

## **Old and new stories of teachers' work**

### **From integrated public-systems to capacity-building enterprise**

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This paper draws from a series of studies investigating the restructuring of education and training since the 1980s. My aim in these projects has been to better understanding the impact of neo-liberal globalisation, and the politics around more inclusive notions of citizenship and voice, on the work of teachers and managers. Here I consider the way government reform agenda have redesigned education and training, creating a new educational landscape and new contexts for educational work. I argue that this redesign of educational contexts has encouraged a variety of pedagogic innovation within public and private education and training providers and has also reorganised collective national educational capacity by deconcentrating large public systems of education and training in favour of an enterprise structure. I document the impact of this shift on the work of teachers and managers, and consider its implications for national education and training provision in Australia.

#### **New landscapes for education and training**

Twenty years ago, public education and training defined the primary frame of reference for educational work. State systems of schools, technical and further education (TAFE) and public universities were the dominant features in the landscape of education and training in Australia. Private school education was acknowledged as a minority provision for the wealthy and/or faithful but, by and large, other private educational provision was hardly acknowledged. Even community education was described as the 'cinderella' sector. The shadowland of industry training and other commercial providers, when recognised at all, were seen to be marginal to the main game.

How the educational landscape has changed. Now public education and training is only one part of a complex education and training market. Schools, TAFE Institutes and universities are increasingly seen as stand-alone enterprises which exist alongside a plethora of other public and private providers. National providers face growing international competition. Public education which was state funded, orchestrated through a centralised educational bureaucracy and operationalised through a largely state-employed, trained and regulated teaching force has been subject to diversification on an enterprise basis.

Public funds are distributed competitively to this public enterprise and to parallel private enterprises. These deregulatory and marketising trends have stimulated commercialisation of public education and training. Funding constraints and competitive pressures drive work reorganisation and intensification. It encourages innovation but oriented towards particular client services rather than public service in general. The overall effect of these developments has been to drive a deconcentration of provision as the large public systems of education and training with their complex division of labour are broken up into smaller units. Alongside this, there has been deinstitutionalisation as the lifelong learning agenda has been taken up and used to justify learning sites beyond specialist education and training providers.

The significance of these developments lies in the way they create new contexts for educational work: for the work of learners, teachers and managers. In a sense, education as a social institution has been redesigned. The implications of this redesign is suggested in the following definition of an institution developed in the ANU's 'Reshaping Australian Institution's' project. This 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 - emphasis included)

My emphases in this definition highlight the way a social institution - a socially constructed context - shapes the activity, organisation, relationships and distributions of power and authority within that field of social action. The institutional arrangements shape what can be said and done. They define opportunities for voice and also insist on other's silence. This is very clear in national training reform where industry has gained voice and teachers have lost voice since the mid-1980s. Institutional arrangements also determine job design by aggregating or disaggregating different kinds of tasks within an overall understanding of 'work' and by defining some work as infrastructural to other work. Let me illustrate the effect of educational redesign for teachers and managers.

### **Remaking educational work**

Perhaps the most striking effect of national training reform and other deregulatory trends in education has been the way teachers and managers have responded to change. Research indicates that some while some staff take up the new commercialising imperatives with enthusiasm, and others decry their development, most educators have responded to new demands while also holding on to valued educational traditions. They have renegotiated their own work and created hybrid educational practices which both sustain learner's individual development and support the capacity of groups of educators to do the work of educating. Like many other researchers, I have called these hybrid educational practices 'capacity-building'.

In the following quote a teacher in TAFE gives some sense of the character of capacity-building. It reveals the way he sees his work as both a response to non-negotiable imperatives which turned the department into a business unit and as a continuing commitment to supporting learners. The department, he says,

*has become a business. I mean to survive you have to see yourself as a business that is proving education to the client who, from a policy point of view, is industry but, from an 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 makign sure that we treat our customers not as customers or clients but, ... in a broad 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)

An associate director in TAFE described this kind of response to the commercialisation of TAFE as 'doing business with an educator's heart'. She captured the strong normative orientation amongst many teachers and managers in TAFE and also the new imperatives accompanying the redesign of education and training. This renegotiation of educational work was widely seen as a response to difficult times in education and training. Teachers talked of 'having to change', of 'being so stressed out' that 'their survival depended on' reorganising their work. Managers talked of their organisation's 'struggle for survival', the difficulties of funding cuts and the challenges of managing workplace relationships in which teachers and managers were increasingly understood in 'them-us' terms.

My point is that 'capacity-building' is an ambiguous development. The phrase itself has a nice ring to it but the circumstances in which educators become capacity-builders are often difficult. The birth of capacity-building has been accompanied, on the one hand, by public sector funding cuts, resource constraints, new accountability and performance demands, teachers doing more with less, and managers trying to encourage, even coerce, change. On the other hand, it has been enabled by government's deregulatory agenda which have opened up opportunities for education and training beyond the resource strapped public providers. Capacity-building, I suggest, is a spill-over response to the redesign of public education and training.

### **Characteristics of capacity-building**

Looking across my recent projects, in both public and private providers, it is possible to identify five key features associated with capacity-building. I illustrate these features with particular reference to a case study of a Victorian RTO.

#### *Capacity-building as a spill over from public educational provision*

As suggested, capacity-building is a response by educators to deregulatory developments which differentially impact on public and private educational provision. The common feature in both sectors is a commitment to service provision with service defined largely in terms of service to learners, while also recognising the responsibility to serve clients.

In public providers, for instance, resource constraints have encouraged innovation as a means of survival and as changing patterns of regulation have promoted diversification. TAFE Institutes now provide training in many different sites - on-shore, off-shore, on-campus, in workplaces. They have extended their services, beyond industry training into research and consultancy services. Within TAFE, restructuring, managed innovation, and reforms in pedagogy create a context in which there is ongoing job redesign. ACE providers have successfully expanded their VET role as a means of gaining income and learners are increasingly choosing ACE for VET because they prefer the pedagogy on offer.

The spill-over from public education and training is evident in the growth of private providers. While these RTO's are clearly committed to being viable businesses, they commonly characterise their work in terms of specific forms of service provision. The case study RTO worked in manufacturing. A manager described its mission as follows:

... I think that the core work of the organisation, at this stage anyway, is still the development and implementation of programs in workplaces. Training

programs in workplaces ... essentially its about getting into workplaces - I think of it as going into an enterprise and saying, "What can we do in this enterprise, which is going to help this place to be a better place?" So I mean that's the idealistic sort of vision of it if you like but at the end of the day, we would want our work to contribute to some meaningful and useful change in that work environment and - and a change that will make it, or help to make it, a better place for the people who live and work there, particularly the shop floor people.

Similar themes arise from other RTO's. One based within a large enterprise saw its purpose as servicing the company's workforce through in-house training. A community-based RTO talked about its work in terms of supporting a local geographic community. An RTO providing foreign language services indicated that they had a longstanding clientel which had formed as a result of the services the RTO provided. In each case, the RTO's saw themselves serving specific communities; some organic to a region or culturally connected group, and others constructed as a result of service provision and associated market research. . In many respects, these RTO's demonstrated quite orthodox public education values, being committed to supporting learning and extend learning opportunities for disadvantaged learners, because of the way government had redesigned public education and training. Opening up the funding market permitted educational capacity that had been constituted and constrained within the constructed agency of public education to spill over into both new contexts and new constructions of collective educational capacity.

#### *Capacity-building as dispersal of teachers:*

Given the historic significance of public education and training in teacher employment, it is not surprising that funding cuts, deregulation and work redesign has led to a dispersal of teachers from the public sector. While some of these teachers have taken up non-educational work (taxi-driving, small business) many more have found ways of re-using their educational knowledge and skills in new contexts (in RTOs, human resources, personnel management, enterprise-based teaching, etc). Alongside this dispersal of the public education and training workforce into new learning settings, there is also evidence of new labour supplies emerging in education and training as people enter teaching by completing the minimum teaching requirements (eg. .

The dispersal of teachers from within the public sector is significant because these teachers have been formed within public education and training, with its distinctive public values and commitments. The staff in one RTO, for instance, shared a common professional history, having worked since the 1970s in public adult community education in TAFE and other organisations. Significantly, they saw themselves as adult educators rather than as industry trainers, even though their current work was industry-based. They considered their educational philosophy, which was rooted in applied adult education, as one of their key strengths and an important element in their competitive advantage. This shared professional formation within public adult education was compounded by their longstanding personal relationships. Some of the staff had worked together for over twenty years and had common networks in adult literacy and community education. Moreover, their personal biographies showed similar features: family experience of working class life, early encounters with inequalities of power and opportunity, an acquaintance with practical politics over the kitchen table. They also shared a love of learning, actively engaging in reflective practice as part of their day-to-day lives, pursuing their own studies, and, in some respects, defining learning as a part of their practical politics.

For these teachers, the RTO offered opportunities of a more freed-up educational capacity, permitting staff to develop innovative forms of industry training which were unconstrained by

the requirements of a being a teacher in a large multi-purpose organisation like a TAFE Institute. This innovative educational practice has proved to be successful. It has generated learning outcomes that benefit shopfloor trainees and which are supported by those worker's union. It has proved sufficiently valuable to client companies to create return business. But simultaneously it represents a dispersal of public education capacity as teachers who were formed within public adult education have become reconstituted as a private agency. They moved beyond the reach of the teachers' union which only covered public employees and became responsible for their own economic survival, both as a company and as individuals. This meant that they had an increased range of responsibilities relating both to the management of the company's business, and their own careers and worklives, because previously some of these responsibilities would have been delegated to their union or their public employer.

*Capacity-building as particularistic provision:*

Capacity-building is a form of educational service provision but it trends towards privately-oriented niche marketing to specific clients. Where, traditionally, public education and training has maintained an ethos of public service, the emphasis now in both public and private providers tends to be customer service. The implication is that providers must be responsive to and consistent with client demands.

The case study RTO's main business was the design, development and implementation of industry-based training programs informed by adult educational principles. The company aimed to provide an holistic and contextualised program for learning and to promote a more effective learning culture within client organisations and in other partner organisations. The company believed that learning within the workplace should be easier, richer and more effective after the RTO's involvement than it was before. But, as one of the teacher's noted, its the client company's management that invites the RTO in to supply training. This is a constraint which shapes what the RTO can and cannot do. Addressing this contradiction required the RTO to provide training that was targeted to particular client companies, workplaces and groups of workers, but it was pursued in a way that emphasised the universal benefits of learning and the importance of creating conditions which would sustain learning for all in the longer term.

Staff talked about the way they managed workplace power relations in order to achieve the best possible learning contexts for the trainees and to protect the integrity of training so that it was not usurped in partisan ways which did harm to trainees. A manager described the kinds of negotiations with companies which mean that the RTO took on board imperatives within the company while also optimising the learning contexts for learners:

In some cases people won't know how they want it [the training] done, or they'll think they want it done in a particular way. Well, I know that's not really going to be effective [but] there could be all sorts of reasons why they want that -- political considerations, manufacturing considerations, management considerations, plain ignorance, all sorts of things. That's always there, its a possibility. And you've got your own ... agendas that you many not be aware of, and paradigms and things that you're working by, and, all of a sudden, your in a situation where you can't do that. So its about being aware of all these complex things and finding a way.

These developments reveal the kinds of contradictions experienced by teachers and managers in the commercialised landscape of education and training as they attempt to reconcile the universalistic ethic of public service which they embody because of their history as teachers in public education and the demands of particularistic provision. These were

contradictions that had to be constantly managed in order to maintain the educational capacity of the RTO and they also seemed to drive the staff so that they pursued their learning work with intensity and passion.

The implications of this trend to more particularistic provision reached beyond those providers which specifically opted to service particular clients and extended into public providers. Both public and private providers are increasingly developing distinctive business profiles being differentiated in terms of the character, often the normative character, of their service provision. TAFE Institutes, for instance, are increasingly seen to service industry. Their pedagogy and style of provision is less attractive to some learners (eg. women in small business) who are turning more and more to community providers for training support. There is evidence that employers are developing very sophisticated understandings of the diversified education and training market and opting for different providers to service their various training needs.

### *Capacity-building as the work of learning professionals:*

Learning is fundamental to capacity-building. Building capacity depends upon individual development, enhancing individual's capacity to live with uncertainty and change, and also organisational development. But when providers build capacity within learning communities and client companies it is their 'pedagogic work' which is critical. The core of this work lies in the orchestration and organisation of learning relations to sustain knowledge exchanges and the co-production of new knowledges.

This conception sees 'pedagogy' as a kind of knowledge management and a means to learning. As Lusted elaborates, the challenge of developing a pedagogy of learning requires us to become conscious

... of the conditions which produce, negotiate, transform, realise and return [knowledge] in practice [ie. learning]. What pedagogy addresses is the process of production and exchange in this cycle, the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the interaction of three agencies - the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce : 2).

As he stresses, learning is not a consequence of any one of these agencies by themselves but an outcome of their interactive effects which serve to 'co-produce' knowledge and other outcomes . Learning is constituted within knowledge transactions that are orchestrated through the purposeful design and realisation of pedagogy. Learning is a distinct form of work which depends upon the pedagogic work of carefully constructing pedagogic contexts, relations and processes. Pedagogic work does not simply facilitate learning but aims to encourage 'noise-free' learning in which cultural dissonances are minimised.

The RTO derived curriculum out of the workplace in the client company. This pedagogic work helped to promote learning which was unimpeded by unfamiliar terminology and a lack of understanding of the trainees experience of work. Teachers emphasised that their role was not to provide knowledge but to help trainees recognise what they already knew and to systematise useful knowledge in ways which would help them. One teacher described her role as 'getting the machete out' and 'clearing out the debris' so that the trainees 'start sifting, sorting through all that undergrowth to work out what are the most important bits'. Another teacher emphasised that he was a key element in this pedagogic work, both as a contributor to the co-produced knowledge transactions and as a means to productive learning relationships:

You teach who you are and what you are. What you *are* is what comes across. ... Your being the way you are, the way you approach people, your character - that is what determines whether people *hook* into things, decide that what you are saying is interesting, you know. ... what I believe is, first and foremost, you must establish those relationships and establish a relationship of trust... all of those things that build people's strong relationships. The process of developing that can be around different sorts of contexts, working together. Only time will establish that relationship so that you can have the potential to have more impact in the area because of the relationships you've created. I think, if you can create those kinds of relationships and you *know* that, that's when the dynamism starts, people start to work together.

But such noise-free learning depended upon creating conditions that supported learning and this depended upon a sophisticated management of the politics of learning contexts. Such management of learning relations was most explicit in industry settings where teachers work between employers/managers and employees/unions. As one teacher commented:

... you're juggling the values of the different groups [in the workplace] and those values, and how they are expressed, are quite different. Each group has different objectives, like the union has a different objective about what they want their members to get from training and the people in training themselves have changing views about what they want out of training. Then the various people in the management structure of the company have different outcomes from training and so on. So your trying to juggle all these things and keep them smoothly in the air and not drop anyone. You've got to keep everyone happy.

When company conditions had the potential to limit training, teachers turned their pedagogic capacities to inducting client managers into alternative ways of training. This pedagogic work also extended beyond specific companies. The staff took their experience of workplace training out into the wider field of vocational education and training policy and practice. Constructing contexts and conditions which would enable knowledge transactions and co-production to extend learning in VET professional and policy communities.

*Capacity-building as the construction of pedagogic agency:*

Pedagogy that supports learning is the *modus operandi* within capacity-building organisations. But while individual staff within these organisations clearly exercised individual pedagogic knowledge and skills, their capacity to act pedagogically rested upon the construction of a collective pedagogic agency through specific organisational practices. This collective agency brought different functions together, locating individuals with different knowledges, skills and dispositions within a structured and durable division of labour.

Within the RTO, for instance, the CEO was quite explicit that building this pedagogic capacity had been an important motivation in the formation of the company:

When I came here ... I had just one agenda. And that was to get the best possible deal for the workers. I found the best teachers I could find. They were miles better than I ever was. Brilliant people, a lot of them. Then I picked on the best teaching practice that came out of their teaching and I promoted that. That's where it came from. So I consciously moved the money around so that that teaching and learning line would come through. I consciously did that. It was definitely my goal.

The construction of collective pedagogic agency depended partly on further pedagogic work directed this time towards the in-house learning by staff, organised through ongoing informal dialogue, reflective practice, support for formal study and RTO-based research, and regular staff development days. This engagement affirmed a vision of the company based on shared goals, moral principles, organisational roles and responsibilities and social bonds which tied the staff to each other and the organisation. As one manager noted, there were constant challenges in living this vision in everyday work contexts. It meant that the vision became a motivating force and a guiding principle but the challenge lay in:

how we negotiate that terrain [between vision and reality] and manage those sorts of tensions in a way that sustains and cultivates the energies that people need to do their work. Because, I think, in some places that I've been in, in the past, ... the tensions are not always acknowledged. And even when they are acknowledged ... they're managed in ways that actually dissipate the energies, erode people's sense of self-worth and professionalism and confidence, and make them feel as if their professional practice has been devalued. So that's what I want to avoid. How do you manage the realities of the world that we have to operate in, in a way that is *enabling* and sustaining to other people involved?

As this quote suggests, the formation and maintenance of an effective collective pedagogic agency requires careful attention to the management of power relations within and beyond the agency (pedagogic and political work) and the management of relations between expertise and income which ensure that the agency is viable in the longer term (professional work).

There is no doubt that the integration of these different kinds of work and associated divisions of labour depend upon sophisticated organisational work. But collective pedagogic agency also depends upon the construction of a shared normative framework that informs the collective vision of the agency. This point was made forcefully by a manager who emphasised the importance of the values which informed the work of the RTO and the way the organisation provided an environment in which those values could be lived on a day to day basis:

... what capacities are being built? Its values. Values in action. But capacities for what? I think it is for building a better world. I.e. the capacity is oriented to an end. And I think that all the staff can see that the world could be a better place than it is. All the New Right stuff has meant that it is very hard to find a way of talking about values. The traditional norms have been delegitimised. If we espouse those old values explicitly we are seen as being beyond the pale. This de-norming is so profound that we seem to have become alienated from our moral positions.

The construction of a collective pedagogic agency creates a context which welds a collection of individuals into a sustainable organisational unit around a shared vision, affirms staff commitments as they undertake their pedagogic work and, importantly, protects those lived values.

### **Redesigning collective pedagogic agency**

Contemporary education and training reform has driven change in the pattern of educational provision and the institutional arrangements that constitute the educational landscape. The institutional design underpinning public education and training created a collective pedagogic agency by organising a large state employed teaching force within the



organisational rules defined by a centralised bureaucracy. The formation of this teaching force in terms of its knowledges, skills, dispositions and values was a consequence of the way government established screening and selection processes in relation to teacher employment, trained teachers within teacher education programs and shaped their work within the ethos of public service. Teacher unions and, later, professional associations supported and represented teachers, particularly in relations with teacher employing agencies and government.

The recent redesign of education and training has destabilised that pattern. It has broken down the large-scale collective pedagogic agency of public education by encouraging the formation of business units within the broad frames of public education and by diversifying providers beyond public education. Both sectors have converged towards an enterprise model.

The old infrastructural work of creating organisational rules to structure educational work, providing teacher support through teacher associations and networks, and forming teachers through teacher education programs has been redefined as enterprise-based work. This workload now falls on the teachers and managers within each enterprise, alongside their other responsibilities for enterprise-based pedagogic work and industrial relations. Ironically, the increased scope of enterprise-based educational work has coincided with market pressures which keeps the costs of training down. Accounting based on contact hours does not acknowledge the complexity or range of work required to sustain collective pedagogic agency on an enterprise-basis. Resources are spread thinner in this shift not only because costs are kept down but because infrastructural supports previously provided through the bureaucracy, unions and teacher education providers with some economies of scale are being undercut through changes in government policies.

The effect of this redesign has been to deconcentrate and diversify collective pedagogic agency by encouraging both enterprise organisation and pedagogic innovation. While this kind of provision permits greater tailoring of education and training to different groups of learners -- an important issue in terms of the politics of voice, there are costs. System coherence becomes increasingly difficulty as the market dictates the proliferation of provision in response to widely differing customer demand. The enterprise-based workloads of teachers and managers increases as small organisational units take on the range of pedagogic and organisational work once orchestrated through the sophisticated division of direct and infrastructural labour of public education and training. Resources are spread thinner as a result of the imperatives of mass customisation and the reductions in economies of scale. And while teachers and managers work ever smarter as well as harder, there are growing questions about government's responsibilities for: providing quality education and training, ensuring appropriate skills supply, and investing in education and training to create a sustainable national capacity in the knowledge economy.

## References