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New imaginaries of teachers and teaching as a field of practice: New
teachers for new times

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Introduction

Recent changes in policy in post compulsory education and training have seen wide ranging attempts to reconstruct the sector to respond to the impact of the global transformation of labour, the impact of new technologies and the increasing uncertainties of life, in order to better 'fit' young people to become knowledge workers of the future. Much has already been written on the impacts of globalisation on work life patterns for young people in Australia (Wyn & Dwyer 2001, McLeod & Yates 2006), and the processes of individualization and detraditionalization (Bauman 1998; Bourdieu 1998; Giddens 1991). These shifting patterns of life and discourses have all resulted in a heightened perception of risk and uncertainty for individuals who have to negotiate their own lives more reflexively (Beck 1998; Giddens 1991). Whilst much is written about the students as subjects of the policy gaze, far less is researched on the emerging identities of the new teachers for these new uncertain times. This paper examines new teacher and new student identities in the changing field of practice of post compulsory education.

For some years now new policies in education in Victoria have advocated that in order to best meet the needs of young people who do not intend to go on to university, schools and teachers must change their ways of working, shifting to a vocational skills development focus, interdisciplinary learning and closer relationships between schools and their local communities (Kirby 2000, MCEETYA 2003). A key Victorian response in the post compulsory sector has been the introduction of a new vocational curriculum, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). The focus of these vocational shifts is on skills acquisition with a competency rather than time based curriculum so that students can gain vocational certificates whilst still at school. There is a growing body of research that a short term linear transitions no longer represent the lifeworlds of many young people, policy still demands 'accountability' from schools and other providers of training, measured in narrow outcomes, of completion of a certificate rather than a job (White & Wyn 2005).

Despite the looming teacher shortage an embedded career structure seems to make teaching less appealing to generation Y. Both education departments and universities are seeking to draw more widely for new trainee teachers. Rather than school leavers themselves, now teacher education courses have increased numbers of mature age students, many mid career professionals, changing direction and undertaking pre-service education courses to become secondary school teachers with direct marketing to recruit those with trade qualifications and experience to teach in the increasing range of vocational courses now on offer in Victorian schools. In Victoria, this vocational turn is subjected to little critique, assuming that all students and teachers will benefit from these changes in ways of working. It is for both students and teachers to take on these newly prescribed vocational identities, claiming that vocational skills and dispositions will prepare the students to become the knowledge workers of the future (Teese & Polesel 2003, Stokes & Wyn 2007). All students and

teachers are now expected to become lifelong learners in order to constantly update their skills and identities (Bauman 2001;127).

The paper draws on the experiences of four student teachers, who have come into teacher education after initial early school leaving and varied life experiences. None of these student teachers, saw them selves as university material during secondary school, let alone becoming teachers. I wish to assert that their experiences brings into stark relief the inadequacy of the current policy frameworks which requires students to make life decisions into vocational pathways at an early stage in their lifelong learning, based on the young peoples' current interests and engagement, and limited understandings of what these decisions might mean for their futures.

The research data is drawn firstly from an ARC Linkage Project , *Understanding and managing risk in new learning networks* (Blackmore et al 2004- 7). This was a regional study conducted in Geelong, Victoria , in partnership with the Smart Geelong Regional Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN). The research approaches included interviews and focus groups with members the LLEN and their 'network constituents' – students, early school leavers, principals, teachers, youth workers, employers, and health and welfare agencies. A second but embedded project involved a longitudinal study of the Young Parents Access Project at Corio Bay Senior College, which mapped establishment of a crèche for the children of young parents who wished to return to school to complete a Year 12 certificate (Angwin & Kamp 2007). And finally a series of interviews with teachers undertaking teacher education courses to teach VCAL course in schools and TAFE colleges.

Neo vocational curriculum shifts

Victorian secondary schools are going through a period of vocationalising curriculum options now advocating that all students should undertake a vocational certificate as well as the usual academic curriculum. The Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) developed the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), the first new senior school certificate since the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) was introduced approx 15 years earlier. Whilst Victorian secondary schools, TAFE & ACE were already providing a range of academic and vocational pathways, Victoria continued to have one of the lowest take-ups nationally of vocational courses, with the dominance of the VCE as a publicly recognized and legitimated certificate holding sway.

The rhetoric of the new vocationalism is about creating a new type of person: an enterprising, flexible, portfolio-oriented, lifelong learner. The rhetoric of contemporary Australian government policy is that schools should be more vocational (Yates 2006:284).

It is assumed in these policies that all students will be able to equally undertake these new vocational courses with a similar degree of agency and success and that teachers too, will enthusiastically embrace this vocational turn. However this overlooks the contested nature of what constitutes learning, its location in particular cultural contexts, in which non-participation in certain forms of learning may make perfect sense.

...people not engaged in education do not see this as a lack,

and that policies designed to encourage participation are based on inadequate conceptualizations of the relationship between people's lives and learning.

Coffield in Clegg & Mc Nulty (2002:576)

Participation, at the policy level, is sufficient; engagement, and success becomes the responsibility of the individual young person (Dwyer & Wyn 2001). Differences in social, cultural or educational capital in Bourdieu's terms, is ignored (Grenfell et al 2001, Reay et al 2005).

Lifelong learning

One central response internationally to globalisation has been the re-emergence of lifelong learning as a focus of policy development (Edwards et al 2002). Just what life long learning means for young people who are already disengaged from school, or would rather be out of school and working, is rarely mentioned. There is on going recognition and concern that for increasing numbers of young people school no longer appears to be a place of productive learning experiences. However whilst lifelong learning is presented as a key policy vehicle of post-school education and training, frequently it seems to be seen as simply the individual's need to continue to accumulate skills and qualifications, particularly vocational skills, as an adaptation to change and uncertainty. There is an assumption in lifelong learning policies of the universality of the experience of change by individuals. Lifelong learning remains a further support for the successful. The lowest participation rates remain for young people with low skills, are unemployed or living in marginalised circumstances. However as yet there is very little theoretical debate as to what is the nature of learning, which underpins lifelong learning (Field 2001, Coffield in Clegg & McNulty 2002, Edwards 2005).

As Bourdieu has argued, those who benefit most from educational capital are those teachers and students who already have this habitus, that is the social or cultural capital which enables them to fully participate and engage in education - should they choose to do so! New pedagogical flexibilities and attributes are most readily realised by the students who bring those class based and gender based orientations to the classroom (Blackmore 2006, Reay et al 2005).

Community development relies on unevenly distributed social capital and those with established networks find it easier to participate in the goods that education can provide. Social capital depends not only on a network of connections with a volume of capital but also on ability to effectively mobilize those connections. Curriculum, pedagogy, assessment does not itself produce more powerful worker subjectivities for the students (Yates 2004).

Further, many students are unwilling or unable to take up these vocational pathways at this stage of their lives. Ball et al (2000) found that many of the young people in their study were not able to participate and take from education similar sorts of opportunities or experiences. Their accounts of their 'choices' and decisions in the London education and labour markets, point out the different 'opportunity structures' which frame these 'choices' and the different 'futures' and identities towards which they are struggling. The fluidity of modern life, the shifting boundaries of relationships and frequently the lack of traditional support structures, left many of the young people feeling uncertain and unable to 'risk' taking chances on further

education outside their familiar fields. They claimed that they had used up their ability to learn, that their experiences in school had left them with ‘damaged learner identities’, believing that they were unable to succeed in further study or vocational qualifications.

New student teacher identities

Primary and secondary teacher education has traditionally been undertaken from two quite different starting points. In the past primary teacher education was the domain of teacher’s colleges with most students having just completed high school and the majority were women. In contrast, secondary teachers usually completed a first degree in a chosen discipline area followed by a one year teaching diploma. A secondary teacher’s identity is more bound up in the discipline area than simply in education. Secondary schools are often described as discipline focused and the school structured around subject areas rather than around children. Today it is more common for the student teacher to have completed a first degree, travelled or worked in a different career, had a family before commencing a teacher education course. These new generation teachers bring with them their own experiences of professional networks and identities. They are interested in learning about teaching, learning to teach but not simply learning to ‘be ‘ a teacher.

Schools need to develop a culture of change and renewal for teacher and student alike, promoting experiment and innovation, breaking with tradition... MACEETYA 2005

The VCAL curriculum focuses on gaining skills and certificates in vocational and work related skills and requires a high level of vocational skills and dispositions amongst the teachers. Teacher education began to offer courses aimed to recruit those with vocational qualifications to become teachers in the new VCAL courses and to provide them with a more integrated model of applied learning based on integrated studies as well as work related and vocational skills.

Increasingly the new student teacher cohorts have had many life experiences since leaving school. Many had been early school leavers who went straight to work for a number of years before undertaking some trade. Many have travelled and lived and worked in overseas and from this informal experience in teaching have realised that this is the sort of work they would like to do.

Although I hadn’t succeeded at school because I was dyslexic at school, I realised I could teach in a very applied way and thought that this was something I might do sometime in the future.

Gary student teacher

....(when I left school)I went into hospitality and trained as a chef and ended up in management but eventually decided I really wanted to teach.

Gary student teacher

I couldn’t afford to keep studying. I left home when I was fifteen I was a truant, I didn’t go a lot for many years, I never had behavioural issues as such, I wasn’t a bad student, I was just bored

Rachel student teacher

I was a biologist in another life. I really enjoyed working with the young people in Nepal for UNESCO, I came back and for a number of reasons decided to change vocations

Brian student teacher

I travelled through Europe and then I did a Montessori course, I did two year Montessori training to become a Montessori Kindergarten teacher and I've trained as a Cordon Bleu cook.

Judy student teacher

For example Gary, who because of his dyslexia and associated learning difficulties, had always been a problematic student for his school and his family, he was put into the box of early exit (GCSE) and find a trade. As he had no particular interest in any trade he fell into hospitality, as it seemed to offer chance to work in bars, make money and travel. His parents, tertiary educated, with expectations of university for his siblings, never saw this as an option for him. After his school experience he was keen to leave and try anything else. Judy on the other hand, experienced the ruling class boarding school, seeing her parents only once a year. She felt she was shuffled between adults whilst her parents enjoyed the high life in the colonies. Her socio-scapes were cosmopolitan, rather than local (Massey in Ball 2000). She had many and varied successful business experiences before turning to teaching. Rachel on the other hand, had little support at home for attending or staying on at school, resulting in her leaving home and becoming independent at 15. Both Gary and Judy whilst at school, had families with expectations of education as both cultural and social capital they they would be able to participate in, at some level, whilst Rachel on the other hand had no such support at home, but ultimately found her way back into formal education .

Thus, people may well be learning, but not what is valued by the system, nor in the ways that are constructed as of value in policy terms, such as the more readily auditable activities accessible through routes leading to assessment and accreditation. These 'new teachers' have had many established identities, compared with most teachers of previous generations, many of whom say of themselves that they 'have never really left school', moving from school to college or university to teach school again.

Looking at the four student teachers, three of whom describing themselves as having Ball's terms, damaged learner identities when they left school, did not see themselves as having the capacity to continue in formal educational pathways as their siblings or peers. At the time of their early school leaving, they had no idea what the future would hold for them, apart from getting out of school and away from formal structures of learning. Few, if any, could have seen themselves as lifelong learners or becoming teachers. Yet the students who they are about to teach, are expected, to make decisions based on their current interests and experience, decisions which might put them on to a vocational path that they might find, as these teachers did, quite unsatisfying a few years on.

Thus the new vocationally skilled teachers are as sceptical of the current push to vocational pathways as some of the older teachers might be. As Gary commented

my biggest concern with the way we're going at the moment with vocational training is that we are finding that if you come from a low socio economic background, you're not particularly engaged and you're not studying very well so we'll find a vocational pathway for you, but we're vocationally pathwaying people into specific roles and pigeon holing whereas we're not suggesting that you can achieve and go on and do other things.

Gary

As these new teachers life histories have shown, decisions around their early school leaving seemed perfectly logical at the time, as processes of individualization now require young people to make career decisions early in their secondary schooling (Giddens 1991, Ball et al 2000, White & Wyn 2001). This decision making has been described as choice biographies (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Ball et al, 2000) Policy seems to assume that all students have equal access to choice and that this decision making actual reflects not only equality of access but also equality of opportunity. While most young people may speak the language of individual choice, control and agency, it is only for some that the rhetoric is accompanied by the requisite resources and opportunities. Yet as Bourdieu has argued, access to educational capital is mediated by one's life history and habitus of those around you (1986).

New vocationalism meets lifelong learning

Bourdieu has argued that the strength of a field is indicated by its capacity to maintain its distinctiveness and to reject intrusions (Bourdieu 1990). In the past schools were tightly bounded communities, able to resist intrusions from those outside. Their traditions were strongly maintained through acculturation of new teachers- straight from school, to university and back to school. Increasingly new teachers today bring with them a range of professional identities and experiences so that their identities and ways of working are no longer formed by the traditional field of teaching. Teachers and students remain the actors whose habitus is a result of their socialization, both within the school and beyond it. But today, perhaps more so than ever before they are able to transform the field into boundary zones where new spaces for learning and negotiation will be able to develop (Tuomi-Grohn, & Engstrom 2003; Warmington et al 2005). The new teachers are no longer working in distinct schools, with strictly maintained boundaries between the formal learning within the class room and the informal learning which surrounds us all.

Without an extended understanding of the meanings of learning and of what is involved in learner identities it is likely that lifelong learning will remain the preserve of those already in work or benefiting from education.
Clegg & McNulty 2002:577

Current policies in post compulsory education in Victoria require students to make life choices within three months of leaving school in order to be considered as having made a successful transition from school, despite increasing research data showing the inadequacy of this view (Stokes & Wyn 2007). Yet the life histories of these new vocational teachers shows the inadequacy of this continued approach. Many young

people who have failed to engage in secondary school or to succeed, are likely now to be directed into vocational fields, rather than have time and opportunity to re-engage in learning beyond the school. Whilst schools are required to focus on rapid transitions into work or training as successful outcomes, teachers will be forced to focus on vocational courses for their students, whilst their own life experiences might be telling them that lifelong learning remains far more complex and long term than policy currently imagines.

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