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Pedagogically Constructing the Future Worker

Lyn Yates

University of Technology Sydney*

*This paper was presented while I was a professor in the Faculty of Education, UTS, and derives from a research project undertaken with colleagues from UTS. From 1 January 2005, I have taken a new appointment as Professor of Curriculum at the University of Melbourne. My address is Faculty of Education, Alice Hoy Building, University of Melbourne, Parkville Vic 3010, Australia. Ph (61) 03 8344 4000.

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Abstract for Paper YAT04503

In an ARC-funded project, Yates, Solomon, Chappell and Tennant are studying pedagogical constructions of new vocational identity across two industry types (hospitality and information technology) and across different education settings: school, TAFE, private provider, work-based, university, community college. This paper is drawn from a case-study of one school, in which hospitality and IT are each offered as subjects that can be taken for dual accreditation (towards a HSC/TER score; and as a Certificate 2 Training competency). The study used interviews with teachers and students, observations, and analysis of documentary materials to show that different worker identities are being emphasized in the two classes, and that these in turn draw on different experiences and identities of the teachers of the two subjects; conflicting epistemologies of the two assessment regimes; and different student cohorts in the two subjects. The comparative site-based methodological approach taken in this project helps to explore the continued salience of two different types of theoretical takes on young people and ‘transition’: the Bourdieuian perspectives on schooling, cultural capital and ‘reproduction’; and the attention paid by du Gay, Gee, Rose, Solomon and others to changing forms of identity work for vocational purposes in ‘new times’. The paper argues that those who most easily meet the rhetoric of the ‘new vocationalism’ are the students least identified as vocationally oriented; and raises questions about the extent to which class and gender dispositions are presumed as well as reproduced in the new initiatives.

Vocational preparation through education is an important site where attempts to engage with the changing form of the economy and work culture are brought together with perspectives on the role and possibilities of pedagogy in forming identity. The recent upsurge of activity relating to schooling and vocational needs is striking. In Australia, MCEETYA's *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools* ((MCEETYA (Ministerial Council on Employment 2000)) has been followed by various state-based initiatives, national forums (Australian 2002; Australia. 2004), consultations with business leaders (Curtis 2001), and a parliamentary inquiry and subsequent report, *Learning to Work* (Australia. 2004). UNESCO has sponsored a major project on generic competencies, the DeSeCo Project, with many associated publications. In the UK major enquiries, learning projects, key centres, mooted policy changes are also in train (Hayward 2004; Pring 2004) The wave of new developments in this area is of interest for this particular symposium, not just because it is one indicator that might be examined to explore the perceived meaning of 'new times' to those engaged in education. It is also specifically relevant to an interest in 'identities' and 'transitions'. The rhetoric about vocational needs today (in 'changing times') frequently incorporates an explicit claim that (vocational) education is not just a matter of supplying knowledge or skill that will somehow remain separate from identity, is not just about competencies seen as thing-like objects to be acquired or possessed. Rather the rhetoric of the '*new vocationalism*' has been of the need for workers to become particular types of people, to take on particular identities: to be someone who is enterprising, flexible, autonomous and, above all, a self-motivating 'lifelong learner' (Gee 1999; OVAL 2003). This paper, then, offers a perspective on debates about changing times, identity construction and transition using a case-study of two classrooms in NSW, each offering 'dual accreditation' vocational subjects in year 12. It begins by discussing the design of this project with specific attention to the problem of 'how do you study identity construction'? It then takes up the case-studies of the two classes with regard to the questions 'what is being conveyed as working knowledge, and as the identity of the worker?', 'how are differences and inequalities working within these classroom and transition practices?'

Studying 'construction of identity'.

Any particular methodological approach opens up some perspectives and forecloses others. In the case of 'identity' a major issue is how much we focus on testimonies of young people themselves compared with other evidence of their actions and orientations. Within interviews or surveys, researchers too have to take decisions about whether to take testimonies at face

value and categorize on that basis, or whether to read subjectivity in indirect ways. Another issue is what type of evidence we look at as possible sources of identity ‘construction’. In the past decade I have taken up a number of different approaches to researching issues of identity and social change and believe that there is usefulness in continuing to see that particular theories can offer useful perspectives without being taken as a model that disposes of all other ways of seeing. (Yates 2003; McLeod forthcoming) I see identity-making as something that involves a human subject who brings biographical and family experiences and emotional hopes and dispositions to their educational environment, but also as something that is continuing to be constructed in conjunction with those educational experiences and wider social discourse and material arrangements. There is a sense in which individuals do take themselves up as discursively constructed subjects; and there is also a sense in which we might want to take account of the way in which individual emotion and intentionality over time is not simply to be read off from those socially formed discourses. There is a sense in which the perspectives of Rose, Foucault, Gee, du Gay and others on the work of individuals today in governing the self are useful ideas to focus on in looking at what school is doing. And there is a sense too in looking at patterns being repeated and changed across class, and gender and race, and at how well Bourdieu or Giddens or Nancy Fraser, Arnot, Weiner and David, Walkerdine, Kenway, McLeod, Bronwyn Davies, Valerie Hey, Stephen Ball, Geoff Whitty, Sally Power or many others provide useful understandings of what is the source of the behaviour and patterns and agendas seen in the patterns.

The project from which the present paper is drawn is an ARC-funded Discovery Project, *Changing Work, Changing Workers, Changing Selves: a study of pedagogies of the new vocationalism* being conducted with four colleagues from UTS: Clive Chappell, Nicky Solomon, Mark Tennant and Carolyn Williams. The project is case-study based and comparative. We have taken two industry types (hospitality and information technology) and five education types (school, TAFE, community college, private provider) and are studying at each of the education sites what happens in education and training in relation to the two industry streams. We gather documentary materials related to the history and regulation within which each site operates; we do classroom observations; we interview teachers, trainers and lecturers and also the principals or heads of department; and we have focus group interviews with the young people. Across the different education sites, the project is focusing on how ‘working knowledge’ is being conveyed, and on how identities are being assumed, constructed, engaged with, or marginalized in the pedagogical practices:

What types of subject identities are assumed and what types of subject identities are being produced in this site?

Where is ‘vocational knowledge’ assumed to reside?

What is the site producing as the desirable worker subject?¹

In my previous longitudinal project with Julie McLeod, the *12 to 18 Project*, the methodological focus was on young people over time, with their schools and schooling experience accessed indirectly, as a back-drop heard through repeated interviews (interviews enabling prospective and retrospective perspectives) with individuals and across cohorts. In terms of methodological design, in that study, subjective accounts, longitudinal perspectives, and school comparison were taken as useful ways in to the more general questions about identity and education in changing times. In that project, the focus was as much on ongoing questions about how difference and inequalities are produced, and listening to young people over an extended time was a way of seeing something of what persisted and what changed in their subjective sense of themselves and their future. One of our starting points there, and one of the sources of our decision to focus on close and extended interviews over time, was an interest in hearing how young people were living and taking up the social discourses, especially those of gender reform, and what identities looked like, seen over time and in particular school contexts – that is to hear the people, not just the discourses (Nielsen 1996; McLeod 2000).

In this current project, the methodological focus in a sense is reversed. Here the direct focus is on what is being done to young people in the education sites: we use documents, observations, interviews with teachers and principals and comparison with other types of education sites as key features of the approach. We do undertake some focus groups with students in the classes we observe, but (especially compared with the approach of the 12 to

¹ Within these main questions, some of the more specific questions we are interested in are:

Where is the knowledge assumed to reside and where is it assumed to be produced – does it come from the students, the workplace, the academic context, and so on?

How is the learner incorporated in the pedagogy?

What types of subject identities are assumed and what types of subject identities are being produced in this site?

What is this site producing as the desirable worker subject?

Is the program built on a conscious agenda to change people?

18 Project) these one-off focus groups and the overall design of this project offer only limited direct perspectives on the subjectivity of the different students. The focus of this project is very much on the experiences they are being drawn into, on what is being done to them and on understanding something of the bigger picture about contemporary times, identity-making, education and inequalities.

No methodology can do everything. In the *12 to 18 Project* it would have been interesting to do observations in the school, to interview parents and teachers, but doing so would have altered our relationship to the students we interviewed and what they would be prepared to tell us. In the *changing work, changing workers, changing selves* project, it would be nice to be doing some extensive interviews and tracking of students, to focus on their experiences and hopes in more depth. But within current research funding in Australia, one has to make choices about limiting design focus if a study is to be carried out with quality. In both projects we are trying to build perspectives by interpretive and nuanced understandings of experiences and sites. The tracking of big patterns is being gathered by other researchers but it is important to remember that interpretive studies such as the one we are doing here can and should draw on wider research and theory in building the picture of what is happening – that is ‘evidence’ is not confined to the empirical and observable moments of the fieldwork.(Yates 2003)

And it is relevant to remember too that the point of doing this type of interpretive empirical work is to try to go, at least in a limited sense, beyond the perspectives that may be derived from our existing theories. Frequently, these days, empirical research takes the form of big surveys supplemented by case-studies. Too often in my view the case-studies are no more than illustrations of points derived from the survey, rather than qualitative research as such. What I mean here might be seen by comparing some of our explorations of a particular theoretical perspective that was the starting point of the project with the papers we are beginning to write following the empirical work. One first stage of work in relation to this project was a book project called *Reconstructing the Lifelong Learner* (Chappell et.al., 2003) influenced by Nicholas Rose and others. In that account, we analysed the contemporary interest in the lifelong learner through a lens of governing and re-narrativizing the self, and showed how this perspective gave useful insights about practices that are endemic in many aspects of contemporary education and organizational practices (our examples included self-help books; programs of gender reform; portfolio approaches to assessment; health

campaigns to alter sexual behaviour in relation to HIV Aids; management and personal development programs). These perspectives on how people are being drawn into ‘governing the self’ are one starting point of our empirical observations in the project – but, as the site-studies and empirical work proceeds we can see that any particular education site and any particular bringing together of learners and teachers is more complex and varied than the policy or curriculum documents might suggest or this particular theoretical take might open up.

Vocational identity and pathways

In the remainder of the paper I want to talk about two main issues from our study. First, in terms of those background policy discussions, to what extent do we see here some deliberate attempts to develop a new type of person through these dual accredited classes, one who is enterprising and self-directing, oriented to lifelong learning, able to present themselves and their skills as a portfolio, etc? Here I will look at how different players in these new education developments see the agendas. And I will discuss some aspects of the teaching of the two classes we studied, and particularly at the assessment and again consider what is being conveyed about being a worker, and what is being explicitly and implicitly developed in the students. Secondly and more briefly, I will consider ‘difference’: what types of backgrounds and student identities are being assumed and what are being marginalized in the process? And how do different kinds of students take up the experiences offered here to them?

Constructing a new worker or resurrecting an old binary?

In this project we interviewed people within the related policy and professional development section of the state education department; the school principal; the two teachers whose classes we observed; and (in focus groups) the students; and we also looked at the materials they produced or were working with, and what was said in class.

There is undoubtedly a new policy rhetoric at work, but the issue of what it means as grounded practice is often unclear (as many writers have pointed out in relation to the ‘generic skills’ agenda (Shacklock 2000; Pring 2004; Williams in press). In this study, we found that the literature of the ‘new’ vocationalism, the talk of ‘enterprise’ and ‘flexibility’ and ‘lifelong learning’, is much more likely to be found among those who have the time and conditions to be talking about the ‘big picture’. Of those we interviewed during the project, it was the people located in the policy and professional development units of the education

department who most readily spoke this language, and who were producing a stream of manuals for schools, using the new terminology, for example a skills portfolio log book. In the schools however, there is a more longstanding discursive construction of vocational skills, one that is grounded in old binaries of skills versus academic knowledge, mental versus manual. Here ready distinctions are made between different types of students ('academic versus not academic') and, at least in the curriculum we were studying, the new dual accreditation development is more an attempt to extend opportunities by allowing students to do two things simultaneously than a reworking of how that student needs to learn or to self-identify.

At the school level, the principal saw vocationalism being taken up not because it was important for all students, but because it specifically benefited those students who lost out within a traditional academic hierarchy:

So rather than doing a watered down version of the traditional academic course, a student particularly in hospitality can demonstrate extremely high level of skills in hospitality and go and in the work placement be very highly regarded and go out into the workforce and through TAFE get an excellent job, whereas they may have left the HSC, the traditional HSC, at a school that didn't value those skills with a very low UAI and a very poor opinion of their own academic skills. But at least by participating in VET it enables those particular skills, the VET skills, to be recognised and acknowledged and rewarded.

For the classroom teachers, too, there was little emphasis on the need to prepare a new type of person, a person with a new awareness of their own skills (as in the work logbook portfolio conception), or a person for whom this would be just the first step on a continuum of 'life-long learning'. For the hospitality teacher, what was important was to produce students who had a real commitment to this particular industry (or, more specifically, to cooking), who had the technical skills for the entry level positions they would enter, and who would display these well to employers in their work placements

But those who want to go into the industry are very quickly identified by um, the way they work. Okay, they are the ones that get in. In the theory may be not so much, but

in the practical, they are the ones that are really trying hard to hold the knife, to put the fingers in the right space, to get the proper product, to plate it up properly, okay. And they stand out. Already in my year 11 class I have identified three or four students who when I've, when they've just picked their work placement, I've directed into places.

For the IT teacher, the important thing was that those who wanted to get new skills alongside their academic studies could do so, and those who had skills already had the opportunity to display this to employers. In the interview with us, this teacher talked some of the language of the ‘new’ vocationalism

I think school students need to learn communication skills because I think although they probably have the ability, and they probably do have good skills they don't always use them. [...] Like, they're 16, 17. I've got some 16 years olds, I don't know if they are 17 yet but I ... earlier this year some of my year 12s are still 16, two of them, I know. I mean they are mature in some ways but they are still their age, so I try to get them to sort of appreciate that there are other points of view besides their own so that when they are in situations, like conflict situations, instead of getting crushed or um taking things personally, they can sort of step back a bit and think about how to handle it, that's all I was trying to get through to them.

However when we observed the teacher actually teaching the ‘communication’ topic in class, the lesson was dominated by definitions drawn from old textbooks (transmitter, receiver, noise), with little attempt to relate this to students’ actual workplace experiences. For this teacher, a central reality of students’ workplace futures is that a high HSC score is important, and needs to be given priority in the way she teaches the course.

Pedagogy and assessment

The classes studied here (one in IT and one in Hospitality) were those were approved programs for dual accreditation, that is, students taking them can sit a final examination that is part of the Higher School Certificate, and can get a score that counts towards their university entrance score. At the same time, both subjects are also accredited for a level 2 Australian Qualifications Framework competency certificate – that is an industry-recognized training structure associated with entry to particular jobs and particular rates of pay within a

broad industry type. But while students taking these courses had the possibility of being accredited in both ways (put another way, the opportunity of orienting their own identity within the discourse of worker accreditation and also within the discourse of academic ranking and competitive entry to university), the two forms of certification were historically and in process associated with different epistemologies of knowledge and assessment – and the teachers had to manage this combination.

But the IT students in particular were less certain that they were learning anything of value. Many already had the hands-on skills for the level certificate they were undertaking, and they had little respect for what they referred to as ‘theory’, the answers they would be required to produce for the HSC examination. The hospitality students were enthusiastic about the hands-on elements of their course. But, apart from the implicit recognition of a portfolio self that accompanies the respect for certification, there was virtually no unsolicited mention of anything relating to generic skills or abilities as part of these students’ sense of what they were gaining within these subjects.

Put briefly, HSC is examined through a final formal written examination that consists in part of short-answer questions, and in part of essays. Demonstration of actual practical skill is not required and verbal accomplishment is highly correlated with achievement. In the AQF accreditation, what is certificated is actual competencies (visible skills). In the course of the year the teacher has to complete an individual profile for each student and tick off a very long list of skills and competencies and abilities as they are demonstrated. You can see that in relation to one of our framing questions for this project ‘where is the knowledge seen to reside?’ some quite different conceptions are being pushed together here. So how does the teacher proceed?

In the hospitality class, the teacher, Mrs Barnes, herself had trained in TAFE, and was a total enthusiast about cooking and restaurants. She spent a lot of her out of school time going to good restaurants, collecting their menus, talking to chefs, arranging behind-the-scenes visits for her students. She highly resented the HSC regime. As far as she was concerned, her subject area worked for many young people whom academic subjects did not suit. Her classes attempted to model TAFE and experiences in commercial kitchens. She insisted on correct uniform, felt no compunction about yelling at students who did something wrong or publicly rebuking them, she set up a class routine that tried to replicate how a commercial kitchen

might operate, though she dwelt on the constraints that made this an imperfect replication – the less powerful equipment, the duty of care to younger students who might use the room, and so on.

In the IT class, the teacher, Mrs Rogers, had come to teaching from a range of backgrounds and retrainings. She had initially worked as a lab assistant in a science laboratory in a university, and then undertaken a science degree. Later she did bits and pieces of training, and gained accreditation as a teacher, and found work in the IT area, though she did not yet have a permanent position on the school staff. In our first interview with her, Mrs Rogers told us that she had a particularly able group of students, and that most wanted to go to university. In terms of the students' IT skill levels, she had a mixed group, with some boys already working in casual jobs in IT and with skills far in advance of the level 2 certificate, while one or two students were almost beginners. Mrs Rogers was quite clear that her teaching was oriented to HSC and maximizing students' HSC result. She spent a good deal of time teaching them definitions.

As I mentioned earlier, the IT students found this book learning of definitions quite boring, and did not see it as very relevant to their competence in the workplace. But, as the teacher recognized, it was relevant to their success in the HSC examination. The examination is ostensibly about vocationally oriented learning, but places high salience on approved definitions, and on demonstration of traditional intellectual skills of expression and synthesis. In the short-answer questions a single approved answer was designated correct, even though, in some cases, this was not at all obvious from how the workplace operated, or from what was conveyed at other education sites outside schools. Consider this question in the hospitality examination:

Q: Why are chefs required to wear uniform when preparing food?

- A: To prevent damage to their clothes.*
- B: To designate the chain of command in the kitchen.*
- C: To promote a team spirit and foster good team morale.*
- D: To protect themselves and protect food from contamination.*

For the purposes of the examination, the correct answer is D and that is not even seen as warranting explanation by the examiners in their report. Yet at the private hospitality training college, there was repeated emphasis on B. The point here is that in this case vocational

subject-matter has been introduced to the school curriculum but with little change to how the high status versions of school knowledge operate.

So in these two classes, different things were happening in relation to the *pedagogical* construction of vocational identity. In one class, work is constructed as something at odds with the norms and interests of schools; and as something that is judged by the boss, not by an examination. In the other, vocational pathways are constructed around the central importance of university entry and being able to successfully demonstrate academic ‘ways of knowing’ regardless of the subject. Neither approach is unrealistic or arbitrary. The cohorts of young people in each classroom were not identical, and the teachers were making judgements about who those young people were and where they were going. The teachers’ own experiences were not similar to each other: one was self-confident and long-experienced in the area she taught; one was feeling her way. The teachers’ power to contest rather than conform to school agendas also was dissimilar: the hospitality teacher was permanent, financially secure, able to walk away if she needed to, and had actively campaigned against certain changes in the examination modes. The IT teacher was employed as a casual teacher, and knew that teachers are often judged by the results they produce in the competitive HSC examination.

‘Difference’

Another ARC funded research project which studied the implementation of dual accreditation subjects in the system we discuss here found that the opportunity to take examinations for HSC as well as for VET was a popular option, and that students’ entry to university was consistent with their overall HSC performance – that is, they were not disadvantaged by including a VET subject as part of their UAI score, though their entry to university overall was lower than the average, reflecting that these subjects are continuing to serve ‘their traditional clientele; that is, predominantly non-academic students, more from working-class than middle-class backgrounds’ (Connell and Crump et.al. 2003), p.48. This report notes:

VETiS is popular with students and families. It seems to provide a relevant curriculum, and a motive for staying in school, to groups of students who are not well served by the academic curriculum. (Connell and Crump et.al. 2003), p.48

However that study raised a number of questions about whether those who took up these courses would be well served in terms of careers (‘whether expanding VET in schools may

do little more than prepare students for less well-paid jobs and –whatever the intent of a more inclusive HSC- in practice direct them away from higher education rather than including them in a broader senior school experience.’ (Connell and Crump et.al. 2003), p.50.

In our case-studies, we focus on how differentiations of students and pathways are being enacted in the pedagogy, assessment, teacher perspective and orientations of the students themselves. In terms of the two assessment regimes for example, there are different embedded assumptions about who a student is and what their potential is. The competencies framework of certificate 2 ties who students are to performance at a particular level of the workplace hierarchy. It is tied to ideas of a workplace hierarchy, reflected in industrial rewards, and of a worker who gradually makes their way up the ladder (normally only to a certain mid-point on the ladder, with more senior workers coming in higher and going higher).

However, the HSC examination questions presumed a hypothetical worker who can assume any position in the hierarchy. In a single IT examination for example, some questions are of the type a lowly administrative assistant might have to deal with, ('list four formatting changes needed...'); some presume a help-desk type of role; and others again, presume positions further up the hierarchy:

draft a memorandum to staff explaining the company's policy and procedures for minimising the risk of computer virus infection and transmission...

or

The extension of non-smoking areas is a recent development in the hospitality industry. With specific reference to current occupational health and safety legislation, analyse how this development impacts on the roles and responsibilities of employers and employees in a hospitality enterprise.

Of course the point of these latter questions within the examination is to produce hierarchy and spread, to assess intellectual ability and not to assess role identifications for an actual workplace. A function of a question that requires analytic, synthetic and reportage skills as compared with getting a definition or calculation correct is to discriminate those who will be awarded distinctions, who will be seen as worthy to proceed to university – and as likely to become managers. In this sense, the dual examination opportunity might slightly extend the opportunity for some groups of students who would otherwise have dropped out, or not taken

HSC, to be credentialled with HSC – but without altering their relative position on the hierarchy. Even if they take the HSC, ‘academic’ ability is what counts both in higher scores and in the qualities assumed to be associated with management level workplace roles.

‘Academic’ ability, as Richard Teese’s work in Australia has so well illustrated, (Teese 2000; Teese 2003) is imbued with gender and class dispositions, learning and networks. From the 12 to 18 Project too, we have argued that there is an increased awareness of both middle-class and working-class girls of new opportunities, and a new valuing of some gendered characteristics of reflexivity and self-awareness. (Yates 1999; Yates 2001; Teese 2003) In the focus groups and from the class observations of the two VET subjects, it was evident that it was the students most likely to proceed to university who were most self-consciously aware about the presumed new work environment – of the need to gather multiple qualifications along the way, to have ‘fall-back’ options that would allow them to be flexible, regroup, take advantage of other opportunities. That is, although students who were more ‘academic’ or from more middle-class backgrounds may have been a minority in the VET subjects, it was these students who were most consciously using this opportunity as a portfolio building trajectory, and it was these students whose opportunities in the new work environment were being most obviously enhanced by the new development. By contrast, in the IT class, the male students who were already highly skilled in technical computing skills envisaged the future simply as a skills-based ongoing extension of their present experience in their part-time job. They see their future as continuing to learn new technical things as different ‘fixing’ issues arise, but do not think about a future where they may go on to different types of work, or about what type of knowledge they would need to do so.

A third issue of ‘difference’ is apparent when studying vocational developments by interviewing teachers and students and observing class-rooms as distinct from listening to the utopian rhetoric that pervades national forums of employers and educationists. In policy, curriculum and assessment formulations, vocational qualities and vocational learning are commonly constructed as attributes or achievements of some abstracted learner-worker, with no regard to embodied and demographic differences of actual students, or to actual workplace hierarchies, prejudices and problems. The policies may refer to generic skills, or to nurturing students who are flexible, reliable, enterprising but these tropes stem from some idealized working world, and some non-embodied and non power-differentiated conception of the workplace. This was evident when interviewing teachers and hearing about other issues that

were a necessary part of their own consideration of work placements, employability attributes and conduct in the workplace.

For example, the IT teacher was struggling to find work placements for all her class because she has a 'duty of care' to these under-age students, and has to take account of where to place young women in terms of the composition of the workplace, and the late travel that might be required. At the same time, it is clear when the hospitality teacher points out to us the students who have been popular and successful in their workplace and likely to be offered further work, that being an attractive young woman is one 'employability' characteristic. Being embodied as female rather than male is not irrelevant to work placement opportunities and success. And specific local work placement realities and work opportunities can be different from the knowledge and aims that are formally taught in the curriculum and assessment documents. Employer bodies argue for 'enterprise' skills; but the hospitality teacher's experience is that most industrial kitchens want unquestioning obedience rather than anything else from their most junior trainee. The students in the IT class could supply examples of how they had dealt with communication issues in their workplace; but the assessment, particularly in the form of the examination, is a-contextual. It requires abstracted answers rather than lived or creative ones.

The generic skills issue has been much debated in policy reform, with some ongoing confusions about the extent to which the new vocational competencies are aptitudes that can be taught, and the extent to which they are innate and not part of the training agenda. ((Curtis 2001; Hayward 2004; Pring 2004; Williams in press)). In the hospitality class the teacher seemed to see specific skills (how to dice vegetables, or plan a menu, or give things the right names) as something to be taught; but skills under the more generic label (communication for example) largely as something the students brought to the situation. For example, she often talked to us about the shortcomings of students from families that had limited experience of eating out. Those who would do well were the students, largely middle-class girls, who were skilled at presenting themselves appropriately in different contexts. This was not something that was taught in the curriculum. And for the teacher as well as the students, writing examination questions about communication was something quite unconnected with actual work capabilities.

Final Comments

This paper has argued that case-studies and attention to policy, pedagogy and assessment in vocational education offer a useful perspective on questions concerning identities, social and educational change and pathways. A close-up attention to reforms in process show ways in which some opportunities are being created and for whom; and also how some forms of traditional inequalities in education outcomes continue to persist. Old divisions of mental and manual; and old conflations of class experience with academic aptitude continue to be evident in the new reforms. And at present, in this state at least, the two different conceptions of vocational learning deriving from the AQF on the one hand and the HSC on the other are simply being added together with little transformation of either, and little explicit take-up within the curriculum and pedagogy of new rhetorics about worker formation as an enterprising, flexible and autonomous lifelong learner.

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