

**Steering Futures:
Practices and possibilities of institutional redesign in Australian education and
training**

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This paper reports findings from an ethnographic study of educational restructuring in an Institute of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in Victoria Australia. Educational restructuring is analysed as a process of institutional redesign and theorised in relation to recent debates in institutional theory concerning the nature of institutional change. The review distinguishes between hyperrational approaches to institutional redesign based upon assumptions about rational actors and their motivations and behaviours, and social and cultural perspectives on institutional redesign that sees purposeful institutional change achieved through processes of 'institutional gardening'. The paper documents the way Australian governments have adopted hyperrational strategies aimed at changing education and training by reworking institutional rules that frame the day-to-day practices within particular organisations. Reworking these practices of organising serves to steer change by restructuring and rearticulating relationships, practices and centres of power within organisations. Data drawn from interviews with the TAFE Institute Director, and various managers and teachers are used to track the effects of government steering in the TAFE Institute. This analysis shows that government steering drives management steering in the TAFE Institute, creating new imperatives and work organisation. These organisational changes are influenced by local conditions and management priorities. They also call forth counter-steering by teachers and managers as they attempt to deal with change. The paper suggests that hyperrational government steering drives towards probable educational futures but is also interrupted by counter-steering oriented to other values and priorities. While there are probable futures, there are also preferred futures to be willed for and worked for.

Education in Australia is currently subject to rapid and far-reaching change. Taking the lead from Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) *Reinventing Government*, Australian governments, State and Commonwealth, have pursued agendas aimed at actively redesigning education as an institution. The institutional rules which once shaped educational provision through

centralised and bureaucratic practices are being reshaped through regulatory mechanisms which stress self-management. The relations, practices and centres of power within education are being restructured and rearticulated. Education as a social institution is being reformed. It is being steered towards distinctive futures.

Lawrie Angus, Peter Rushbrook, Lynton Brown and I are investigating this institutional redesign in a large Australian Research Council-funded project called the 'Social Organisation of Educational Practice'¹. This interview-based research has focused on institutional redesign in schools and Institutions of Technical and Further Education (TAFE, like Colleges of Further Education) in Victoria. In this paper I focus on institutional redesign in TAFE. The paper draws on the work of the research team as a whole to outline some of the processes of institutional steering and the way these constitute a struggle over probable and preferred educational futures.

Institutional redesign in education

Institutional theory recognises that society is organised into distinct regions of social practice, or 'institutions'. These institutions, such as education or the economy, are evident as distinctive patterns of organisation which are an effect (or outcome) of particular 'institutional rules' or, in our terms, 'practices or organising'². These practices of organising (or institutional rules) constitute contextual settings (or institutions) that shape behaviour and other social action. In the national 'Reshaping Australian Institutions' project³, these complex features are captured in a working definition that states that 'institutions' are

... sets of regulatory norms that give rise to patterns of action, concrete social structures or organizations. ... Institutions can be public or private, so long as they refer to a set of regulatory norms (not merely a single norm), resulting in a whole structure of relations rather than just a single relation. Institutions therefore constitute the social infrastructure which orders the behaviour of relevant social actors (both individuals and groups) and organises relations among them. Institutions may either have been deliberately chosen (as in the case of laws) or have emerged from interactions among persons without explicit design (as in the case of social conventions) but they all have an impact on the distribution of authority and influence in society. They both establish individual and organisational centres of power and constrain the exercise of that power.

(Reshaping Australian Institutions, 1994)

This definition foregrounds the context in which practice occurs. It suggests that action always occurs in a social infrastructure which orders and organises behaviour, relationships, individuals and groups, and power and authority. This social infrastructure is the social, discursive and organisational medium in which practice occurs.

These basic understandings of institutional theory have been reworked as powerful tools for institutional design (eg. Goodin, 1996). Building on the assumptions of rational actor theory, it is argued that if contextual settings shape behaviour, then changing contextual settings will change behaviour. Further, if preferred behavioural outcomes can be defined, the contextual changes which produce these outcomes can be sought. And, once these required contextual changes have been identified, the levers for change can be pulled.

Contemporary reformist governments have taken up this promise of institutional redesign, informed by rational actor theory, in their work of steering educational futures through reform. Under the policy of 'Schools of the Future' in Victoria or the recent Commonwealth

'National Training Reform Agenda' (NTRA), governments have moved rapidly to deploy positive and negative sanctions, screening and selection procedures and other practices of organising in order to reshape Australian education (Marginson, 1993). Such governmental processes of institutional redesign have brought about significant changes in the relations and practices of education (Marginson, 1997). The student has become the client and then the customer, and this redefinition has been extended to encompass not only learners in classrooms but also their parents and employers. And, as employers have become customers, students increasingly have become regarded as products to be delivered to industry whose needs are to be served. The specification of required outcomes has spawned competency standards, performance indicators and quality mechanisms which have constituted a textual reality that is more institutionally significant ('real') than the face to face relations between people (Jackson, 1993). Changes in industrial and workplace relations have reconstituted the frameworks which govern people's work (Seddon, 1996a).

But despite the impact of these institutional redesign measures, critics argue that institutional redesign informed by rational actor theory has major limitations which have had a profound impact on their governmental applications (eg. Mulberg, 1995). One set of critiques (eg. Stretton and Orchard, 1994) challenges the assumption of the rational actor with his monomotivational pursuit of self-interest. Institutional designs are developed on the understanding that people are only motivated by direct benefits - money, status, or regard - rather than more complex motivations.

Another set (eg. Ferber and Nelson, 1993; Gatens, 1996) critiques the abstraction of the rational actor and the neglect of the implications of embodiment. The agents that occupy institutions are not abstract models but flesh and blood people. They are positioned socially and culturally which means that they live as sexed, raced, aged, classed social actors. This positioning and their social and cultural embodiment predisposes them to particular tastes, desires, preferences and choices. From this perspective, actors are not abstractly rational, all the same and, therefore, predictable in their behaviour. Rather, their behaviour is differentiated and socially patterned. These different embodiments constitute distinctive standpoints and underpin systematic and enduring practical politics.

Critics also argue that the reductionist understanding of the social actor in institutional theory is accompanied by a reductionist understanding of context. The context in new institutional economics appears as a thin backdrop for action which ignores social and institutional histories, and the practical politics which arise precisely because of the different and conflicting ways that institutional actors are socially and culturally embodied (Offe, 1996a). Moreover, in these complex contexts, pulling levers for change does not always result in one to one associations with effects. The introduction of new sanctions or regulatory practices of organising are proven stimuli for organisational change but desired changes cannot be quarantined from other aspects of social and institutional life, and they create unintended consequences and flow on effects.

These limitations in rational actor theories of institutional design contribute to what Offe (1996a) calls a 'one-eyed fixation' with utility or purposiveness. This orientation disregards rights which were established in the past and retain contemporary validity. It encourages judgements of institutions on the basis of their instrumental value alone, on their optimality as 'welfare maximising machines'. As Offe (1996a: 111) suggests, 'the methodological neglect of valid rights, and of the nonutilitarian basis of their validity ... deprives [the New Political Economy characteristic of neo-liberal government] of every argument against openly authoritarian, indeed terroristic, uses of this theory of order'. Authoritarianism, acting in the name of future utility, can justify the removal of every institutional suboptimality, every obstacle to reform, every obstructor of progress.

As Linder and Peters (1995) argue, there are decisional and dialogical traditions in theories of institutional design. The former, 'hyperrational' approach (Offe, 1996b), relates institutional design to critical moments of decision associated with rational imperatives. The latter, 'institutional gardening' approach (Offe, 1996b), emphasises longer term social processes involved in reshaping relationships and practices which are necessary for growing institutions anew. In a sense, the former traditions imply that the institutional design and the norms that structure relations can be learnt by institutional members whose responses and patterns of practice will be more or less consistent with the rationale of the designers, whereas the latter traditions imply that members shape institutions and learn norms by living them and jointly negotiating the institutional rules within organisational contexts of practice.

Our research to date indicates that processes of norming, and of living in and through institutional re-design, are extraordinarily complex. Part of our work is an investigation of government intervention in the reshaping of education. This reshaping is playing out, not surprisingly, as a contested re-making or re-assertion of the regulatory norms that shape what counts as practice in educational organisations. Practitioners in specific educational organisations are engaged in struggles over the legitimation of educational norms, and there is, in the everyday work and practice of participants, a sense that previously (at least partially) institutionalised norms are being (at least partially) displaced or challenged by more recently asserted norms. In other words, institutional meaning is being made against alternative meanings. Regulatory norms are being both contested and asserted and, in any case, must be remade as established expectations are challenged.

Government steering

Governments have become a major activist force in educational redesign. Various strategic policy interventions have been key mechanism for inducing educational change. While education policies do not entirely prescribe educational practice (Bowe et al 1992), policy incorporates particular educational values and views of the nature and purpose of education which policy designers either assume to be normative or intend to become normative, and which are intended to be institutionalised in practices.

During the 1980s a kind of educational policy convergence emerged between the major political parties in Australia. Previously significant issues of social justice and educational equity became more problematic and peripheral to the main education agenda which became increasingly characterised by economic rationalism and New Right thinking (Pusey 1991, Marginson 1993). The particularly strong emphasis on notions of social justice within previous Labor policy, and Labor's history of distinguishing itself from the more blatantly capital-oriented Coalition parties, however, may have made it more difficult for Labor than the Coalition to jettison once-cherished social values. In the event, in education and other social policy areas, Labor in the 1980s and in the early 1990s retained elements of social justice priorities although in modified forms which may have paved the way for socially harsher Coalition policy (Rizvi 1993).

Governments of both parties, at both State and Commonwealth levels, became particularly responsive to business and industry spokespersons and economic analysts, who advocated that education and other social services should be structured according to market principles. This endorsement of the market has been of immense importance in institutional terms. For example, the more market arrangements are accepted in education, the more difficult it becomes to maintain issues of access and equity on the education policy agenda, both at government level and in educational organisations. The market-oriented approach enables governments to pursue such normative preferences in a relatively hands-free way because markets are thought to work to the extent that individuals take responsibility for their own achievement and make strategic choices according to their own assessment of payoffs,

opportunities and opportunity costs. Governments are not required to strive to make correct choices, or, perhaps more importantly in institutional terms, moral ones, through careful processes of planning and moral suasion. Institutionally, responsibility for provision of educational services and commodities is sheeted to local educational organisations which must themselves provide quality products in competition with other providers. In order to perform well in the market, the argument continues, educational organisations need to be freed from bureaucratic restraints so they can develop maximum flexibility. This is necessary because competitive pressures have their own discipline which forces educational organisations to perform better and better and to give customers what they want. That is how entrepreneurial organisations are thought to survive and flourish.

As part of the current reforms, teachers were subject to new demands and controls which in many cases curtailed the forms of professional practice that many of them associate, often somewhat romantically, with progressive educational values asserted during the 1970s and into the 1980s. Educational policies during that period were largely characterised by an emphasis on governments and policy makers working collaboratively with teachers to promote educational and social change that was intended to enhance the social capacities of students. The rhetoric was mainly educational and the discourse was largely dialogical. But increasingly this emphasis on teacherly issues of teaching, learning and curriculum in policy debate were replaced by a more indirect reform strategy in which the practices of organising educational work were being manipulated. Funding, outcome measures, policy targets, industrial relations and management became the new levers for change. These do not impinge immediately on the face to face work of teaching and learning but they shape the institutional contexts in which such work proceeds (Seddon, 1994). Their effects were to change management requirements, funding arrangements and the like, redefine relationships, and the practical parameters and constraints, of educators' work (Brown, *et al*, 1996).

The new focus of educational redesign, and the emphasis on a decisional process of reform, incorporate a general ethos of contractualism as the basis for social organisation and professional relationships (Alford and O'Neil, 1995). This emphasis was consistent with and linked to wider processes of economic restructuring. Part of the broader microeconomic reform agenda entailed changing work practices (especially 'entrenched' union negotiated conditions) in order to introduce greater flexibility of labour in workplaces. Used extensively, contractual arrangements are meant to ensure reciprocal accountability. They are consistent with the redefinition of the role of the teacher from progressive educator and participant in educational politics to one of competent performer of relatively neutral tasks related to efficient and profitable delivery of prespecified curriculum, and of being a responsible manager of learning contexts.

As the earlier policy trend of devolution through 'responsive bureaucracy' and 'inclusive' educational governance began to be questioned within all Australian education sectors in the late-1980s, TAFE, after about 1987, began a rapid transition to contractual staff arrangements and fee-for-service course delivery. In a move which strategically advantaged the TAFE sector, the growing market emphasis shifted attention onto vocational outcomes. Because TAFE has always claimed close relationships with industry, there was some willingness to implement policies and administrative procedures that incorporated the kind of contractualist principles that were associated with industry success.

The decentralising and marketising trajectory of education reform is evident in many parts of the world. In Australia, the changes have been taken furthest in Victoria. The trend became particularly clear with the election of the Liberal National Party coalition government in October 1992. Before the end of the year, the new government had embarked on a range of education cuts and policy initiatives. In school education, the 'Schools of the Future' policy

was launched setting local management of schools in place, decentralising administration while recentralising control over curriculum and assessment, and establishing school-based program budgeting and enhanced opportunities for corporate sponsorship. But it is in TAFE that the decentralised and marketised agenda has been taken furthest.

The reform of TAFE has been accelerating since the 1980s. It has been driven largely by the federal Labor government's 'National Training Reform Agenda' and by the complex negotiations between State governments and the Commonwealth which led to the formation of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and a panoply of other national agencies to implement the national training market, competency-based education and assessment and user-choice (Lundberg, 1995; Anderson, 1997). In Victoria, reform has created a highly decentralised state training system. TAFE Institutes in Victoria are, now, autonomous training enterprises. They are subject to intense competition from other public and private training providers, and from schools and universities. The reduction in public funding to TAFE, alongside this intensified competition, has pressed Institutes and their staff towards a variety of efficiency measures, particularly casualisation of staff, and increased income generation in order to survive. Money, markets and managerialism have become central to the day to day work of TAFE Institutes.

Management steering

At Streeton Institute of TAFE (a case study site), the Director, Barry Klein, is quite clear about the impact of government steering and uncompromising about the need to respond to new pressures. As he says, 'TAFE's business is business' and what comes first is his enterprise, Streeton. Barry sees his role as doing deals, competing for market advantage and reorganising Streeton to win in the competitive environment.. And he sees Streeton as being ahead of the pack.

The changes in TAFE funding have required an aggressively entrepreneurial approach. As Barry notes:

The government at the moment ... takes of 1.5% productivity gain every year. Now in this place that's about \$700,000 per year comes out of your budget. So you have got to adjust the way of doing business. An average staff is \$50,000. There is 12 staff out the door tomorrow.

To some extent, Barry had foreseen the trend to reduced government funding and had put in place strategies to offset the effect when he first took up the director's position at Streeton back in 1989.

The trigger really was survival because in the past we have been centrally funded, centrally controlled agencies.... the government was just going to pump money in no matter how it was spent but now we are actually accountable for it. I saw back in 1989, when I first came here, that this place was doing nothing at all in terms of business activity. So I used shock tactics. We've done pretty well. In 1989 we were bankrupt. Last year our profitability was over \$4 million.

Now he pursues income from wherever possible and this has led to both internationalisation and industry-based delivery of Streeton programs.

Barry Klein is uncomfortable with the label 'educationalist' and with educational discourse. He regards all that as 'too academic'. He is much happier talking about training which he clearly regards as a different, more practical and more worldly business than education. He

refers to Streeton as a 'firm' which, like any private company, must first and foremost 'protect its bottom line'. While accepting that the Institute has 'community service obligations', he also suggests that having to honour such commitments limits the Institute's capacity to improve the bottom line.

An associate director at Streeton clarified the change that had occurred:

Today each area is a cost centre in its own right ... It was an immense change and I think as a college we were the benchmark in terms of that ... You know, we were forced to become efficient. We were essentially originally a public service institution, a public service mentality and understanding, and there was a bucket of money that came in and we didn't have to worry too much about a whole range of accountabilities. Today that's different.

The change in ethos at Streeton has been underpinned by distinctive management decisions which have, themselves, steered the Institute towards greater commercialisation. Barry comments,

How we have done it to this point is, of course, empowering the people to do the job. Now that sounds a pretty good start but what it actually means in real life is that we have contract with each of the departments and divisions in this place to deliver numbers of student contact hours which the government fund. We also allow them to do any business they like in the way of utilising their resources and they keep the profit out of that business. ... Its been successful to the point that each one of the divisions cuts each other's throat to survive. It's been very successful because it make everybody in this place know whatever they do is business whether its government funded or privately funded business. The problem is I haven't got my hands on the money. I can pull it back but everyone blows up. Some of my divisions are carrying a million odd dollars in their accounts.

The formation of an internal market within Streeton has created a dynamic for change - become entrepreneurial or die. This market steering has been accompanied by organisational restructuring premised partly on entrepreneurial success and partly on complementarity with the new marketised management agenda.

Hairdressing, for example, is held up as a model of success, a 'can-do' department that is generating over \$100,000 per year. Hairdressing is headed by a dynamic new Head of Department, Malcom Isles. He was seen to be running ahead of policy in terms of self paced, competency based teaching approaches. Lisa Gordon, a teacher recruited to the department by Malcolm, recalled

He was running the department. We had a staff meeting and he said "we're on the self-pacing train and if you don't want to get on it that's fine - get off it, but this is where it's going and it's express and it's not stopping any stations".

Perhaps not surprisingly this suggestion provoked a degree of resistance from staff used to controlling their own teaching approaches. In the end, a department of eleven was reduced to seven staff whilst still maintaining student numbers. Classrooms were remodeled as open plan salons. Workbooks were supported by a program of computer-managed learning which allowed students to proceed at their own pace conducting self test from a computer test bank. Lisa became a key player in Malcom's approach, personally writing up competency based course materials which were subsequently re-worked by the staff group in a process which ultimately bestowed a degree of shared ownership of the standardised materials.

By contrast, the humanities department was closed. Its staff were relocated across the Institute. Geoff Ingham, for example, ended up teaching communications in the Business Studies Department. In Art, falling student numbers provided management with the pretext to dispense with four permanent staff members through forced redundancies. These processes destroyed any illusion that staff were safe in the increasingly market-driven environment.

But the processes were not always consistent. Where falling enrolments led to staff cuts in Arts, they have been used to press staff in the Engineering department to take up work in Asia where there is still a market for training in engineering - often in association with major transnational corporations. The difference in the approach to management steering in these two cases illustrates the scope for judgement and the taste of management. As one member of the Art department put it, 'we do not fit the profile'.

Staff steering

Barry Kline and most (but not all) of the managing group at Streeton Institute see themselves embracing the future. They are racing to meet it. They broadly share a vision and they are *willing* that future into reality. This is a future of new alliances among corporate players and is far removed from the traditional networks - unions and professional associations - that have sustained and enriched educational practice.

One divisional director makes the point. He was once a trade teacher in a technical high school. Now he is revelling in the exciting entrepreneurial era:

I'm currently managing two projects [in South East Asia] at the moment ... One, New South Wales TAFE couldn't deliver so we delivered within three days and had someone on the ground up there and won the contract ... With the other project that I'm running, it's a green fields site; there's no plant there at the moment, just some training rooms and offices ... We prepared and wrote the resource material from scratch for 320 hours of training by four, in three weeks ... Then we delivered for a month. It's now all been translated and we go up there to deliver for three more months ... Magic projects! The demands on the College were just incredible and we just [snaps his fingers] did it.

TAFE's tradition of seeking sectoral legitimacy and identity through its claimed 'unique' relationship with industry may partly explain the orientation of many TAFE managers and some teachers to emulate the private sector. Barry Klein attributes Streeton's recent success to its being 'ahead in that culture change' to embrace entrepreneurialism and commercial competition. Competency Based Training (CBT), program budgeting and management by objectives have generally been accepted by managers at Streeton, and by education policy makers, as the embodiment of business 'best practice'. The implementation of such measures serves the further purpose of reinforcing TAFE's principal connection with business and industry and, therefore, as a refutation of its links with a 'school-based' past, which both Barry and other Streeton managers wish to distance themselves from. Business and industry have become the significant third parties, if not primary partners in the education design process. They are appealed to in a generic sense to give legitimacy to the direction of change. In this way, Streeton managers have jumped ahead of government policy in that they see the entrepreneurial agenda as their own.

There is no doubt, however, that a number of teaching staff at Streeton Institute regard the entrepreneurial ethos and what they see as the erosion of complex educational relationships

as anathema to educational principles and their own cherished educational values. Geoff Ingham makes the point:

As I said to Barry Klein on several occasions 'we're not here because we want to be salespeople. We're here because many of us want to be *Teachers*. Now you're asking us to become commercial, to look at the cost-benefits and all that sort of thing - to balance the sheets, and that's not what we're here for, that's not where our mentality lies. (emphasis included)

From our first day at Streeton we heard senior management, and others, refer to 'dinosaurs' among the teaching staff who were assumed to be locked into the 'outdated' educational agendas and debates of the 1970s and 1980s. For many, especially some managers, terms like 'educationalist', 'intellectual' or 'academic' are used derisively. The unmistakable message of those who were dismissive of 'dinosaurs' and 'educationalists' is that these teachers are unable to make the jump to the new commercial climate that is being willed into existence in TAFE.

However, dinosaurs were not only criticised for their apparently antiquated thinking but also because they were seen to be wedded to work practices and conditions that their union had previously struggled to win for them. The dinosaurs were therefore painted as romantic academic idealists at best and ineffectual time servers at worst. They were still seen to inhabit the old environments in which progressive educational thinking and union activism had once thrived - humanities, arts and the VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education - general education programs).

Less often stated, except by dinosaurs themselves, was the view that dinosaurs were defenders of traditions and values that, in the ongoing processes of educational reshaping, still retain substantial institutional legitimacy. For this reason, some teachers were pleased to be associated with the dinosaur tag, but even they have virtually given up defending the vision of education they had long fought for. Once, they were activist designers in education and progressives in TAFE. Now they were cast as conservatives. They may continue to resist policy interventions and refuse to comply in their own classrooms, but they are resigned to marginalisation:

People like me are relics of a different era. We're not market oriented. We don't give a fuck about the dollar basically. We've got a commitment to broadening minds, opening inquiry, getting people to think and to develop themselves through that and, along the way, giving them other skills that will help them fit into society but with the intellectual apparatus hopefully sharpened a bit. There's no future for people like us in TAFE ... It's a sad thing but we're an embarrassment to them. They just want the yes-people who'll come in and if you give them a copy of 'Mein Kampf' and told them that's what you're going to teach, that's what they would teach. No questions. It's a job.

The interesting point about the dinosaur language is that it stereotypically defines the partially institutionalised 'old' educational culture of TAFE teaching in terms of the new one which is willed and worked for by its activist proponents - the more competitive, entrepreneurial, industry focused orientation being asserted especially by managers in TAFE but also by many practitioners on the ground. Quite clearly, people who have taken off in an extension of TAFE's entrepreneurial and business oriented traditions do not experience current pressures for institutional change as impositions in the same way that the 'dinosaurs' do. Many staff believe that the implementation of the NTRA, and its stimulation of entrepreneurial activity, has opened up (not closed off) opportunities for everyone. And once

people have started running with the agenda, regardless of where it came from in the first place, they seem to have developed a sense of ownership and personal investment in it. There is talk of empowerment and new freedom to achieve.

Lisa Gordon, for example, who describes her own academic studies as restrictive, is an unqualified advocate of the new directions in training and is highly critical of those who express misgivings. She has been promoted to Assistant Head of Hairdressing and has worked hard to position the Department in the vanguard of change. She suggests that many teachers have a 'public service' attitude which blinds them to opportunities that, like her, they should seize:

The sad thing I think for a lot of TAFE teachers is they don't see the opportunities that are there for them. They don't open their eyes. They wear blinkers. I'm a hairdresser for God's sake! I mean! And I've had a sister who's an academic who has huge problems with me being a hairdresser and doing the things I'm doing now. Now, if a hairdresser can open their eyes and look above ... there's opportunities there for everybody!

Lisa is puzzled that more teachers do not think like she does:

When can we get the academics to understand that it doesn't mean that they lose their jobs, and it doesn't mean that they lose power or control, or whatever it is, that in fact it gives them more and it's not a threat, that it will be one of the best things that's ever happened to education?

Such puzzlement is interesting. Like many of the managers, Lisa attributes the lack of enthusiasm of teachers for the managerial and entrepreneurial future being pressed into existence as a product of ingrained attitudes and a simple inability to see the benefits of the new order, its design and its structuring norms. Indeed advocates, like Lisa, criticise management for failing to communicate the benefits of the new environment adequately to staff.

Critics like Geoff Ingham, however, claim that such a simplistic view of their position entirely misses the point. The point, as he sees it, is that 'there's not even the slightest educational pretence in this place any more'. Education considerations, in this point of view, have been squeezed out by opportunistic market considerations. It's a question of values and normative orientations. The upshot is that teachers are required to demonstrate corporate loyalty to the Institute which cuts across the concept of loyalty 'to the education profession'. Geoff Ingham claims: 'Some of those people have no concept of profession. It's whatever the company wants'. The 'old educators' see themselves as the last generation of teachers in TAFE with pedagogical training and they despair that, as they are dying out, there is no mechanism for reproducing teacher culture among contract and sessional staff who generally have been appointed for their industry, not educational, experience. Some teachers refer to sessionals as the 'pedagogy-poor group' who, in using print and computer based teaching materials 'have no pedagogy of their own. They don't have the skills to critically analyse or develop [the material] because they don't have any educational foundation to work with'. The dinosaurs feel that they have passed their use-by date and find it increasingly difficult to argue that what is educationally important should be defended over what is administratively convenient or what industry wants.

However, this dichotomy between enthusiastic, entrepreneurial advocates and despondent, high-minded critics of educational re-design is somewhat misleading. In some 'practical' curriculum areas which were involved in direct training of industry-employed students, and in which CBT and an emphasis on commercial activities had generally been embraced, we

found some of the most profound (to us) thinking about issues such as pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation. These data give some indication of the complexity of responses at Streeeton to the current educational re-design, but also indicate that the professional educational discourses of the 1970s and 1980s, now dismissed by some organisational players, may have penetrated quite deeply into general educational thinking in TAFE.

Jim Stevens in animal care, for example, maintains that education cannot simply be commodified as a product to be delivered but must be negotiated as part of the teacher-student relationship. He asserts that education

... *has* become a business. I mean, I think to survive you have to see yourself as a business that is providing education to the client who, from a policy point of view, is industry, but from the educator's point of view is the people that come in here on a daily basis. I think it's wrestling with that - trying to keep industry happy but making sure that we treat our customers not as customers or as clients, but ... in a broader sort of educational perspective. I mean, we really do see them as people and, sure, we have to justify our existence under policy, but they are still people with problems, people with issues, and from an educational perspective that's just as important as meeting the demands of industry. (emphasis included)

A similar consideration led Jim and his colleagues to modify the assessment regime that was specified under CBT and which teachers felt was 'pushing them from teaching to assessing' to the point where they were 'bogged under with assessment'. But their strategic adaptation of the assessment regime has as much to do with pragmatic imperatives as educational ones:

We do use computer managed learning assessment [but] we see it as a superficial form of assessment that simply looks at whether a student has read the material ... We've tended to go to a more holistic form of assessment in terms of a project or an assignment or case study or that sort of thing. Not arduous, but nevertheless can be justified and figured back to the learning outcomes. And partly it's survival. Not all of this is driven by good educational principles. You know, we're saying, 'Shit, we just can't cope'.

The pressure on Departments to develop and use computer based instructional materials in order to allow for individual student progression (as well as the marketing of courses and materials to other providers) has been resisted by many teachers as foreign to educational values. The core group of teachers in animal care, however, seems to have found a way of combining pragmatic adaptation and protection of educational principles. Their pragmatic critique of CBT has led them to critique, to some extent at least, their former pedagogical practices. As Jim explains:

The big change of that technology is not so much technology [as such], but all of a sudden the teaching that was going on was no longer a private affair in the classroom between the teacher and the student. It then became a very public affair because the documentation was public. And so all of a sudden the students knew exactly what was in the subject from start to finish. It was available to the employers. To other Departments. That was quite threatening for a while for all of us I think. All of a sudden, if we were documenting stuff it had to be right and that required some review of the material ... and also it made our assessment methods very public. That actually, for us, had a fairly positive effect because it demystified the process if you like. All of a sudden

these were documents that people could comment on and processes that people could comment on, and that could be changed.

This move to computer based teaching materials evaporated the teacher's paternalistic mystique. While he says this has 'created a sense of disempowerment for some people', it has also necessitated more collaborative working relations and the development of good curriculum:

In the end we all sit down and kick it around. 'Well look', someone says, 'I think that this should be in there', and two people say, 'I don't think it should be. Justify to me why it should be in there', or 'justify why it shouldn't be in there'. 'You want to reword it? Well, it's perfectly clear to me'. Justify why you want to reword it'. So the document then becomes more publicly owned and the way we've tried to overcome that disenfranchisement is for people who have been the biggest 'kickers' of the system, to actually ask them to do the edits so we pull them in and then they have some ownership over the product rather than the product being dumped on them.

The process seems to have worked because 'some teachers at one stage wouldn't use the materials in any way, shape or form - just refused to use them!'. Now the view in the Department seems to be that 'these learning materials are no different to your whiteboard or your overhead projector or anything else. They're just another resource. It's just that they're group owned'. When it's all boiled down, 'there's still that relationship with the students and between teachers' that is the essence of educational practice.

We have spent some time on this teacher's account because it seems to illustrate the way organisational actors are struggling to deal with imposed institutional design. Many TAFE teachers were struggling to balance commercial viability against their commitment to educational and social values. Some were even be prepared to critique their earlier educational ideals and practices and develop innovative approaches to teaching and managing. That this is going on suggests that top-down institutional design is being confronted by bottom-up institutional design in ways which are reconfiguring institutional practices and re-vamping educational values.

Conclusion: implications for future design

Our general conclusion is that, although theories of institutional design provide a relatively complex view of agents, the dominance of those theories that focus on the choices of self-interested individual actors as explanations of institutional reality does not account for the complexity of organisational life at Streeton Institute. Such perspectives overprivilege the solitary, knowledgeable, calculating rational actor who is assumed to be sovereign and to have a purchase on reality which gives a sense of clarity of purpose to individualistic calculations of benefit. While rational actor theories account from some aspects of institutional redesign at Streeton, they by no means capture the whole picture. Social and political theories of institutional life are a necessary addition to rational actor theories for understanding both institutions and the practical effects of contemporary levers for institutional design.

The paper shows that TAFE is currently being remade through processes of organisational steering driven by government, management and teachers. Policy and practices, internal and external, to Streeton endorse different normative orientations which shape the agenda of possibilities for ongoing institutional design and change. For example, many managers and some teachers see themselves as running ahead of the entrepreneurial agenda and even independently of it. However, other teachers, especially those who had been activists

in willing and working for 'progressive' educational thinking and practice, feel alienated within the agenda and see the values that are inherent within it as foreign to their professional identities. Where some resist the new ethos from an unreconstructed and often marginalised position, others have found ways of affirming educational values within the marketised context. Such activists who 'do business with an educators heart' provide a powerful counterpoint to the more commercially-oriented staff who seek to become independent entrepreneurial operators in the training market.

The institutional design that is manifest in government policy interventions, therefore, authorises and legitimates particular kinds of change and frames direction for continuing change. This powerful affirmation of probable futures is reasserted by powerful actors within the organisational life of Streeton. But in the implementation of these institutional designs in practices of management, teaching and learning, we can detect signs of other visions for the future. There are trends which suggest that while income generation is enhanced at Streeton there is also a re-norming of educational practice going on. Driven by educational and social principles, resistance and sheer pragmatism, we see staff working both within *and* against the design agenda in ways that suggests, to us, possibilities of preferred as well as probable futures for TAFE. Such a view sees institutional design as a collective and conflictual process of steering futures through the assertion and defence of normative possibilities. It is this kind of organisational politics which will ensure that ongoing processes of institutional shaping do not lead in socially dysfunctional directions.

Note

1. See Seddon, Angus and Rushbrook, 1994; Seddon, Angus, Rushbrook and Brown, 1998.
2. Other researchers talk of practices of ordering (Law, 1995) or practices of government (Foucault, 1980). This talk of practices is significant partly because it implies something which is less cut and dried, hard and fast than a 'rule'. It also flags a particular way of understanding the relationship between structure and agency.
3. The 'Reshaping Australian Institutions' is a major interdisciplinary project which is investigating changes in Australia's major institutions. It is orchestrated by the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University (RSSS, 1998; Seddon, Angus and Selleck, 1998)

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