill area] modules are just purpose built for running commercial courses on weekends and in the holidays and I can't see any problem with that if it's, like, business, companies actually paying their people to come in and running those courses. For some reason, funnily enough, apparently there's been a bit of a kind of like a *stop*. … our Head Teacher actually developed quite a lot of this stuff… but they - she wasn't allowed to actually pursue it further, after having a release [to develop it] all of last Semester. I don't know *what* happened because as I said, I think they're just perfect. And I wouldn't have any problem teaching them either.
> *So who put the kybosh on it?*
> Marketing section, apparently - yeah, weird, isn't it? (2:6).

I was given many examples of efforts to increase section income, even though the teachers may sometimes feel cynical about the educational validity of what they are doing. As one teacher said, who had seen the money being made by private competitors who were doing workplace assessments:

> and I've started doing it as well, getting out and assessing people in the workplace, or they come in and sign up for the Certificate IV in [industry area] or whatever … I say right, enrol in all these modules, what skills have you already got? Oh, I've done this, I've done that, I can put up this, I can do that. And I say right, I'm coming out, and I've got all of the assessment documents with the assessment criteria - tick, tick, tick, tick, tick - you know, a good day's work I come back with 700 ASCH or something. And they're good, because they help balance the 30 or 40 ASCH that take hours and hours of one on one [in flexible delivery] because people may not have the study skills to study flexibly (12:14).

But there are also many people who don't know how to be entrepreneurial, and are not happy about being expected to:

It's hard to have a will to market when you haven't got the training or the inclination. You're so busy with the regular mainstream courses, that - commercial courses are often more trouble than they're worth. … I've got no ideological hang up about the - ah - continued operation of some government department. If it's not doing a worthwhile job, well it shouldn't be there in my view. But I think that TAFE does a worthwhile job, and it's difficult to get adequate funds these days. … So it's very hard to manage [laugh]. … We bust the budget - we can't run on the budget we've been given. And they say, oh well, go and get some commercial courses, you know. Well, when students are paying … a large amount of money to learn [the skill area] … as a potential second career, then it's very difficult to attract students to a commercial course. You've got the [choice] of paying 180 bucks to do a mainstream course, or we can give you a commercial course for 400 bucks - same people, same room … [T]here's no point in accountants getting control of the thing unless it's doing its core business - and TAFE's core business is educating people (21:10, 15).

And there are those who remain defiantly against a plan to turn them from being educators into being small business entrepreneurs:

we're in charge of basically everything. They give us a number of hours and a number of dollars to work with, and then we've got to keep total control over the thing. I don't, because I say if I make a blue, well stuff it, I'm sorry and they can bloody sort it out. That's my logic to it. I never trained to do it, so bugger them (35:7).

That reaction is understandable when looked at from an educational point of view, but frustrates the management who see Head Teachers as managers, first and foremost. But Head Teachers are sometimes faced with what they see as impossible demands:

We've had a 40% reduction over the last 3 years. And 10% was taken away from us at the end of February when I'd spent the allocation for the year. So I got into trouble for that [laugh]. So that makes it extremely hard, because they keep moving the goal posts as well. … I've got a piece of paper today saying that this is the budget allocation given to your section from transfers from

other sections, do you agree they're correct, and if so, you *declare* that they are correct and date it. And I thought, this is like a legal document! Be buggered if I'm signing this until I find out exactly what it is I'm signing (31:2).

Doing more with less - Mark's story

Mark's story illustrates the pressure that section Head Teachers are under, with the increasing emphasis on cutting costs and heavy demands: for detailed reporting on results, to be entrepreneurial, to experiment with new modes of delivery.

The morning I came to interview him, he was in the middle of a tense confrontation with a colleague. His colleague had flared up, accusing Mark of not being sufficiently committed to the section he heads, because he had arrived late, having dealt first with a family matter. Mark is stretched thin, and so are his colleagues. It is a small section, with no clerical help and with heavy responsibilities, including delivering courses off campus. Mark has a professional wife who works full-time, and small children. He says allowances are not made for men with family responsibilities, no matter how much he puts into his work.

He was finding the balancing act almost impossible:

> You're in and out [of the TAFE section] all weekend. And it just - at the end of the day, you try to juggle your own life, with a bit of give and take, and, you know, you witnessed this morning that that blows up in your face. Absolutely blows up in your face. You know, there's no opportunity for people, in a very small team like we experience here … there's no opportunity for people to simply do what they are good at. That's not good enough. … if you're dealing with a two person section, all it takes is for one person to be out of action and, as you witnessed here this morning, the other person feels the load. And it becomes not just an extra load, it becomes breaking point (12:2).

This small section had been battling to get students. While they were still important in the Institute's profile, unlike some of the other trade areas, their student numbers had dropped for various reasons, including a local recession. They had decided to run

courses by flexible delivery, where students would be sent a package of material to work their way through at home, with support from phone contact with the teachers and periodic blocks of face to face teaching. There were no resources available to them - no self paced learning materials, no clerical support, no extra time for development of this new form of delivery. They had to develop (and make multiple copies of) all the packages themselves. They were already running the standard on-campus courses as well as moving into a range of commercial delivery, all of which took a lot of time to organise.

They had not expected the overwhelming response they got to the offer of flexible delivery, and with so few resources, they almost went under. Mark's rueful comment, a couple of years into this process, was that

> it's much easier to deliver face to face. If we had a section where I had a full-time course, delivered face to face, I saw the students - you know, I would be sleeping more than a couple of hours a night. … Flexible delivery's great. It's a pain the arse (12:5).

He finds the increasing pressure to report on his activities a strain. He says, "there didn't seem to be the pressure before" (12:3). But he is now expected not only to ensure full enrolments, but also to continually justify everything he is doing. Even where there are not direct requests for reporting, there is a sense that justification could be demanded at any time. He says that often the only reason the demands are not made is that " management leaves it open because they're in such a rush". But the corporatisation of TAFE has introduced an atmosphere where Head Teachers are constantly mindful of the detailed reporting requirements that dog even the most everyday activities. With resourcing tight, this exacerbates their experience of time constraint and produces a high level of frustration: "You know, you could spend almost an entire week just justifying how [you could?] use the resources for that week!" (12:3).

He speaks in mocking terms of the demands for accountability:

> I was talking to … my equivalent in [another centre] - he is now Head Teacher of something like 240 hours a week. And I said … how do you

manage to - I can't keep track of everything that's going on at 60 and 80 hours a week. He said, I don't. I can't. He said: and then somebody will come to me and say - ah - your part-time teacher, where is she? [laughter] … And he said: I sort of stand up and have a look around and say, I don't know. I don't know where she is. [Switch to hectoring tone:] And why don't you know! We're accountable! You're the manager, why don't you know where she is? I don't know where she is. Her EC says she's supposed to be here, but she could be anywhere. And that's the sort of stuff we're getting (12:23).

And he is frustrated that he can't do anything thoroughly:

Somebody has an idea - they dump it on you. And then they come back a few months later and say well, you didn't do anything about it. Well, I haven't had the fucking time to do anything about it, you know? That's why I haven't done anything! That's why, you know? I haven't got time. I'm not sitting there waiting for someone to have an idea that I can act on. … I think it's a real problem that a lot of Head Teachers face, that the pressure's on. The pressure's on to maximise utilisation of resources, the pressure's on to maximise commercial activity income, to maximise the community's perception of TAFE, positive perception of TAFE … (12:4).

Yet, he says, there are no extra resources allocated for marketing at section level. He tells me of the two weeks of his holidays he spent preparing and sending out brochures for his courses. He laughs about how the volume of work burnt out the letter folding machine. He resents the fact that this level of unpaid work is expected now. But, "when you set reasonably high standards in terms of how you deliver teaching", there is no choice. It is difficult, he says, to be both entrepreneur and educator. "I think that's a real dilemma that a lot of Head Teachers face. I mean you either do one well, or the other one well, or both with a reasonable level of mediocrity [laugh]" (12:4).

The new TAFE demands flexibility and responsiveness to its "customers", yet the way resources are allocated can make this very difficult. Because of his flexible delivery, Mark has trouble as a result of the abrupt funding decisions that are often

made at the beginning of semester, depending on enrolments across the various sections. His campus had better than expected enrolments at the beginning of the semester when I spoke to him, which meant the usual financial leeway, that some advertised courses would not run, was not there.

So, with the college budget fully committed, he was told at the last minute that he could only run those classes that were fully enrolled. But Mark's courses are offered flexibly. Courses are promoted to students as being available all year round, with enrolments taken at any time, as opposed to the traditional once a year or once a semester pattern. He has people "joining up a bit at a time". So he is faced with a demand that he turn away students, which negates the flexibility of his program but is also frustrating because "it's taken you maybe two years to get them there". He begs for some consistency to allow him to plan:

> I argue all the time about - can we have some idea of what our resource allocation is going to be, long term … Fixed so we can work within that constraint. And the answer is of course, well, we don't know what we're getting. You know, the Institute Director was [here] last Tuesday and said well, we don't know what we have … they really don't know what the budget is - and it's like this anticipated budget, but you may have blown it [frustrated laugh] by the time the state budget's handed down! It means you don't know where you're sailing (12:6).

He is beginning to question his ability to manage. He describes the "constant bloody state of emergency" he works in, the constant frantic pressure of things not done. He recognises that it is impossible to manage effectively in such an environment, but also blames himself:

> maybe there are certain management skills that you need to have in order to manage in a state of emergency. And I tell you what, I haven't got them (12:7).

But, Mark says, people are starting to dig their heels in:

> you know, at the end of the day you go home with more to do than you started with. And you know what? It's mostly administrative stuff. It's not about

getting some lesson preparation and stuff, you know? So we've had people here who've said, right - Tuesday is my admin. day, I'm here for 9 hours … What I can't do goes - happens next Tuesday and you can't talk to me between then because I am teaching (12:24).

I ask him where he thinks the administrative overload is coming from. He gives a graphic description of the effects of devolution of responsibility, a managerialist process which often displaces costs onto front line employees[55]. He talks of the work that used to be done by regional administrative staff, then was "pushed down" to the campus level:

and then they start to decentralise down and they start to shrink the admin. workforce in the office as well. It's got to go somewhere. The Head Teacher can do it. [laughing] I've got a great idea - give it to the Head Teacher. We had a head teaching meeting … two weeks ago, and I tell you what, it was almost like - it was almost like revolution. It was like - we are *not* doing any more. This poor person came in from Institute office to talk about "global planning systems" - and it was like, how much more do you want us to do!? (12:24).

In spite of uncertain and dwindling resources, there is an expectation that Head Teachers will plan and budget "globally". In effect, as one interviewee said, each section is run like a small business (31:2). As a result, Mark says, the Head Teacher's workload increases, and the educational role suffers. And it is impossible to pass the administrative workload to campus office staff, who have also suffered from constant restructuring and intensification of work:

the office is stuffed around so much, they'll work to regulation. That's it! Not my job today, I'm sorry. That's it (12:24).

Mark is worried about the future of his industry and is facing a new onslaught of curriculum change with the launch of Training Packages for his industry area. He is cynical about the Packages as an educational tool. He says that they are just "numbers in boxes", and he has concerns about the way that they might be delivered:

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[55] Muetzelfeldt (1995) - see Chapter 3: *Concepts* for a discussion of this process.

> [T]he thing that really bothers me is that you've now got a workplace trainer who hasn't got any credentials at all. Doesn't have any credentials as a trainer and doesn't have any credentials in terms of that industry. And sure, people out there in the industries, in all industries, have got a lot of skills, but sometimes it's really nice to have a credential to really know that what people are doing is perhaps - is close to the mark [laugh] (12:12).

At the time I spoke to him, there was an attempt being made to match the TAFE modules with the Training Packages, but he could foresee that instead of getting funding to run the TAFE Certificates he is currently running, he will be funded to deliver the Training Packages, and that would mean "we will spend more time, even more time, administering people in training. And it means it spreads us even further" (12:13). He doesn't see anything wrong with delivery in the workplace, but is concerned about the quality of the delivery, particularly under the traineeships which are becoming dominant in his industry:

> for TAFE to move more towards workplace assessment, assessing people in the workplace is not training people. It's just going and saying, OK, here [are] the competencies that the ITAB has given us. I have this hat on that says I am a workplace assessor, and I'm coming out here to see if you've met those competencies. That's not training. That's not training at all, it's just ticking the boxes (12:13).

But under funding pressure, Mark has started doing workplace assessments himself, as a way of generating ASCH. He says it makes him feel, "as an educator … more compromised than usual" (12:16).

In the end, Mark is struggling to keep his head above water. He says he tries to work as a professional, with the implied commitment to see the job done no matter at what cost to the teacher as worker. He resents those who refuse to work outside the award, but says, "*They're* going to be the people that survive in TAFE. The people you see at 4.30 - you can set your clock by them. They're gone". He is not so sure that he will survive:

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It's people like us who think seriously about whether you can really survive doing these things for another - you know I have this joke these days - I've got 25 years of this sentence left, you know? How am I going to get there? (12:18).

He feels TAFE is "suffering the whims of the state government." He wonders:
Maybe, maybe [the reason] we're all getting really stressed about this - is because we're not - we really believe that at some stage in the future things will get back to normal? There's no such thing as bloody normal any more. This is normal. And maybe what we're facing, I'm facing, is I don't have the skills to manage this new normal existence. Maybe that's the case (12:20).

Towards the end of the interview, he says, "I said to someone the other day, I wish I was 60 … All this would be over. My life would be over" (12:20). But then he ponders a particularly cynical rumour he heard recently that, "they're trying to get rid of us before we're 55" to save on the superannuation payouts. He tells me that the person who put forward this theory said, "you know what? I'm not going [stubbornly]. I'm not going anywhere. I have worked too hard for my super. And that is his attitude towards TAFE at the moment. And it is rife. It is rife" (12:22).

Casualisation
"TAFE teachers are too expensive" (1:9).

As Head of Studies in a small country campus in the mid 1990s, I was told that the reason we were having trouble managing on the budget we were given was because we had too many full-time permanent teachers. We had around eighty per cent full-time. There were no educational arguments given at the time for reducing our full-time staff numbers, just the need to cut costs.

TAFE has always relied on some part-time teaching staff. This is useful educationally for a range of reasons, including having people working in the industry to maintain currency of knowledge in the teaching section. It also allows for greater flexibility in

course offerings, as there may not be sufficient demand for a specialist skill for a full-time teacher to be employed.

But in the mid to late 1980s, TAFE believed that for reasons of educational soundness, stability, continuity and simply so staff would be available to students, it was important to have a much greater proportion of full-time than part-time staff. At that time (1986-87) TAFE's policy was to increase its full-time permanent teaching staff from around 70% to at least 75%.

Current figures are hard to come by. TAFE is no longer open about its staffing. For instance, the Teachers' Federation has been unable to get precise figures for a number of years, but estimates go as high as seventy per cent for part-time staff. Part-time staff are certainly in the majority[56]. One regional Head Teacher I spoke to voiced a common sense of outrage when he said, "the Department's agenda of more than 50% casualisation, it's just absolutely ridiculous. It is, it's really abominable" (40:17).

Some sections still have a large majority of full-time staff. But these tend to be the sections that are under threat of closure, or at least substantial reduction.

> In this Faculty for example, there's 97% full-time staff and only 3% part-time teachers, and they've told us - put it right on the table, they only want 70% full-time staff, and 30% part-time teachers. And really, I think, judging by the way things are going round here, they're quite happy to scale down the place, and I wouldn't be surprised if in the not too distant future it's privatised. Because they're really trying to get people out the door in the way of voluntary redundancies (31:3-4).

In other cases, there has been an increase in full-time staff because of the closure of sections in other campuses, with full-time staff from the closed campuses being transferred (1:2). Where there has also been a drop in course hours, through budget cuts or a drop in demand, these teachers can have a great deal of difficulty making sure they have a full teaching program. This creates a flow-on effect for the part-time teachers in those sections, who may have been teaching the equivalent of a full-time

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[56] See Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET -the transformation of TAFE.*

load for many years, and suddenly find themselves with a reduced load or even no work.

While many Head Teachers extol the virtues of their part-time staff, they also feel the lack of full-time staff. The "incidental" hours of a full-time staff member help to support the section both administratively and educationally:

> If I went back over the books now, back to 1974, I bet that I had the same number of students as what I've got now. Nothing has really changed. What has changed is that instead of teaching them with predominantly full-time teachers, I'm now teaching them with predominantly part-time teachers. That's a huge change. … and the problem with that is, that whilst the part-time teachers are there to do the actual teaching, they're not there to do the incidental duties associated with it and they're not there to keep the section running (30:10).

And a number of people I spoke to were worried that the trend would be towards total casualisation of sections. With the increasing number of "generic" line managers who often have no educational background in the areas they are responsible for, and with the proposed introduction of "generic" Head Teacher positions, they envisaged a future where:

> You'll have a section manager that's not an educator. He'll have as many part-time teachers in sections as possible. You may have a Head Teacher who's this multidiscipline Head Teacher who is supposed to be responsible for educational delivery across a whole lot of sections and they're administered by somebody else (12:17).

The part-time teacher hourly rate is meant to compensate the teacher for lack of holiday pay, for class preparation time, for lack of sick pay (unless they are teaching substantial numbers of hours) and so on. But with the increased reliance on part-time teachers, increasing administrative and educational demands are being made on them, which the hourly rate cannot compensate for. In many cases, part-time teachers have no dedicated office space, have no access to computers and find it hard to stay in the "information loop." They also must take work where they can find it, so they travel

between campuses, sometimes between Institutes, and are not usually compensated for their travel time.

Part-time teachers are also often expected to do any staff development in their own time. Even their access to staff development is now being squeezed. They have for years been offered a short training course in adult education, initially called Basic Methods of Instruction, now subsumed into VITAL (Vocational Initial Teaching and Learning), a two part course of three days on teaching and two days on workplace assessment. This course has been free for part-time teachers. But in at least one Institute, as from Semester Two 2001, it became like any other TAFE course and new part-time teachers have to pay to do it.

It is not surprising, then, that sections are having increasing trouble finding quality part-time teachers to fill the gaps left by the reduction in full-time teacher numbers. The extreme insecurity of the employment doesn't help. In TAFE currently, sections will often not know until the semester begins whether they can employ their existing part-time teachers.

Funding is not the only problem. When courses were consistently one semester or a year long, part-time teachers were taken on with the expectation of at least six months consistent employment. With the increase in shorter modules, shorter courses and commercial courses, employment can be for nine weeks or less. One Head Teacher who is running commercial courses, and who is keen to do more "so we can earn some money," worries about whether he will be able to find the teachers to teach them:

> the commercial courses aren't as stable for a School to operate. They're not a
> stable *base*, if you like, and so … it sort of fragments the teaching staff,
> because I might lose them. I have good teachers who - for years we've
> developed a really good teaching school. We have the best one in NSW - the
> best team in NSW here. And we have the reputation for it. And I feel that it
> will fragment that, break it up, because those teachers - most of them are part-
> time teachers - if I don't get that course - you're always hanging on a string to
> see if you get enough numbers for the course, or it doesn't run - they'll have to

go elsewhere to earn their living. … And so if I ring up and say, well I've got this class, they say, I'm sorry, I've got a job on, I've quoted for a job and I've got a contract now … and I'm tied up for another two months (26:9).

Some sections in country areas also have trouble filling part-time teacher positions in new skill areas because there are not people with the relevant skills available locally:

The only thing is, the further away you get from the larger centres, people aren't working in those areas, anyway. So if we need to train people so they can get jobs either here or if they go to the city, then we've got to have people with those skills. The only way you're going to get that is getting someone that wants to come in full-time from Sydney or wherever and move here - that's fine, but you're not going to get the people working around here (38:19).

Casualisation - a tale of three part-timers

Keith, Linda and Graham are all part-time teachers. Keith is from an expanding service industry area, Linda teaches in General Education, and Graham is a trade teacher. All three would dearly love to have a full-time position in TAFE, but are giving up hope of ever achieving it - not because their skills aren't in demand but because they can see that TAFE rarely hires full-time teachers now.

Graham teaches on two campuses. One is near his home, the other is over a hundred kilometres away. He also works in his trade area as a contractor. He says the travel is "the nature of being part-time - you know, you've got to put in the effort to still be there" (15:1), that is, to have a chance at further employment. He is in his early thirties and has substantial experience in both large and small industry and has worked in his own business. He moved to the country because he and his wife, who is also a teacher, thought it would be a better life for their small children. Unfortunately, they had trouble making it work financially. They had decided to move back to Sydney, with Graham returning to a "good job" where he had an expense account and a car, when his wife gained a teaching position in a nearby town, so they stayed.

Graham has been trying to put together a consistent income from his own work ever since, but is finding it difficult in a depressed rural economy. He is proud of his skills

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and experience and is not willing to compromise. So he has had difficulty in some local job interviews. He described one interview to me:

> they said to me - if you got no work, if we asked you to dig a hole, would you dig a hole? I said, no bloody way. I'm [a tradesperson], I'm not a labourer. … I'm not going to sit back and say, yes I'll do that, you know? … And fortunately for us, [my wife has] got the full-time job, so I can pick and choose at the moment (15:5).

His industry area is volatile, and he is used to the ups and downs of the business, and of contract employment. But he is concerned at the way TAFE is going as an educational institution. Even when there is a downturn in the industry, he believes,

> TAFE should maintain what they're doing - that is training. That should be a core, that we do train for those that are working in the industry. … Then you've got people that can't get jobs, that still want training and in that scenario, the way I see it, … there should be an opportunity for everyone, every school leaver, every young person … you either work or you get the dole - well, if you want to study, you should be given that opportunity (15:11).

Graham hopes that the part-time hours he is doing in TAFE "might grow - might grow into something better" (15:5). But he knows that what he is currently doing is not sustainable in the long run. He says that he knows of a college where "they ended up with no part-timers, because if you can't supply someone with a steady amount of work, you'll lose them" (15:11).

Linda has been with TAFE for six years, all part-time. She has been teaching "19 to 21 hours a week" for the same section "for the last three or four years", a full-time teaching load. In spite of her experience, she says, "there's always uncertainty at the beginning of each semester - there's the mad part-time scramble." She coordinates a course, as well as doing face to face teaching, and says, "that takes a bit of the pressure off teaching, but the administrative [pause] trivia is pretty overwhelming!" (36:1).

Linda has the option to return to her previous job as a full-time school teacher, and her husband would prefer that financial certainty. But she has two children, and she can work her TAFE program around their needs. She also finds that she has become deeply committed to teaching in TAFE, and would like the chance of a full-time job:

> I thought originally here when I started, yes, I'd really like to stay here and get a full-time job, and I've done lots of things to try and make myself an invaluable teacher, but I think it's - you know, it's not going to be of any use in terms of securing a full-time position, because I don't think there are going to be any (36:5).

Linda does a lot of curriculum and resource development work for TAFE, on contract. She also teaches on commercial courses that the section runs. She has even won an award for her teaching. But she still finds herself in the disturbing position of not knowing whether she will have consistent teaching hours from semester to semester: "we work at the whim, virtually, of whoever the Head Teacher is" (36:3). She sees her own circumstances reflected in those of her students:

> we talk about the flexibility and the transferability of skills. That's become very important. And … what is work and what is the nature of work, and the way work is changing, and I think people are very much - many of the younger students are very much aware and understand that many of them never will work in perhaps a permanent position, or a permanent full-time position … Some of them seemed to be very accepting. Some of them it worries them, obviously, about what the future's going to be like without any full-time employment. I mean, I always sympathise with them! [laughing - referring to her own situation] (36:6,7).

She says she feels "variable" about her situation in TAFE:

> at times like this when I'm very busy, and I do enjoy it - I mean, TAFE's done - I've been able to do things I never thought I'd ever, really, ever do. And I guess it's because people like [a Head Teacher] - they've encouraged me to do things, whereas when I was teaching in high schools, they were really big, busy places and nobody ever really takes much of an interest in you. It just seems to have really suited me (36:8).

She related stories to me of how wonderful it is to see adult students getting a second chance at education and succeeding. But she is finding the job increasingly pressured, with an excessive administrative workload and major changes to curriculum. She too is worried about the changes happening to TAFE. She has tried putting gentle pressure on the management for a full-time position, but has been told they can't do anything about it: "he always says, look, if I could get you a full-time job I would" (36:18).

She feels vulnerable, and believes that makes people in her position too weak to fight back. She recounted a story of successfully taking her employer to the Bureau of Industrial Relations when she was 17, because they were not paying her the right penalty rates. But she says now the balance of power has swung to the employer "and I don't think it will ever swing back again. Not while you have people in this position, which is the position that we're in" (36:19).

Keith has been with TAFE for "approximately nine years." He laughs that he'll "be getting long service leave soon!" (18:1). He teaches a regular 12 hours a week face to face, but coordinates a number of programs for another eight hours and also teaches on commercial courses. He is the only teacher in his section and is responsible for the course marketing and student selection as well as most of the administrative work. He and his wife also run a small business, and he is doing a part-time degree in further education and training. He says "it's a case of putting as many irons into the fire [as possible] and then pulling out ones that are exhausting us most of all" (18:1).

Given the demand for courses in his section, I asked him if he thought that eventually TAFE would *have* to make the position full-time. He said:

> To be honest with you, I don't see a full-time position becoming available here. I mean, I'd *like* the thought of it becoming available, but unless I can develop it further and further and further, and the only way I see us being able to do that is through TAFE Plus [commercial] courses, which are always very iffy. They come and they go. With the way economic rationalisation - and cut backs etc etc etc, no I can't see it (18:2).

He says there is increasing demand, not just from the local population, but from the local industry as well. But he has no faith in TAFE planning:

> the way that I see that TAFE operates is everyone is running around fighting bushfires and dealing with the change, and dealing with the bureaucrats, that there's no real coal face development. That's the impression I get (18:2).

He says that he works about six and half hours for every four hour lesson, but that he does it because he enjoys it. He is interested in, and excited by, adult education, and his study is contributing to that.

His study has also made him wary of the argument that justifies a high proportion of part-time teachers in TAFE on the grounds of industry currency. When we talked about the pros and cons of workplace assessment, he said,

> I think a problem with TAFE is the fact that 50% of teachers are part-time and they've got that industry experience. But from what I've seen from my own experience, it really doesn't have any quality management, because these teachers are taken in and they're given a syllabus and they don't really understand learning objectives, they don't really understand assessing. They don't really understand adult learning and they're put there - and I've seen it, and I've done it myself and it horrifies me to see what's going on and to think what I've done myself. And I think it's terrible. So although the industry says you've got to have up to date industry experience, well, I think the learning strategies and the educational side is more important (18:4).

He says that his attrition rates have improved substantially since he has applied his study to his teaching practice, from "about …25, 30% to zero" (18:12).

Like Linda, he sees his own situation reflected in his students' future. His is a highly casualised, insecure industry:

> Hopefully - I think what will happen is the people who are committed, there'll always be a job for them. So we're moving at this stage from a place where you've got job security - you go into one company for life - what must happen is people must develop their employability more, which comes to the aspects of lifelong learning, which is what I'm doing at the moment, so you've got to

continually update your skills, update your qualifications, show that you're committed to your line of work. Because if you don't, you become the cannon fodder which is what the mainstream of [his industry] is, I think. So you've really got to become committed, and keep that cutting edge, so that even at the age of whether it's 45, 50 or 55, you've still got to show you've got that commitment (18:7).

For all this, he remains firmly committed to TAFE: "For all its inadequacies I certainly believe in TAFE. I think the facilities that it's got and the resources that it's got are second to none … and so I think it offers the best. Certainly better than any private providers, or ACE[57] can provide" (18:11). But in the end,

I don't get the *opportunity* to put enough into the job because with my conditions of employment, I'm on a day to day basis. Any day they could say to me, that's it, honey boy, you know? You've got nothing else. So as far as that - I do feel that everything that I put in is tentative. … It's not put in for the good of the institution, and in that way I think conditions of employment suck, really. Because I don't have any sense of security. And I think if I *did* have a sense of security, it would give me an opportunity to give up other things that I'm doing to maintain, you know, the security that I need to pay my way (18:12).

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[57] Adult and Community Education

III The teachers' work and working conditions

Chapter 7: Educational issues in the changes

The teachers in my study were critical of the way the changes to vocational education and training have impeded their ability to perform as educators. They saw the purpose of TAFE as being to deliver a broad based vocational education that would enable their students to not only perform competently in the work place, but also to develop as learners within a post compulsory education system[58]. It is their faith in education as a social good that contributes to their commitment to their working lives as teachers, as much as it is their passion for the subject area in which they teach.

The trade teachers expressed disquiet about what they saw as a trend towards deskilling in their industry trade areas - a loss of specialised craft skills that they believe are irreplaceable. Their concerns included aspects of deskilling that Ainley (1993) comments on, including limited ability to deal with uncertainty (p. 22) and reduced labour mobility (p. 11).

As Connell (1985) notes in discussing "manual arts" subjects in schools, such areas of study do not lack intellectual content: "Where the academic curriculum strongly separates mental from manual labour, the learning of principles from an application of skills, this kind of curriculum unifies them" (p. 94). The teachers I spoke to were concerned to retain that intellectual content.

Brain surgery without any knowledge[59]

> … with the Training Packages, because the competencies are established, there's an assumption that the Training Package only needs to link to the competencies, rather than giving a broader base of understanding, theoretically and perceptually and philosophically about why we do things, and I think that's certainly quite strongly demonstrated in shifts in our courses in TAFE. I think they're much less theoretical and much more competency

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[58] These concerns were echoed by TAFE teachers interviewed in a recent study undertaken by Chappell and Johnston (2003) for ANTA.
[59] 8:10

based and I think there's some significant disadvantages to that. And I guess the students just have to hope they're lucky and are taught by someone with a broader perspective (43:8).

A primary focus of responses in the interviews was a deep seated disquiet about what is happening to vocational education and the teachers' work as educators. The moves to competency based training, to modularisation, and to a system of "user choice" which gives employers far more power to choose what their employees are to learn in their TAFE courses, have combined to put pressure on the structure and content of learning.

Policy decisions at the national level reified "flexibility," and denigrated "lock step," "time based" educational delivery in favour of a kind of "just in time" training. The result, according to many of the teachers I spoke to, is the loss of a more broadly based education which emphasised the knowledge that underlies the skills that the students were learning to apply:

> … we've always gone pretty much down the path with our stuff of having pretty good underpinning knowledge and skills… last week, all of this in one area was thrown out and ANTA just simply said "this is not what we want … we just simply want to see outcomes, that is, practical outcomes, where someone demonstrates the use of something, because we consider all of this is inflexible and doesn't allow transferable people". Now, that is totally alien to having a broad base of underpinning knowledge and skills, because you go down this narrow training path, you continue to have to retrain and retrain (8:9).

And the narrow training path can mean assessing someone's competency on the basis of whether they can do a narrowly defined task: "yes, he did hit the right button on the PC" (8:9). But in work of even limited complexity, hitting the right button on the computer requires a broader knowledge of the process than is required in much competency based training.

Others refer to the new style as "monkey see, monkey do", or use terms like "holistic" to get across what they feel is being lost when the educative process is broken down into achieving "competencies."

> … the courses themselves have become a joke. They really have … they broke them down to competency based curricula, and for an art process that immediately eliminates excellence, and I think [pause] that's why the National Art School separated from the TAFE system, was a belief in the fact that if you fragmented everything, and broke it down into small components, you lost sight of the creative process and the overall end point (39:3).

Another teacher reflected sadly on how this diminishes the role of a teacher:

> …there's competencies now and all the person has to do is achieve those competencies from the national criteria. Whereas before we used to be educators, we used to teach them the whole lot (42:6).

Some are also concerned that curriculum has moved from a structured course syllabus to a "massive great patchwork quilt" (8:12) of modules from which students (or their employers) choose. This, these teachers say, attacks a process of building knowledge, and depth and understanding are lost. As one said, "TAFE to some extent is still in a lock stepped system and I know we get a lot of criticism for it. But a lot of what we deliver, it's very difficult. And education is lock step - you don't do integral calculus in kindergarten! [laugh]" (8:12).

Some of the teachers I spoke to could see the advantages of teaching the students just what they needed to know for their work:

> I think what we've got now is a huge improvement on when I started. Because when I started in 1972, there was … virtually, … a statement that said, at the end of three years, these apprentices will have learned how to do three or four different things. Now, nobody said how well they had to do it, or how - it was all very - airy fairy statement. Nobody ever really questioned whether or not that was really what they wanted to know in order to survive in their place of employment. Whereas nowadays, with the modular system that we've got and the competency based training that we've got, at least there's some possibility

that the skills that we're teaching them are the skills that they need. And there is some degree of quality assurance. Now that's a huge change that I've seen. I could honestly say that there was a big percentage of what I taught in the 70s was not relevant. Whereas in the 90s, that percentage probably is zero or very, very small. … It's giving people what they need, not what you think they need (30:9).

But most remain at best ambivalent:

I see advantages and disadvantages. I see advantages in [that] … a person can come in and pick up the modules that they need in order to make them [pause, seeking the right word] comfortable in a particular situation, and I think that's a good thing. I think our same time, same place next week attitude has slightly changed. [But] it presents all sorts of [class] programming problems, and being a mechanic I have a real problem with it, because I see education as a natural progression and because I'm not very smart myself, I see that in order to get to B, you need to walk the road. And the only way you get there is the same way you eat an elephant - one piece at a time (20:17).

The problem is that "education isn't just learning how to dot an i and cross a t, there's a lot more stuff underneath" (28:13).

What is a particular concern in some of the trade areas is that the building of knowledge about the properties of materials that workers must handle in their work is not allowed for in the new curriculum as it was in the past.

You still need those basic underpinning knowledges of [the material]... [a local company] said they can get people in, they've got great computer skills, but they don't know anything about [the material]. And you can design this intricate cutout on the CAD[60] machine, but it's impractical for the machine to do it. The computer says yeah I can do it, but a [trade area] person knows that you can't do it because the offcut can't be supported, it'll break. It'll do all sorts of funny things. It'll [unclear word] in that corner. A person with [the material] experience knows that. If you walk down and ask him on the bench,

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[60] Computer Aided Drafting

can this do that? He'll say, no, it'll break. But you go up to a programmer and he'll say, I can do it (6:11).

And far from the competencies being transferable, the teachers are concerned that the skills training is becoming so narrow, that employees become trapped with one employer:

> … the employers like it because that means they're trained specifically to do what they want them to do, and then that means they've got them. They [students] can't move on because they haven't got enough general education or general vocational education to be able to move on (42:6-7).

The teachers I spoke to largely recognised that the neo-liberal argument of historical necessity that links education in a tight nexus with a particular view of economic imperative is flawed from an educator's perspective[61]. Many of the teachers have had previous experience of commercial training environments, and they draw a distinction between "education" and "training"[62]. They are concerned that TAFE is trying to turn itself into a training organisation, when its primary purpose should be educational. Most of the teachers don't object to TAFE delivering commercial training, but they believe it is only an adjunct to TAFE's main purpose:

> You've certainly got to be more flexible. TAFE itself has gone about marketing itself and attempting to get into the training market all wrong and now wants to clutch at anything. … I don't believe that you can simply attempt to run training within an educational environment. I do believe that they are - they're two separate things (8:17).

So, this teacher argued, while "training" may be appropriate to suit the needs of a specific job in a specific enterprise, where all that is wanted is a "very quick data dump" at as competitive a cost as possible, that is "not what broad based underpinning knowledge and skills education is". He also argued that it is not simply a matter of taking a *teacher* and attempting "to turn him into some entrepreneurial trainer":

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[61] See Chapter 3: *Concepts*; also Apple (1995, p. xvi and throughout)
[62] While this distinction might be debatable, it was used by many of the teachers I interviewed as a kind of shorthand for the emphasis given to narrow, enterprise specific delivery as opposed to a broader vocational education.

You've now entered the training environment, maybe you turn up in a suit and tie, you know, you've got the bells and whistles, you know, the laser pointers, you've got all this nuts and boltsy stuff - none of which is part of your classic education process (laughing) (8:17).

Further, he said, TAFE's managers are too eager to promise what they cannot deliver - they also do not necessarily have the skills suited to a commercial environment:

[T]hey figure that we can do everything. If you go to a training organisation, they firmly know straightaway what they can, and what they can't do. We say, oh, gee, look I'll get back to you and then there's an enormous push for us to do things that we really aren't exactly in, or equipped to do (8:18).

Where do you stop the deskilling? Where's the pride in saying, I'm a door fixer?[63]

Apart from the narrowing of curriculum to meet enterprise specific training needs, another area of considerable disquiet for the teachers was that the "industry" that is driving the changes is not the broader based industry they are used to consulting with. Local, small businesses are more likely to need people with a broad range of skills, rather than narrow, task specific skills. The teachers are concerned that what is happening in VET is leading to deskilling. Further, they are concerned that the educational voice has been lost in the formation of the agenda:

… the Australian National Training Authority are the people that are controlling the structure and conditioning it, and when you think that 80% of Australian small business is four or less people, there's no representation for small business on ANTA, so they're not really asking at the interface what sort of skills people need. There's no educationalist on that Board … (18:10).

As outlined in Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE*, the impetus for changes in TAFE's curriculum and delivery came partly out of award restructuring and the push for vocational education and training to become "industry driven".

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[63] 20:20

When the ANTA Board was established in 1994[64] there was a clear decision to make the Board industry-based. However, although calls to have an educational perspective on the Board have resulted in the appointment of representatives from two state training authorities, there is, as the Report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training in July 1998 points out, still no provider or student representation (Australia. Parliament. House of Representatives Standing Committee, 1998, p. 12). Recently, TAFE Directors Australia have become increasingly vocal in their demand for representation on the Board.[65]

ANTA not only advises the combined state and federal Ministers responsible for vocational education, it also holds the purse strings (or "the whistle and the dollar bag"[66] as one teacher said). This has allowed it to set the agenda, not just in terms of policy, but even as far as the curriculum delivered in the classroom.

Many of the teachers, who often have maintained very strong links with their industry, question whether the "industry" that is driving the national vocational education and training agenda through ANTA is the industry that is employing, or likely to employ, their students[67]:

> people come up and thump their fists on the table and say, but industry wants this - *what* is industry? What the hell is industry? And nobody seems to quote statistics as far as what does *industry* want from the people in our courses. Nobody's gone out there and done a survey. Nobody's done an extensive study on it. We're only assuming, by one representative of a *large* manufacturing company, like BHP, where we get all our stuff from, but, oh! that's gospel, we all bow down to the BHP policy. And we know that the people we put through our course and eventually get work are employed by small businesses - you know, one or two people, even, and we're making decisions on behalf of the 90% of small businesses in Australia. We're saying this is what they want, but who knows? (28:11).

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[64] 1994 is the date it became operational. The decision to set it up was made in 1992.
[65] TAFE Directors Australia 2001 Position Statement: *Skilling Australians for the future - the role of TAFE in an innovative Australia* (p 2 of 11 < www.tda.edu.au>)
[66] 8:9
[67] See also Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE.*

A number of teachers (and one manager) told me of instances where employers, supposedly the driving force behind the changes, were either ignorant of, or not at all interested in, the changes being implemented in vocational education.

> … we know that BVET is undertaking a survey at the moment with employers as to what they plan to do next year, do they still plan to go to TAFE for training, or are they going to go elsewhere. And a lot of employers are apparently saying "What? What changes? What's this user choice? I've never heard anything about it. What's it got to do with me?" (1:11).

These concerns are echoed across the industry areas represented in TAFE, and the teachers are sometimes cynical about the politicisation of the decisions being made about curriculum:

> the bodies that allegedly represent industry don't - it's some lobbyist who's managed to get into that environment and they're pushing a particular agenda, and not in the interest of the industry. So it's not always - there aren't always sensible decisions made by industry bodies. They often lobby the wrong things (21:14).

The lobbying, they see, is directed at meeting sectional industry interests, not the interests of vocational education in general. And the concern of the individual employer is not necessarily in the best interests of either the national skills base or the individual student/employee[68]. The result, many of them see, is deskilling in their industry areas:

> I really don't know who designed the modules, or where it's come from. When we asked, we were told it's what industry needs. Industry wants to pay the minimum dollar for the maximum benefits and that is never going to change. And as far as the term multiskilling - they've almost got it right. It's *down*skilling (34:9).

If an employee wants to develop skills beyond those of immediate use to his or her employer, then "let him go off and do some more study and then start to build up his

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[68] It is interesting that, in spite of the national reform agenda's push for "industry driven" national curricula, The Australian Industry Group complained in 1999 that the national approach is not meeting specific industry needs (Chappell & Johnston, 2003, p. 10).

bricks into a wall" (20:19). The teachers' concern is exacerbated by what they see happening with the traineeships and "New Apprenticeships" that the Federal government is promoting. And some teachers link it with the increasingly contingent nature of the workforce:

> … we might train people up to be just carpentry hands and just doing wall frames and roof frames and if they only know that and that's all they're being trained in, like these trainees only being trained in some specific area, they don't have the whole picture (11:19).

If the trainee then wants a broader based education in the trade, there is no provision for that and they must find the time and money to do it for themselves.

> So their job … starts and finishes there. They can't adapt to the other work, you see. And so I think this is what's happening with a lot of the workforce. It's been too - specialising too much. … Well if you only learn part of an industry, you've got to be a specialist in that area, don't you? I mean that's all you know. I mean, how can you go across to another area and say, well, I can do that, if you've only just learnt this (11:19).

But in the current climate, the teachers have no choice:

> … the funding at the moment is in traineeships. That's where the Commonwealth funding is and that's of course how we're directed. We need the money. Everybody needs the money. Everyone's on the band wagon (14:10).

For the teachers, such an approach diminishes the knowledge base that they are dedicated to building in their industry or trade areas: "that was one of the beauties of TAFE when I was there [as an apprentice]. The company that I worked for did a certain type of work. Now, if they only trained me for the work they want[ed] me to do, that's all I'd ever be able to do" (19:6).

The teachers see signs of a narrowed skills base that curtails the individual employee's pride in their own abilities, and also puts Australian industry at risk. They compare what is happening in Australia with their knowledge of what has happened

in other countries. They say that European countries tried going down this path in the 1970s and 80s and abandoned it (42:6). They speak with pride of how truly multiskilled Australian colleagues were snapped up in the past by American industry because "they could fix a whole range of machines, if they were any good. They paid them a small fortune and wept tears of blood when they left, because they had the ability to be versatile …" (20:10).

It's not going to work[69]…

To add to the frustration, the teachers see what they regard as absurdly misguided decisions being made in the rush to please industry, coupled with what Connell (1997a) calls the "panic factor" - the demand to be internationally competitive. An example was given to me by a ceramics teacher. Ceramics in TAFE has always been a creative course much in demand by people who want to learn to create craft pieces. With the push to make TAFE curriculum "industry driven", the curriculum in ceramics had to be responsive to "employer needs" - so,

> they started off going to Fowlers and all the - basins and toilet manufacturers, and they found that we didn't have an industry in Australia. … they started off industrial design and applications, and they wrote curriculum for industrial modules, and then they - when you write that, you sort of create the need for facilities in the college. And they couldn't do it. So it meant that … their industrial portfolio collapsed because they could only afford a couple of colleges to have the facilities… (39:6).

The teacher knew the industry area - even beyond the small business level of the artists and craftspeople catered for in the courses TAFE offered. I was given a cogent description of the industrial and competitive climate of ceramics manufacturing on a global scale. Apart from a struggling Tasmanian industry "trying to stamp out porcelain plates that had a bit of an art edge to them" there was little likelihood that Australia would develop a significant ceramics industry that could compete with "the Asian market" (39:6). So the new industry driven TAFE was trying to develop curriculum for a "section of industry [that] is a fallacy".

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[69] 39:5

[What we are training for is] the art industry - the craft market. And … to justify it because then you had to have a trade course to justify it, they then found - they were very awkward about the word "art", because it never fitted into a conventional concept of trade, and they were very awkward about income, because there are very few artists who can declare themselves an artist, or do declare themselves an artist on their tax, … employment opportunities are not particularly visible … we have Caroma and we have Fowler, and that's all we've got. We don't have a tableware industry and we don't have fine porcelain or anything like that. The only thing that runs, and it has done for a long time is small cooperatives, small group workshops (39:6, 8).

The teachers see curriculum being developed that is not where the local demand for TAFE courses is.

What we are doing is dictated predominantly by the ESCs[70]. The ESCs are being manipulated, well, our particular ESC I believe is being manipulated in terms of what is *perceived* to be the need, by people who purport to represent the industry. I don't believe that it is truly representative of the industry. It's truly representative of … a minority who happen to be the larger companies (20:15).

That statement illustrates the acuteness of the understanding the teachers have of the political nature of curriculum[71], an understanding that has been heightened as the neo-liberal agenda has tightened its grip on TAFE course delivery.

They are also sometimes quite scathing about the fact that national curriculum development is tendered out, a further aspect of the commodification of education. Previously in TAFE NSW, curriculum was developed in TAFE by teachers on release from their teaching duties. So curriculum is often developed in other states and it may or may not be relevant to local needs.

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[70] Educational Services Consortia, the name at the time for the TAFE Training Divisions, later Educational Services Divisions
[71] See, amongst others, Apple (1995); Connell (1997a); Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett (1982); Ginsburg (Ed.) (1995).

…most of the manufacturing is being done in Victoria, so when you start to look at the national system, funny how most of the people who are on the ITABs and the VETABs and the blib blabs all happen to be Victorians, or the majority happen to be Victorians, and so they then say, well this is what the industry says - well, did you speak to this company, that company, that company? Oh, no. Well, who did you speak to? Oh, well it came from Melbourne. What the stuff has that got to do with New South Wales? (20:15-16).

While it may be argued that it is legitimate to have national curriculum developed in the heart of manufacturing, other examples given to me suggest that successful tenders may not always be based on relevance or sound educational experience. One teacher gave me a graphic and sarcastic description of curriculum development in his industry area:

[A]s regards what could voc. ed. be, then it should be better at doing the things it does. It should be better at mapping curriculum based on needs. It should be better at doing that. Instead of a group of people sitting around somewhere saying they need a bit of this and they need a bit of that, we should have mapping processes that map what people need and the size of the market. And we should develop that into the sort of educational resource documents that occur in the best courses, but not often enough. Too often the syllabus just emerges from somewhere. I mean the quality management syllabuses were written in places like Launceston in Tasmania, Katherine in the Northern Territory, Mackay in North Queensland - I mean these are *hubs* of manufacturing industry, you know. You've got to believe it - there's a lot of manufacturing industry in Katherine! And that's seriously where they were written. On what basis? A group of people sit - maybe one person sits down - got the contract, right, they lock the office door, and two days later they come out with a syllabus. That's not what voc. ed. should be. It should be getting out *there* and mapping. And I know there's bits and pieces - talk about workplace assessment and workplace skills and all that sort of stuff. But it's got to be flexible as well. It's got to be capable of being painted on a small canvas. At the moment, the [group?] flexibility we've got, the workplace skills and so on

are all nation wide and the national module - the national scheme - solved a problem we didn't have. The problem was the transportability of skills. Now, in all my years in voc. ed., I don't know anyone who's been hugely discomfited because they've got a Victorian qualification and they migrated to New South Wales. I mean that was solving a problem we didn't have. And you construct a whole heap of problems we now *do* have that we didn't have before. And it just defies common sense (32:12).

As noted before, many of the TAFE teachers have extensive knowledge of their industry and impressive networks. Because of that knowledge, they were often aware of how effective or otherwise industry consultation in curriculum development is. The problem, a number of them said, is that not only is the consultation specific to particular sections of the industry, but that many employers simply did not have time to be closely involved with consultative processes leading to curriculum development.

> Now, I'm going back to late 80s, early 90s, the problem that I saw was that in the majority of instances, the people that the ESC, sorry, the Industry Training Division were holding meetings with was what was then the Chamber of Commerce, [well known name in the industry] etc - I've got nothing against [industry person name], so don't get me wrong, but they had their own axe to grind. They had their own training [provision]. And they then spoke to a large part of the industry and then they formulate[d] *their* ideas and they came back and they were very heavily involved with what was happening with the Industry Training Division in terms of advising, etc as the Industry Training Advisory Board, the ITAB, or as a representative on that. Now, to my knowledge, there were at least 35 to 50% of the people that I knew personally, who were in charge of fairly large companies, who were never, ever, ever contacted. Of the remaining 50%, at least 50% of those didn't know what was going on. Of that 50% which breaks down to the last 25%, about 10% got involved. Because they had time to. But the *real* people, they didn't have time. They were too busy doing (20:18).

Where teachers were given the opportunity to review curriculum before implementation, their opinions were not necessarily given any weight. One teacher described to me a curriculum development process that "claimed they were meeting industry requirements" (39:5). But the teachers, who were in touch with their local industry representatives, could not see that was the case. Still, the teachers participated in the curriculum review panel. There were more than twenty of them at one meeting, and they argued that the curriculum as proposed would not work - the allocated hours were inappropriate, there was a need for more practical work. They asked that the process be delayed to allow the teachers to work more closely on the curriculum in their holidays.

> So, we left, and at the end of the holidays we got a letter and it said, thank you very much for your participation in this curriculum review panel, we have made a few adjustments according to your recommendations and it will be coming on line at the end of the year (39:5).

Survive, fellas, and do as best you can[72]

As vocational education has been overhauled to meet the various political imperatives, the changes at classroom level have been constant.

> … well, since I've come here, I've very seldom taught the one thing twice, so I haven't settled into any pattern that I can actually say, well this is different to that. It's all been go, go go - being ramped up into new stuff … the curriculum has changed every year. … I actually was very stressed earlier on, because I thought I'd type up all my lesson plans … and put them on disk and then - wow - I could print them out and I'd look organised and then 6 months later the curriculum changed and we had to throw that in the bin and then, ah - it doesn't matter. It can't change again. It's changed four times (7:11; he had been with TAFE for five years at the time of interview).

Teachers referred to the "rush" to develop and implement new curriculum and the frustration of being expected to implement poorly developed courses. One told me of his experience with a curriculum which, although not finished, was to be

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[72] 6:7

implemented in New South Wales in the new year, "dished up to students, as it is, with its warts and all" (6:21). It had already been implemented in Victoria.

> It's a national curriculum, hasn't been accredited in New South Wales yet. This is only four years after the other one. … And it's got problems, … We *know* there's problems there. We know there are going to be problems. And that's what really gets up our noses (6:21).

Both content and delivery methods have changed, and there have not been concomitant resources committed to support classroom teachers in implementing the changes.

> … they're introducing flexible delivery. We are in the process of writing notes for it now. I've got to write a lot of stuff today. That will take us quite a while. We wrote modules before. We were on contract to write modules, and after we got them all written and we were in the process of teaching them, they cut it all out. That was all abandoned and we've suddenly got a course that was written in Victoria … and they said this is your new course, you've got to teach that, and we have to rewrite all the notes. There's only three of us. We're not given any extra time to do it. We're not on contract or anything like that, so we have to write it in work time - your preparation time. So we're pretty busy (29:9-10).

Even those teachers who agree with the direction of the changes point out the lack of support for teachers who had been used to a very different way of delivering courses:

> They had a hard time implementing a competency based training system when they were used to the old lock step. And they had a lot of problems, which they solved with very little help from TAFE … there's not much support for teachers … it's you know, survive, fellas and do as best you can. They had a hard time (6:7).

To add to their stress, teachers are finding that the skills areas they are expected to teach have changed substantially, and they are not given sufficient training in the new areas. Instead they are expected to find time to develop the skills themselves. This is particularly the case in areas where new technology has had an impact. Many of the

teachers had limited computer skills, yet they were expected to implement curriculum based on computer skills. One trade teacher who had returned to his section after some time doing project work, commented, "The course has completely changed. We have computer studies in the course now, we have communication, business awareness - subjects we didn't have before. And I've had to pick up those threads" (6:6). Another said, "One of my colleagues was suggesting just this morning, for example, we should be running something on Internet - html - teach them to set up a home page for themselves. That's quite different to teaching people how to run a lathe or a press" (32:8).

Oh, it's a political agenda[73]

> … the national framework and all that stuff. I mean what it's taken away - it's taken away flexibility. We can't get short courses up the way we could before. … You'd have to go around and campaign ceaselessly amongst the various industry and political groups - it'd take you years (32:11).

Many of the teachers see the changes as irrational and fickle but many also recognise the political nature of the changes, which adds to their frustration and sense of helplessness:

> … it's this rush to - it's all these policies - all these committees that have been put in place, like Carmichael and Finn and the Deveson Report - and it's a rush to put something in place without any real input (18:10).

One, who felt that his teaching area had so far escaped being "so caught up in this roller coaster" put it down to the fact that, "We get our students off the street, not apprentices, not trainees. They're just students. … And I think partly because our curriculum person is still around. Highly committed to the industry and the course. Not a political animal who will follow all the latest fads" (18:10).

In spite of the rhetoric of "user choice" in vocational education, as Connell (2001/02) points out, the commodification of education leads to a *reduction* of choice and a convergence on normative practice. TAFE Institutes spend large amounts of money

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[73] 32:10

marketing their supposed difference, touting the winning of "quality awards" and publishing glossy brochures and newsletters for industry. The language of TAFE has become the language of business texts, not the language of education, and a number of the teachers I interviewed exhibited interesting attempts to come to grips with the change. One example which struck me at the time was the teacher who referred to "the person" and corrected himself to "the product we're turning out" (6:11). The recently released "Schofield Report" (NSW TAFE Commission Review Committee, 2001) indicates how powerful this shift has been, the Committee being asked to review *product* research and development and its report referring to "product roll-out"[74]. Break-out boxes throughout the text quote sources that include the founder of Visa Card extolling the virtues of change (p. 11), speak of "consumer-driven learning" (p. 12), a "just-in-time learning system" (p. 16), or adding value (p. 17 and elsewhere)[75]. At the same time, the main recommendations of the report support the perceptions of the teachers that I interviewed.

Most of the teachers I spoke to bemoaned the *loss* of quality and the *loss* of difference. As noted above, they have been told they must deliver national modules, whether they are appropriate to local needs or not. I believe it is more than resistance to loss of control over curriculum that motivates these criticisms. Rather, it appears to be a deep seated frustration that the curriculum that they are being forced to deliver, driven by a national political agenda, does not always work for their students, or for that matter, for the employers of their students.

Numerous examples were given to me of courses that were too short, too long, too rigid.

> We went from 212 to 874 hours. … Now, I don't know. Why is it that we haven't had more than three people look at the course. Why is it that people come in and say, I need to know this. I have a burning ambition to know about [an aspect of the trade area], or I have an absolute necessity where I need to know about [the trade area], and you show them the … Certificate and they say - shit, I'm not going to do that. That's 800 hours! Yeah well, what we'll do is we'll take this module and this module and this module. What do I get at the

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[74] Recommendation 3; p 63
[75] For further discussion of the Schofield Report, see Chapter 3: *Concepts*

end of it? You get a statement - a print out - a computer print out that says you've completed these modules out of this course. And they say - and? That's it. That's all you get. But I do twelve months and I do 6 hours a week, and all I get is that? No, that's not all you get, that's the bonus. What do you mean that's the bonus? What you really get out of it is the technical information that you need (20:18).

Or, as he said earlier in the interview,

… somebody in their wisdom decided that a mechanic was a mechanic was a mechanic, and so he put in all these generic thingos, and if you have a look at the engineering modules, there are something like 216 engineering modules that they can choose from in order to do it. Well, that's marvellous, that's wonderful except that it's not aligned with the thinking of the person that wants to be the mechanic (20:10).

In the end, his teaching section developed a "de facto" course, in order to meet the needs of "industry on one side" and "our clients - the public - on the other side" (20:19).

So how many people out there on the job just tick the boxes?[76]
Another aspect of the changes to vocational education that worries the teachers is the move to "curriculum free assessment," an attempt to give employees a chance to have their existing skills recognised without having to undergo a period of training time. "Recognition of prior learning" has been written into TAFE syllabus documentation, and most teachers don't have a problem with it where students can adequately demonstrate that their skills and experience fit them for credit in a particular educational area.

However, many of the teachers I spoke to were very concerned about the push to "workplace assessment" which has become part of the vocational education agenda, and on which the Training Package concept is based.

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[76] 44:10

I think the positive things will be that people will actually be working and training in the workplace and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. But I think there are some problems associated with delivery in the workplace. And I'm really concerned about that. … with a traineeship, for example, I think there's a tendency for employers just to tick them off - tick the boxes and say these people have done this stuff (12:13-14).

Partly, their concern is that there is a perceived lack of quality in educational delivery in the workplace by private training providers, and that the competition will force TAFE to reduce its standards as well:

… the way the Training Packages are supposed to work is that if you have an employee, or you're an employer and you want someone to do some Training Packages, you contact the ITAB, they send you the packages. They send you a list of workplace assessors. You contact the workplace assessor - dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. So we may get some competition there. But we have competition in terms of workplace assessment now. I believe that [private college] has a person full-time on the road doing workplace assessment. That is, they're out hunting ASCH. Would you like a credential? If you'd like a credential, sign up for this course - tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. Ok, I want you to do this, this, this and this and now you've got a Certificate IV in [subject area]. And we're starting to play the game, too (12:16).

The teachers' concerns were essentially twofold: that the workplace training and assessment process would not reflect what they regard as quality education and that industry, particularly smaller businesses, would neither be interested in, nor capable of, doing the assessing.

…. you also find that a lot of employers are not very happy - are not very comfortable with training, documenting the training - on the job training for these people, because (a) they're not competent, (b) they … [don't] want the responsibility … I think [Commonwealth Education Minister] Kemp's off his marbles if he thinks it's going to work. Because it's just not going to work (40:11).

The Training Packages and work based delivery are another nail in the coffin of broad based education, too, because training on the job means that the student only learns what is done in that particular workplace, on that particular machinery or in that particular way. While this would seem to suit employers, as one teacher said:

> … they're changing. Initially they said, yeah, beaut, we only want to train people in certain areas, but industry I think is coming around, …They want to give the responsibility to people who know what they're doing. And this is what's emerging. Very much so (40:11-12).

But it puts employees who want to learn the industry area, rather than just a specific job, in an invidious position:

> The pressure goes on the young people who they're employing, saying, look, we can do this. You can do it on the job. I know, for example, last year we had a young girl ring us and say, look, I really want to come to TAFE, and my boss says I'm going to do it on the job. So I don't know - I think eventually she came, but I think eventually she had to leave the company (41:8).

And the standard of the training offered on the job was questioned over and over again by the people I interviewed. Of particular concern was the expectation that TAFE should accept a qualification issued purely on the basis of workplace assessment as a prerequisite for a higher level course. A number of the teachers said that this would inevitably lead to a downgrading of the quality of TAFE courses as well.

> I guess industry now has set a standard so [thus] high, and TAFE has a higher expectation of their students. So the pressure is now on us to lower our expectations, so when the assessors go out, they are … expected not to look at … what we would expect our students to do in TAFE, but what the industry standard is, which is fine. The only problem I think about that is that when those students are given their certificates saying, yes, you can do x job, then if they want to come to TAFE and do the higher job, they might not necessarily meet our standards, but we've given them the certificate (41:8).

In the end, as one teacher said, " I feel that we'll move away from education and we'll just become facilitators, not even trainers, because a person will be able to get a self program paced [sic] learning [package] and go away and do it and come and say I can do all this now, test me" (42:7).

Finally, with the emphasis on workplace training and assessment, "What is happening to all those students who haven't got employment, who can't be assessed in the workplace …?" (14:6).

Certainly, the idea of education as a social good gets subsumed into a scramble to meet the latest policy initiatives - and always within an ever-shrinking budget:

> [T]hey're changing the very nature of education from one that was once considered to be a right, that was once considered to be a solution to the training needs of the future … now they're changing it to what I call a political thing, that is, it meets the perceived needs of the electorate. And if the electorate's happy and the politicians read it in the paper the next morning, they're happy. And if they're happy, they get off the minister's back and then theoretically we get on with the job in the colleges [of] trying to put together a piecemeal approach when we don't really have a long term plan.
>
> *So it's sort of like education by daily poll?*
>
> Well, it is, there's no two ways about that because even the concept of continually exploring things - you don't get a chance to evaluate, because time doesn't allow that, it appears. So you're moving on into a new initiative that you hope, probably genuinely at times, will be the solution that you want, but you're constantly being driven by doing your job more efficiently with hours and dollars and so on (3:14-15).

IV Cultural traditions and industrial strategies

Chapter 8: The destruction of occupational cultures

Apprenticeship was the … summit - the ambition[77].

Notwithstanding the Kangan Report's emphasis on expanding TAFE's provision beyond a "manpower" role to an "educational and social" one (ACOTAFE, 1974, v.1 p. xxvii), throughout its history TAFE's *raison d'être* has been the training of apprentices. The relationship between TAFE and trade training was enshrined in industrial legislation, and in spite of the national push to break the nexus, New South Wales has maintained the system of declared vocations, with TAFE still being the primary provider of apprenticeship education. Those of us in non trade teaching areas were continually reminded of the dominance of TAFE's legislative obligation to the apprenticeship system when we were competing for resources.

The emphasis in this study is the manufacturing and engineering trades. It was these trade areas that were the initial focus for the sweeping changes made to TAFE in the last decade or so (see Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE*), as Australia sought to come to grips with the implications of a globalised economy. And because of its primacy in TAFE historically, it is trade culture that has dominated TAFE teacher culture. Paradoxically, given the initiating role of the manufacturing and engineering trades in the changes, it is the trade culture that has been the main target of the managers who have sought to carry the mission of change in TAFE.

When I was growing up in the Australian working class, the tradesmen were the rich people in the community. Doctors, lawyers and other professionals didn't live near us, or if they did, we didn't know them. "You can always fall back on a trade" was a frequently repeated catch cry. As Cockburn (1985) says, "The honourable process of the past used to take a lad through the hardships of apprenticeship to the security of craft status, by which he became a man respected by men and a worker with some status in the working class" (p. 177).

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[77] 32:4

When I asked the teachers why they had entered their various trades, many of them answered to the effect that "it was the summit of ambition" for a working class kid, particularly male. Their parents would only allow them to leave school if they immediately entered an apprenticeship.

> When I left school … I wanted to leave school early, and I did and [my mother] said I could only leave school if I took up a trade. And, at that time, my sister was going out with a chap, they were engaged to be married, and he happened to be a [trade name] and said I can get you an apprenticeship - and that was it (6:9).

Many of the teachers I interviewed entered a particular trade area more or less by accident, often through the influence of a family member,

> *Why did you become an electrician in the first place?*
> I don't know. I liked fiddling with things as a kid, I suppose. I lived in [country town] ... When I left school, there was no work up there, and in the August holidays before I failed the Leaving [laugh] the brother-in-law in Sydney - one of his neighbours was an electrician, and I'd sort of mentioned that I wanted to do something, and I came down to Sydney for two weeks, and worked with this guy - like work experience - and, yeah, thought that was all right, so at the end of it I - at the end of the year I applied for a few jobs, and got an apprenticeship with [large manufacturing company] (38:6).

A few had a burning ambition to be a carpenter, a mechanic, a welder, from a young age.

> Originally - I was 6 years old, and I remember … I was going to be a carpenter. And my poor old father pulled his hair out finding nails and everything around the whole house - I used to hammer nails everywhere. … I reckoned I was going to be a carpenter you see, so it all - the school days I was into the woodwork and all that sort of caper and as soon as I finished high school I went straight into finding a job - got on the pushbike and rode around the country and got three jobs that day and got an apprenticeship the following day and so I was into building.
> *Interesting. Do you remember why? What captivated you?*

No. Just that that struck my fancy. I wanted to be a carpenter. I don't know where it came from (11:3).

Some had begun working in the area before they left school:

What made you choose hairdressing?

Because that was what I was involved in and I started when I was 12 on Saturday mornings and after school and school holidays and that sort of thing.

What, actually commercially?

Yes, yes. I was - for want of a better word, forced into it by my parents. I had a chance to get this job on a Saturday morning with a view to an apprenticeship and all those years ago the apprenticeship was the big thing and it was the thing to have a job, and it was the thing to have an apprenticeship and my parents - didn't *force* me into it, but suggested that I take up hairdressing. So I did, and

Were you allowed to work at 12?

Yes, Saturday mornings I was. Well, I don't know - and then, when they wanted to start my apprenticeship, I was too young to leave school so I went to the Education Department and got an exemption. I left school when I was - 14 I think… (23:2).

And some made a "false" start:

I worked for a jewellery manufacturing company, which I really loved doing. And my parents had a business in [trade area], that was the family business and they couldn't see any other line of work but [that trade area], so in those days the father sort of had more - ah -

Clout.

Had more clout, yeah, but, no, [quoting his father] I think making diamond rings is for fairies, so I think we'd better get into making [trade product], and I hated it. Fortunately, when I got into the industry, I got into [associated area] initially. I was never one of the slaves on the floor making [product] … which was a bit of luck - probably because of the drawing skills and things like that I had (29:2).

However they entered the trade, all were socialised into a culture that has at its core a strong sense of history and tradition. And through that socialisation, they developed a sense of identity inextricably linked with their mastery of their trade. As Ainley (1993) says, if skills have their source outside any one individual then they are part of a culture, "acquired through apprenticeship and through tradition … the itemized competencies demonstrated in the performance of a skill become dissolved into the larger whole of which they are but a part" (p.5).

It is this larger whole that the teachers felt was being lost in the changes that have taken place in vocational education (see Chapter 7: *Educational issues in the change*).

I feel that at least they know what is an acceptable standard and where they fit …[78]

The teachers recognise that the changes to TAFE are more than simply structural, that they impinge on the very culture of an organisation that has had as strong a tradition as many of the trades that have been taught through it.

> [C]learly the section is - has got a real problem. Coping with changes in the market place, coping with changes in emphasis, different students, different courses, teaching things differently through flexible delivery methods - enormous cultural change for teachers in this section. And the low enrolments are a cause for concern. It'd be nice if I could slope off for the last time in five years time not having been the Head Teacher who closed the section down. The section was founded in 1947. It would be nice if it was still here when I left. It's a modest ambition. It's going to be a tough ask (32:18).

What some of the teachers are mourning is the loss of that TAFE culture, and a tradition of passing on skill in their industry. Discussing the way that trade skills are part of a culture with a history and tradition, Gleeson (1995) refers to that culture as providing " a context for the constitution of new workers while at the same time, protecting and defining a social and industrial function". Seeing trade skills as "mere instrumental assets", a commodity subject to a market, as the "post-Fordist conception of industrial restructuring" does, is thus a mistake (p. 157-8).

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[78] 16:8

That recognition is reflected in the teachers' deep unease that something important has been lost to their trade in the rush to implement the new curriculum (see Chapter 7: *Educational issues in the change*). For many, what encouraged them to begin teaching in the first place was to share in passing on the trade:

> The thing that I always have in the back of my mind is the trade, and how it's going to affect it. Because it's really what I'm here for. I'm a part of a trade, but I'm a teacher and educator within that trade area. And I see that the trade, if you like to call it, our trade, is going to suffer a lot as a result of the changes and the fact that we can't stabilise anything. And I don't think it's going to be a short term problem, I think it's going to be a long term problem. It's just like there's going to be a void in the middle there while everything is being sorted out (16:9).

They are proud of their skills, and want to pass them on:

> I guess what really appealed to me with teaching - because I like communicating, and I like the idea of having people around - well, I like having a good time, I suppose - but the primary reason was because I knew I was a good draftsperson. I knew I could impart a lot of knowledge, and I knew it was a good job (28:3).

On the other hand, quite a few of the teachers came into TAFE to escape the working world of their trade. For them, the hard, dirty work, and the long hours demanded by the masculine culture in their industries (Cockburn, 1985, p. 181), was something they were happy to leave behind, particularly when their children began to arrive:

> I was working in management at the time. … when I joined that role as a production manager, I would have been … 26 or 27 years of age. I had something like 260 people to be responsible for, and after about 4 years in the role I realised that they had effectively buried many other production managers because it was a sales orientated company and it wasn't a quality of life. Our family was starting to arrive. My daughter was born in Adelaide and I just wasn't seeing the family (3:2).

Some of the people I interviewed had a commitment to teaching from an early age, like the woman who said:

> When I was a little child, I always had a blackboard, and I was always the teacher teaching whoever happened to be around. Whether there was nobody there or somebody - the kids in the neighbourhood or whatever. So, yeah - I used to rope the kids in the neighbourhood and make them be the students. I was *always* playing that. So it was obviously - I've been lucky enough to fulfil it, too (44:3).

Others had a liking and respect for teachers and, having developed expertise in their trade, wanted to use it to move into a more challenging role:

> I wanted to get into teaching. … I came from … a little town out the back which is - really not a lot of prospects unless you want to play football all your life, drink grog all your life, and that's about it. And I could see there was a bit more to life than that (35:1).

And some had to try more than once:

> … I applied for a teaching position then. I liked teachers. I liked what they stood for, and what they tried to do. And I got to the final interview stage, and they patted me on the head and said come back when you know something [laughter]. It really upset me, because I thought I was the best welder since sliced bread (34:3-4).

A number were head hunted by TAFE, having been recognised as experts in their fields. The stories some told me were of small trades, where the networks were strong, sometimes right across Australia. Tradesmen who were particularly skilled quickly developed a reputation, and the trade schools in TAFE would sometimes call and ask them to apply. And some were inspired by teachers they had when they were doing their own training. One of the teachers who told me his story said he came in "for all the wrong reasons". Having married and with children coming, he decided that he needed stability and security in employment, but the deciding factor in his decision to teach was his impression of one of his own teachers:

> … one of the teachers at [TAFE college] that I'd had during one of the courses that I did, did have a bit of an impact on my life in that he used to motivate classes, he'd bring in a lot of equipment that he'd built himself. It was real craftsman stuff. Not only was it good [trade area], but it was beautifully constructed, and it was always in polished wooden boxes, and he actually polished it himself, you know, he was the complete package, old [teacher's name]. And I spotted this ad, and it was unusual because it was - it was I think in an evening or Saturday paper - I've still got the ad somewhere, and it was a single ad … and it was like a couple of inches, a couple of columns wide. It was a reasonable size, 3 inches by 4 inches - for those times, it was - and it just stuck out - and as I said it was August, I think, it was about August of 1970. And I thought, gee, look at this, well you can't get any bigger than the government. And then I started to think what sort of a life [teacher's name] may very well have had. … I've since later found out he was a bachelor and all the rest of it! [laughing] But I thought, well, he always seems to have a smile on his face. We're all interested in what he says. He seems to have a rich, enjoyable life, and he thoroughly loves what - and I started to think, well, I've always been a yacker, and I just thought, well, hey, I'll give it a go (8:5-6).

Many of the teachers maintain the culture even in the language they use. They refer to the "calling" (e.g. 16:8), a signifier of the power of the trade tradition. They use the metaphor of having "served their time" for their own apprenticeship training. They determinedly use a kind of working class patois, the grammar of the workshop, for instance, "me" instead of "my, "done" instead of "did". And it is in exercising their expertise that they gain most satisfaction:

> …the most enjoyment I get out of my whole career is when I'm standing in the workshop, and somebody sings out, good job (34:21).

The commitment to the trade, and to passing it on, remains with some of the employers, too. A number of the teachers told me of employers who were happy to keep sending their employees to TAFE for training, in spite of the fact that TAFE could not provide the latest in equipment, partly because they recognise that, "You can have all the most modern technology and unless you have the basic skills -

traditional skills, you can't operate. It's like putting someone in a F18 fighter and they just make a mess and crash it" (26:2). And partly it is simply that the employer remains firmly part of the trade tradition:

> [Referring to the student] He's operating a machine [at work] that is much more sophisticated than any machine that we've got in our Training Package. He's operating it by himself - it's a $300,000 [unclear] machine and he's operating it himself and here we are training him on a machine of lesser quality. So are we wasting his time? [laugh]
>
> *It's difficult, isn't it?*
>
> It's hard, isn't it? I was only talking to him yesterday and I was saying to myself, gee, we really don't fit their requirements. But they are a [unclear] company, they're a fairly large company and there's not many of those left. But they diligently send apprentices to us almost every year. In fact, every year.
>
> *Why is that? Is that tradition or - what do you think? They've got a commitment to the trade?*
>
> There is a sole owner of that company. Joe, his name is. He started that company right back in the 70s and I think he's a staunch believer in the trade. He's a staunch believer in the [trade name] industry and traditions of the [trade name] industry and he's - that's why it's like it is. And most of his staff there think that way. His staff are old people from the old fashioned [trade name] industry and they've got those entrenched beliefs - a tradesman needs to have that full training package to be a holistic person - to have that knowledge of [the material] that you <u>do</u> need to really know what you're doing.
>
> *And to have an identity as a [material] tradesman*
>
> That's it. That's it. That's it (6:16-17).

Whatever their reason for coming into TAFE, I was surprised by the number of teachers who remembered the exact date and circumstances of their entry, "The second of September, 1975" (11:1), "9am March 13th 1972" (32:1), "1973, February 1st" (34:1). For some of them the recognition of their status in the trade, represented by their selection as a teacher, is significant:

…the test was horrific. Trades tests in those days were worse than they are now. It was an 8 hour solid at Ultimo, consisting of 4 hours of theoretical stuff and 4 hours of practical and oral examination by various other teachers in the section. There were, I remember, there were something like 23 arrived on the day, and I'm thinking, "how many jobs are going here?" And during - the first paper we sat for was a theory paper and during that period of time, there was about 3 or 4 got up and left. And I know at the end of the day there were 19 - and I was the only one recruited. I don't know that I was the only one offered a position, but I do know that I was the only one that came out of that (8:6).

The team has been dispersed and shattered and I find that quite a difficult thing …[79]

The other aspect of TAFE culture that is being challenged is the collectivist culture of teaching. As Anderson (1998) says, there is a process of "cultural renorming" going on, "whereby the norms or values and behaviours customarily associated with 'being a TAFE teacher' are undergoing qualitative change" (p. 20). He suggests the values shift involved in this renorming is from a set of social democratic values (including TAFE as a social contract, public interest, cooperation, and inclusiveness) to a set of neo-liberal values (VET as an economic contract, private gain, competition and exclusiveness).

Teachers who try to cling onto the old values are castigated as "dinosaurs". One of the people I spoke to said,

… you should defend the organisation that you work in, I suppose, which is then hard if you think - I mean, doing that course down at UTS[80], I've been quite shocked at the view of TAFE that people have. I can remember in my first class when we all had to say what we're doing, everyone looks at you if you work in TAFE like you're kind of - you *are* a troglodyte. And that was a shock to me, because when you're within an organisation, you accept the values of that organisation.

So where are the others [her fellow students]?

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[79] 43:4
[80] University of Technology, Sydney

They're all in private industry, aren't they? They're either in community groups, or private training. Lots and lots of private training. TAFE's a dirty word (27:15).

Many of the teachers have not shifted in their values, but they despair of being able to stem the tide. For the trade teachers, the incursion of neo-liberal values and its effect on their work as teachers is often inseparable from what they see happening in their trades in industry. Ewer (1996), one of the architects of the early training reforms through his work in an Accord tripartite research body, in hindsight suggests that, "one desirable feature of [the apprenticeship] system - the process of socialisation into a craft or calling - seems to me to be one of the unfortunate casualties in the tidal wave of CBT". He argues that it is "a sense of duty to the standards of their craft", more than a "commitment to their 'customers'" that prompts trade workers to produce quality work, and that the attacks on the apprenticeship system in Australia "have more to do with its incompatibility with the political discourse of the day, rather than its pedagogic weaknesses or gender inequalities" (p. 15).

As outlined in previous chapters (see Chapter 7: *Educational issues in the change;* Chapter 6: *Doing more with less*), teachers have struggled to implement the new agenda, in some cases welcoming some of its concepts, but generally finding themselves cynical about its origins and purpose. What they particularly mourn, however, is the loss of the TAFE culture that supported them and added to their joy in teaching. As a number said, a new element of divisiveness has entered their daily work experience:

Everyone's - everyone's seems to be - I don't know - we're not pulling together. We seem to be more worried about our own backside and just making sure that we hang onto our own job, where before we were just one big happy family. You'd do *anything* for this place. … We're really worried about our jobs, and we'll do what we can, that's *trade* based to hang onto our jobs (31:11).

In speaking of the state-wide culture engendered by the old School structure, they mourned the loss of not just the professional, but the social collectivity:

[E]very School had a different flavour. Building was a very good flavour because it's all pally pally stuff … we used to have things like Chips and Splinters once a year and that was a get together for all the staff in the whole state. And we used to have that religiously every year, and so there was a *really* good feeling.

Was it social or conference?

All social, yeah. There were conferences but mostly it was social for everyone. And then we used to have the annual ball for the - the building annual ball which is still operating but not very much these days. But those sorts of things were very social. But that's all gone these days because we've all been [squeezed?] into these Institutes (11:9).

And another referred to the loss even at college level as a result of the restructuring:

we've lost a lot of the college - the camaraderie of the college, which I think is a really bad thing (44:20).

The entrepreneurial culture demands competition and marketing. So sections in different colleges and Institutes who previously cooperated, sharing ideas and resources, are "dog eat dog now… they're competing with us for the same students" (27:11).

The social justice aspect of TAFE is also being eroded. As one teacher said,

I believed TAFE was for the worker and TAFE was, for want of a better word, for the poor, and TAFE was for people who really wanted to learn but just couldn't afford to, but really wanted to. And I no longer see us like that. And I don't want to be here. I am here because I'm here - it's a job, and it's good pay and - but it is not - I'm not doing what I want to do and I'm not working the way I want to work (23:15).

What is happening in TAFE is a reflection of what is happening in the wider community:

[re privatisation, casualisation, economic rationalism] if you'd asked me twenty years ago, I'd have said there's no way they'll get away with it, because

every man jack would down tools and do something about it. But people are not that aware of comradeship and - there's too many individuals out there now, and they don't work as a team, because one day they work one day for this fellow, and they don't work the next four days, then they might get five days work at - they're not part of a community, of a family, of a workforce (34:20).

One of the effects of these changes to the TAFE culture is that some teachers have lost their commitment. For their colleagues, this can be one of the saddest and most frustrating things of all:

Like, you come here and one of the things I get frustrated with this place is that people have got this attitude like, I've been hired, I've gone through my twelve months probation, I'm in now. And falling short of killing someone, you won't get me out of here. And I spoke to my blokes today, and it's like - what can you do to me, you know. And you think, hang on, this bloke's being paid nearly a grand a week. You're only here for 30 hours. You're only teaching twenty. It's not bad money, now how about putting something back into the place. …

On the other hand, you've obviously got [quite a bit of commitment?]

Yeah. The place has knocked me about a little bit. You've got to be careful not to bring yourself down to other people's standards. When you look around -

[Were they?] always like that?

No.

So tell me about the change.

Oh, it's just - I think the place becoming real dollars and cents… (31:8).

Again, as with their concern about loss of quality in the trade, they are concerned about the loss of quality in the teaching. Whereas "the teachers had their heart in it 15 years ago. I think a teacher now that's passionate is an extraordinary individual" (24:11). With the loss of hope,

instead of being that really vital communicator, vital teacher, you're just doing a process. And that process anybody could do. So really you're devaluing the work. I have a concern with that, too, … that we're actually lowering the

standards of teaching and what we stand for, and so that allows other people to perceive, well, if that's what a teacher's role is, I can do that and so other people with lesser skills than what we would aspire to, they might perceive that they have all those skills - well, I can do that anyway, because they haven't really seen the teacher operating at their optimum.

So you think the commitment's gone, because there's no future?

I think so, yes. A lot of that commitment's gone (3:10).

While the overriding feeling expressed in the interviews was one of loss, not all of the past was seen through rose-coloured glasses. Teachers spoke of nepotism and mediocrity in the old TAFE, - "like people employ like people" (3:4). And there can be a downside to the solidarity engendered by a shared culture. One (male) teacher who had retrained from a manufacturing trade area to a general education area was finding that his former colleagues no longer related to him as freely as they used to. The fact that he had moved from a trade area to a "soft skills" area, and that he might have a chance of becoming a Head Teacher in the new area, meant that he had not complied with the "game plan". When asked what he meant by "game plan", he said, "it's the game plan they feel comfortable with, that they might not move forward, but if we all do it, we're all in the same boat" (3:9).

It is because they are men, he said. The solidarity of the male trade culture means that they get "pissed off" when "you're not complying with the rules". He said, "I tend to be outside the boat, might be behind them at times, sometimes I'm out to the port, sometimes I'm out to the starboard, but I'm waving to them and sometimes I'm in the boat [laughter]" (3:9). But, he said,

in fairness to men, they tolerate the shit more than what women would.

What sort of shit?

Well, it's the shit of not moving, of complying, of being loyal although it's a lost cause. Not *questioning* the cause. In fairness to women that I know, most of them wouldn't cop the shit. They would question it, say "no, this isn't right" and I respect that not because it's a ... what I perceive as a female strength, but I respect that in all people, that they actually have that assertiveness … and [the new teaching area] for me has really given me a chance to reflect on

myself and why perhaps I am to port, to starboard, out of the boat. Why do I act in this way. And why they perhaps act the way they do ... most males tend to get into trades because of the selection process and that's historical in Australia, … even today. … [And while that situation remains] we will have the view of the ruling gender which happens to be in the trades, male. And then they'll be influenced by their male peers and then it gets back to where we were - minor change at the edges, but really the core thinking is still the same. That's an observation (3:9).

Still, as Ewer (1996) and others have argued, the fact that there are aspects of trade culture in Australia which are harsh and exclusive, particularly of women, does not justify the destruction of the craft tradition. Connell (2001/02) has identified the problem that neo-liberal orthodoxy rode on the back of the democratic critique of education bureaucracies of the 1960s and 1970s. That critique attempted "to widen access to education, to make the system friendlier to underprivileged or underrepresented groups" (p. 7). Those groups included women and their access to education in non-traditional areas, including the trades. But, as Connell says, that critique was "twisted into an argument for market solutions in education" (p. 7).

Training reform as it was initiated by the AMWU[81] in the late 1980s, as Ewer (1996) notes, "was largely about solving a whole series of *industrial* rather than pedagogic problems" (p. 13). The restructuring of the trades, and of vocational education and training, resulting in the destruction of trade and TAFE cultures, is a political, industrial agenda, not an educational one.

The teachers I interviewed, at least, seemed to feel that it would be difficult to retrieve the best of the culture that has been destroyed in the remaking of TAFE. They are concerned that when the teachers are gone, the skills will go too because they are not being replaced:

> The last of the fashion teachers are really a breed that is just not going to be there any more. We have so many skills that no one is going to have access to (13:10).

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[81] Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union

And

> I've got members of my staff, that when they're gone, they're gone, and all the skills that they've got are going to go with them. They're not being passed on. I've just been talking to a trainee now, … I said, if you look at [name of teacher] … if I say to him I need a piece of equipment, not too big, to be able to do this, and of top quality, to be able to carry this, he'll design it - he'll draw it. Once he's drawn it, he will make a working drawing for it. He can order the steel for it. He will then, if he wanted to, fabricate it. He can then weld it to x-ray quality workmanship. He can then erect it, put it up into place, and [there's the?] job. Now in tomorrow's day and age, if I want to do that, I will need a draftsman. I will need some sort of supervisor to OK it. I will then need probably an estimator to order all the materials so they don't over order. I will then need probably a boiler maker, marker off to be able to put it together. I will then probably hire a specialised welder to be able to weld to that standard. Then I will have to employ an erection crew to put the thing up, and spray painters - I might need 8 or 10 people (34:5).

Most of all, they don't want to be the ones who see the end of a tradition:

> What I would like to dearly do is, before I retire, is not to see this educational system that's been going here for a hundred years, my small section, be destroyed. I would hate to see the education in our trade - because it's not only the last hundred years, it's hundreds and hundreds of years of development and skills - and it's all there - the skills are all there, they just have to be nurtured, and the community needs it. And it also creates jobs. Young people come from somewhere, they spend time with us, they get a job. They go out and they become a useful person in the society (26:18).

IV Cultural traditions and industrial strategies

Chapter 9: The union - resist or negotiate?

Membership of unions has been in decline in industrialised nations since the 1970s (Gahan & Bell, 1988; Western, 1996). This reflects both a crisis in legitimacy (Kallick, 1994; Moody, 1997) and the power of the neo-liberal agenda which changed the workforce with a rapidity that left the union movement in its wake[82]. That agenda, and the managerial strategies that came with it, have produced a more individualised, casualised and fragmented workforce which is not conducive to collective action. As one of the teachers said,

> It's very easy to organise and have support of people when they … understand what their job is and what their role is and where they fit into it and what they have to do. And because everything is under such change and under such attack, they become less sure … about what they do. And I think what we're seeing in terms of the union is a lot of people less willing to stand up and be united and be counted … to take a unified position on a whole range of things. They feel so personally under attack in terms of their job security, in terms of their careers, that there's a rather competitive element, I think, that operates these days in terms of people sort of knowing that their career may depend on the demise of somebody else's … (1:5).

Even so, TAFE teachers are still highly unionised. Of the forty one non-managers that I interviewed, only three were not members of the union. Two of these three were from the "old" TAFE, from the Manufacturing and Engineering Division, and one of the two says he means to join the union. The third was from a para-professional service section.

Twenty one described themselves as active members, which meant anything from regular attendance at branch meetings to holding delegate positions. Two described themselves as "somewhere between" active and non-active. Fifteen described themselves as non-active. The three part-time teachers were all members of the union,

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[82] see Chapter 3: *Concepts* for a discussion of this agenda.

although they described themselves as non-active. Only three were members of another union: one part-timer, who still worked in his trade area, one a non-teacher member of the Public Service Association, and one who maintained membership of his professional association/union as well as being a member of TAFETA. Contrary to my expectation, none of the full-time trade teachers maintained membership of their industry trade union.

A number of the teachers side-stepped my question about what the union should be doing to challenge what has been happening to TAFE. This was partly because I sometimes asked the question as a double barrelled query about what senior management could be doing, or what the union could be doing. But some responded in the context of the broader issues we had been discussing, about the way society was going, rather than in a way specifically relevant to TAFE:

> *So what do we do about it…?*
>
> … I don't *know* what to do about it. It's Monopoly. And who's going to win the game of Monopoly? When you win the game of Monopoly, the whole bloody wheel falls off - it's just finished, isn't it? And that's what's happening. Somebody's starting to end up with all the money.
>
> *Do you think the union movement can be strong enough again to do something about it?*
>
> Well, I was thinking about that sort of the other day, about what's going to happen, and I reckon there's going to be another Bastille Day. It'll just keep going and keep going and keep going until there's that many poor people, they'll just have to revolt and take over the country - and these movies you see where they've got poor people running around blasting hell out of other people, yeah - I think that that *may* be - end up the way that the free enterprise world's going to have to go (19:15).

But in some cases the side-stepping was also because people are puzzled about what the union *could* do. In the context of "global business unionism" (Moody, 1997) which saw unions and employers working together in the "new times" of globalising capital, and in the face of the neo-liberal attack on collective bargaining, the perception was that the union had lost the battle:

Ten or fifteen years ago I think the union had the word on the government[83]. In 1998, the government's got it all over the union. I don't think we are smart enough or clever enough any more. I think they've tactically set out to smash unionism throughout Australia, not only in education, but in all - as you can see from [the MUA battle[84]] … And I think it's working. I think they are totally breaking unions to pieces. And if the way things go - like I'm expecting that most people in another ten years will be casual workers, with two or three different [jobs[85]] - but only casually. …There'll be no unity of employees together as we know it (34:17).

One defined it as a hegemonic campaign:

How come they won? Because I think they were better organised than the unions. They were much better organised than the unions. The scare tactics - and I've had a fellow come to me during the week with his hands up in the air saying, "look, our jobs are going to be finished. They're going to do without us before long. They don't need us." The publicity that employers use, and the media of course went along with it, because they're also big employers. The publicity machine convinced us that if we didn't go along with it, that it was either take this, or you get nothing at all. And I think it's been probably the best planned and orchestrated campaign that [there] has ever [been] in the history of humankind … (30:8).

People saw the union as "hog tied" (26:26) and exhausted. "And it's hard to get creative when you're bloody tired" (2:19). The exhaustion is caused by constantly fighting "bushfires". In an earlier time the union was generally dealing with a centralised bureaucracy, now it is dealing with eleven Institutes: "people say they're not doing anything, because they haven't fixed our problem. They haven't fixed the problem of [the local area] because they've got to put out the bushfires in all the other bloody Institutes" (40:21).

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[83] The government in the TAFE context is also the employer.
[84] A major confrontation on the Australian waterfront in 1998, which galvanised unions nationally and internationally against an attempt by the Federal government and Patrick Stevedoring to break the Maritime Union's power.
[85] Unfinished sentence - [jobs] inserted for clarity

A number of people recognised that the union is its membership: " I don't like the term unions, because - it is union, but what I classify - the union to me is the people" (34:20). But the membership is fragmented:

> I think everyone should be taking action and really looking to make sure that these governments and managers don't keep putting the thin edge of the wedge in and trying to open the gap wider. … I know there are sections in the college which are very factional. They don't attend meetings. You get the regulars who do attend, and they're the ones that really start believing and hope that there is - there *may* be a bit of light at the end of the tunnel. But there are other people couldn't care less if it blew out or not (40:20-21, also see 1:5 above).

And some felt that the membership, like the managers[86], are afraid:

> We're a reflection of the rest of society as well. Many people are obviously frightened about what's going to happen to them. … there used to be that idea of job security. Well, even in schools now they're talking about that loss of security, and so that's an incredible personal threat to people (36:17).

Even so, most felt that the union was not being "smart" enough (2:19), that it should develop a prescriptive strategy. They felt there was a need for union leadership: "the union has to develop a line… the union has to say it can be done in this way, this way, this way. This is where we should be going, too, not this way" (1:14) and that the union should not just react, but be proactive: "I find the union's reactionary [sic] all the time, instead of - it doesn't really lead in anyway. I find - if there's a problem, it sort of dampens that problem out, then goes to the next problem" (41:19).

But there was no consensus on what direction the union should be taking. Some felt the union should tackle "the *big* issues, rather than putting out the little fires" (30:11):

> I really believe that the unions have to play a more significant role in identifying real work and how we go about getting real work and retaining it and being more an influencing factor on the decisions of the country, as opposed to being a reactive influence (3:16).

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[86] See Chapter 11: *On management*

Others thought the union should stick to bread and butter issues:

> I feel sorry for unions. Because they're in a no win situation. The union can only do so much, but at the end of the day, I think in a lot of cases people have had it with unions because … it comes back to the early days, when it was always conditions, more pay, you know what I mean? And now they're getting into political areas. Well, people don't want to know about that (31:18).

I interviewed this teacher just after the union called a stop work meeting in defence of public education in mid 1998, and he continued:

> We had a strike here last week and all the blokes said, "I'm not going on strike, I can't afford to lose two hours pay."
>
> *But see, that was in defence of public education.*
>
> I know! [laughter] (31:18).

On the other hand, one of the women I interviewed around the same time said she was "all for" the defence of public education stop work. She is not an active union member, because she does not like the union "telling me … we're going out on strike". "Ask me if I'm striking", she said, "don't tell me". She felt that her conditions and pay were good, particularly when compared with "lots of other people who work just as hard as I do, if not harder". So she feels the union is being greedy, that they "always have their hand out" and she says she is not prepared to support it when it is "going for my better working conditions or higher pay", although she will fight against a *reduction* in pay and conditions. But she would definitely fight in support of public education and against government funds going to the private sector, particularly in schools (37:17-18).

Quite a number of the teachers thought the union needed to tackle both the big issues and the bread and butter issues:

> Our union at the moment should be - two concerns - and they're the concerns of mine and my staff, I know - what are we doing for the community, that's what we're here for. And look after the teachers that are delivering the goods (34:17).

Some of the people I interviewed talked about the structural problems facing the union: "TAFE restructured. The union didn't. And that's been a huge mistake" (30:11) and of how "one of the difficulties for the Teachers' Federation is that the TAFETA is such a small subsidiary of it" (43:14). Which means, for TAFE teachers,

> we haven't got a leg to stand on union-wise unless we go with the [school]
> teachers - the other 60,000 public school teachers within the system. And
> that's what we have to do … We're not like the MUA. We can't stand up and
> say *this* is what we want. We have to bend a little and go as much as possible
> with the rest of the teachers in the Education Department (14:17).

She goes on to say, as a number of people did, that it is the defence of public education in *schools* that she would fight for more than TAFE "because that's where we've got to start. That's where we're really starting to lose it" and that she is "being more of a pessimist" and "giving up on TAFE, but I know I shouldn't" (14:17).

A number talked about the dilemma the union faces in holding the line: "what do you do - do you build walls? or do you go out and actually attack the situation?" (7:19). There are policies the union has, in an attempt to hold the line, that have made for difficult decisions at section level:

> What people struggle with is whether to resist … or whether to negotiate the
> territory. And I've got some of my teachers said, just resist, and others [said?]
> negotiate the territory, and so there's quite a potential for conflict in that. Now,
> the clients don't want you to resist. We're just running through the last stage of
> the old course, and we had seventeen people that wanted to come during the
> day, and thirteen that wanted to go at night. And some of the teachers refused
> to take two extra in the day. Some of them didn't, said all right, last year
> through I'm prepared, for the sake of these people that have been very good
> students, if they've got commitments and they can't come at night, I'll take the
> extra. So there's the potential kind of divisiveness there with implementing
> the Teachers' Federation guidelines[87] (27:5).

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[87] That is, the union policy of taking no extra enrolments because of the battle over student:teacher ratios

Quite a few people said that they felt the union needed to adapt to changing times. To some extent, this is a reflection of the power of the "historical necessity" argument that has dominated the neo-liberal agenda. But it also reflects the difficulty that teachers at the classroom level have in resisting the demands for "flexibility" and "responsiveness" while still maintaining teaching conditions and their jobs. The issue of student:teacher ratios is particularly problematic. It has been traditional for teachers to put in a few extra students above and beyond the standard ratio, because inevitably a few students will drop out for various reasons. But under budget pressure, TAFE is trying to make that a condition, and understandably, TAFETA has dug its heels in. Quite a few of the teachers I spoke to were working outside Federation guidelines, because if they didn't "we wouldn't be able to service the students. We'd have classes closed, we'd have teachers out of work" (22:14). The conflict also adds to the teachers' feeling of stress (41:19-20).

One of the teachers arguing for the union to change had been under threat of redundancy. He consistently used the language of the "new TAFE". While deeply in earnest, his use of the language of the marketised and coporatised TAFE sometimes sounded almost like parody. Living in fear of losing his job, he argued that TAFETA had little choice:

> You've got to now start selling your product and if you can sell your product correctly, you can get people through the door. And, you've got to be flexible. You've got to be flexible. Which means another kettle of fish. Which means teachers and management and the union have got to sit down and talk about how flexible they've got to be so you can then do a package to show how flexible you can be to your customer. And then some - happy consensus needs to be brought up there. And I know everyone's protecting their little lot. This is my lot and that's your lot. And I do this and you do that and these are my hours and these are my times off. But I think we need to really look at ourselves as a - as a package. How do we come over to the customer? I don't think we come over very good.
>
> *But given that people are already feeling pressured and not supported and over stretched, doesn't the union have a role to actually try and protect those conditions?*

Yes. They do. But I think they have a bigger role to protect our jobs [laugh] and somewhere in that lies the answer. Because without students, we haven't got a job (6:23).

Some people said that it is action that inspires members, and referred to a time when there were: "these great strikes, where you'd all go along to Harold Park, and they were very uniting" (36:17). One activist said the union should be doing more to

try and rally the troops together. By consultation, by - see, we find that threatened strikes and things like this, we *normally* get a good turn out. We have got a good turn out, because if you publicise the issues, and make people aware of what's happening, where it affects them … they *will* respond. But then if there's no action - see it's been a while since we've had much action. A few years ago, a couple of years ago, before Labor was in, we had good rallies. Quite a number of twenty four hour strikes etc, which were very well attended, because there were issues … (40:21).

In the 1991 confrontation with the Greiner government[88], when the changes to TAFE were really starting to bite, the membership were united and angry and had voted for a 48 hour strike. The mass meeting on whether to continue the campaign (held across the state using Skychannel facilities) was confronted by a union president, Phil Cross, urging them to be careful what decision they made, because the government had threatened to deregister the Federation over the TAFETA action. He argued that to continue with the campaign in its "present form" wouldn't "go anywhere". He also said "Will it lead to deregistration of the union? It will." In other words, the action of a small part of the overall union, the TAFE teachers, would threaten the whole Teachers' Federation. Geoff Turnbull, the TAFETA President, told the meeting that "The Executive believes that it is time to suspend the industrial action… We must be realistic…."[89] The threat of deregistration was not the only issue. It is clear that the Executive also thought that the strike might not get all the members out. The strike was called off.

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[88] See Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE.*
[89] Quotes taken from a video of the meeting at Wentworth Park September 3, 1991. Video held by NSW Teachers' Federation Library.

So, in my interviews, there were those who felt that the union had been out-manoeuvred and was fighting a losing battle. And then there were others who seemed to have given up on the union. The MUA conflict, which was very much in the news for some of the interviews, and which had prompted a community backlash against the collusion of the Federal Government with the employer, had heartened some. But others felt that TAFETA simply does not have the strength of unions like the MUA. They felt that for TAFE the battle has been lost, the world has moved on. The union should accept it and move on too:

> I think TAFETA is run by people with no grasp of the real issues. … I've been a member of a trade union since I started work. I was a member of [his industry union] and then I went into TAFETA. I've been a branch vice president … [I've been] a delegate to the Council on Fridays down at Sussex Street. I've stood on picket lines for TAFETA. Enjoyed picket lines. Ah, I think they're stark, staring mad. I think they've completely lost their marbles. I think they're chasing after yesterday's dream. It's gone. The sort of issues they're talking about are student:teacher ratios - in this teaching section, student:teacher ratios are meaningless, one because we don't have enough students, and nobody's helping - not TAFETA, not management - nobody. And we run flexible delivery. And under those conditions, ST ratios are pointless - meaningless. And they're fighting all these old battles. … I think they should close up shop. Go home. [unclear] I think TAFETA should talk to all their members. TAFETA should realise we'll very soon be in the next century and that things like the old battles of the ST ratios and all that sort of stuff, and demarcation and all that - you can't teach this because of whatever - I think that's all gone. And I think TAFETA wants to [ie should] become extremely flexible. Wants to embrace the future, and by embracing the future I really mean that. We're talking about how to market courses in competition with private providers, … how do we do that? We've got to talk about ASCH[90], dollar ASCH, instead of ST ratio. And all those new ideas have to be embraced by TAFETA. They're not going to do that. We'll troop over to the [local venue for Skychannel broadcast] again in a few weeks time, no doubt,

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[90] Annual Student Contact Hours. Used as a funding mechanism - see Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE*

another page of meaningless resolutions that will get absolutely nowhere (32: 12, 17-18).

These people were as alienated from the union as they were from their management. They saw it as helpless and ineffectual and distant from the grass roots problems: "I think it's a bureaucracy in itself and I think it really is cut off from the ordinary member. I mean, we're going to have that big thing on the 17th 'Fight for Public Education' … I don't think it works any longer" (27:14). Or, from another:

> I've got little faith in the union. I'm disgusted by the inactivity of the union. … The union hasn't informed people thoroughly. I mean there's people who are being paid a lot of money in the union who really - I see have an obligation to keep people like me, whose job is to teach students, informed *exactly* where everything is politically. The tensions, what's going on - I feel that our union's let us down. … I have a lot of faith in [one union representative]. But there's other people there who I just think are getting old, you know, and they're kind of there for the duration[91]. They don't want to rock the boat. … I'm not saying that we should upend them all, kill everyone, change everything. I don't know what the answer is. But I do know that we're sort of slowly being disenfranchised (24:16).

One teacher, a staunch supporter of the union, referred to the fact that many of the union officials are "all retiring in the next five or six years too. I mean we've got a cadre crisis coming up in TAFE [laughter]" (2:20).

In general, both those who felt the union was doing the best it could, and those who had given up on it, were expressing despair that anything *could* be done. Most didn't have much idea about what the union should do about it. As one said,

> What good will it do? What good will it do? It's all very well for them to broaden their aspects [eg by holding Defend Public Education stop work meetings] and all that, what good does it do? It just costs us money [by going on strike]. And it saves the government money. … I'm sure there are [other tactics they could use], but I've got no idea what they could be. But it's just

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[91] Gahan & Bell (1988) found that the "professionalisation" of the union leadership was a factor in the decline of union membership.

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that no matter where you go, people who matter, or people who make the decisions - they just don't listen (23:17).

V Organisational and management issues

Chapter 10: Fragmentation/organisational chaos: "it makes you wonder what the hell's going on up there"[92]

> Probably one of the most [unclear adjective] change[s] that's starting to impact and is going to have even more impact [ah?] through the TAFE DTEC[93] restructure [are] proposals to devolve a whole lot more of the control to the Institutes and the move away from central control and central support. I think that … means you have… less of a feeling of there being educational quality, educational policy, educational *validity* that is there to support you all the time, and it's becoming far more on the basis of what's the most cost effective, what costs the least … rather than any sort of … centralised support that wasn't tainted necessarily by the money question all the time. There is less unity throughout the whole state in terms of teaching sections working together, less support for each other… (1:5).

TAFE has been restructuring almost constantly since the late 1980s (see Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE*). There have been ongoing restructures at state-wide level, Institute level, campus level. There are restructures that affect management positions, education positions, administrative positions. TAFE has been a Department, a Commission, taken over by another Department, then by yet another. There were Regions, then Networks, then Institutes. Within Institutes, the restructuring has been relentless, particularly at upper and middle management levels with various models being tried out, all different, Institute to Institute. There were Schools, then Industry Training Divisions, then Education Training Divisions, then Consortia, then Educational Service Divisions now just Educational Divisions - all in a little over ten years. There were central agencies like the Women's Unit, the Aboriginal Education Unit, the Disabilities Unit, the Outreach Unit, the Equal Employment Opportunity Unit. Where such central units still exist,

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[92] 35:12

[93] TAFE was restructured again shortly after this interview. See Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE* for details of the DTEC restructure.

they have been subsumed into the units in the Department of Education and Training, where the emphasis and expertise is, understandably, school education. The constant changes have created confusion and have fragmented the organisation.

Many of the people I spoke to were appalled at what they saw as clumsy experimentation with various forms of organisation, with no improved outcome:

> And years ago we had nine regions and these eleven Institutes are doing the same job as they did in the nine regions, but they've actually got about 200% more staff in them, and it's all management staff. … And it really started when our Mr Metherell started, he got his fingers on - the Scott Report was it? And so then they really changed it, because then they pushed it into those networks, 24 networks and they found that was not workable, and they brought it down to 11 Institutes which was a bit crazy, too. I think they'll go back to nine regions again in a few years, … we seem to get new management - it's been probably every two or three years … and we seem to have a change in the Director-General level every time. So we've got this Ken Boswell[94] now, so really the change before this last one which happened last Christmas, that was overnight basically when they gave it to Ken Boswell and it's called DET now, Department of Education and Training … Before that it was DTEC, yeah, and Jane Dipstick[95], yeah, that's right, and so of course now those sorts of changes have all occurred and it leaves the staff sort of - sort of - god, where are we? … it changes everything up there, but it never changes the workplace. That's always the same, but it makes it harder for you to do your work … [because] every Director … seems to have the concept that they have to sweep the old away and put their own style in, you see. And so that may not change the exact nature of everything, but it changes the *way* things are done (11:9).

The continuing organisational chaos has meant that teachers have felt as if they are battling alone to make sure TAFE's educational process continues. It is the fragmentation and isolation that they speak of most when they talk about the

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[94] Ken Boston, Director-General of the Department of Education and Training at the time.
[95] Jane Diplock, Director General of DTEC, and the Managing Director of the NSW TAFE Commission. "Jane Dipstick" was one of the derogatory names she was known by within TAFE.

organisational changes that have beset TAFE. And the most critical aspect is their sense of isolation as educators. They feel they have lost their educational line of support - they mourn the loss of educational leadership, and the loss of contact with their peers across Institutes and state-wide.

Some of that isolation has been the result of deliberate policies, rather than simply the chaos of an organisation in the throes of constant structural change. Institutes were encouraged to compete with each other, competition being seen as an end in itself under the neo-liberal policies of both Labor and Liberal governments.

Thomson (1998, p. 41) refers to the "Funder-Purchaser-Provider (FPP)" model as a key tool in "New Public Management" (du Gay, 1996 p. 186; Thomson, 1998), describing its essence as a split between management decision-making and delivery. The rationale is that there is less likely to be the "corruption" of territoriality and self-serving behaviour with such a split.

In TAFE, policy and curriculum development were deliberately separated from the operational levels of delivery. Partly this was an attempt to keep centralised control to a minimum. Partly, at least in the case of curriculum, it was the result of the idea that TAFE curriculum should be available to all comers, including private providers - supposedly to contribute to a manufactured "level playing field". Partly it may have been a reaction against the old School system (the system of educational line management that was the precursor to the Educational Divisions). This separation of policy and curriculum development from delivery has created a distance between the TAFE teaching sections and the Divisions[96], and now "they're working for - um - anybody, aren't they?" (27:11).

In the old TAFE structure, the Schools had controlled recruitment, teacher transfer and curriculum. This had sometimes brought them into sharp conflict with local managers. For teachers, this was not necessarily a problem. Indeed, educational staff were sometimes able to take advantage of the dual line of responsibility, gaining the support of a School to deal with an antagonistic Principal or Regional Director, or

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[96] "Division" is used throughout as a generic term to avoid confusion with the various name changes, the most recent of which at the time of writing was in Semester 1, 2001.

vice versa. This, to the Scott Management Review[97], was an administrative horror. But teachers did not necessarily see it that way:

> I think the big mistake, and this also ties into ideology in all this, that's another big turning point when Scott came in [with his analysis?]. I remember Scott was on the radio. He'd finished his school report, he hadn't finished the TAFE report, and he said, quite genuinely, he said, "you know TAFE and schools are really very different places" [said in tone of amazement]. He was really quite surprised [laughter] and I thought - this is a great start. … He saw this parallel structure in TAFE, the academic structure, and you had the college structure - the Schools and Colleges. And there was a degree of tension, a healthy degree of tension between Schools representing education and Colleges representing administration. And Principals and Heads of Schools were more or less equivalent. And they'd have a few barneys. And I think that was really healthy. And he just did away with the Schools. … there was the sort of idea that they would make this one structure and it pushed education right out of the picture. And it never recovered - we haven't recovered yet (9:12).

Under the new regime, the Divisions were to stay at arm's length from the teachers:

> the whole matter of the ESCs[98] being under attack all the time means that their role certainly now is not to have anything to do with teachers. They are only meant to have a point of contact, either through the HOS[99] or through some sort of unit within an Institute, without giving that direct support and so the educational line has gone (1:5).

In my interviews, the responses to the loss of the School structure were varied, sometimes depending on how close a liaison people currently had with their Division. Some people had very bad experiences with the old School structure. The Heads of Schools had a large amount of control over the career prospects of individual teachers, and nepotism in particular Schools was perceived to be rife. But many

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[97] See Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE* for detail on the Scott Review, which was a review of TAFE administration instigated by the Greiner government in 1989. Its publication marked a major turning point for TAFE in NSW.
[98] Educational Services Consortia - the name of the Divisions at the time of this particular interview.
[99] Head of Studies

teachers spoke of how much they missed the *immediacy* of the educational support they had been able to get:

> They were *approachable*. You know, you could ring up, and there'd be enough people up there to answer your questions. So that was fine. And then we moved from that to … the Training Divisions, and we lost quite a lot of contact (39:15).

A great frustration is the number of levels teachers now have to go through to get basic advice:

> I used to be able to get on the telephone and go: hi, what do I do here? I would go direct to the top. I still can in some respects … [but now, for most things] I've got to go through my Institute manager (37:14).

The teacher who made this comment says she used to have a lot more autonomy.

For a long time after the School structure was replaced, teaching staff tried to maintain direct contact with the Divisions, and Divisions would find themselves being rapped over the knuckles for sending advice directly to the teaching sections. But teachers faced with overworked local managers are having difficulty getting advice at any level:

> in [general industry area], we had some - in *[specific trade area]* we had someone we could go to - having trouble with this, can we sort it out. That was your Head of Division [in the School structure]. We've got nothing like that now. And they're actually - they get upset if we go outside of our area looking for advice. … If I've got a problem, I should go to [Head Teacher] , and if I don't have any luck with [him], I'm supposed to go to [local manager, Head of Studies level] - now I'm still asking - I'm still trying to get a meeting and talk to [him] one to one, or a meeting with the section and he's not interested. He's too busy, right? Because he's - he *is* , he's too bloody busy (19:9).

They often have sympathy for their local managers, but speak of them as being uncontactable, of how they are constantly in meetings, and frantically rushing about. In addition, with the constant restructures, the managers are constantly changing jobs:

"[so] as soon as you get someone you've got an understanding with, they go - the tall poppy syndrome, just [chopping sound] [laughter]" (41:17). This is not only unsettling. It can lead to perceptions of management as being just out for themselves, not committed to the teaching sections they manage.

> [I]n the main, middle management is newly appointed, because we've had restructure after restructure after restructure within the Institute - they're either acting in the position, or have been newly appointed. And it's just a question of them saying, look, how high [ie does senior management want them to jump]? And again, they can't see the ramifications of the ideas that they're coming up with, and they certainly don't intend to be around to see the result (30:11).

But often teachers are critical of having line managers who are responsible for their educational delivery but who have no background at all in the area.

> [W]e've got a woman in charge of our section who would be a lovely lady to meet socially, would be a lovely person to meet outside of work, but she knows nothing about our subject matter area. When you talk to her, she needs three translators to understand what we're talking about (7:4).

This is particularly a problem where the section is small and specific and is used to dealing directly with its industry. There are some very funny stories about mistakes and confusions that managers at Head of Studies level have made when industry representatives have been referred to them for advice.[100] Because of the management models in the Institutes,

> your HOS does not necessarily have any educational knowledge or expertise in your area. And yet they supposedly are the point of contact in terms of education, the point of contact for the ESC. And I just see more and more wrong decisions being made educationally because they're not being made at a level where the whole thing is thought through…(1:5).

Ostensibly, the Divisions were set up as they were so TAFE would improve its links with industry. They were "supposed to be a small group of three or four people just

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[100] Unfortunately these cannot be used here as they would too easily identify the people I interviewed.

directing curriculum development and being a contact point for industry" (21:5). But in some cases,

> that's failed lamentably. It simply has not worked. For example, the Training Division would survey industry - they'd ring around and say we want to come and talk to you and so on - very rarely, I might add. They're conspicuous by their absence as far as the industry goes. But [on] the occasions that happened, the people in the industry would ring *me* , you know, as a contact with the industry who they know, and said I've had this guy ring me and he wants to talk to me, what should I tell him? (21:5-6).

Under the old School structure, TAFE developed curriculum for itself, using teachers released from their teaching programs. Many Divisions are still doing this, although the teachers are now on contract. But now curriculum in many areas is developed at a national level, and curriculum development is tendered for. The tenders are won sometimes by people who have no link with a teaching institution, and who may have no real background in the specific area:

> The contract for the [specific] industry went to the ITAB who sub contracted it out to a private company that live in [regional area], that turns out to be a tin pot organisation - knows nothing about national curricula, or Training Packages, or [industry area] competencies. Who did they ring up? They ring up us to ask if we could give them a briefing about what the [industry] competencies really are, and how the national course was mapped to the [industry] competencies, and what are the ASF levels and all the rest of it (27:10).

All of this adds to teachers' impression that many of the changes in TAFE are not rational at best, and are dishonest at worst:

> Communication's gone to pot. And I think it's because you haven't got - we used to have trade people looking after the trade people. And now you haven't got the trade people … You've got bean counters. We call them bean counters, because that's all - anybody above us [is] - all they're trying to do is watch the money. Not educational stuff (19:9).

Even where teachers had not found the old School structure to be very supportive, they still mourned the loss of association with their peers on a state-wide level:

> [S]adly within TAFE, this section [marking place on table] is doing something, this section [ditto] is doing something, and this section [ditto] is doing something, all for the same Division, but this section doesn't know what this section [ie other section] is doing and this section doesn't know what this section [ditto] is doing (23:9).

A casualty of the new structures separating the Divisions from the delivery level were the state-wide conferences that used to be held at least annually:

> We'd all toddle along and the people who were retiring got their silver tray - but we had a chance to find out what was going on - we also did our networking and we had all these contacts with people. I know a lot of people in TAFE, but you just don't contact them any more. Number one, you don't have time to ring around. But you just sort of do your own thing, I suppose. But in those days, you'd say, oh, we've done this, oh, good, could I have a copy of that, and I'll send you this - it was brilliant. And I think that's a real shame that we've lost that, because it really does prevent you reinventing the wheel (44:7).

But under the new structures, Institute management has been firmly opposed to such conferences. Apart from the cost, Institutes have wanted to consolidate their autonomous positions, and have been wary of anything that smacked of the old School structures. The result is that:

> Sections *totally* feel isolated. It came up in [one of the working parties set up] under the Consent Award too, one of the things that teachers wanted most was some sort of professional association, or most people would like to return to the School situation but, barring that, they want something that brings people together on a state-wide basis for that educational support to each other. Some sort of network set up that will allow resources to be shared, ideas to be shared, inputs (1:6).

The reaction from the Institutes to such a suggestion was: "shock, horror and how much is this going to cost? Not are there benefits to doing it? How can we set it up?

But, you know, why would we want to do it, you've got your Institutes, that's all you need" (1:6).

In spite of that, some areas continue to hold state-wide meetings: "Well, we just jacked up … and told them to stick it [laughter]. We did. And we were the only ones. And I tell you what, it's the *best* thing because you're able to get a handle on what's happening" (40:6). And some Institutes have recognised the loss of educational support and exchange, and are setting up meetings themselves:

> they're trying to gather themselves again now, and put that together again I think. With the structure now our [Heads of Studies] should have a much closer link with our Education Training Divisions. I can't see that happening here at the moment, but I think they're trying. And I think our Institute has had a lack - a lack of initiative in that area for quite a few years and I still feel - I still feel quite isolated. Unless I network myself and generate that myself, nothing's going to happen. Where that *shouldn't* happen. The communication should be coming down all the time, not me trying to find my way to go up to the communication. … But for the first time in - two years or something, we are having a meeting with *our* ESC in our Institute with all teachers and all part-time, full-time staff, which is excellent (14:14).

The restructures have left people demoralised and cynical. They see it as a kind of "charade"(22:8) and they are fed up:

> I just couldn't give a shit, really. Every time you read about it - you see these Gazettes and you see there's been a few changes, and you think, well what the - nothing changes down here. We keep getting a few ideologies that trickle down from various people, but apart from that - the only thing that changes - everybody that comes into a new position or a new position's established, or we're amalgamated with School Education, whatever, the main thing that comes through is, we've got less money to spend, we've got to watch our budget, we've got to get students in, we've got to commercialise. It's been happening now for nine years, and everybody is just really sick of it. They're just really sick of it. … People at grass roots level just couldn't give a stuff about what happens above Head Teacher level. Who cares? Nothing changes.

They might - we might feign interest, oh, yes, Billy Bloggs is now Faculty Director of - oh, well, good luck to him (28:12).

V Organisational and management issues

Chapter 11: On management: They are so far removed from what's going on and they're only a doorway away[101].

> There's an increased emphasis on managerialism rather than professional practice … There's an increased expectation that we'll do the right thing by our managers, rather than by our students (43:9).

The corporatisation of TAFE has introduced the forms and language of entrepreneurial management. Goals have been redefined. TAFE's culture as a public sector organisation providing education as a social good has been overtaken by a business culture (Chappell & Johnston, 2003). As du Gay (1996) argues, "A key feature of enterprise as a rationality of government is the role it allocates to the enterprise form as the privileged model for the conduct of conduct" (p. 180).

While TAFE in NSW arguably held the line in terms of educationally valid curriculum far more staunchly than did some of the other states (Byrne, 2001), its organisational forms and administrative systems have become imbued with "the ethos of enterprise" (du Gay, 1996). One result has been the introduction of contractualism into workplace relations which had hitherto been collegiate. As du Gay argues, the assumption of contractual responsibility affirms a "certain kind of identity" and that identity is "essentially entrepreneurial" (p. 180). Contractualism has also introduced a level of individualisation of accountability (Yeatman, 1996) which is arguably antithetical to the previously collegiate culture of teaching.

Chappell (1998) reports that TAFE teachers and managers vary substantially in the way they describe the "institutional realities" of TAFE. Managers (in Chappell's case College Directors) used the language of the commercial world: of the market, entrepreneurialism and the bottom line. In contrast, teachers spoke of the negative impacts of reduced funding, increased workload and organisational restructuring.

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[101] 17:8

As noted above (see Chapter 3: *Concepts*), business definitions of efficiency and effectiveness have become "naturalised" in public sector discourse. But the teachers I interviewed were resisting this process. They continually expressed impatience and frustration at what they saw as managers' attempts to enforce business priorities over educational ones.

However, some of the teachers I interviewed had sympathy and no blame for overworked managers trying to do their best in a climate of constant cost cutting:

> As part of the Federation, we've had meetings and we've talked about, you know, how dare the management cut these courses, and the management do this and the management do that … [But I've acted in a management position] and I know what the managers have to go through. … You know that it's not the management's fault that the money is reducing (16:14).

They see people who are frantically running from meeting to meeting, under constant pressure to perform. But the cost of that frantic busyness is that the managers are becoming more and more alienated from the people they manage. Speaking of his boss, one Head Teacher said:

> He's a man who's walking in and out of this building at all hours of the morning and night, who just seems to have this huge burden on his shoulder. When you try and meet him, or you talk to him, he just seems to be this man walking around with a brain full of stuff knowing what he *has* to get done, and he's listening to you, but he's not really. As he's talking to you, he's thinking, "now I should be doing this" - He's just so - he seems to me the epitome of the stressed professional. He really is. He's either going to have a stroke in the next five years, or… (28:16).

The end result, according to a number of people I talked to, is that: "all of a sudden that kind of buffer, or that interface between management and delivery is now not at HOS[102] level … it's now Head Teacher level" (12:22). They are saying that in terms of educational delivery it is the Head Teachers that are holding it together, while the management "only views the classrooms and students as a statistical case" (21:4).

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[102] Head of Studies, the non-teaching line managers of teaching sections.

That is, the teachers are making a clear distinction between education "the core of the business in … the *real* TAFE [his emphasis]" (21:4), and what they see as the increasingly non-educational concerns of management. "If … they didn't have good Head Teachers or Senior Head Teachers, TAFE wouldn't run at the moment" (42:11).

Over and over, I heard people talk about how management seems to have proliferated with each restructure. It is hard to get clear figures to substantiate this[103]. It may simply be that the movement of non-teaching positions away from the centre has made the layer of management at a local level seem larger simply because it is more visible. It may also be that the heightened sense of management may be a result of the corporatisation and marketisation of education which has led to specific educational sites (the TAFE college, the Institute) becoming "business units" separate from the broader educational system of the previous, bureaucratised administration. Thus the roles of the line managers have become more corporate, less educational, but also more immediate in the daily lives of teachers[104]. Whatever the truth of the matter is, an increasing number of managers is a common perception: "The only organisation in the Western world that's increasing its layers - a proliferation of middle management. Exceeding curious. Exceeding curious" (32:16).

For people who are struggling to get enough money to buy basic materials to run classes, the restructures have seemed like an obscene waste of money[105] to no good purpose:

> Sometimes I get annoyed because they restructured saying we're so top heavy
> - this was in '88, '89 - so top heavy we needed to do this, that and the other -
> By the time they bloody well finished and spent sixty million dollars, we're
> still as top heavy as we were (44:18).

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[103] The Performance Audit Report of the Audit Office of NSW does, however, refer to unnecessary duplication of management both across and within Institutes (Audit Office of NSW, [2001]).
[104] See Seddon, 1997, for a discussion of how directive regulatory power became focused on the school site under managerialist systems.
[105] Kell (1992/93) notes that at the height of the restructures, student enrolments fell, yet the TAFE budget was overspent by $30 million (p. 26).

Teachers see an increase in paper work created by a burgeoning layer of middle management, and money going into supporting that management rather than into the classroom:

> When I started here many years ago, we had a small administration and virtually you knew everyone. And then, within the last seven years, over here, we would be getting letters across the desk here, and there were people with these high faluting titles and you didn't know who they were, where they came from. This empire just blossomed out of nowhere, and you thought, well, what's going on, you know? And all the paper shuffling - you thought you were here for teaching the students. And so, I think a lot of the money for education went into that administration (26:11).

Many of the teachers have no respect for the individual managers, regarding them as incompetent at best, or corrupt at worst (10:18 and others). This exacerbates the resentment they feel at the amount of money they believe is being wasted on management. Jones (1993) comments that the "public truth" is that the new managerialism introduces greater efficiency, but that personal experience indicates that the inefficiencies are still there, and that opportunistic managers remain, but on higher salaries (p. 266). I was told many defamatory stories of managers who, according to these reports, had no interest in education and were simply interested in their own advancement:

> To see those people getting $100,000 a year or whatever they get - you know, there's hundreds and hundreds of people like them eating all the money out of the system that could go towards improving the quality of education - is just sickening. It breaks your heart (24:15).

This resentment was particularly strong where sections were comparing their own lack of resources with the new equipment they saw the managers getting:

> People just feel that just more & more, all this … restructuring just seems to create new managers - lots more new managers. And it just doesn't seem to us that the resources are getting into the classroom. And that's what really pisses people off - teachers. … For example in our area, I mean, how many years - we just fought for years to get computers! It's just ridiculous. Our students

come along, the part-time teachers, and they've got access to Powerpoint at work. You know, fabulous designs and they do their presentations and they're beautiful. And there we are with just crappy old black and white overheads. … And then you see … Heads of Studies who frankly, it just seems to [us] all they do … is just that they interfere and they're actually earning all of that money and they've got state of the art computers and all the software and the colour printer and everything and where are we in terms of teaching? That really pisses the teachers off. … We should be state of the art in the classroom … It's all top heavy and the resources don't seem to be getting to where they're actually supposed to (2:13, similar comments 21:18).

A number of the people I spoke to thought that management in the pre-Scott structure was incompetent and nepotistic. But none of them thought that the new structures had improved management in TAFE: "you realised early on in the old TAFE that people appointed to management positions were appointed because they were unspectacular, and they were conformist. The innovative, creative people had it beaten out of them" (32:3). But now, he says, "I think there's a lack of confidence in management" (32:15) and part of the problem is the continuous restructuring: "… and they get towards the end of a restructure and they just wheel people into positions, you know. They get tired of it - so many openings, and so many people, just plug them in. And it's square pegs in round holes" (32:15).

Others felt some sympathy for the managers who find themselves no longer doing the work they had applied for:

I don't know [the Institute Director], but I can just imagine him taking you [ie middle manager] in and saying, right, well we're restructuring and you're going to be doing this, and you're going to be doing this, and you're off to meetings all the time, and at the end of the day, you're not really … doing what you want to do (18:15).

And they suggest that,

they've got no choice ... they're too old to go out and find another job and they're too young to retire. They've all got family commitments ... so they

have to stay in their jobs. So they accept these direct appointments into jobs but ... they're no longer qualified to do it ... they're out of their depth. And so what we end up with is a whole lot of incompetent people in jobs that they're no longer *happy* about [her emphasis] (17:4).

A few were beginning to feel that things were finally starting to settle, and that finally they had a manager who knew what he or she was doing. This response was most common where the Institute had made an effort to re-establish an educational line of management, rather than in those Institutes which were operating on managerialist models, where the emphasis is on generic management skills rather than subject expertise or educational leadership.

What the teachers were most critical of was managers who, instead of being advocates for their areas of responsibility, were simply managing funding cuts: "I think they should stop only being managers and bureaucrats and develop their visioning skills and their ability to negotiate for improvements in funding, not just manage the funding that's cut" (43:13). A number of the people I spoke to had been managers themselves, either in TAFE or in private industry, and: "I used to fight tooth and nail for my employees. I used to run a company, and I had a Board of Directors to answer to, and I'd fight tooth and nail for those people - for everything. If I needed a new machine, there was no way I wasn't going to have it." He comments that his perception of TAFE management is that "it doesn't occur to them to fight for it - oh, well, we've got to cut funds. So then they go and tell the next one, you've got to cut funds, and then he goes and tells someone else, and it goes down the line until it gets to the poor TAFE teacher" (29:19).

Overwhelmingly, even where people saw that the pressure was external to TAFE, and overtly political, they felt that management had: "rolled over so many times it's unbelievable" (1:9). Very few thought that management had done all it could in the face of the attacks:

> [T]he whole move to a competitive training market, whether anyone needs it or not; and the move to make funding far more difficult, not necessarily given straight to TAFE, means that TAFE then believes that it has to turn round and

look at how it can do things cheaper and be … more competitive back. I mean
I don't agree with the way TAFE's taken it on. TAFE, I think, has almost
thrown its hands up in the air and said "Oh god! We're about to die!", you
know, "therefore we're going to make sure you die along with us." I think
there are a lot more sensible things that could have been done (1:8).

Certainly, the teachers recognise that the public service is no longer a bureaucratic,
civil service model and has become increasingly politicised:

I believe to a certain extent they're puppets [ie senior management], anyway,
aren't they? I mean… if a manager has a different ideology than say, the
government of the day - the government of the day is pushing CBT or
whatever the latest bandwagon is - the Scott Report. If a [manager] stood up
and said, "no, hey, wait a minute, I don't believe that. I reckon we should…" -
how long would he last? I don't think he'd last very long at all. So, to get
where that person is, they have to be able to agree with a certain number of
people to climb that ladder, now, anyway. So to a certain extent, I see
management as virtually - they've got strings higher up, somewhere, and in
particular TAFE - especially middle management. I feel sorry for them in one
regard, but I sort of think, gee they're gutless wonders in another regard,
because they're not - surely if they got out of the influences they're hearing
and listened to their own heart and what they really believe. I wonder how
they sleep at nights, because there must be a lot of conflict there (28:16).

Many of the people I spoke to wondered that - how the management can carry on,
believing in what they are doing:

[T]hey seem to - um - initiate something at the top level, and it will come
down through the management and when it hits us, I think, how can this line
of managers this has all moved through actually believe that what they've
been told to do and what they're now doing is a good thing? It's like - I know
they don't believe it is. I know they've been told that this is what they've got to
do … and they pretend to believe that what they're doing is right. … [But]
they're just worried about their job, and so it goes down the line. They don't
necessarily think it's right, but they're the instruments … I've actually talked to

a couple of them about it. And I eyeballed someone one day and said, "you're not happy in your job any more", and this person looked me straight in the eye and agreed with me. He said, no, he's not (17:6).

And some are decidedly less sympathetic, particularly about the senior levels of management:

> *Do you think people like [the Institute Director] believe in what they're doing?*
> [long pause] Hitler did too, didn't he?" (35:12).

The general impression is that management is frightened:

> I feel sorry for the middle managers, because they're just told, go and do this, and they're made to go and do this … it was interesting talking to a lady that was at a [middle management] meeting with [the Institute Director] a month or so ago, and apparently he just sits there and dictates to them. Nobody asks questions, they all bloody nod when they're supposed to nod, it's like the applause button going … If they rock the boat, they bloody get the letter, don't they? Everybody's shit scared of getting their redundancy now. And it happens all the time (35:11).

A major problem is seen to be the system of contracts at senior levels of TAFE. These were once permanent positions, based on the notion that public servants should be free to give disinterested advice, without fear of losing their jobs because the advice might be politically unpopular. Now they are short term (three or five year) contracts. The contracts include a set of performance indicators that enforce compliance with particular objectives. These objectives, as far as the teachers are concerned, are not necessarily in the best interests of longer term educational planning:

> See, a lot of these fellows [managers] come in on short term contract, a three year contract, and I think the terms of their contract are reduce the spending in [the Institute] on education or make savings, or make staff cuts, otherwise that's you finished. And I think that's what's happened. They're trying to reduce - they're trying to lessen the conditions, lessening the quality of

education. Quality of education, if you bring it up now with a lot of people is a dirty word. They don't want to know. They're not interested (34:16).

Or, as someone else said, "the problem is, I think, that you become part of somebody else's performance indicator" (21:13).

But there appeared to be some confusion about the prevalence of contracts, since some of the examples people talked about were managers who would very likely not have been on contracts. They are, however, all on some kind of performance agreement and review. Under the 2001 award, this system has been extended down to the teacher level. This kind of management system individualises risk (du Gay, 1996, p. 183) and according to the teachers, makes opposition less likely:

> all those people looking to keep going their way up the line or even at the
> HOS level of maintaining their positions in the light of Institute restructures ...
> a lot of them look for any way that they possibly can to ingratiate themselves
> … So I think we've lost a lot of that independence and the ability of people to
> be able to actually stand up and say "no" when they believe that "no" is the
> right thing to say (1:9).

Yeatman (1990) argues that the managerialist agenda allows the "central and controlling levels" of the bureaucracy to garner support from ambitious middle-managers (p. 7). Some of the teachers went further, and attributed a lack of ethics to managers aspiring to promotion:

> [A] lot of people … in the management area, use these positions and use this
> system of contracts to get where they want to be, and they couldn't give a stuff
> about what they're in charge of. They don't care - if they initiate something
> today, they don't care what kind of a mess it's in tomorrow, because they're
> not going to be here - they'll be two more rungs up the ladder (17:16).

A large part of the teachers' alienation from management centres on the idea that the managers are preoccupied with goals and processes that are not primarily educational. This reflects a common separation in bureaucracy between management and delivery. But in the new TAFE, because of the loss of educational leadership considered

elsewhere (see Chapter 10: *Fragmentation/organisational chaos*), the balance has been tipped even further.

> I don't think [management] give a square fuck about the quality of teaching that goes on. Everyone's obsessed with their own issues, which are political and structural and no-one's into the depth, or the involvement - you know, the process (24:17).

Long term planning is demanded, but short term change makes planning pointless.

> They come up with all these harebrained schemes like - oh, we've got funding from here and funding from there and funding from somewhere else - like, [quoting] we're fighting and tendering for funding here and funding there because the funding, state recurrent funding base is shrinking, so we've got to find it somewhere else. So suddenly they find this big bucket of money and say, get out there and start this course [in frantic voice] and you've got one week to get it off the ground. I mean, where's planning? I know you've got to be able to respond, but you've also got to have some kind of common sense and some kind of balance, like you - yes, you can respond, but planning's still got to come in there somewhere (17:7).

So it is understandable that when asked to do the long term planning, the teachers feel that it is really a waste of their time:

> A business plan, which is a bloody lot of work and it takes a bloody lot of time to do, for *what*? For *what?* They can show it to me at the end of the year and say, oh yes, that was very good, now do another one for next year. And - all I do is - I start putting ditto and handing it in. We spend a lot of time doing things that nobody looks at. … whether I think, stuff it, I just won't do it, I don't do it and nobody notices … nobody says, you haven't done it. The Senior Head Teacher in [a neighbouring section], she'll say, did you do this, this and this? Nup. *Didn't* you? Nup. You have to. I said, fine, they'll have to ask me for it. But they don't ask me for it, so, stuff it, how important is it? (23:19-20).

One referred to such demands as "top management crap" and says he tries to isolate it: "quite often it gets filed in the big round file under your desk. And some teachers look at it and say, OK it's more than four weeks old, then [laughing - unclear] wastepaper basket. If it's really important, you'll get a second notice [laughter]" (40:17).

They also express frustration that no matter what decisions appear to be made, nothing actually happens:

> They have meetings on courses, how we're going to restructure the courses. How we're going to restructure the use of the building. How we're going to restructure staffing. How we're going to - and somebody makes a big decision on it. And the bosses are called in, and they take notes and there'll be all this white board stuff and they'll give you copies of it all, and it's never heard of again. Nothing ever happens. I'm still here. I'm still teaching. I'm still in the same teaching role. I'm still in the same building. Nothing's ever happened (29:14).

The teachers are particularly scathing about the managerialist jargon in the new TAFE:

> I'm just sick of my, ah, I'm just sick of my pigeon hole being absolutely filled with crap about, well, what do they call it now - they're not meetings, they're 'stakeholders' ... I don't even know, you know? And it's to do with the way they're going to look at vocational learning… (7:2).

They are understandably impatient that they can't understand much of the material they receive and a culture of mockery has begun to grow up around it:

> the terminology that we've got, I was told that it stands for [rose to go to filing cabinet] I've got folders and folders of this bloody stuff … We've got a meeting next week for three hours. [Name] is going to come and tell us about this system. [reading] Objectives: validate 9802 FPS data - look at all this bull … Update 99 - I don't know! So I rang [name] up, and [she] turned around and said to me, you mean the "effin' pee", and I said, I beg your pardon, and she said the F & P sheets, and I said exactly. That's how you should name it.

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But all that stands for - your 9802, that's 1998, Semester 2. Why don't they write the bloody thing? (34:14).

One of the people I talked to turned her experience into a furious satire:

Guided self assessment[106] … we're having to convince ourselves that we're a legitimate training provider and that we have a *vision*, and that we have *confidence* in our management, and that we have *confidence* in ourselves, and confidence in our system and we can deliver educationally sound programs for no money, and all this sort of stuff … it's all tied to the funding - VET funding. You've got to be registered as an authorised training provider with [BVET?] in order to get *any* funding - even our state recurrent funding will be coming through that … And not only that - TAFE - it wasn't sort of TAFE had to be, it was *Institutes* had to be, and it was down to *campuses* in Institutes had to be. So they weren't satisfied with someone in Head Office saying, well, we're OK, [in mock American accent:] you can give us your money [laugh], they had to have all of *us* tell them that we were OK. And it was all tied in to these vision statements - and I didn't know that at the time, but these big spewy green A3 laminated posters with Our Vision Statement were sent around to all the campuses about a week before the guided self assessment - and they sort of appeared on the wall near the photocopier, and you know, right in front of your cup of tea in the tea room … and you'd read this shit, and you'd think - give me a break! are you kidding? Like, you know, I promise to treat my fellow human beings with the utmost respect [in a stupid childish voice] … And I promise to tell the truth and I will never [return to normal voice] And I'm reading this, and we've just been *fucked over*, excuse me, in Benchmarking number 2, Restructure mark 5 - and here's some - here's some *trog* telling *me* that they'll always be [in lisping, insincere voice] "open and honest" and I think - well, but you're not even being open and honest with *us*! Like this whole thing was like this whole *scam*, you know? Like no-one was telling you what was going on, no-one would tell you that, you know, three of you aren't going to have a job when all this is over, and this is just one campus - like, are they kidding? And then I turn around and read that. I went and took

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[106] The 2000 Audit Report into TAFE NSW notes with approval the use of "guided self assessment" (Audit Office of NSW, [2001] p. 50).

it off the wall in the [manager's] office because I was that peed off about what it said and what they'd just said to us in this benchmarking restructure meeting. I said, I'm going to get a copy of that, because they're not even being that with us. It's almost like - this is how we're going to be, but it doesn't apply to any of *you*. Like it just applies to some people. It's very select who we're going to be open and honest with - and she was on the phone, and I'm taking this thing off her pin board, and she's going [in frantic voice] "hang on, hang on a minute, what are you doing? what are you doing with that?" And I said, I'm going to photocopy it! … because it's bullshit! Anyway, so I went and photocopied it, and then I took it back in and thumbtacked it back to her wall [laugh] … Yeah. So all these things went around about a week - while I was in the guided self assessment, and they're going on with all this spewy shit and asking all these questions that - the questions were *loaded* , like you weren't able to answer them in an honest way because there was no way for you to answer them honestly, because they composed the question and then they gave you options to answer. But none of the options to answer were satisfactory options in *my* opinion, as far as the question was concerned. I felt like there should have been "other" at the end of it, and then I would have put my answer … Anyway, we're sitting there in this guided self assessment like a room full of little doobies and these people from [another] Institute who were the facilitators, and they ran through the whole thing with us, and how it was all laid out, and what you should say, … and how you should rank all these questions, and everything … it was almost like it was policed, … it was almost like an exam. OK - when it was time to start, they went through each question with you, and then they wanted to see you write - pick one of the answers, or rank it how you thought it related to your particular campus, or your particular management, or whatever, and then they wanted to discuss what people's responses were. And I just sat there as they went through. And they got to Question number 5, and this was taking some time, each question took some time - and after about number 5, the guy was sort of looking around at everyone, and I hadn't picked up my pencil, because I felt that there was nothing there that I could put down that would honestly answer that question, [from?] what was provided, and he was watching, and he'd seen that I'd not

picked up my pencil, and I hadn't made a mark on the paper, and you're not allowed to do that, apparently, you'd be disqualified. And so then I saw him [whispering:] [bend down?] and he said something to the lady there. And then he walked around the room behind my desk, so he was actually looking over from the top, and then walked back around and [whisper, whisper, whisper sound], you know. And then he made a point of asking me particularly at the next question what my response had been. And so, that was all I was waiting for - I let fly! [laugh] [I said? So?] You'll be sorry. You should have just let me walk out of here without doing this exam! Because I said, this is a crock of *shit*! (17:9).

The anger she expresses is indicative of the anger that others voiced when talking of how they felt about the language and processes being imposed on them by what Gee, Hull & Lankshear (1996) refer to as the "new work order". Gee et al. point out the paradox that the language of the new capitalism, while framing the discourse, is "insulting" if spoken directly to workers (p. xvi). Although it is difficult to argue against "quality", "responsiveness" and "flexibility" from *within* the discourse, the teachers I spoke to were reacting to that implied insult. They experienced the language and management forms as being patronising, frustratingly irrelevant and hollow. One teacher spoke vividly of his reaction to a manager he felt was trying to manipulate him: "'And how does that make you feel?' - and the hairs on the back of your neck stand up - you want to jam something up their throat … That's the psychology stuff that they're teaching them" (19:9).

Particularly, they feel that there is a gap developing between what they see happening around them and the rhetoric of management:

And too many lies are being told … There's people being made redundant and unclear stories being told about the process of that, and conflicting stories being told about the process of that … And I'm not sure whether it's dishonesty by ignorance - people don't know what's going on, so they make up a story and tell it, or whether there are deliberate lies being told. But either way it's undermining the integrity of the organisation. And when that occurs at the very top level, that always filters down. And people are fragmented and

don't have a sense of wholeness to be able to keep rolling with their work (43:14).

The loss of trust fuels the rumour mill and increases demoralisation. One teacher told me that the climate had resulted in their section becoming so concerned about their future, although they have not been under any direct threat, that when they were asked to move from their current premises so they could be refurbished, they wondered whether it was just a way of getting rid of them:

> Just to give you a feeling for the culture, we came back on the Monday after Easter, and there was a notice about this meeting. We all heard about what it was about, and I can say … to the very person, everybody went to that meeting thinking "they want to close us down" OK? Now that's the mood. And we're not an area that's been under attack in particular. Nothing - it's not because of that. It's just how everybody thinks. And everybody left the meeting convinced. Even though they've [ie management] denied it. They wouldn't commit themselves either. See, there's no commitment. So we're supposed to be committed, but they're not. … And of course that's the other major change, I think that you used to rely on your Head of School, their job was to barrack for you. And now they barrack against you. It's been a total reversion [inversion?]. Absolutely (9:2).

So management concerns are seen as very different to the concerns of the teachers. Managers don't "investigate the concerns of everyone under them and report those concerns upward". Instead, they "*hide* any concerns … so that no-one above them ever hears any bad news" (24:18). Management are no longer advocates for their staff, and they don't listen.

V Organisational and management issues

Chapter 12: What the managers said

Cornford (2001) argues that the politicisation of the public service has resulted in
"less critical analysis of political initiatives in policy formulation and
implementation" (p. 17). He cites Hawke's research finding that "many VET policy-
makers and managers have limited tenure in their position, little or no real
background in vocational education and very limited knowledge of previous policy
initiatives of only five years ago" (p. 17). That conclusion supports the view of
managers held by many of the teachers I interviewed (see Chapter 11: *On
management*). However the managers in my study did not fit this profile at all, even
though one of them voiced the same perception that the teachers had:

> the people who understand training and vocational education are not the ones
> who are now management. And it's been seen in terms of - ah - *managerial*
> skills as predominant, and *managerial* theory - ah - just another thing which
> you manage. Where in effect, in many ways, what would be a *better* input is
> having the understanding of the - ah - vocational educational theory (45:12).

On the other hand, the policy makers at the national level may not have much
background:

> Federally we're … driven in education and training by either bureaucrats or
> people [who are] driven by profit dollars to shareholders (49:11).

However, all the managers in my study had substantial backgrounds in the vocational
education and training sector, and most had begun as teachers in the TAFE system. It
is tempting to think that this may be part of the reason why TAFE NSW took a more
oppositional stance to many of the sweeping changes that were introduced by the
Federal government[107]. Judy Byrne, who retired as Director of Educational
Development in 2001 after 31 years in vocational education and training, says that
while TAFE NSW may look like "national whingers", it has "more intellectual
firepower, people who can see the issues" than other states. In its opposition to some

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[107] See Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE.*

facets of the national training agenda, "often we've turned out to be right" (Byrne, 2001, p. 18).

Of the nine managers I interviewed, four were quite unhappy with the direction TAFE has taken and all expressed some reservations. All of them could be classified as "senior managers" vis-à-vis teaching staff. Some were at Head of Studies level, others were in senior Institute positions, and four were in positions with state-wide responsibilities. Seven were located in the metropolitan area, two were regional. Five were female, four male[108].

National training reform: "flavours of the month"[109] and "born again vocationalists"[110]

The managers regretted many of the educational impacts of the changes forced upon TAFE by national reforms in vocational education and training. Like the teachers, they were aware that the much vaunted "industry driven" system was often driven only by particular sectors of industry, particularly, "Big business, big business, big business" (47:5).

> [O]ne of the problems for us as an institution the size that we are as part of the national training system is that at the national level, … no matter what the rhetoric says, the preoccupation has been with large enterprise training needs. And the whole structure, the national framework, is built around assumptions about what the skilled labour requirements are of basically large, and perhaps some medium sized enterprises. The small business person and the self employed person basically are not being catered for within the national policy framework (46:7-8).

This concern was repeated by other managers, who related experiences of talking to local industry representatives, or to smaller trade associations within an industry area, and discovering that they knew nothing of what the ITABs, the bodies supposedly representing them, were arguing for. The difficulty is that far from becoming more

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[108] When asked to describe themselves at work, all of the men described their work role: manager; all of the women described how they felt: eg bored, frustrated, deskilled, task focussed, frantic, interested in people, overburdened.
[109] 45:12
[110] 49:5, 11

responsive to industry particularly at a local level, the processes put in place to ensure industry driven curricula instead separate the delivery point even further from the client industry:

> You've got [a] TAFE teacher - or any other teaching section, who respond to an Institute management of some kind. In terms of curriculum and course design, respond to the Educational Consortiums … In turn, respond to a TAFE Commission type policy, who in turn respond to a BVET, who in turn respond to an ANTA. Who in turn work [through?] a national ITAB, who in turn work through State ITABs, who in turn mostly have members who are, as you said, peak industry bodies, who in turn are composed of employers. So if a small employer wants their students doing something different, instead of being able to negotiate with the teaching section of the local college, they're expected to go through that channel, and it's the old game that kids play of ten people in a line, give the first one a message, how's it come out at the end. There's no way transmitting the message through that long chain, having it filtered by what's in the interests of all these bodies it goes through, and what comes down to the teaching section may bear very little relationship to what their local employers wanted (45: 11-12).

In the end,

> the community don't have a *clue* what's going *on* … and when I say community I also mean the industry and business sector… and they don't see it as being particularly relevant to them. They just want a productive worker and don't want to go really into the analysis of how they get a productive worker (4:6).

Some of the managers also agreed with the teachers who expressed deep concerns about the effect the reforms were having on the knowledge base of vocational education. One regarded CBT as self-evidently leading to deskilling and spoke scathingly of the "Laurie Carmichael approach" and "born again vocationalists who think they knew about it all". Measuring competency is fine, he said, "but we've separated them out from the whole thing. And a good carpenter is more than the sum of competencies one to ten" (49:11).

The by-product of "industry" rather than education dominating curriculum decisions is a narrowing of the base because business has different priorities:

> Australia doesn't have a training culture. I think we did have more of a training culture three decades ago than we have now. People can't afford to do it because they're on about driving the dollar - every hour's a dollar. So … people don't teach people to be builders any more. They teach people to hang doors, or to put in windows, or to fix plaster board … because the competition was too great. And as a consequence, a lot of employers, both the large companies and small companies, don't commit to training. Can't afford apprentices. Look at the apprenticeship numbers in Australia, going down drastically. So the born again vocationalists introduced New Apprenticeship Scheme - whoopee do. What they've done is change it to traineeship. Traineeship is not commitment. Not commitment to training. It's bullshit (49:5-6).

The teachers I spoke to were concerned with the narrowing curriculum and the loss of mobility that they saw occurring for a workforce trained in limited, enterprise-specific skills. Some of the managers, too, expressed unease about what TAFE's "responsiveness to industry" might mean for its students:

> with disappearing work … the opportunit[ies] for people who are educationally disadvantaged for whatever reason are going to be minimised. … So while a lot of the rhetoric is looking at having career paths and as educationalists we look at that, I think the practice in industry, in some sectors, and especially in small business, is that they are … actually wanting to limit skills and have them so customised that I am concerned about how people are going to be able to transfer and their mobility within that industry. Now, I haven't got any evidence for that, it's just a gut feeling (4:7).

Again reflecting the teachers' concerns, another manager pointed out that what is good for the employer is not necessarily what is best for the student. While ANTA and the State Training Profiles promote work based delivery and work based assessment,

a very large percentage of our students are training to get *out* of their existing job. Now, you can hardly go to your employer and say, assess me for something that I don't want to do, or allow me to go and get assessed in another industry, which is not you. There's not much employer backing for that (45:10).

On the other hand, one of the managers, who expressed reservations about the Taylorist implications of competency based training[111], gave an example of industry backing for a longer term, more educational orientation. His experience also echoes that of some of the teachers[112] I spoke to:

[I]n one of the Training Packages which I'm intimately connected with, I'm on the National Steering Committee … the industry *insisted* on a knowledge base - absolutely insisted, and told ANTA to go and stick their stupid academic, bureaucratic crap up their fundamental - we *must* have a Training Package which is connected to knowledge … it is absolute nonsense for it to be based on pure competencies, it's got to be knowledge based. … They want to build the future now, and so they talk about knowledge bases … I think there will be a move towards education as opposed to training… (48: 13-14).

There was criticism of the competitive training market. At the time of my interviews, there was strengthening anecdotal evidence nationwide of inadequate training on-the-job and by private providers [113]. One manager referred to recent research he had read on the effect of competitive markets on traineeships. He pointed out that most of the previous research had been on employers, but when trainees were asked about their experience,

overwhelmingly the response from trainees who have done their training either on-the-job or with other providers, have said they feel short changed. They know what their friends who did their traineeship through TAFE got out of it, and they feel they haven't developed their skills like the TAFE trainees

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[111] See Brown (1991) in Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE* on CBT and Taylorism.
[112] eg 8:9 - See Chapter 7: *Educational Issues in the Change*.
[113] The anecdotal evidence was subsequently substantiated by research, for instance Schofield, 1999. See also Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE*.

have. There's nothing to build on to additional course levels, and they just feel that they've been [shafted?] (45:13).

But the managers were pleased that NSW had to some extent held the line:

I don't know what will happen if there's a change of government. Because Chika's[114] a bit of a market girl. But certainly the current Minister's not overboard about competition. I mean they agreed to what they think they had to, to keep ANTA happy, but in NSW we haven't gone the way they have in Victoria or Queensland, just opening absolutely everything up (51:10).

The teaching staff: That certainty has gone. That's their big worry.[115]

A number of managers argued that the old TAFE needed to change, and was only forced to do so when confronted with the national reform agenda. Indeed, two said that the agenda was positive because of that, one arguing that the agenda was "all about change instruments. It's not the ends, it's the means towards the end". The result was a "playing field" that was tilted so steeply, with TAFE "right down the bottom" that it had to "stop looking at its navel and start looking at … how it responds". However, he added, "the shame of it is there's been a lot of damage on the way. The madness of Victorian TAFE and the stubbornness of NSW TAFE" (48:15).

The other was more vituperative. She believed that TAFE needed to change, but would not have done so but for the pressure of the training market. She argued that TAFE's

award conditions are antiquated in this day and age when people are working like dogs to earn twenty thousand dollars … I think it's *embarrassing* that there are teachers who are working two or three days a week and they're taking home sixty thousand dollars[116]. I think it's inequitable (47:6).

She argued that "the public dollar has shrunk" and that TAFE needed to "think about what its core business is and customise our training and try and earn a bit of extra money". She worried "whether TAFE will survive" and was ambivalent about

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[114] Kerry Chikarovski, the Opposition Leader at the time.
[115] 46:4
[116] This is hyperbole. The teaching rate at the time was less than $50,000 per annum, and the teachers' award is a 30 hour week.

whether the changes were good or bad. But she was adamant that TAFE needed to
shift

> To leaner, meaner, focused - to make the shift of discussing whether that extra
> half hour I worked was overtime or not. To: I'll go out and deliver on the
> worksite (47:6).

Her response, while harsher than most, particularly in her criticism of TAFE teachers,
was indicative of the attitude of many of the managers. The sense of historical
necessity of the neo-liberal "new world order" (Marginson, 1997, p. 58) imbued their
perceptions of TAFE. They expressed a view that the world having "moved on",
many of the concerns raised by the teachers were at best irrelevant or at worst
whingeing. Speaking of ANTA and of the Director General of DET, Ken Boston, that
same manager commented:

> where they are is where the world is. People work incredibly hard out there.
> Everybody works incredibly hard, and I think there are a number of TAFE
> teachers who work incredibly hard, the ones like me who always have. There's
> a whole raft of them and well and truly the majority who - would *die*, I have to
> say, if they were sent out back to private practice, into the private sector. So
> the world has moved. A lot of teachers haven't (47:3).

Even where managers disagreed with the directions being taken, and felt sympathy
for teaching staff in TAFE, they expressed impatience, bordering on contempt in
some cases, for staff who continued to resist change. They were particularly critical
of teachers fighting for job security:

> I think [casualisation is] an inevitable part of a process of restructuring and
> change, and in fact, you know, I suppose in my view, I would like to see more
> contractual arrangements than currently exist. I believe - it's got to be linked,
> however, to performance. I *don't* believe that in the kind of environment that
> we're working in, where we've got to be responsive to community and so on,
> that the person who sits back on their hands and says, well, I've got a job
> irrespective of whether I move my bum or not, I'm here, I've got a job, I'm
> secure, and I don't care about this other person - and that distinction between
> those categories of workers I think is highly problematic for an organisation.

Now, I believe we ought to have a different environment for hiring people. …
I think that the notion of security has got to go … out of the lexicon, and what
we've got to do is concentrate on the issue of satisfaction, job satisfaction,
performing well, serving the community well, doing your job well. That then
will assure you of a secure future because you're performing well (46:9).

Murdock (1994) makes the point that the idea of "flexible specialization" has been
seized on with enthusiasm by post modern writers as a reaction against the "vertical
hierarchies of modernity". But, he says, it is really about "new freedoms for
employers". Under "flexible specialization", permanent employment supported by
collective bargaining through trade unions is replaced by contingent forms of
casualised employment. The rhetoric of the flexible workforce, he says, "urges people
to learn to live with insecurity" (pp. 243 - 244), just as the manager quoted above
does. The managers I interviewed stand as employers in relation to teachers and they
expressed an employer viewpoint perhaps more strongly on this than on any other
issue.

It was clear from the managers' comments that they are frustrated by their inability to
get rid of some categories of teachers to make way for other categories that they saw
as more appropriate. Speaking of TAFE's "social responsibility" to provide training
for jobs for unemployed young people, one said:

… one of the problems is at the same time you've got a whole lot of teachers
saying I don't want to be unemployed and I'm a fitting and machining, or I'm
an elec[trical] trades teacher. On the other hand, … there are [sic] lots of
unmet demand in the [marketing course] - [it] is a growth area. But I can't
give more kids jobs in that area, and train them - I can't even *publicise* it
because I've got a whole pile of fitting and machining and elec. trades teachers
(47:4).

It is to some extent a lack of resources that puts these kinds of pressures on the
managers.

Institute Directors are driven incredibly much by the dollar and there's nothing
they can do about it. They are - their funds are really, really tight. … and that's

why many of them would like to be able to offer redundancies because you know, you might find one section with not a single part-time hour being worked, and in fact, underprogrammed teachers, and then you've got the situation that you were describing [where one full-time Information Technology teacher was managing a section of twenty part-time staff and had been asked to increase delivery by 20%], and that must lead to internal tensions within colleges, too - of the IT[117] teacher looking at the F & M[118] section and thinking, bloody hell (51:7)[119].

The more aware managers maintained some respect for the motivation of the teaching staff, recognising the teachers' commitment both to their role as educators and to their skill areas. But they did not think it was sustainable:

I think there's a huge resistance in *many* cases. I won't say all, because some … do I generalise? Many of our trade people … have come in because of the craftsman nature of their industry … But the commitment to the craftsman area and excellence - is looking at a lot of the preservation of the old skills without necessarily taking on the developments in terms of the - the business imperatives out there and looking at productivity and costs of that (4:6).[120]

One of the managers argued that it is organisational ineptness that leads to TAFE's perceived lack of flexibility, or "currency", in its staffing. More than a lack of purpose or the pressure of a "VET marketplace", the main problem for TAFE, he said, was that "we don't turn our staff over … people don't move through". With an ageing workforce and an "average organisational lifetime [of] 15 years", the organisation, he said, needed to be "sophisticated and smart", to take advantage of experienced people and a "steady workforce", but to provide them with opportunities to maintain their "currency" in order to meet "customers' needs" (48:8-9).

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[117] Information Technology
[118] Fitting and Machining
[119] In fact, in my interviews, this perspective was more commonly voiced by managers than by teachers.
[120] Later in the interview she said "in terms of the difficulties with the staff and their craftsman sort of base, I understand that value and that passion and that's part of that passion that I respond to and enjoy working with" (4:17).

And one, while sensitive to the outcomes for staff faced with redundancy, blamed the teachers' personal inadequacy for those outcomes. She could see that people facing retrenchment have borne an "enormous" cost on a personal level, but criticised them for a lack of "ability to adapt to change". She linked that perceived incapacity with the kind of industry they had worked in, perhaps extrapolating from the prevalent arguments about "old" industries incapable of adjusting to the new globalised marketplace:

> a lot of their experience in the workplace has been the same practices over and over again, very little *need* to change. Their thought processes, their work methodology, their [work?] old way of doing things. And so therefore they had very few skills in terms of dealing with it and … the personal skills or the inner resources, to think, well, I've got to look at this. And I think it was partly their communication skills, it was partly their understanding of the learning processes, the process of change they'd never experienced before and so they didn't have that network, or anybody to talk to about how to deal with that (4:10).

Her attitude is the employer's perspective on the kind of self-criticism that Dan (see Dan's story in Chapter 5*: When the Numbers are dropping*) subjected himself to. He had tried to adjust to the demands to change that were made of him, but in the end blamed himself for not being able to. This manager's sympathy for cases like Dan's was overridden by her frustration as a manager:

> [Their experience] had [a] significant impact on family life, their own personal self esteem, and in many cases, their value as an employee has been significantly destroyed ... it's very difficult for an organisation who does say we'll provide you with opportunity and then they don't have the capacity to respond to that, after many, many, many, many, many years and they're still not able to, to just say look forget it and discard them. And in discarding them they are, you know, their life is ruined. A couple of them have taken up the challenge with an enormous amount of time and pain … and many of them, well, one or two of them have opted out through … voluntary redundancy. Two, to my knowledge, have retrained that I've had involvement in and two of them are basically abusing the system and don't care much about it. And

they've got so many medical problems and what have you - they're just - wasted. I mean, they're wasted human beings (4:10).

When asked how the changes in TAFE had affected teachers, most of the managers were sympathetic, although a couple said that many teachers had not been very much affected at all:

they have been almost untouched by all of this, and I am sure you could interview people that have felt like - there's a great din and noise out there all around them, you know, constantly - there's this constant maelstrom, [but] because they haven't had to deal with any of this - [it] hasn't impinged on them in any direct sense (46:5).

She went on to say that the main effect would have been their need to be accountable and to "manage within the resource that they've got" as opposed to what she referred to as "an open cheque book situation" that she said prevailed before (46:5). But, contradicting the perception quoted above that the teachers had not been much affected, she had recognised earlier in the interview that

for many of them, the real crisis has been about the changing national training agenda and the disappearance of certain kinds of industries. The lack of commitment by employers to apprenticeships and traineeships has, I think, led to a crisis for our teachers, those teachers who in former years didn't have to worry about where their … next student intake was going to come from … the core business which used to be apprenticeships - it was fifty per cent of our business or more in the 1950s, that's all but disappeared now. That certainty has gone. That's their big worry (46:4).

Some of the managers understood that for many teachers their reasons for being in TAFE were being whittled away under the new regime. They recognised the teachers' unease about the way their educative role is changing, and often agreed with them about the ideological intent behind the changes. But in the end, they expressed a conviction that adapting to the changes is imperative for survival, and even that the "challenges" should be seen as opportunities, So they were often critical of the teachers' resistance:

I mean, we're employed by the government and we are technically agents of government policy and [then seem to be?] constantly having this personal conflict about what you have to do in terms of that's the direction that is required versus your personal philosophy. Teachers are very strongly experiencing that. That's something I think that is [debilitating?]. They came into education because of this … and what they're seeing happen in terms of educational practice and their definition of what quality is versus what other people and the government is saying is quality is - um - in many cases is quite divergent.

And how are they dealing with it?

Sticking their heads in the sand and saying, in some cases, it's not happening. Fighting, resisting. Some are taking on the challenge. Some are saying the pain's getting too much, maybe I'd better move on, sometimes just roll over and we give up some of our principles. But some of the principles, in terms of giving up, they often will experience new ways of doing a thing and actually can learn from it, so some of it has been positive (4:15).

The managers seem to have more faith in the prospects of worker "empowerment" in the new work order than do the teachers. They recognise that the teachers' job is "getting extremely more complex, and things that were easy to do a decade ago are hard for Head Teachers and teachers to do now" (45:12). There is a lack of system support, with demands being made on teachers to do things differently, while "the administrative structures haven't changed at all" (33:7). But rather than seeing something essentially problematic about how the neo-liberal agenda has changed the labour process of teaching, a number of them expressed a perception that the problems are primarily organisational. One manager said there is

a lack of clarity where people are able to draw the boundaries around their particular set of challenges to be dealt with and managed and moved on with. So they can't be proactive at the personal level. I don't think teachers are empowered, and we haven't got systems in place, or a framework in place that allow teachers to be empowered to address these challenges. They always seem to be in catch up football (48:8).

A number of them sympathised with the excessive workload and how it distracts teachers from teaching:

> I do understand when the expectations are excessive, as they have now become. See, the administrative load that is dropping onto Head Teachers is crazy. And TAFE really is riding on the back of its Head Teachers, I believe now[121]. And they are very close, if they haven't already reached it, of saying enough, thank you very much. And the system will stall. But it doesn't seem - senior management just keep pushing it out, pushing it out - unless they wake up [unfinished sentence] … It's quite ludicrous. It's generated to make some of the senior bureaucrats feel much happier because they can quote all these figures. It shouldn't be people at that level - Head Teachers should be focused on the educational side of it. More and more - 50% of their work load, probably, at least, now is on that. They just do not have time to look after the quality of what's going on in the classroom (50:15).

And some expressed admiration for the teachers' commitment:

> what holds me is that they *haven't* walked out. See if they were so despondent and pissed off with us all, they would have left. They're all very capable people in their disciplines, you know. TAFE teachers *are* a unique breed. They didn't come in because they're all millionaires and now they want to give something back. There's something about teaching that is quite different … And they get their joy out of watching their students …They don't get their joy out of restructures, they don't get their joy out of not being trusted and all those sorts of things (49:15-16).

Even the manager who was most critical, who said of the teachers, "I don't mean to be totally shoulder padded cruel, but … if I really, really wanted to be honest, I'd say, having a job is becoming [a luxury]" (47:7) also said that what inspires her most is:

> teachers at the grass roots. … their dedication because they actually remind me of when we were all … teachers how hard we used to work and how much we *gave* to TAFE. It was because we were committed to what we did and these - it's the teachers that inspire - it's not the tradition, it's the fact that

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[121] See comments made by teachers that TAFE would not be surviving if it were not for the Head Teachers, Chapter 11: *On Management*

there's still teachers out there, grieving, demoralised, whatever, who because
they're good human beings, good teachers [are] committed, no matter what!
That's it (47:10).

The holy dollar[122]

As noted above, a number of the managers saw the vocational education and training
policy makers as lacking in educational experience. The driving force is not
educational decision making, but the politics of neo-liberalism.

> The people in DTEC[123], I don't know what their background is but I guess I
> just - I see them as being administrators and [unclear] without actually having
> training experience and background and it's just so, so *political*. And the
> politics are such a huge dynamic, such a huge driving force, that it's just
> getting in the way of the rhetoric - the rhetoric of achieving better education
> and training. The holy dollar (4:13).

Muetzelfeldt (1995) argues that technical efficiency ('the bottom line') may be "an
end in itself" in the private sector, but that the primary motivation in the public sector
should be "social effectiveness". Managerialism, he says, does not deliver social
effectiveness (p. 104). As noted above, the TAFE managers I interviewed did not fit
the managerialist mould, in that they were not just "generic" managers (Leggett,
1997), but had educational backgrounds. This gave them a perspective that was not
always sympathetic to a managerialist agenda. One manager pointed out that a
decision

> may be *economically* rational but educationally irrational … there's no point
> in making an economically rational decision … if it's socially irrational,
> technologically irrational and educationally irrational, because it's going to
> come back and bite you (45:18-19).

But the imperative is the demand for "efficiency" in the expenditure of public funds.
The argument is that teachers have "to come to terms with the fact that activities cost
money" (46:4) and that having vacant positions in a class, for instance, is an

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[122] 4:13
[123] The body which had subsumed TAFE at the time of the interview - see Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE* for discussion of the various restructures.

unconscionable waste of public funds. Here the managers were expressing their frustration with what they see as a kind of self-indulgence, whereas the teachers see it as defending educational priorities over the "dollars and cents"[124]. Managers may be aware that

> it's not always the fault of a section that there's eight vacant spaces, because of that other thing about the demand being different, and changing, and employers' commitment to training - a moveable feast depending on the economic environment and the market conditions.

But

> this is the public dollar, and the community's resource, and … you have some responsibility - this isn't something that you have a right to - you are a custodian of these funds and this resource, and you have a duty to use them the most efficiently that you can for the greatest number of people that can avail themselves of it. I think that's been the most significant change (46:4-5).

Ostensibly, it is hard to argue against the "accountability for public funds" line even if, as Marceau (1995) says, "the language used to discuss education reduces policy questions to degrees of conformity with two common criteria: efficiency and effectiveness" (p. 111). And, as Angus and Seddon (1997) argue, "Accountability tends to be reduced to economic viability more than to educational responsibility" (p. 8). But the experience of some of the managers is close to those of the teachers in my study. There is no *educational* logic where qualitative data is crowded out by an "emphasis on quantitative tools" (Marceau, 1995, p. 115). One of the managers expressed his frustration at what he saw as an almost irrational focus on budget exactness:

> the beginning of this year, we were called into a meeting … and the table was thumped - we would not go one dollar over - and in fact, as it turned out the budget wasn't spent anyway, so that was a bit stupid. That's almost as big a crime as overspending. But - I think it's still pretty gung ho. … Very much budget focused, ASCH focused. I mean I was beaten around the head a couple of weeks ago for not reaching my ASCH target, when in fact I did - as far as

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[124] See Chapter 6: *Doing More with Less.*

I'm concerned I did because I told them what we could produce and went and produced it. … Just because they added another 60 thousand to it, without any logic in terms of have you got the teachers to meet that, have you got even the students to do it… (50:11).

This manager was at one with the teachers in his exasperation with planning processes that did not have educational issues as a priority. With a background in teaching himself, he prefers "to focus on what the teachers are doing, how well they do it". While he does not argue against the necessity for better planning, like the teachers he is impatient with the emphasis on what he sees as figures "dreamed up by senior management … without any consultation". He says he and his manager colleagues are "not allowed to meet on a regular basis or discuss educational type issues". He sees it as "economic type rationalism" which has no link with the "reality on the ground" (50:11-12).

Apart from the argument that social effectiveness should be the measure in the public sector[125], there is some concern that public sector organisations like TAFE *cannot* function effectively according to corporatist models[126]. As one manager said,

[TAFE is] operating in this sort of private, competitive market and of course, in the market place the organisations that can survive - they're smaller, and they're just doing some things, not everything. And so maybe - it's also an organisation going from being a public sector to a commercial - you know? You can't do that. It doesn't happen. It doesn't happen successfully. Because it's a *completely* different type of organisation (33:18).

She thought TAFE should be responsive and "relevant to what people's needs are", that it "should be better oriented to what customers need" but did not believe that the answer lay in a competitive training market. Rather, she said, "you could *value* things in different ways" (33:18).

Being forced to act like a profit-making corporation, "a process of coporatisation, rather than … being sold off completely as with other public utilities" is still a form

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[125] See Muetzelfeldt (1995) above.
[126] See Chapter 7: *Educational issues in the changes* for a similar argument made by the teachers.

of privatisation of the TAFE system (Miller, 1997, p. 21). Many of the managers I spoke to accepted this direction, and spoke of "business decisions" (47:3) rather than educational decisions, or put a positive spin on the resource squeeze[127]:

> *Do you think TAFE's in a bit of a crisis financially?*
> No.
> *You don't feel that here?*
> No, no. What's happening here is that we've got a shrinking budget - core budget, and we're expected to generate revenue through various ways, and we have structured programs with strategic alliances through … sponsorship schemes, which all sound rather dirty if you didn't take the time to sit down and say, well, what does this mean. What it means in the simplest form is that we teach [name of trade area] here, the major providers of [trade material] in the industry know that unless they've got trained people out there, trained customers etc - [so] they give us a bunch of [trade material] (48:16).

This manager also spoke approvingly of the substantial capital equipment investment made by a large corporation on a TAFE campus. He was aware of the arguments about this kind of industry subsidy for public education. He referred to the "old fashioned" reaction to "public education by the golden arches". But his view was that

> they've got a need, we're in partnership and our main goal is public education, to provide opportunities for individual aspiring people. And you get that done without prostituting the goal. Being in partnership with enterprise doesn't prostitute the goal (48:16).

One manager even used an almost Orwellian euphemism to argue that there were no cut backs in funding: "we're not having cut backs. No. There's been *adjustments*, but that's been mostly market driven" (45:15). When I pushed him, he conceded:

> There's - ah - what some people call cut backs … Yes, there are resourcing pressures, I don't run away from that. … And some of our responses to that have been, well, demonstrating the extra value that we provide by the way we do our business (45:15).

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[127] Chappell (1998) found that managers in TAFE were more likely to use the language and concepts of enterprise than were TAFE teachers.

Whether using the language of business, or using the language of educational provision, many of the managers regarded casualisation of the teaching staff as an inevitable and major consequence of the funding crisis in TAFE. As one said, "Institutes simply do not fill vacant full-time positions" both because full-time teachers are more expensive and because "they want the flexibility to … move their resources around" (51:6).

However, they recognised that casualisation creates its own problems, "where you don't have enough full-time teachers to provide the - infrastructure … that you need to keep the section going" (51:6). Or, as another said, "we wind our business down when we don't have a full-time teacher tying things together" (45:18). The answer, a number of them said, is to introduce contracts, "so you could have somebody who - you pay them the full-time rate but you wouldn't necessarily be stuck with them for ever, and they would do the things that full-timers do" (51:6). But this raises another set of problems:

> I think it's obviously going to result in people … feeling less loyalty to whatever organisation they're working for, and presumably people being more likely to work for a number of organisations who may in fact be in competition with each other. And that can happen, obviously, with teachers now. But I think it can come back to bite you if it goes too far. Because you end up not being - being unable to maintain your infrastructure (51:7).

The managers made no bones about the institution's lack of loyalty to its staff, but are not necessarily happy about it:

> from a manager's point of view [there is] a strong push in terms of part-time, so we can look at minimising our long term commitment in terms of the workforce.
> *Do you have [concerns about that?]?*
> Yes, I do.
> *Can you see any way around it?*
> [long pause] No, I can't … but with the finances being so variable and dynamic it's very difficult to - at this point in time - the way our financial systems are arranged, to give [contracts?] and that's very dispiriting and while

often they end up working with you for six years or what have you, it's still …
you're basically exploiting them. That's how I feel. But I haven't really given it
much thought, to be honest (4:8).

We've been "realigned". Feels like a restructure, though[128]

It surprised me that some of the managers were of the opinion that many of the
radical restructures and major directional changes have not really affected the
teaching staff (46:5 quoted above; 33:9). All bar one of the managers had not been in
a teaching role since before the new structures were introduced in the late 1980s,
which presumably influenced their perspective. But Angus and Seddon (1997) make
the same mistake when they argue that "the new levers for change" namely "funding,
outcome measures, policy targets, industrial relations and management," do not
"impinge immediately on the face-to-face work of teaching and learning" although
they recognise that the reshaping of the institutional context, funding arrangements
and so forth "redefine the relationships" and affect "educators' work in both schools
and TAFE" (p. 5).

Two of the managers argued that TAFE is now too big to operate the way it had in the
past. Both had state-wide responsibilities and were responding to my comment that
the teachers had expressed alienation and a sense of fragmentation. One said: "what
they're missing is the sense of connection to a broader organisation. That's not going
to be repeated because the organisation is twice the size that it was a few years ago"
(46:14). The other,

> It's too big. It's just too big. Not only are we dealing with a hundred year old
> culture, within a culture we're also dealing with huge numbers, absolutely
> monstrous numbers. And we're dealing with a very immature corporate entity
> where we've got several business units whose primary challenge is not some
> other corporate entity – it's their own business units … Because there's no
> basic corporate business rules [that] have been put in place as to how
> Institutes are supposed to work. Or you *could* argue, taking - jumping out of
> that box and saying there *has* been some business rules applied to the
> Institutes and that is go out and compete against each other, because that's

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[128] 50:2

what we want. We want at the end of the day a field of a thousand flowers, only the ones we really want will be still standing. And they'll be the strong ones, the ones that are going to go on (48:21).

As with the interviews with some of the teachers, there were some scathing comments about the "old" TAFE. One manager had become so frustrated he had left for a number of years, until he was head-hunted back in:

I was sick of TAFE. I was completely disenchanted. … It was mainly to do with people, it wasn't to do with teaching. It was because I was pissed off with the process and the lack of empowerment for people like ourselves to be involved in the decision making processes and improvements. I remember distinctly walking around with a cheque for $7,000 that had been given to me by [a large firm]. And it was sort of a statement of the culture of the time - [the firm] asked us for assistance. It might have been the first commercial course ever run by [TAFE?] and they paid us, and the system couldn't handle accepting not only the hard work of teachers about to do something extraordinarily different in those days - they couldn't even handle taking the money. But one didn't resign from TAFE because of that. [There were other reasons like] personalities in the Head of Schools department which was [sic] in my opinion somewhat archaic in their approach, and bureaucratic - people weren't being recognised and rewarded, industry was moving away - not being supported and not wanting to be supported. Curriculum development processes were archaic nonsense … also I needed a change. I wasn't growing. And TAFE wasn't allowing me to grow. So I went out and found a job (48:3).

Many of the teachers mourned the loss of the old School structure because it represented state-wide networks of support and was a strong source of educational support[129]. But the managers were generally very supportive of the Institute structure:

Oh, yes! Absolutely! I think it doesn't - it doesn't work equally well everywhere, but I support it.

Why?

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[129] See Chapter 10: *Fragmentation/organisational chaos.*

Because it's more efficient. It provides you with management closer to the point of delivery. This crazy situation that we had before the Scott restructuring of a Director of Colleges who was responsible for the one hundred and something colleges across the state, it was idiotic. And that person did nothing to support the colleges. And the Schools … at that time weren't able to give people the coverage, and the favourites got the support. And a lot of people in the structure were neglected. And the college principal felt like they didn't have the authority to lead, manage, or support staff. Because they [ie the staff] were getting their support from some distant realm somewhere else (46:15).

And a number were quite scathing about the role of the Schools in the old structure. One said that the staffing function that the Schools had was inappropriate. "They moved staff around, they transferred people, they had control over their lives." Many would argue, she said, that it "was a regrettable and dreadful period because they were actually, in many senses, abused and controlled by the School structure" (46:14).

Another pointed out that, "Schools did bugger all for part-timers, unless you went out to a college where the college included their part-timers. So the halcyon days weren't" (51:15). But they did not necessarily think that the organisational structure should fill the gap in educational leadership the teachers said had been left by the loss of the Schools. Some of the comments showed a certain level of impatience, even contempt, for teachers who wanted to be "rescued". One suggested that the teachers should fill the gap themselves:

Those who look nostalgically to the past often don't want to face the future of … having to design their programs, having to cater to a group of students that actually have a variety of needs, not having the prescribed texts in front of them there, and being able to ring up some Head of Division, hey, look, this is all wrong, what am I going to do about it, tell me. That's what they're regretting the loss of. Now, it's not going to come back (46:15).

Teachers were now being asked to "work like professionals," she said, "but a lot of them don't like it" (46:14). She went on to suggest that it is no longer possible to offer educational support on a state-wide basis. "The specialist expertise isn't there to spread across the state" (46:15).

Another of the managers was to some extent sympathetic with the loss the teachers had expressed, recalling his own experience as a Head Teacher in the old structure, of being able to have direct contact with the Head of School. But he was also impatient with the teachers' regret, although he saw it as symptomatic of an organisational problem:

> for goodness' sake, that was 'Eighty-six or something, wasn't it? That's twelve years
>
> *'Eighty-eight*
>
> Well, ten years ago. So what we have is an organisation where there is a very strong commonly held view of discontent because of what existed twelve or ten years ago. … And the expectations in terms of leadership, they probably wouldn't be able to define, except to relate to positive aspects of what their experience was ten years ago, and so therefore you could logically argue there's no connection to reality, and that's an indication of a sick organisation (48:18).

In spite of their criticism of the teachers' "nostalgia" (46:15), the managers themselves had experienced the destructive nature of the continual restructuring in TAFE. One reflected on the impact of the resulting organisational chaos:

> certainly people do see the restructuring as always being threatening, and one of the worst things that's happened as part of that is constant restructuring. When it occurs, you spend a considerable amount of time focusing internally - what happens to me, or what happens to my section or the way we manage … And that actually brings about part of our downfall, rather than focusing on what is it we do for industries and communities and students, and putting all of our energy into focusing outwards (45:17).

Like the teachers, they also experienced the fracturing of the organisation. One Institute based manager said:

> It's strange now, certainly in the last two years, with the Institutes - longer - one doesn't know what goes on in another Institute, despite the fact that it's TAFE. Whereas ten years ago, you had close ties with people all round the state, that hardly happens (50:3).

And another, with state-wide responsibilities, admitted, "*I* have no idea what the structures are in *any* Institute. … I wouldn't know who to contact in the Institutes" (51: 9).

This manager also reflected on the double impact of the two restructures which had most recently occurred on a state-wide basis, where TAFE was taken over by first DTEC then DET:

> any exercise that involves shedding staff creates pain and angst, and any exercise where one organisation appears to have triumphed over another creates a huge amount of angst, because in this last restructure - well, both restructures, there was probably about as much angst over TAFE being swamped as there was over people's individual jobs. There were both things going on (51:14).

These managers were not only coping with overarching, state-wide restructures, but also the continual restructuring that had been going on within the different sections of TAFE. One Institute based manager commented wryly on the new language being used:

> with the latest - what do they call it now, *realignment* - trying to get away from restructure … in August '97 - oh, yeah, we've been realigned - feels like a restructure, though (50:2).

In general, though, as with other changes in TAFE, the managers saw the structural changes as being reflective of the way the world is now, to be accepted and worked with, rather than resisted:

The Scott Report really shook everybody … Ironically, a lot of it's come true. But at the time it was the most damaging thing to morale that you could ever hope for. … I've done a bit of study and spoken to a lot of people about organisational change, and what they tell me is that for every ten years of age of an organisation, to change it, it takes one. Ten to one ratio. We're talking about a TAFE organisation [we've?] built up over a hundred years of culture. It's not going to happen in a year. It's going to take ten years. … we're now ten years after Scott. Had there not been, after Scott, the Ramsay institutionalisation [ie move to Institutes], the DTEC, DIRETFE, this one - we might have been on track. But now we're a year into the next ten years. …. What that's proven to me, and what a lot of teachers can't accept is, this is the new way of the world (49:16).

Of course, we're not very powerful[130]: how they see their role and experience their work

Even though the systems under which they operate may be predominantly managerialist, the managers generally valued their educational background and believed it was important in maintaining an educational focus in TAFE.

There's a lot more sense, I believe of - ah - mutual understanding between managers and teachers in TAFE than there tends to be in other state systems. We can have a good argument. We respect each others' views. But broadly, the majority of TAFE managers understand where teachers are coming from and try their best under the circumstances to respond to them. It may not be apparent, but still … most of us, I believe, are from a teaching, educational philosophy background (45:14).

However, one commented wryly:

while we use the word managerialism, I don't think people actually have managerial skills. [laugh] And nor the sense of valuing *that* as a set of skills. And that's something I've noticed in TAFE especially, because people got promoted to jobs not because they were a manager … when you go back to the managerialism thing, that isn't what happened in TAFE, because they

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[130] 51:14

didn't choose people who were managers. They didn't bring in generic managers. In fact the odd time they tried, they got booted out really fast, people who weren't educators (33:19).

And another, recently promoted to a senior management role, admitted to feeling "really scared at times … scared of failure" because she had "no training, only the experience of watching others" (4:7). But educational leadership remained the priority:

I always worry when I say I'm a manager, because I don't really think that's a good thing. I hope I am a leader. [Senior management should] take more of a leadership role, and be prepared possibly at times to stand up to their superiors and their politicians and say, this is not the way to do it. I mean, after all they are highly paid bureaucrats with a lot of knowledge, and I think they should be saying, some of this is crazy. I don't think a lot of them are game. At my level I can do that more easily. I mean, I may not be popular, but - I think you have to show where your commitment is, and the commitment for me is education and the teachers and the students. Now, whatever other things we have to do, we've got to massage all the economic rationalism to make it work (50:14).

They felt their role should be to make it easy for their staff, "to sort out problems so that it's as easy as possible for them to do business" (45:8), to act as a buffer to allow teachers to get on with teaching:

Because as far as I'm concerned, if I can't deal with the educational issues, then I won't be doing my job. And I see my role as a real buffer to absorb all this nonsense about bean counting on the one side and trying to sieve that so, yes, people are conscious of the need to manage economically and so on. And I've got a great group of people. I think they do that incredibly well. But to try and shield them from this other nonsense (50:12).

They missed working in a "hands on" role where the results of their decisions were visible, immediate and tangible.

In this environment, what you're doing is a lot more processing, conferring, liaising, negotiating, and arriving at the point of resolving matters. You don't have that sense of the joy of an outcome that I think you have when you're actually out there working closely with community and industry and students and teachers, and making things happen for people, ensuring that the environment that the centre provides is a supportive one and … easing people's working life, basically (46:3).

A number of them, particularly those with state-wide responsibilities, regretted their lack of contact with teachers and the general fragmentation of the organisation. It made them wonder what they were achieving, what contribution they were making. The fragmentation of the organisation had led to a level of territoriality that created barriers for those working across the state. These barriers are also the result of the deliberate strategy of the "new public management" (du Gay, 1996) that separates policy making from delivery. The rationale for this separation is that it *reduces* territoriality (Thomson, 1998; du Gay, 1996) but this has not been the experience of either teachers or managers in TAFE.

One of the managers with a policy making role said that her job had changed from a central role in relation to the teachers to one that is so distanced from them that she has lost her sense of purpose (33:9). She was angry at the loss of connection:

I regularly, practically every day, I think, what am I doing here? what have I achieved that's justifiable and useful? it is this thing about being kept away, … There's this *duplicitous* thing where they're saying, because they're going on with all this stuff at the moment about how our main customer is Institutes, we've got to consult with Institutes, we've got to work with them to give them what they want. We've got no way of keeping those contacts. … see, we don't have any connection with the teachers at that level. We don't have any connection with anyone else, either, like those Head Office people that we used to have a lot closer sense - like the planning section, the marketing people -I don't know anything about that any more. So it's not just our connection with the Institutes - there's no connection with anyone else (33:9, 11).

One of the most strongly expressed feelings that the managers had when talking about their work was frustration at their lack of power to order the TAFE world as they would wish. One felt, as did many of the teachers I interviewed[131], that some of her manager colleagues were too self-interested to resist inappropriate changes. Commenting on the Institute Managers Association, she said:

> I don't see it being a strong questioning body that has credibility and it's - I think you can question and get somewhere when you've got credibility but I don't think it's got credibility, because it hasn't really fought. Now, I've been to a few things and I actually - I don't go very often because - it's all the old guard and it's a lot of the ones who want to move on and move up and they see it as being a vehicle to move on and move up rather than actually looking at professional standards (4:16).

But most said they simply did not have the power:

> so much of our work, so much of our tasks now, our staff will say we're disappointed because management has sold out. Well, it may well be that we were part of a network in doing a project, or an interagency thing, or an industry/TAFE type thing, that we didn't direct the project, so we didn't have a chance to either sell out or not. It was just that the rest of the network didn't accept the TAFE position (45:17).

Where they could, they valued their ability to "push the issues" they are committed to, although as one said of access and equity "it's not the flavour of the month, but I still verbalise that." Things that they *can* control, they do, but "it's really hard when you're continually bashing your head against a brick wall" (4:14-15). In general, they felt that whatever control they had was very limited. As one said, while she tries to "promote the good things" and to "ameliorate things that you don't like", at the same time,

> we're not very powerful … we don't control the money, we're just as suppliant over the money as the Institutes are. We don't control the employment policies, or even have any input into them. So it's … very hard. We've

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[131] See Chapter 11: *On management.*

certainly whinged constantly about the downside of competition, the problems with Training Packages … clearly you can have your say, and you can promote the good things, but I guess, at the end of the day, the politicians will do what the politicians will do, and … there's not a great deal you can do about it aside from provide the advice (51:14).

This manager went on to muse about the inherent ideological conflicts in the "new" TAFE. She spoke of the conflict between the managerialist rhetoric of letting "the managers manage" and the desire of politicians "to control everything", a conflict she says the upper echelons of TAFE live with every day: "so that you're always operating in a quite ambiguous environment about what you really are allowed to do and what you're not allowed to do, and of course, you're always short of money" (51:17). She was particularly critical of the idea that private sector entrepreneurialism could be simply transferred into a public sector environment because it "simply fails to take account of the role of the politicians in the way the public sector operates" (51:17).

The managers, like the teachers, spoke of the increasing intensification of their work, which means that, in spite of their policy making role, they have little time for research or review. One reflected on her past experience in senior public sector positions, and recalled having a lot of time for "reflection and reading, and actually processing issues in a careful and thoughtful and thorough way". She no longer has that time, and finds herself:

running very much on the fuel of past experience and knowledge, and not on a regeneration of that. And that's the great frustration. I think that's probably true of most people at certain levels, but I think it is a very, very difficult environment. You could do with many more people. But the budget reality is that you won't get them, so you've got to find different ways - you've got to work differently (46:3).

Even though she held a senior position she said "I realise now that I even feel guilty going out to lunch" (46:4). Another manager commented on his not having done any reading for a long time (47:9). And a third spoke of the "*extreme* pressure" of work

that she and the people who work for her are experiencing. She said, as a result, "some of them have spat the dummy and gone" (51:17).

So there is a lack of information, a lack of thinking time, and a lack of time to develop relationships with, or respond to, staff.

> *How much discussion do you hear at your level of those sorts of issues?* How much navel gazing do we do at executive level … as opposed to listening to people? - ah - the opportunity, you're dead right … The opportunity is not all that great as a [manager] (48:9).

He feels he has gone backwards in terms of being able to be a leader in the organisation, because of work pressure:

> I think I detected a sense around the place where people are angry with me because I haven't got enough time - or not able to take the time, or perhaps I haven't got the capability or skill to invent the time, to provide for them in direct leadership (48:9).

His thoughts echo those of the Head Teacher Mark (see Chapter 6: *Doing more with less*), who also questioned his own ability to manage in the new TAFE.

Many of the teachers had commented on this "busyness" of management and it was interesting to see that the managers themselves recognised the problem:

> The disconnection between management and them [the teachers] I think is [because] there isn't enough time for those people at that management level to make the sort of connections that they need to make. … Because people are focused on managing a much broader thing … In terms of providing educational leadership and support, I believe that that's something that the Institutes still, because they are still in their infancy, have not come to terms with. So they've given a lot of their Faculty managers or Heads of Studies huge administrative loads, which many of those people are actually *learning*, because they actually came from a teaching stream, they didn't have the management skills … (46:14).

I asked one of the managers if he still found his job exciting. "Oh, yeah", he said, but the "greatest danger - the only concern I have being a TAFEie is working myself to death" (48:23). He also said that he no longer had time to read, and relied on listening to the ABC on his car radio for discussion of ideas.

Another of the managers was no longer excited by her work. Instead, she felt alienated and frustrated. In the past, she had been proud of her ability to make connections between people, to make things happen between them. But now, she says, "that sort of thing is seen as wasting time. … Establishing and maintaining relationships is not seen as work, is not seen as useful work". She says she now tries not to talk to the people she works with, "because it takes my time and I don't have much time". Instead, she spends her time on the computer, "all day on the email". But, she says, :

> I think what *is* this work about? What is it that I'm doing, because it's not really producing anything, and it's not - well, it's mostly not with teachers, at all. It's not connecting with people, really. … if I'm not at work for a day, there'll be 40 or 50 emails, and so you get into a panic (33:10-11).

Like the teachers, however, some of the managers still get joy out of their work. Mostly that is in their connection with what remains of the educational side of their work. One spoke of enjoying going to college award nights "and seeing some smiling, happy faces" or of going to industry events and being told TAFE is doing "a really good job" (48:22).

And one of the state-wide managers said:

> my major thought about what I do now is - and this is to help me a little bit - is to influence the future for TAFE. I can't change the past. I'm not in an Institute to do day to day stuff, so I satisfy myself trying to influence the future … One of the greatest joys I've had this year is to see the twenty two thousand university students come back to enrol in TAFE (49:4).

On the whole, the managers reflected much of what the teachers felt about the great changes that TAFE has undergone. However, they were more likely to accept the

changes, and spoke of the necessity of working within the new parameters. There was also a considerable tendency to be impatient with the teachers who refused to "move on". They constructed the teachers as being conservatively committed to existing practices, reluctant or unable to change, rather than as deliberately resisting the changes[132]. The managers also indicated more strongly that the old TAFE needed to change and were more likely to speak approvingly of the positive outcomes of the new agenda, even where they agreed that the changes were brutal and potentially damaging to public education.

As in Chappell's (1998) study, the managers were more likely than the teachers to use the language of the corporate business world, as if it were normal and necessary, although their attitudes were frequently ambivalent, particularly about managerialism.

While aware of the problems caused by casualisation, many of the managers accepted the need for a highly casualised workforce, both to allow them to move their "resources" around (51:6) and because of funding constraints. Where the teachers saw the answer to the problems caused by casualisation as being the employment of more full-time teachers, the managers were more likely to want to introduce short term contracts.

In terms of the effects of the national reform agenda on TAFE's educational role, the managers and teachers had similar criticisms. Where the teachers often spoke of the changes according to specific examples and local knowledge, the managers tended to speak in broader terms, but they tended to reach the same conclusions, including on issues of deskilling, narrowing of curriculum and the detrimental changes to the apprenticeship system.

The managers also expressed similar disquiet to the teachers about their own labour process. They too were feeling the effects of work intensification and a loss of autonomy.

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[132] See Leggett's (1997) study for a similar disjunction between school based and central administration discourses in her study of schools in Western Australia. However, Leggett suggests an alternative reading, arguing that the lived reality of the classroom is different from that of the centre, thus limiting the impact of new management practices. While that may be a contributing factor, the disjuncture made explicit in my interviews does not entirely accord with her interpretation. My reading of the TAFE teachers' responses is clearly one of resistance.

But in the end, while hardly positive, the managers saw themselves as being adaptable to change, an attribute that is prized where "change is the only constant" in the "fast capitalist" world (Gee, Hull & Lankshear, 1996).

VI Conclusion

Chapter 13: And what of the future?

In August 1999, mass "voluntary" redundancies were occurring in TAFE. This time it was State government cuts. Some Institutes experienced more pain than others, because the "benchmarking" process – a league table of delivery cost per student contact hour compared to other "similar" Institutes - showed them to be "less efficient." Institute Directors were called to Sydney, and told to get their delivery costs down.

A colleague of mine had retrained from Fashion to General Education, and had been waiting for more than a year to have her new teaching position confirmed. She was not safe until it was gazetted, and in spite of assurances that it was purely paper work, she could not rest easy until then. She came into work one morning and told us that she had received a letter from the Institute Human Resources section in the mail the day before, and had been unable to open it. She said she sat and stared at it for what seemed like hours. Because of the news of retrenchments that had been in the press, she was terrified that it would be a redundancy offer. Finally, before she went to bed, she bit the bullet and opened it. It contained a specially minted TAFE Olympic pin, along with a message from the Institute Director.

These pins, which were sent individually to the home address of every TAFE employee, became a symbol of how glib and uncaring "they" are about TAFE. There was even a campaign to return them en masse to the Institute Director. In other Institutes, rallies against the cuts saw anti-Olympic banners and slogans. Every time the media announced another short-fall in Olympic funding, people gritted their teeth and remarked cynically that we'd soon see yet another round of cuts. The pins seemed to be the epitome of the superficial (and expensive) gloss – the colourful brochures, the wall posters exhorting staff to follow quality precepts – that made the day to day struggle to maintain classes all the more bitter.

In the *Australian TAFE Teacher* in 2003, Forward writes of the way the struggles within TAFE reflect the struggle of the broader society "to assert itself as something other than an economic system" (p. 6). She writes angrily of the "rampant culture of entrepreneurialism and competitiveness" which has displaced TAFE from its appropriate role as part of a broader public education system. She argues for defiance and resistance.

Forward comments on the "constant assertions" that the role of TAFE teachers has changed, but she says that instead of being complimented on their ability to now "effectively teach anything, anywhere, anytime", TAFE teachers have been constructed as "the impediment in the quest to reform the system" (pp. 6, 7). As Lawn (1995) argues, teacher professionalism is "part of the politics of the labor process" (p. 125). The attributes of a "good teacher" are socially constructed, made explicit through a contested process between "ideological management imperatives" and teachers' own definitions of their work (p. 126).

Prescriptions for the TAFE teacher most suited to the new century, implicitly denying the appropriateness of the present workforce, have been frequent. An early attempt was the document *Staffing TAFE for the 21st Century* (VEETAC Working Party on TAFE Staffing Issues, 1992). The Steering Committee for this report was equally divided between employer and employee/union representatives, with the addition of a representative of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Training. The language of the document, while not as completely corporatised and marketised as later TAFE documents, is still that of the business world, referring to TAFE's "clients", "key stakeholders", the need for efficiency in achieving "outputs" and, critically, arguing the need for "appropriate flexibilities".

While being relatively careful to recognise the skills, experience, and dedication of existing TAFE staff, the recommendations of *Staffing TAFE for the 21st Century* include a move toward contract employment in order to ensure "an appropriate mix of staff" (p. 85). The document also advocates "measures of staff efficiency and effectiveness" (or performance indicators) as a "management tool" and considers the possibility of differential wage rates to attract people in hard to staff areas, to extend

the hours and weeks of teaching and to enhance productivity through "performance related pay" (pp. 85, 87, 91).

In spite of some recommendations that would normally be anathema to the TAFE teacher union, the document was supported as a basis for discussion by the Federal union, which was trying to prevent the increase in casualisation and the deprofessionalisation of the TAFE teaching workforce (Peoples, 1995a, p. 2).

Another frequently cited document of the mid 1990s that prescribed the "new VET practitioner" was a discussion paper prepared for the Staff Training and Development Division of NSW TAFE on "The Roles and Competencies of the VET teacher in the year 2005" (Lepani, 1995). Again there is the assumption of inevitability that is so prevalent in documents relating to vocational education and training throughout the reform period: the inevitability of an "enterprise culture" (p. 9), and of a move from an industrial economy to "a knowledge economy whose characteristics include globalisation of economic structures" (p. 2). As with so much of the discussion of this era, marketisation of the VET "product" is assumed.

And in the marketised VET environment, the demand is for "VET practitioners [who] will need to combine specialisation with diversity to maintain their flexibility in a dynamic VET market" (p. 9). Lepani deliberately moves away from the term "teacher", adopting the term "VET practitioner" to describe the requisite elements of the new practitioners' "career pathing". The VET practitioner of the future, she says, will be a "specialist learning facilitator", a "market analyst and researcher", a "consultant to enterprises", a "developer of strategic partnerships", a "designer of multimedia learning products and services", a "knowledge management strategist", a "business manager for products and services provided to different market segments", a "communications strategist", a "career pathing strategist" and an "assessment and accreditation specialist". In short, they must "develop multi-skilling" in order to best fit the requirements of the "globalised knowledge economy" (pp. 8-10).

TAFE managers, too, were being exhorted to embrace change if they were to survive in the 21st century. In May 1998, the keynote speaker to the TAFE NSW Managers'

Association Conference was Robert Eder, an American Professor of Human Resources Management. He began his address with some ugly statistics on how many American managers were losing their jobs in the United States. Having frightened his audience, he went on to tell them that in order to survive in an environment of "greater speed and competitive change" they must build

> a work culture where everyone has a customer, is responsible for knowing how the customer views the service or product provided, and places customer loyalty as the top priority … [The few managers that remain] are expected to lead … fundamental change in the workplace culture and to foster a sense of proactive business stewardship within each employee (1998, p. 27).

Again, the emphasis was on "knowledge-based competition [that] has now spread to virtually all sectors of the global economy". Instead of having a secure job, employees must accept their long-term employability would be subject to on-going training and "job rotation assignments that enhance market skills" (p. 27), a perception echoed by one of the managers I interviewed (see Chapter 12: *What the managers said,* 46:9). As in the documents addressing the 21st century TAFE teacher quoted above, Eder's recommendations included a range of competencies the new manager requires, and advocated a system of performance review tied to those competencies. Finally, Eder said, "Though stressful, these are also exciting and potentially fulfilling times to be a manager, if you have the right skill set" (p. 28).

For both teachers and managers, there was a threat of imminent demise, accompanied by exhortations to seize the day and turn the "challenges" into "opportunities" - an overriding sense that "there is no alternative", a phrase coined by Margaret Thatcher and shortened to the acronym TINA (see Chapter 3: *Concepts* for a discussion of this sense of historical imperative). But as with the entire neo-liberal agenda, the risks are individualised - an expectation that if you couldn't "stand the heat" you should "get out of the kitchen", a prevalent catch-cry of the time.

In 2000, the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training at the University of Technology, Sydney was funded by ANTA to explore the future of vocational education and training in Australia. The researchers ran a series of workshops

involving "experienced VET policy-makers and practitioners" (Hawke, 2000, p. 2). Hawke reports that the workshop participants often expressed the view that "VET was dead" (p. 68). He argues in his conclusion that

> VET has moved from being a political backwater to being a political plaything and the most disturbing consequence of that has been a sense of powerlessness in the face of powerful forces demanding the unreasonable and the unrealistic (p. 68).

Yet, he says, there is still a need for "educational concerns focused on work" even if those concerns have changed. But the new VET, he says, may no longer be a sector of education and indeed "may not resemble anything we have known". The starting point is for VET to identify its purpose (p. 68).

For the TAFE teachers I interviewed, there was no problem with purpose. They had a clear idea of where their commitment lay. They were taking on some or all of the roles that had been defined for the TAFE teacher of the 21st century. With funding cuts and increasing levels of "contestable" funding, not only teachers' employment, but also many of TAFE's educational programs, particularly in access and equity areas, have become contingent and short-term project based. But most of the teachers were rejecting and resisting the TINA imperative. They remained staunchly committed to a broad based, publicly funded adult vocational education system, and their joy in their work came from their role as educators. They did not want to become simply adjuncts either to a privatised system serving enterprise-specific training (see for instance the concerns expressed in Chapter 7: *Educational Issues in the change*), or to a school based vocational education "stream".

As indicated in Chapter 6: *Doing more with less* above, the teachers I interviewed consistently indicated their understanding of, and anger at, the political nature of the "dollar bottom line" rationales offered by government and by management in their decision making. Their anger was exacerbated by their own experience of the transfer of state expenditure to increased resources for capital - both in the state support for private providers in competition with the public education system and in the state

support given to employers for "on-the-job" training which the teachers believed was often no training at all.

They were also strongly resisting the managerialist push to make them managers of business units. They sometimes used the language of the newly corporatised TAFE, but the bulk of our conversation was about how they were salvaging, or attempting to salvage, educational purpose from the blitz of paperwork and management responsibility that was being thrust upon them.

However, it was as educators that their sense of isolation was greatest (see particularly Chapter 10: *Fragmentation/organisational chaos*). The collegiate culture of TAFE has largely succumbed to the restructuring that has had as its major aim the destruction of that culture and its replacement with a more "entrepreneurial" and competitive culture. The competitive rhetoric of "quality awards" and "product enhancement" is seen to be hollow by teachers who struggle to maintain some intellectual content in their new "modularised" and "customised" delivery.

As with the "classroom Taylorism" of competency based training (Brown, 1991 - see Chapter 3: *Concepts* for a full discussion), a case can be made that far from introducing a new era of innovative, risk taking, flexible, cutting edge work practices, the rise of corporate managerialism led to a strengthening of Taylorist practices in public sector management. Teachers and other workers in TAFE may be multi-skilled, but that is through an intensification of work practices rather than an increase in the "intellectual" portion of their work, and the greater autonomy and workplace democracy envisaged by the Labor movement advocates of the new industrial age has not occurred.

Reid (1997) argues that it is only in a return to labour process theory as it applies to teachers' work that educators will be able to "wrest back a greater degree of control over their work" (¶ 3) . In this context the teacher resistance that I have documented in this study can be seen as reflective of the fundamental conflict of interest between capitalists and workers that labour process theory argues. Indeed, it could be argued that the exposure of this essential conflict is greater in TAFE than in the work of other

teachers because of TAFE's historically direct link with the labour market. The need for coercive control that capital must extend over workers results in the proletarianisation of teachers' work, an effect that seems to be borne out in the reports of the teachers I spoke to, particularly as the "industry-driven" reform agenda gained momentum.

However, as Reid argues, the determinism of the proletarianisation thesis ignores the ways in which workers resist various forms of control. My study clearly indicates that teachers in New South Wales TAFE are neither incapable of adapting to change nor unaware of the demands that they do so. Rather, many of them are resisting those demands, believing the political assumptions behind them are at best misguided and at worst corrupt. The "apparatuses of power" have not quite managed to "legitimate a particular kind of truth and way of life" (Freire, Preface to Giroux, 1988, p. xxxv[133]), a truth and way of life that is antithetical to the teachers' belief in public education as a social good.

The teachers I spoke to expressed their disquiet not only about the way the *content* of their teaching was being changed, reduced to enterprise specific "data dumps" (8:17 - see Chapter 7: *Educational issues in the Change*), but also about the delivery methods they were being expected to embrace with the introduction of competency based training. Apple (1995) argues that the individualisation of education, with students working on individual tasks, as with "self-paced" and "flexible" delivery in TAFE, encourages "passive individual consumption of prespecified goods and services that have been subject to the logic of commodification" (p. 29) [134]. That is, the "logic and modes of control of capital" (p. 28) are becoming embedded in the day to day educational delivery. Challenging this kind of ideological influence is difficult from within the rhetoric. I was impressed by the dogged determination of the teachers I interviewed to maintain a sense of what was valuable in education in spite of the pervasiveness of the neo-liberal ideology that the VET reform agenda has introduced to TAFE.

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[133] See Chapter 2: *Carrying out the study* for the implications of this argument for my purpose in this study.
[134] See Marginson (1992/93) on competencies as a commodity in the training market - Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE.*

While they may not have fully understood or have been able to articulate a theory about what was happening to their work, they had no doubt that it was antithetical to what their concept of education is all about. Their resistance took the form of anything from grumbling to outright subversion of the processes. Certainly, it seemed to me that while the managers saw the teachers' resistance as being an indication that they were unable to accept the "new world", the teachers' alienation from management was more a resistance to the neo-liberal ideologies permeating the changes TAFE was undergoing and a rejection of the forms of control that were being applied to them. That is, the teachers are resisting the proletarianisation of their work.

They are also insisting on questioning the curriculum decisions being made, particularly those they saw as reducing curriculum from an *educational* approach to an enterprise-specific, instrumentalist approach. In many instances, they were maintaining the educational integrity of the courses they were delivering, even where that may have put them in positions of conflict with management. If, as Connell (1995) argues, the "politics of education can best be understood as the struggle to control the production of capacities for practice" (p. 101), then many of the teachers I spoke to were committed to that struggle.

The managers I spoke to were more likely to use the language of the business world (see Chapter 12: *What the managers said)*. And there were indications that some of them were modelling themselves on their counterparts in industry (see particularly interview 47, Chapter 12: *What the managers said*), perhaps using the language and techniques of business to increase their status (Watkins, 1992, pp. 248-249). Indeed, in TAFE, this process may well have been enhanced by TAFE's traditional links with industry, which under the new regime metamorphosed from local links responding to local conditions to links with peak bodies at a national level, thus exposing TAFE management to the "leanest and meanest" of big business. As Watkins (1992) argues,

> Particularly in difficult times, the proposition that the tough and often repressive organisational strategies of the workplace (the real world) are required to survive these periods, is presented as just sheer common sense (p. 255).

But in spite of the pressure, mostly the managers retained a similar sense of purpose to that of the teachers. They were not prepared to give up the struggle to keep TAFE NSW as a major public education provider. This is also evident in the submission made by the TAFE NSW Managers' Association to the Vinson Inquiry in 2002. While their submission accepts a responsibility "to provide a commercial service to enterprise and industries" they also argue for TAFE to maintain its role as "a publicly funded institution that provides open access to education and training to the people of NSW" (p. 4). They argue for a restoration of funding by both State and Commonwealth governments to forestall further commodification and commercialisation of vocational education (p. 5).

A way forward

In the current crisis in public education the spotlight has to a large extent moved off TAFE and away from its role as a key player in the "skill formation" agenda initiated by the Federal Labor governments of the 1980s and early 1990s. The debate in recent years has primarily been about the other two tiers of public education: schools and universities. TAFE is no longer such a centrepiece of educational planning, and struggles to make its demands for funding heard.

In spite of their resistance, the teachers I interviewed were frequently at a loss to know what action could be taken, either individually or collectively, that would allow TAFE to move forward in a direction that seemed valid to them. Their responses to the crisis ranged from a belief that TAFE was on the verge of disappearing as a public education provider to an attempt to work with the new TAFE and turn its purposes to what they believed was valuable and in the best interests of their students. While expressing deep grief and a sense of loss, many were continuing to introduce innovative practices in their teaching and most continued to find joy in their classroom work. Their persistence and resilience is impressive.

Some put their faith in a belief in a kind of cyclical political process, hoping or expecting that the pendulum would swing back away from the corporatisation and marketisation that has been imposed on TAFE. While such cyclical theories are highly debatable, there is evidence that there is some re-evaluation occurring.

However, there is no indication that the modularised, fragmented, assessment focused curriculum forms of the reform agenda are likely to be reviewed. Even while there is growing evidence that the "skills formation" reform agenda did not succeed in meeting its objectives, with the system being seen as overly complex, confusing and unable to meet persistent skill shortages (Buchanan et al., 2001, p. 7), the implementation of the Schofield Report and of the national industry Training Packages appears to be entrenching a model of "just in time" training.

According to a management report to the TAFE NSW Managers conference in 2003[135], the already fragmented course structures are being revised in favour of competency unit based enrolments and qualifications rather than by course or even module. This is likely to further promote "assessment-only pathways" to credentials, as opposed to formal, structured education based on curriculum (see Sobski's comments on the educational issues implicit in this development, Chapter 4: *From Tech to VET - the transformation of TAFE*).

If curriculum is indeed the "main specification of the labour process of teachers" (Reid, 1997, ¶ 28), then for TAFE teachers the struggle is likely to intensify with this increasing fragmentation. The success of their struggle is, at least in part, likely to rely on teachers being able to maintain and rebuild the previously collegiate culture of TAFE. Hargreaves (1994) writes of "contrived" collegiality, "the substitution of more evolutionary and spontaneous forms of teacher collaboration by administratively controlled, safely simulated forms of collegiality" (p. 191). Although they might be suspicious of the rhetoric of "teamwork", with its underlying assumptions of management control (Gee, Hull & Lankshear, 1996), many of the teachers I spoke to continue to work closely with their colleagues to ensure that the curriculum they are delivering, however fragmented it may have become, meets their view of what education should be, in the best interests of their students.

Teachers as a group continue to be innovative, including in their use of new technologies, and to develop and share resources, not only within their own sections, but across their industry areas when given the chance. And they continue to demand

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[135] Gary Willmott presentation to the NSW TAFE Managers conference, Sydney, 2003. Circulated internally in TAFE NSW.

their own definition of quality, based on their educational commitment, rather than on the competitive notion of "quality" exemplified in the proliferation of awards that have their ideological basis in a false entrepreneurialism.

Because so many of TAFE's part-time teachers are now long-term employees, they have become part of the admittedly diminished collegiate culture, and their self-funded education in adult learning theory helps to resist the expected proliferation of entrepreneurial "VET practitioners" (see for instance Keith's story in Chapter 6: *Doing more with less*). The challenge of contractualism, with its individualisation of accountability (Yeatman, 1996) and its encouragement of an "essentially entrepreneurial" identity (du Gay, 1996, p. 180)[136] may paradoxically have been met by the sheer scope and speed of the casualisation of the TAFE teaching workforce. That is, the fact that large numbers of casual part-time TAFE teachers are at the same time long-term employees, may mitigate the fragmenting effects of casualisation, effectively absorbing them into the culture of the full-time permanent teaching workforce, with its persistent collegiality and commitment to public education as a social good.

With both TAFE teachers and managers having concerns about the reform agenda's attacks on curriculum, the possibility continues to exist that NSW TAFE will retain a sufficiently strong identity to provide a brake on further attempts to diminish its role as an organisation dedicated to the equitable provision of a broad-based education.

Even though some of the managers I spoke to appeared to believe the teachers' resistance was a result of their inability to adapt (see Chapter 12: *What the managers said*), TAFE workers in my study, both teachers *and* managers[137], appear to be *choosing* to take a particular path of resistance and sometimes subversion, in favour of their own educational beliefs and value systems. These beliefs and value systems are more collective, and in some instances appear to be class based. There is a strong belief that TAFE is an educational organisation that gives a second chance to working class people (see for instance, quote 34:18 in Chapter 5: *When the numbers are*

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[136] See Chapter 11: *On management*
[137] In my experience, this is also true of other TAFE workers - administrative and library staff, for example.

dropping; quote 23:15 in Chapter 8: *The Destruction of occupational cultures*). As Forward (2003) says,

> Our struggle, as teachers and teacher unionists, is to defy and resist attempts to fragment and compartmentalise our work, to deskill us, to colonise and define our relationships with each other and our students, to overwork us. We must continue to do this, because we know that the majority of students who come to TAFE are working class kids who deserve, and indeed must have, a real education (p. 7).

There is a need to turn the almost visceral resistance evident in the participant responses in this study into more strategic responses to the neo-liberal agenda. While the development of strategies to effect that is beyond the scope of this study (and beyond any individual capability, including mine) the evidence I have presented provides some hope that it may be possible, given the passion and commitment of the people I spoke to.

As for the broader context, TAFE inevitably remains enmeshed in wider social responses to the transformations wrought by globalising capital and its proponents of market liberalism as an all-encompassing ideology.

The "community obligation" aspects of TAFE's responsibility, while weakened as a priority in a post-Kangan TAFE, retain some force both in the community's (and thus the electorate's) perception of TAFE and as a means by which governments may seek to ameliorate detrimental social effects of the neo-liberal agenda. This is evident, for instance, in the way the government has turned to TAFE to address the educational displacement of disaffected young people[138].

A shift in focus is also evident in the framework for discussion proposed by ANTA for the national strategy for VET for 2004-2010. Their "discussion starter"[139] no longer gives as high a priority to the imperatives of global competition as in previous

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[138] For example, the $1.9 million allocation for a joint schools/TAFE initiative in the NSW State government Budget Estimates 2003-04, 6-12.
[139] ANTA *A Discussion starter for the next national strategy for vocational education and training 2004-2010* paper circulated internally in TAFE NSW.

documents. Rather the emphasis is on the economic as only one aspect of VET, along with social and environmental well-being.

Electoral sensitivities to the harsher effects of neo-liberalism have meant that TAFE teachers even at section level have learned to lobby according to the electoral cycle. Struggles over curriculum remain hidden and difficult, but they have become part of the struggles over attempts by governments to privatise educational costs (most recently in NSW TAFE by dramatic fee increases proposed for 2004), and over working conditions and salaries. As Lawn (1995, pp. 116-117) argues, teachers' conditions of work cannot be separated from a broader understanding of what teaching is, and the campaigns conducted by NSW teachers to preserve public education have invariably integrated them. So far, government attempts to *separate* teachers' working conditions from the broader struggle appear to have failed[140].

More recently it has become evident that teacher unions, like other unions under pressure, are adopting a policy of forming broader coalitions both nationally and internationally. Moody (1997) is optimistic about the growing sense of working class anger across the industrialised world, as people see the gains fought for by previous generations "disappearing before their eyes" (p. 34). While he recognises that labour movements have been weakened by the "past twenty or more years of international restructuring, downsizing, and lean production" (p. 37) he argues that there is an opportunity for transformation inherent in the rise of "a new labor internationalism" (p. 38). Certainly, the NSW Teachers' Federation is learning lessons from both the broader international labour movement coalitions and from the experiences of colleagues in countries like the UK[141]. The first case of national level collaborative action over salaries is set to occur in September 2003, with teachers in New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria striking together in response to alleged collusion by the states to keep teacher salaries down (Irving, 2003, p. 1).

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[140] For example, the Vinson Inquiry (*Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education*, 2002) integrates the need to improve teachers' working conditions into its recommendations, effectively counteracting the public demonisation of teachers that occurred in the bitter 1999 salaries dispute.
[141] An example was the reference made at the July 2003 state-wide stop work to the use of teachers' aides to replace teachers in the UK because of teacher shortages.

In a discussion of social reproduction theory in education, which effectively relegated school teachers to the role of agents of capital, Connell (1995) argues that the role of education systems in social change, and the strength of notions of social good that underpin the cultures of those systems, limited the success of attempts by the "new-right" of the 1980s to discipline teachers and schools (pp. 92-93). This study bears out that argument in the context of vocational education and training in TAFE NSW.

While teachers "are not the messengers of a better world, the advance guard of the good society" (Connell, 1995, p. 109), their political struggle remains important. As one of the trade teachers said to me:

> [W]e don't discover the world, we just seem to keep it moving (3:12).

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Appendix A

(note: this is a *sample* letter and has been edited for sense. It contains all the pertinent details of letters written to the Institute Directors. Exact content differed depending on whether I was personally known to the Institute Director, what my past association with them had been, the timing of the request, and whether I had recent phone or email contact).

[Name]
Institute Director
[Institute name]

Dear

I am a TAFE employee, currently on leave without pay from Southern Sydney Institute, and engaging in full time study towards a PhD at the University of Sydney, Faculty of Education. I would like to conduct some of the field research for my thesis in [Institute name] and I am writing to seek your agreement.

My research project is provisionally entitled *The Changing nature of work: the experience of adult vocational educators*. My study uses TAFE, and the TAFE teaching workforce, as a window into the changing world of work. I would like to conduct some interviews with staff from [campus name/s], preferably in [month/s]. The interviews take about one hour and will be kept confidential. Participation in the project is voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time. I have approval from the University's Ethics Committee.

I would appreciate it if you could email a response to me: j.clark@edfac.usyd.edu.au so that I can make the arrangements. Should you have any questions, I can be contacted at the University: [phone contact] or at home on [phone contact].

Many thanks

Judith Clark

Appendix B.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
School of Social and Policy Studies in Education
Sydney NSW 2006

Telephone (02) 9351 2791
Facsimile (02) 9351 4580

Subject Information Statement & Consent Form

Research project
The changing nature of work: the experience of adult vocational educators

Researcher: Judith Clark

I am carrying out the research project *The changing nature of work: the experience of adult vocational educators* for a PhD I am undertaking in the School of Social and Policy Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, University of Sydney.

My study uses TAFE, and the TAFE teaching workforce, as a window into the changing world of work. If you agree to participate in the study, it should require no more than one hour of your time. I will conduct an interview with you around a series of issues (see over). The interview will, with your permission, be taped. The tapes will be wiped when I have completed writing up my thesis. You will not be identified. Pseudonyms will be used in recording and processing the material.

Participation in this project is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions about the research, including any that arise after the interview, you can contact me by phoning 02) 9351 6236.

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager of Ethics and Biosafety Administration, University of Sydney, on (02) 9351 4811.

If you agree to be part of the research project, please fill in the attached consent form.

Thank you

1 of 3

Interview topics

The interview will canvass the following questions:

If work is changing and/or disappearing for large groups of people, how do those changes affect teachers in TAFE? How do you experience the change? How do you feel about it? What might it mean for your area of teaching? For your students? What changes in patterns of employment have you noticed - for yourself, your colleagues, your students? What changes have happened to your own work and working conditions - what do you perceive as the causes? What understanding do you have of the broader influences which are impacting on your work? How do those influences relate to how you see your own and your students' futures? Is it dependent on subject area? Has your subject area changed? Has what you are teaching or how you are teaching changed?

For managers, similar questions will be canvassed from the management perspective.

I will also ask you for some information about yourself - your past experience, how long you have been with TAFE, your age, how you might define yourself within your community, what aspirations you have.

Consent form

I _____

of _____

_____

_____

agree to participate in the research project *The changing nature of work: the experience of adult vocational educators* being conducted by Judith Clark of the Faculty of Education, University of Sydney, on the understanding that I can withdraw from the project at any time and that confidentiality is assured.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Subject details

Subject No:

Age: <25 θ   25-30 θ   31-40 θ

            41-50 θ   51-60 θ   >60 θ

Male   θ   **Female**   θ

Full time worker   θ   **Part time worker**   θ

Please use a few words to describe yourself:

at work: _____

at home: _____

in the community: _____

Would you describe yourself as an active member of TAFETA?

Yes   θ   **No**   θ   **Not a member**   θ

Are you a member of another union?

Yes   θ   **No**   θ

If yes, which union? _____

Are you a member of a professional association or associations?

Yes   θ   **No**   θ

If yes, please name the association(s) _____

_____

Appendix D   Demographic data

Sex/ Age	n	full-time	part-time	regional	metrop.
F 31-40	3	3	0	3	0
F 41-50	14	13	1	4	10
F 51-60	3	3	0	2	1
Sub-total	**20**	**19**	**1**	**9**	**11**
M 31-40	5	3	2	3	2
M 41-50	10	10	0	6	4
M 51-60	15	15	0	5	10
Sub-total	**30**	**28**	**2**	**14**	**16**
Total	**50**	**47**	**3**	**23**	**27**

Union (TAFETA) membership

Male/female	active	non-active	"between"	non-member
Female	8	7	2	3*
Male	13	12	2	3
Total	**21**	**19**	**4**	**6**

* one member of Public Service Association.

Length of time in TAFE

Pre-Kangan (1974):   15
1975-1989:   31
post-Scott (1990):   4