

---

---

## **What are teachers saying about new managerialism?**

**Pat O'Brien**

*City Beach High School, Perth, Western Australia*

**Barry Down**

*Edith Cowan University, Australia*

Since the mid-1970s, successive federal and state governments have redefined the governance structure of Australian schooling in accordance with the principles of the market and its corollary new managerialism (Hartley 1997; Marginson 1997; Robertson 2000; Yeatman 1990). Morley and Rassool (1999, p 61) argue that 'the introduction of markets and managers has been a generic transformational device designed to restructure and reorient public service provision'. According to Yeatman (1990, p 14), this structural and ideological shift has resulted in a corporate-style bureaucracy whereby public sector activity is 'reduced to the effective, efficient and economic management of human and capital resources'. As the dominant style of public administration and public service, it seeks to make government efficient by doing more with less, focusing on outcomes and results and managing change better. The common elements have involved site-based management, the language of improvement and budgetary devolution (Morley & Rassool 1999).

Commenting on the British experience, Hoggett (1996, p 12) argues that three fundamental but interrelated strategies of control have been implemented over the last decade to drive these reforms. First, competition has been introduced as a means of coordinating the activities of decentralised units. Second, there has been an attempt to decentralise operations whilst centralising strategic command. Third, there has been the extended development of performance management techniques.

Against this backdrop, we set out in this article to examine how six senior teachers in one secondary school in the northern suburbs of Perth, Western Australia have experienced and responded to these generic managerial reforms. In doing so, we are keen to re-insert 'the missing voices of teachers' (Smyth 2001, p 149) back into the reform debate that raged in Western Australian schools in the late 1980s and simmered throughout the 1990s following the introduction of the mandated *Better schools in Western Australia: a programme for improvement* (Ministry of Education, Western Australia 1987).

This article will be focused on four considerations. First, we will briefly review what the critical literature is saying about the impact of new managerialism on teachers' lives and work. This broader body of knowledge will provide an explanatory framework for making sense of the teachers' stories gathered during the ethnographic study. This will be followed by a brief account of the specific policy context in which the study occurred. Here, we outline the policy shift to school-based management encapsulated in the *Better schools* (Ministry of Education, Western Australia 1987) report and subsequent policy texts in Western Australia. Next, we will consider the usefulness of teacher story research as a way of revealing the large array of experiences, feelings and ideas of classroom teachers as they grapple with these reforms. Finally, we will report on five emergent themes of the study - the inappropriateness of market reforms in education; the problem with managerial control; intensification of teachers' work; insecurity and stress; and poor teacher morale.

### **What's wrong with new managerialism?**

In this section, we allude to what the critics are saying about the nature of new managerialism in education and the impact on teachers' lives and work. To begin, Gewirtz and Ball (2000, p 253) acknowledge that the new 'market revolution' in education has produced fundamental changes or reforms that have consequences 'not only for work practices, organisational methods and social relationships but also for values of schooling'. They describe a shift in educational discourses from 'welfarism' with its public service ethos, emphasis on collective relations and commitment to equity, care and social justice, towards 'new managerialism' with its customer-oriented ethos, concern for efficiency, cost-effectiveness and competition, and emphasis on individual relations (p 256).

In a similar vein, Robertson (2000) describes the shift in values as a 'transformation of cultural assets: from trusteeship to entrepreneurship, procedural to market bureaucracy, and collective to individual association'. Sinclair (1996, p 234), too, describes the emergence of a new managerial discourse with 'new icons such as outcomes and missions, and new rituals to enshrine them including corporate planning, performance evaluation and new fiscal accountability arrangements'. In this new corporate culture certain policy trends are identifiable, including choice and the rights of parents, school effectiveness and school improvement, teacher competence and accountability, and raising standards of achievement (Humes 2000, p 37). The implications of these policy shifts for education have been profound, as Gewirtz and Ball (2000, p 253) explain:

For the new manager in education, good management involves the smooth and efficient implementation of aims set outside the school, within constraints also set outside the school. It is not the job of the new manager to question or criticise these aims and constraints. The new management discourse in education emphasises the instrumental purposes of schooling - raising standards and performance as measured by examination results, levels of attendance and school-leaver destinations - and is frequently articulated within a lexicon of enterprise, excellence, quality and effectiveness.

It is not surprising that radical reforms of this kind are having a devastating impact on the lives and work of teachers (Smyth 2001). Gee et al (1996) suggest that modern organisations have adopted a new set of tools and procedures, designed to change social relations in the workplace; a form of socio-technical engineering. Morley and Rasool (1999, p 34) express concern about the way in which 'school performance now represents the central concern within an education system penetrated by a cascade of over-regulation'. Likewise, Gleeson and Husbands (2001, p 2) argue that 'the current policy and practice emphasis on 'the performing school' has profound consequences for the 'performance' of the school's performers: its pupils, teachers and leaders'. What we are witnessing, according to Merson (2001, p 84) is the establishment of a new apparatus of control and regulation whereby:

Managers are to be given enhanced powers of surveillance and control to ensure teachers' compliance and increased productivity. There is to be a reduction of security of employment for many teachers. The teachers' task is to become increasingly narrowed. Individual teachers will be encouraged to compete with each other for the rewards of such compliance. The traditions of cooperation and collegiality will be hard to sustain. This social model will not be lost upon the children nor on society.

Writers such as Solondz (1995, p 219) describe the psychological consequences of new managerialism including 'reduced staff morale, job security, professionalism and career development'. Robertson and Soucek (1991, p 129) observe 'a heightened competitiveness for resources and recognition between individuals and departments within schools where teachers talked of knowledge and secrecy, politicking, bargaining and the advancement of personal careers'. Woods et al (1997, p 7) and Mentor et al (1997, p 136) highlight the massive work overload, loss of spontaneity and/or reflective time, and increased levels of stress, ambiguity and ambivalence of teachers. As Smyth (2001, p 10) points out: 'teachers are reeling from the effects of poorly conceptualised reform policies that have literally torn the heart out of their work'. He elaborates by explaining how teachers' subjectivities are being damaged through three relays:

- (1) the corrosion of the culture and character of teaching, with the shift to individual responsibility for delivering outcomes;
- (2) the intensification in leadership and management away from supporting the work of teaching, to pursuing corporate visions; and
- (3) the dislocation of teachers' pedagogic and professional identities as educative space is eroded, with teachers having to lead increasingly divided lives, continually moving between the corporate makeover of their work and agonising decisions about what they regard as being the essence of good professional judgement.

In all of this, Smyth argues that there has been a fundamental 'leaching away of trust' (2001, p 30), and despite official efforts to adopt more placatory and gentler terms such as choice, collegiality, ownership, consultation and empowerment (Hartley 1994, p 231; Humes 2000, p 30), schools are nonetheless being restructured along lines that:

... re-institute hierarchies, diminish co-operation, foster competitive individualism between schools, and in the end divert schools away from their educative agenda by requiring them to be entrepreneurial and more like businesses. (Smyth 2001, p 32)

Significantly, the restructuring of public education to the ideological imperatives of the corporate order has major political implications for the future of public education and democracy itself. Giroux (2000, p 85) argues that 'the corporatising of public education has taken a distinct and dangerous turn as we approach the twenty first century':

No longer content merely to argue for the application of business principles to the organisation of schooling, the forces of corporate culture have adopted a much more radical agenda. Central to this agenda is the attempt to transform public education from a public good, benefiting all students, to a private good designed to expand the profits of investors, educate students as consumers and train young people for the low-paying jobs of the new global marketplace.

Giroux goes on to warn that 'the new corporate order works against the critical social demands of educating citizens to sustain and develop inclusive democratic identities, relations and public spheres' (Giroux 2000, p 85). In other words, we are witnessing what Soucek describes as 'a loss of critical sensibility' (Soucek 1995, p 127). Sinclair (1996, p 229) sums it up well when she says, 'the debate about the 'what' and 'why' of education has been superseded by a fixation on the 'how''.

### **The policy context**

From an organisational perspective the 'market revolution' (Gewirtz & Ball 2000, p 266) described so far has seen centralised, bureaucratic systems of education move toward devolved structures in which schools accept responsibility for many of the services previously provided by central authorities. This and other decentralising processes in education have been variously described as school-based management, local management of schools, or the self-managing school.

Built around market practices, the aim of devolution is to achieve greater effectiveness in schools (Caldwell & Spinks 1988, 1992). It has spawned a variety of models of decentralised systems of education and created diversity among schools based on levels of school autonomy in relation to matters such as finance, employment of staff and curriculum and student enrolment, while still remaining accountable to central authorities. Self-managing schools, then, are best seen as organisations whose orientations place them on a continuum of degrees of independence in the market. In the remainder of this section we want to refer specifically to the policy reforms in our own state of Western Australia. It is not our intent to provide a detailed account of these developments, which can be found elsewhere (Down 1990; O'Donoghue 1994; Robertson & Soucek 1991; Trotman 1996).

In 1987 the Western Australian Minister of Education released the *Better schools* report which proposed the devolution of administrative responsibility for schools to the local level. This involved a highly politicised corporate restructuring

of central and regional offices during 1987 and 1988. The purpose of the reforms was to create a style of educational administration that demonstrated:

- responsiveness and adaptability to the needs of the community and to government priorities;
- flexibility in the use of resources to meet these goals; and
- accountability to the government and the community for the standard of service and funding (1987, p 5).

The Ministry of Education as it was known at the time, claimed that this form of administration would require schools to be self-managing and publicly accountable through a system of performance management. Central to this project was the creation of education districts headed by superintendents responsible for professional support and the supervision of school performance. District superintendents were in turn accountable to a Director of Operations in central office. This formally established the organisational conditions and the priorities and values at central and district level within a new corporate culture.

The *Better schools* report (1987, p 7) proposed that a timeline be established for the implementation of reforms which would see schools 'become the focus for the administration and delivery of education'. The new self-management role for schools was to be achieved by the phasing in of various initiatives by 1992. These initiatives included:

- providing a school grant to each school, so it has greater discretion over resource acquisition and use;
- staffing schools according to a school staffing entitlement to allow schools greater flexibility in staffing;
- devolving to schools significant responsibilities in the areas of school staff management;
- devolving to schools much of the responsibility for selection of teachers so that staff at the school are compatible with its goals;
- devolving responsibility for school programme administration to schools;
- instituting a requirement that schools undertake a school development plan each year;
- encouraging the formation of school-based decision-making groups to provide for community participation in the management of schools; and

- improving all schools' administrative support capacity, by increasing staff levels and the use of information technology in schools (Ministry of Education, Western Australia 1987, p 7).

A follow up report entitled *Devolution and decision making in the government system of Western Australia* (The Hoffman Report, 1994), with its emphasis on deregulating school boundaries, Total Quality Management, increased community control, and performance management, 'moved the management of schooling further into the discursive terrain of the market and public choice theory' (Trotman 1996, p 7). The contradictory messages of free-market entrepreneurialism, increased controls facilitated through corporate managerialism, and the rhetoric of devolution created considerable tension and contestation at the school level, as borne out by the widespread industrial unrest in Western Australian schools in 1988 and 1989. For many teachers the purpose of these reforms was not so much about efficiency and excellence in education as reducing funds available for public education and exerting greater control over their work (Down 1990).

The release of the Education Department of Western Australia's (EDWA) *Strategic Plan 1996-1998* (1995) continued the trend towards increasing centralised strategic control by mandating prescriptive guidelines on school focus, curriculum, flexible organisation structures, staff professionalism, resource management and quality assurance. In the case of the school curriculum, specific details were fleshed out in curriculum documents such as *Student outcomes statements* (1994), *Curriculum framework* (Curriculum Council 1998) and *Outcomes and standards framework* (1998), all of which 'became an integral part of the accountability mechanisms embedded in the *Strategic Plan*' (Trotman 1996, p 8). In the context of this new policy framework we want to consider how teacher story research can provide an important antidote to the dominant managerial discourse outlined in these official documents.

## **Teacher story research**

Teachers' stories provide a powerful means of exploring and understanding the changing nature of teachers' work. According to Goodson (1992), teachers' stories offer insights that are replete with the language, values, prejudices and perceptions teachers have about their work. They provide a means of capturing the richness, intimacy and complexity of teaching.

Significantly, teacher story research offers a counter to the dominant managerialist discourse of school reform, as Shacklock (1995, p 2) explains:

Work-story research is about editing teachers back into accounts produced from research into teaching by creating a 'space' in the discourse where teachers' voices have legitimacy and can be heard in their complexity, in educational research.

The study comprised of two phases. Firstly, an exploratory study of classroom teachers commenced in 1995 amidst statewide industrial unrest surrounding the conservative Government's proposed Workplace Agreement legislation. As one of us (Pat) was teaching in the case study school at the time, it

was possible to carry out extensive participant observations, ‘purposeful conversations’ (Burgess 1988) and embedded interviews (Pollard et al 1994) as well as collecting minutes of school meetings and union publications to create a mosaic of teachers’ work. Based on this material, a series of frequently cited themes were identified – resources, recognition, workload, management, school culture, change and morale – which provided the basis for more detailed semi-structured interviews.

In the second phase, six teachers, one female and five males, all of whom were experienced Level 2 teachers with Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) classification, were interviewed. The decision to narrow the study to Level 2 teachers was in part due to the desire to examine how long-serving senior teachers with a strong sense of professional identity were coping with significant mandated reforms. In addition, these teachers have lived through the shift from ‘welfarism’ to ‘new managerialism’ (Gerwitz & Ball 2000) and are therefore well placed to reflect on the nature of and impact of managerial reforms on their work. Furthermore, they have demonstrated competencies in teaching plus responsibility for low-level administrative tasks at department level. Within the school hierarchy these teachers are positioned beneath the school leadership team comprised of the Principal, Deputy Principal and Heads of Departments.

The six teachers represented a broad cross section of disciplinary areas including the four ‘core subject’ areas, and together had an average of twenty-one years teaching experience. All teachers were considered to be highly competent and enthusiastic about their work. Interviews were conducted in the final four weeks of school term in 1996 and lasted for approximately one and a half hours. Based on their stories and interviews a series of emergent themes or inventories of meanings were identified - the inappropriateness of market reforms in education; the problem with managerial control; intensification of teachers’ work; insecurity and stress; and poor teacher morale - and it is to these themes that we shall now turn our attention.

### **‘Corporatism has nothing to do with kids learning’: the inappropriateness of market reforms in education**

Teachers in this case study believed that corporate reforms of the kind outlined earlier are not only inappropriate for education, but significantly, make little difference to children’s learning. Teachers talked about the hidden political and ideological agenda, the economic imperative and the unfamiliar values they saw being promoted and pursued by the reform process. For them, the new corporate values emanating from official policies such as the *Better schools* (1987) report neglected teachers’ knowledge and experience, and were at odds with their deeply held pedagogical values.

#### ***An ideological instrument***

When asked for their opinion on the origins of the corporate reform of education, teachers were quick to link the process to the ideology of economic rationalism.

Teachers generally expressed the belief that the reform process had little to do with educational values and more to do with cost cutting. One teacher commented:

To me the agenda ... is very political and it is run by politicians who are influenced by some of your high flying people in the community.

Regarding the origins and rationale of educational reforms in Western Australia, another teacher stated that:

... if I reflect back, I'd say it was basically political. To me it seems to have evolved from the Burke [the WA Premier] era when the Labor Government was trying to change its image to one of the buddy of the entrepreneur and all this sort of thing.

The same teacher went on to describe the perception that the reform process was motivated by free market values. The teacher talked of an agenda that included the government's intention to reduce spending on education by increasing the enrolment of students into non-government schools. The movement of students to the private sector would be achieved by making public schools less attractive while giving increased support to the private system. In his words:

... there's a downgrading of our education system. And I don't think it's a hidden political agenda, I think they have made that quite clear in the way that they are funding money towards the private system.

Another teacher who was intimately aware of the British experience was adamant that the corporate reform process was driven by the desire to create public education along the lines of private enterprise and, in turn, make public education subject to market forces. In a discussion of the origins of corporate reform in general, the teacher concluded rather pessimistically:

I imagine the political powers that are trying to introduce corporate management into the world of education want to ensure that the same practices are there, are in place across the economic structure, whether it's in education or it's in health care, business, industry.

A number of teachers commented on the declining funds available for public education and how the consequences were being played out at the local school level. Such views indicate that teachers are highly suspicious of the motives of government and its lack of support for public schooling.

### *Unfamiliar values*

While some teachers acknowledged the usefulness of corporate managerialism in certain industries there was overwhelming agreement that it was not necessarily appropriate for schools. In the words of one teacher:

In your real world ... in the open market the commodities that you're talking about may be you know ... cornflakes on the shelf, or something like that, and you've got to be good with facts and figures and all the rest of it. But our commodity is a living entity and they are not all the same. They don't all look the same, they are different. So, you know, using this approach of free market just doesn't work.



Another teacher spoke about the incompatibility of market values in the classroom. He said:

I mean, you know, my classroom doesn't have any corporate structure in it. You know, I mean, I'm not a businessman. I'm not a business person, I've had no experience. Maybe I've got a slight experience of business but I'm not commercially orientated.

### ***Inadequate resources***

Teachers were sceptical not only about the educational value of corporate reforms, but the personal-professional consequences of adopting new work practices that were inadequately resourced by government. Such concerns were exacerbated by the belief that the department [EDWA] had abandoned its responsibility for the implementation of system-wide reforms as evidenced by the elimination of curriculum support facilities for teachers. As one teacher put it:

Once upon a time it was the Education Department because they provided schools with backup things like resources, in-service, which were meaningful to the classroom teacher, to the classes concerned. Now all that sort of thing has disappeared, so nowadays the teacher is left to his [sic] own devices and he has to come up with the goodies without having any sense of knowing whether he's doing it correctly, because he [sic] hasn't got any materials, hasn't got adequate books or adequate resources. So to take all these new changes into practice they got the old, threw it all out the door, replaced it with nothing.

When asked about the provision of professional development, teachers thought they were being kept in the dark. As one teacher explained:

It [reform] was introduced ... by providing conferences, seminars, PD, if you like, for the management first ... but from my experience it tends to be that by the time it comes down to the teachers there's less and less PD available on that, because most of the money is invested in management.

### ***Lack of pedagogical legitimacy***

With a shared belief that corporate educational reform was driven by the ideology of economic rationalism, many teachers expressed feelings of mistrust and cynicism about the reform process. In short, the reform lacked pedagogical legitimacy among teachers as suggested by the following observation:

The people who are setting the agenda for what's being taught in the classroom are so removed from the classroom and haven't got their finger on the pulse. You know, it's either someone who's been 20 years out of the classroom, so he doesn't really know what's going on in the classroom, or it's someone who's spent one year in the classroom and then has been in Administration for ever after. Or someone who's never been in a school in their life, telling us what to do ... people at the top should be people that have experienced what it's like in a classroom in Western Australia so that they then have some sort of rapport with the teachers. That's where the cynicism comes from.

The teachers in this case study were highly sceptical about the principles and values underpinning educational reform in Western Australia since the late 1980s.

They thought the emphasis on corporate imperatives such as cost effectiveness, competition, flexibility, decentralisation and deregulation was inappropriate in public education. There was a strong view among these teachers that educational policy was heavily influenced by political ideology and business values, to the detriment of students and teachers alike.

### **‘Communication is from the top down’: the problem with managerial control**

Each of the teachers in this study described how corporate values and top-down management strategies were reinforced through school-based decision-making processes dominated by the Principal. They acknowledged that the devolution of responsibility to the school level had created a situation where the intrinsic values associated with teaching and learning were being marginalised in favour of managerial imperatives linked to promotion. In their view, commitment to student learning attracted little recognition under the new regime.

#### ***Systemic control***

Teachers were acutely aware of the systemic level of control over their work. They described a style of management that was top-down, prescriptive and manipulative, as reflected in the following comment:

Well with corporatisation, no longer are you getting educators, you're getting high profile businessmen and policies run by business. The policy of the school is affected by the Principal, because she or he, has their say. But overall, they take policy from the District and the District takes it from Silver City [EDWA].

The unmistakable feeling of these teachers was that managerial control was increasing at the expense of their own professional autonomy, as illustrated in the following comment:

Flexibility for what? There's no flexibility in what we teach. No, I don't think we are given any flexibility and I think our self-esteem has been stripped from us and we are told, you know, if you don't get this outcome you're a loser and if you do get this outcome it wasn't because of anything that you did it was because the curriculum was great.

Teachers also spoke about the dominance of the Principal in school decision-making processes and the way in which this effectively silenced any alternative to predetermined systemic goals, processes and outcomes. As a consequence most teachers expressed feelings of professional and personal frustration.

#### ***Committees***

Teachers were fairly consistent in their view about the role of school-based decision-making processes. They spoke about the ineffectiveness of committees to make decisions independent of the Principal's influence, as the following comment illustrates:

You can't have a true committee if the person in charge is an underling for the Administrative Section, and that's what goes on in all schools.

Another teacher offered the following view of administrative control of committees at the school level:

These committees and things that they've got, the agenda is already written and they already know where they [Administration] want to go before you get there ... I don't mind the idea of school based decision making groups, it sounds great, that you know teachers are working towards common goals, that's fantastic, but when you get into reality, some of these committees are not committees, they are driven by the Admin[istration], who have already made up their mind what's going on and what will happen and I really think that they pay a bit of lip service to quieten the majority, that the decisions have already been made in a lot of situations.

### ***Staff meetings***

When asked about the role of staff meetings in the school decision-making process, one teacher explained that a high level of administrative control also applied in that forum:

Because they are so structured you don't have general business. It's just, it's all structured, formal information that Admin[istration] want to get over, running general school events and the way that they think things should be run, they get guest speakers in who they think you would like, and that sort of thing.

Another teacher spoke about his experience of attending Heads of Department meetings where, again, there was evidence of the Principal's domination of the agenda:

If you went to a Heads of Department meeting, the Principal would have their say and that was it. You didn't have time to discuss, you didn't have time to talk, there was no leeway for general discussion, it was what the Principal wanted to get over, end of story, end of meeting ... and I know when I went to staff meetings if the Principal didn't want to hear something he would cut you down ruthlessly, and no qualms about it. I got to the stage where I felt, 'Well what am I doing here'?

The issue of control was frequently discussed by teachers in relation to school-based decision making and accountability. Among these teachers there was considerable resentment about the loss of professional autonomy, as we shall examine in more detail shortly.

### ***Lack of recognition for teaching***

Furthermore, teachers believed that classroom teaching was not being recognised or taken as seriously as it might by management. In their view, the culture of managerialism and administrative priorities had spread unchecked across the school to the extent that teaching and learning was of secondary importance. Teachers described how the performance of administrative and other non-core duties was the only way for a classroom teacher to gain professional recognition. In the words of one teacher:

... the policy of advancement in schools nowadays is what you do for the administration, rather than what you do for the kids.

One teacher claimed that the School Principal exercised unreasonable authority over their time. Mandatory attendance at meetings during recess and lunchtime, plus DOTT (duties other than teaching) time was common, as explained by one teacher:

If the Principal suddenly decides that this is what I have to do in my DOTT time then I'm basically expected to do it. For example, they called a fundraising event ... over a certain number of periods of the day and you happen to have all DOTT periods. Now technically it's your DOTT time, but practically what happens? You're down there supervising students through your DOTT time. That's the sort of thing I mean. What your duties are sometimes tend to fall right in the lap of what the Principal says.

In discussing the way administrative duties are devolved at the school level, one teacher described how the Advanced Skills Teacher position was appropriated by the Principal for purposes other than teaching. The teacher described how their role was being manipulated for management purposes:

If you want to be an Advanced Skills Teacher, you go on this committee, this has got to be done, that's got to be done, You don't have a choice, you do it.

Evidence suggests that the incorporation of increasing amounts of administration and other non-teaching duties into the workload of classroom teachers is one of the most significant dilemmas facing teachers today. As one teacher put it 'We all have to be in the administration system'.

### ***Promoting self-interest***

While talking about the increasing competition between teachers for promotional recognition, one teacher noted how they are now 'doing more for the system and the school than the kids'. The teacher was especially worried about the consequences for students:

What I have found in most departments is that ... everything else suffers down the line. Teachers have to show they are responsible to the school, they have to portray the school as an outgoing thing with fantastic things occurring in it. Then the kids, I find, are usually on the last level. You know, whereas it should be the kids first.

Another teacher spoke about the importance of gaining managerial experience in the promotion race:

... if you've got someone who comes in through merit promotion and gets a level three job, that person is trying to move up the ladder, so they are not really worried about the education of the kids, they are looking at getting from level three to level four and what qualities will I need? Oh, more in management. So they are looking at how they can delegate things and how they can get more management experience.

Asked whether teachers were becoming obsessed with self-promotion, one teacher concluded 'I think to some extent to get anywhere in this system you do'. There was strong evidence that teachers were feeling professionally threatened and

undervalued in the current climate and, as a consequence, teacher morale was low (O'Donoghue 1994, p 41).

### **'I was a teacher once, now I'm a teacher some of the time': intensification of work**

All teachers in this study described how non-teaching duties associated with administration, accountability, performance management, documentation, and change in general, demanded an increasing amount of their time. For most of them this meant less time for their students and teaching-related activities. Another consequence was the decreasing time available to participate in conversations with their colleagues which only added to their feeling of isolation and stress.

#### ***The corporate workload***

Teachers described how their work was increasingly consumed by 'paper warfare', a term used to describe a diverse range of documentation related to management meetings, performance management and other forms of accountability associated with the culture of new managerialism.

Generally, these teachers expressed the belief that the intensification of their work coincided with devolution. Speaking about the changing nature of workloads over the last decade, one teacher commented:

Well I don't think it's actually increased in terms of how I prepare my lessons or give my lessons - I think the administrative work has overkill. I'm pretty sure when I started you know, there wasn't as many forms to fill in as I have now, or spend time being accountable to a Head of Department and ... the Administration.

Another teacher spoke about the burgeoning paperwork related to systemic policy initiatives. Of the current practice, it was said:

I think there's, you know, there's so much paper work. You've got to read it and digest it. If you don't keep on top of it it's just lost in the basket. I had an 'in' and 'out' basket and a 'too hard' basket. Now I'm finding one has a 'read' basket ... all the little bits of information that you've got to read is enormous.

For these teachers, a growing awareness and concern about litigation has added to the problem of documentation, as noted by one teacher:

Oh, I have to have all the documentation ... and a lot of time would get wasted on covering ourselves.

These concerns were compounded by the introduction of mandated curriculum reforms, in particular the *Curriculum framework* (Curriculum Council 1998) and *Outcomes and standards framework* (Education Department of Western Australia 1998) which demanded significant levels of documentation for accountability purposes. In the words of one teacher:

What was once an enjoyable area of work has now become very hard because it's all been regimented to achieving outcomes that have very little relevance to anybody. They're good on paper, but to attain that is almost impossible when you cover so many broad fields within the outcomes. I've had to work a lot harder. The overall marking again has probably trebled.

When asked to compare teachers' work prior to 1987 and the late 1990s, one teacher captured the feeling of many when he stated 'I was a teacher, I'm now a teacher some of the time'.

### ***Less time for kids***

Teachers believed that the additional workload contributed to circumstances in which 'there is less time for kids'. For most of them, personal survival was a priority as illustrated in the following comment:

Oh, it's cut and dried that there is no time for improving a student's quality of where they're going because I'm too busy surviving myself.

Teachers talked about the difficulty of balancing competing and contradictory demands which lead to feelings of vulnerability and guilt (Woods et al 1997). These feelings were compounded by the results-oriented emphasis of the new outcomes approach to teaching and learning. One teacher commented:

I don't come to school with kids in mind, I come to school to find out how much trouble I'm going to be in for not filling out what report, and how accountable I am and who's going to sue me or, you know, like the stress levels are just, have reached new heights.

For others, the loss of space for informal talk with colleagues was a problem 'You know when you sort of chew the fat', said one teacher. According to another teacher:

You're too busy doing other things ... you know there is no pressure release. That to me is stressful because you don't have the time or the chance to talk to people. There's no staff association, there's very little time, if any time together, it's always 'This is what we've got to cover', it's all planned, it's all set to deadlines and there's no leeway.

### **'Your word is not your bond': insecurity and stress**

Accountability and performance management processes created an increasingly threatening work environment for this group of teachers. Their stories indicate that they are feeling vulnerable to a results-oriented teacher appraisal system that relies on expansive documentation, non-teaching interests and self-promotion rather than improved classroom practices. In short, they described a working environment that was uncertain and professionally unreasonable.

### ***A professionally threatening system***

For these teachers the new ‘performance culture’ was the most threatening aspect of the reform agenda (Glesson & Husbands 2001). Despite having previously good teaching records they were beginning to feel inadequate and vulnerable. There was a strong element of cynicism and mistrust in their attitude towards performance management (Down et al 2000). These feelings are evident in the following comment:

I think the idea of accountability is fine in concept ... I quite go along with it, that we are all accountable for what we do, but one wonders what the actual agenda is behind it.

Others associated accountability with cost cutting:

With less money they [EDWA] are trying to make sure that there is some sort of system that can go around that they are accountable for. And the way to do that is to have many such, I suppose, forms or regulations, or hurdles I suppose you could call it, that everyone has to abide by or perform. So they are making people accountable. You do this task, you will do this, this and this. And they are delegating it out. So what it comes down to is less resources in the classroom ... the teacher will have to show that they are doing a better job each year as well.

Of particular concern was the lack of clarity surrounding their roles and responsibilities. For some, this created concern for their professional safety:

I’ve never been given a job description. I mean I’ve been given a list of things that I’d be expected to do, but it’s never specific to me as a classroom teacher or as a form tutor ... my concern is that individual teachers are individuals and the input that you can put into your job will be dependent upon your skills, your expertise, your knowledge whatever and your energy and to some extent how much free time you can devote to it.

Most teachers in this study were able to describe a situation that was personally and professionally threatening in relation to performance management. One teacher remarked:

Oh I think it makes them [teachers] feel very stressed, very vulnerable. I just think there is so much negative reinforcement for the teacher.

Another teacher summed up the unrealistic expectations of teachers today:

You have to go to a meeting at night time, you have meetings after school, we have meetings in our lunch hour ... It’s not recognised. You go to parent nights, you go to parent meetings, you go to presentation nights, you go to things like school river cruises, balls, drama things. You’re expected to go to all these things over and above your own time, and management are saying ‘But that’s part of your job’.

### ***Pedagogically irrelevant***

Another significant theme was the belief that performance management failed to adequately acknowledge excellence in classroom practice. These teachers were

disappointed about a system that was pedagogically irrelevant to their core teaching responsibilities. In the words of one teacher:

Since I've been trying for promotion no-one's ever come in and seen my classroom ... I really think for promotion we need to have people look at people teaching and see that, you know, that good curriculum delivery is there.

Furthermore, they acknowledged a sense of betrayal in relation to their deeply held pedagogical values. When asked about the skills that were required by classroom teachers, one teacher replied:

How to whip up the statistics or how to do graphs and how to prove that, you know, this year's Year 10s did marginally better than last year's. Well big deal ... It doesn't mean that we are better or worse teachers.

The low level of trust between managers and teachers was reflected in the experience of one teacher whose students performed poorly in the Tertiary Entrance Exam (TEE). The classroom teacher described feelings of vulnerability and inadequacy about the performance of his students and the way in which statistical evidence was used against him in an unreasonable manner:

The kids' results were down from what the mathematical formula said that they would have achieved, and you know, I was held accountable for that and I had to jump through the hoops and say why those kids didn't achieve particular results which a mathematical formula said that they should achieve.

Significantly for this teacher, no senior staff bothered to observe or inquire about his classroom teaching. Asked about the consequences of this experience the teacher said:

I was there in the school that had marks below the average, that was well known through the school, and I felt very uneasy about that. I really questioned my teaching there for a while. You know, you've got to reflect on it, but I know what the kids did in the classroom and I've got a good understanding of what happened and why it happened ... It was as if virtually to say, you know, you can't be trusted. I guess there is some of that, yeah. I mean you've got to have every bit of documentation to be able to present ... Your word is not your bond is it? That's basically what it comes down to.

Stories like this confirmed the view of these teachers that the focus of the school had shifted from classroom teaching to managerial imperatives and, subsequently, teacher control. One teacher summed up this trend as follows:

You know, teachers are going to be professionally managed by fulfilling certain tasks that have got no relationship, I guess to what their duties are, their teaching duties, so the corporate body is satisfied that they are doing a good job, and if you're not doing the job that they require then, you know, you're shifted out.



### **‘I wouldn’t tell anyone to do teaching at the moment’: poor teacher morale**

Common to these teacher stories was the lack of recognition and loss of professional identity. They talked about the inflexible working conditions, delegation of responsibilities, low levels of trust and inadequate resources. Typically, they described an education system that gave them little control over policy but increasingly blamed them for poor student performance. They shared a common belief that the system offered few opportunities for promotion or financial reward for competent teachers. Furthermore, there was no recognition of the increasing workload created by implementing continuous, under-resourced and poorly articulated reforms. With the perception among teachers and the community in general that public education was being run down, the status of teaching and teacher morale was low.

#### ***Lack of professional recognition***

When asked if the new corporate culture of school management had encouraged professionalism among teachers, one teacher declared:

No. Well, no, no, we’re delegated tasks. There’s no professionalism in there at all. You know, in the true corporate school, you’re delegated a task and you will carry out that task and that’s it.

Significantly, there was a perception among these teachers that school reform was being done on the cheap, as one teacher observed:

In business your on-line manager would see you every year and, you know, interview you and make a report on your achievements or success or performance that year. And in the world of business you were rewarded, you know, you might have been given a pay rise, you might have been given some salary enhancements in other forms and you were given praise in terms of appraisal. Has the principal of the school ever come and thanked me personally for the contribution I’ve made to the education of the children? In all my 20 years of education, never.

Typically, the motivation for teachers undertaking additional duties associated with managerial reform was couched in the discourse of teacher professionalism. However, there was a strong feeling that the appeal to professionalism by management was manipulative and exploitative of teachers’ goodwill.

Another source of frustration for teachers relates to the perceived poor standing of public education in the community and the lack of commitment by elected governments. For many teachers this neglect is increasingly seen as a deliberate strategy to drive students from public schools to the private sector. In relation to public pressure, many teachers pointed to the unfair blaming for poor student behaviour both inside and outside of the school. One teacher talked about the burden teachers faced in having to promote school image in a competitive market:

We see not just the parents of our kids, but the community at large makes value judgements on the school from all sorts of standpoints. The behaviour of the kids going to and from school makes an impact, the stories that they hear of ... what kids are doing on the weekend.

In this kind of environment it is hardly surprising that teacher morale is low. As one teacher put it:

I won't put up my hand and say 'I'm a teacher', like it's almost an embarrassment. I can't justify an argument anywhere that says, you know, I'm proud of what I'm doing or I even know what I'm doing.

Nonetheless, all teachers in this study managed, somehow, to maintain a strong commitment to their students and their work, as the following comment shows:

I think most teachers are dedicated and will try their best to enhance the learning in their particular classroom. So no matter what the system tried to impose on them, I think in the classroom ... I think sometimes the doors just shut and, you know, some good teaching does go on.

## Conclusion

The teachers' stories in this case study show how the culture of new managerialism is impacting on teachers' work. The stories from these six senior teachers indicate that they are uncomfortable with the values and practices of the new work order, in particular the ways in which it undermines their deeply held pedagogical values. For them, educational reform of the kind imposed by the *Better schools* report works against their interests and those of their students. Hartley (1997, p 48) captures these sentiments well when he says 'It just does not feel right. And it does not feel empowering'. What teachers in this study are saying about the culture of new managerialism can be summarised as follows:

- Managerial reform is being driven by industry and a political ideology committed to privatisation and cost cutting.
- The corporatisation of public education is inappropriate.
- There is no demonstrable evidence that better educational results have been achieved as a result of this approach.
- School-based decision-making is dominated by departmental policies through the Principal in a top-down controlling manner.
- There has been a cultural shift in schools away from collegiality and collaboration toward individual self-promotion and competitiveness.
- There has been an intensification of work and increasing levels of uncertainty and stress.

- There is now less time and space in schools for informal sharing of teacher experience and learning.
- Accountability is a one-way process where teachers do not have the opportunity to make their views heard.
- Documentation for accountability and performance purposes means less time for students and matters related to teaching and learning.
- While teachers are now more accountable for professional decisions and school performance, they have less control over policy and resources to support their work.
- Teachers feel vulnerable because of accountability demands in circumstances where there is a lack of clarity about their rights and responsibilities.
- Teachers receive little community and/or professional recognition of their work.
- There is little opportunity for promotion and/or financial reward for competent classroom teachers.
- With the perception that public education is being run down, the status of teaching and teacher morale is low.

These findings confirm the general malaise of teacher morale noted elsewhere (Menter et al 1997; Smyth 2001; Woods et al 1997). Importantly, the stories illustrate how the broader patterning of power, knowledge and control enshrined in the ideology of new managerialism impacts on the everyday lives and work of teachers. As suggested by the critical literature surveyed earlier in the article, radical educational reform of this kind can only begin to make sense in the broader context of what Apple (1996, p 29) describes as the 'conservative restoration' (privatisation, centralisation, vocationalisation and differentiation) advocated by the New Right. He argues (2001, p 9) that these transformations are occurring at the official policy level largely because of 'the New Right's ability to convince a significant portion of the population that what is private is now good and what is public is bad inside and outside education'. In this context, we should hardly be surprised 'that teachers have been pushed to the margins when it comes to being consulted about changes to education' (Smyth 2001, p 149).

Given what teachers are saying here about the alienating impact of new managerialism on public schools and the people who work in them, it is vital to remember that 'even in the face of the most stringent control of schoolwork, human agency creatively shapes teachers responses' (Troman 1996, p 487). For this reason, we want to conclude by drawing on Gramsci to remind ourselves of the potential for counter-hegemonic practices. As Gramsci (1971, p 377) argues, ideology is 'the terrain on which men [sic] move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle'.

For him, consciousness is not originally given but 'produced through a socially determined ideological field, so that subjectivity is always the product of social practice' (Mouffe 1979, p 204).

In the current conservative climate, Gramsci's work is of great political significance for teachers because it shows the possibilities of building what Lather describes as 'counter-institutions, ideologies, and cultures that provide an ethical alternative to the dominant hegemony, a lived experience of how the world can be different' (1984, p 55). In this task, we conclude by suggesting an alternative vision of the 'socially just self-managing school' as advocated by Smyth (2001, p 228):

Such schools, as distinct from their mainstream self-managing look-alikes, are small research communities, collaboratively researching their own practices, understandings, and situations; providing students with learning experiences that allow them to question and learn about society; avoiding competitive academic curriculum, and pursuing instead democratic emancipatory tasks; regarding learning as a cooperative task; structuring time for teachers to negotiate and reflect; developing in teachers a pervading commitment to extending their own and their students skills; regarding knowledge as being constituted through interaction; taking the problems of society as a starting point for discussion - not as given; and working so that social justice becomes something that happens in *all* schools, not something learned about in isolation in *some* of them.

## References

- Apple M (1996) *Cultural politics and education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Apple M (2001) *Educating the 'right' way: markets, standards, god and inequality*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Burgess R (1988) Conversations with a purpose: the ethnographic interview in educational research. *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, vol 1, pp 137-155.
- Caldwell B & Spinks J (1988) *The self managing school*. Lewes: Falmer Press.
- Caldwell B & Spinks J (1992) *Leading the self managing school*. Lewes: Falmer Press.
- Curriculum Council (1998) *Curriculum framework*. Perth, Western Australia.
- Down B (1990) The state and educational reform: a case study of the *Beazley and Better schools* reports in Western Australia. *Critical Pedagogy Networker*, vol 3, no 3, pp 1-5.
- Down B, Hogan C & Chadbourne R (2000) How are teachers managing performance management? *Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, vol 28, no 3, pp 213-223.

- Education Department of Western Australia (1994) *Student outcome statements: working edition*. Perth, Western Australia.
- Education Department of Western Australia (1995) *Strategic plan 1996-1998*. Perth, Western Australia.
- Education Department of Western Australia (1998) *Outcomes and standards framework*. Perth, Western Australia.
- Gee J, Hull G & Lankshear C (1996) *The new work order: behind the languages of the new capitalism*. St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin.
- Gewirtz S & Ball S (2000) From 'welfarism' to 'new managerialism': shifting discourses of school headship in the education marketplace. *Discourse*, vol 21, no 3, pp 253-268.
- Giroux H (2000) *Stealing innocence: corporate culture's war on children*. New York: Palgrave.
- Gleeson D & Husbands C (2001) Introduction: the performing school: managing, teaching and learning in a performance culture. In D Gleeson & C Husbands (eds): *The performing school: managing, teaching and learning in a performance culture*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Goodson I (1992) *Studying teachers' lives*. London: Routledge.
- Gramsci A (1971) *Selections from the prison notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Hartley D (1994) Mixed messages in education policy: sign of the times? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, vol 42, no 3, pp 230-244.
- Hartley D (1997) The new managerialism in education: a mission impossible? *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol 27, no 1, pp 47-57.
- Hoggett P (1996) New modes of control in the public service. *Public Administration*, vol 74, pp 9-32.
- Humes W (2000) The discourses of educational management. *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, vol 1, no 1, pp 35-53.
- Lather P (1984) Critical theory, curricular transformation and feminist mainstreaming. *Journal of Education*, vol 166, no 1, pp 49-62.
- Marginson S (1997) *Markets in education*. St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin.
- Mentor I et al (1997) *Work and identity in the primary school*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Merson M (2001) Teachers and the myth of modernisation. In D Glesson & C Husbands (eds) *The performing school: managing, teaching and learning in a performance culture*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Ministerial Independent Assessment Group on Devolution (1994) *Devolution and decision making in the government system of Western Australia (The Hoffman Report)*. Perth, Western Australia.
- Ministry of Education, Western Australia (1987) *Better schools in Western Australia: a program for improvement*. Perth, Western Australia: Government Printer.
- Morley L & Rassool N (1999) *School effectiveness: fracturing the discourse*. London: Falmer Press.
- Mouffe C (1979) *Gramsci and Marxist theory*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- O'Donoghue T (1994) The impact of restructuring on teachers' understandings of their curriculum work: a case study. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, vol 10, no 1, pp 21-41.
- Pollard A et al (1994) *Changing English primary schools: the impact of the education reform act at key stage one*. London: Cassell.
- Robertson S & Soucek V (1991) *Changing social realities in Australian schools: a study of teachers' perceptions and experiences of current reforms*. A paper presented at the Comparative and International Education Society Conference, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- Robertson S (2000) *A class act: changing teachers' work, the state, and globalisation*. London: Falmer Press.
- Sinclair A (1996) Leadership in administration: rediscovering a lost discourse. In P Weller & G Davies (eds) *New ideas, better government*. St Leonards: Allen and Unwin.
- Shacklock G (1995) Pain, care and cutting corners: a socially critical ethnographic, work story account of teaching in one school. *Teaching and Teachers' Work*, vol 3, no 3, pp 1-8.
- Smyth J (2001) *Critical politics of teachers' work: an Australian perspective*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Smyth J (2001) *What's happening to teachers' work?* Lansdowne Lecture, University of Victoria, British Columbia, 18 July.
- Solondz K (1995) The cost of efficiency. In S Rees & G Rodley (ed) *The human costs of managerialism*. Sydney: Pluto Press.

- Soucek V (1995) Public education and the post-fordist accumulation regime: a case study of Australia. *Interchange*, vol 26, no 2, pp 127-159.
- Troman G (1996) The rise of the new professionals? The restructuring of primary teachers' work and professionalism. *British Journal of Sociology*, vol 14, no 4, pp 472-487.
- Trotman J (1996) *The corporatisation of education in Australia: a Western Australian study*. A paper presented at the International Standing Committee of the History of Education XVIII Conference, Krakow, Poland.
- Woods P et al (1997) *Restructuring schools, reconstructing teachers*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Yeatman A (1990) *Bureaucrats, technocrats, and femocrats: essays on the contemporary Australian state*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.