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# The Human Price of the New Economy for Today's Teacher Educators.

## Introduction

Since the early 1990s governments across the Western world have intensified the link between education and national economic goals. In Australia, education is now seen as the basis for the country becoming more economically competitive and better positioned to compete in the global economy. Hence educational institutions, including universities and faculties of education, are being reframed in light of the changing needs of the new economy. Much has been written about how this new economy has impacted on general education. While less has been written about its impact on teacher education, much less has been published regarding its impact on teacher educators. The aim of this paper is to redress this gap in the literature. In the first section of the paper the writers examine what is meant by the new economy and how it has resulted in changed work practices for teacher educators. In the second section they discuss their life history research. The final section of the paper explores the data they collected in light of the psychosocial consequences for teacher educators as embodied in the concept of disenfranchised grief.

## The new economy

The term 'new economy' suggests an economy different from any past form. This is illustrated by the wide variety of expressions employed to describe it: digital economy, information economy, knowledge-based economy, learning economy, knowledge market, postmodern market, knowledge organisation or knowledge management. When the new economy is associated with education, the expression, 'knowledge economy' is regularly employed. According to Stephen Ball, knowledge economy is "a much-used term in relation to contemporary education policy but as a concept it is elusive and misleading" (2008, p. 19).

Although unpacking the meaning of 'knowledge economy' is not an easy task, Ball described it succinctly when he wrote, "the development of the knowledge economy can be understood in terms of the increasing role of knowledge as a factor of production and its impact on the following four elements: a) skills, b) learning, c) organisation and d) innovation" (2008, p. 20). What follows is a brief discussion on the changed form of production. After this, how the new methods of production impacts on each of the four elements identified by Ball is explored. This is followed by an examination of the resulting impact on the work practices of teacher educators. Whilst in this paper each element is analysed independently, in the reality of the workplace, they are very much interwoven.

The contemporary form of production significant to the new economy is associated with a new type of technology known as 'high-tech'. In the industrial or modern era, the type of technology employed was related to a style of work sometimes referred to as work of the hand. In the contemporary or postmodern era, the form of technology which has revolutionised production is often termed, work of the head. Unlike the previous period which depended on the physical labour of the individual, within the current era, physical labour is substituted by high-tech production which is reliant on the mental skills of the worker. Knowledge workers who engage in high-tech production are central to the new economy as was noted by Korres who wrote, "Technological progress has become virtually synonymous with long-run economic growth" (2008, p. 40).

Teacher educators are implicated in promoting this knowledge based form of production. As Grimmett, Fleming and Trotter write "the traditional role of universities ... has been re-fashioned

around academic capitalism to support economic development and global competitiveness” (2009, p. 11). Thus there arises in education courses an increased prominence given to mathematics, literacy and information technology as these are the areas required by knowledge workers and seen as central to the economic advancement of the nation state.

Significant to high-tech production are the new type of *skills* required of workers. This has resulted in a shift in emphasis to training workers to develop what is commonly referred to as ‘flexible skills’. But the training takes a new form, and the skills to be learnt are different from those required in the previous industrial era; “training is increasingly abstract training in analytical skills – as one might expect if the abstract intellectual nature of high tech is reflected upon .... This emphasis on intellectual training is enormously influential in education today” (Hinkson, 1991, p. 31).

Commenting on these changes Peters contends, “Western governments have begun the process of restructuring universities by obliterating the distinction between education and training ...” (2002, p. 147), thus taking a very instrumental and vocational view towards education. This creates a dilemma for teacher educators as they become silent accomplices in the shift which sees education being “collapsed into a single overriding emphasis on [education] policy making for economic competitiveness and an increasing neglect or sidelining ... of the social purposes of education” (Ball, 2008, p. 22).

Associated with the shift in emphasis towards training for flexible, abstract skills, is the increasing emphasis on *learning*, in particular, lifelong learning. Many educators would argue this is not a recent concept. What is new, is that contemporary advocates of lifelong learning situate it within the realm of a knowledge economy and the “neoliberal imaginary of globalisation” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 82). Thus learning is seen as necessary to support economic advancement of both the individual and the nation. This results in an emphasis on the need for individuals to constantly upgrade those skills appropriate for work and life, in particular, skills applicable to the technological and the communications revolution. As Rizvi and Lingard suggest, “Ultimately, the dominant ideas of both knowledge economy and lifelong learning are predicated on the assumptions of social efficiency, viewed largely in terms of economic efficiency” (2010, p. 85). These same authors further suggest that economic efficiency has emerged as a ‘metavalue’ subsuming other values associated with education.

For the contemporary teacher educator this creates a tension. In the past education was concerned with moral development both of the individual student and the community. The correlation between education, the advancement of democracy, creating a more socially just society and the goal of self-actualization was considered fundamental to the wider vision for education. Today, this view of learning and education has weakened significance; an emerging reality which for many teacher educators is a contradiction to their personal vision of the purposes of education. Bates believes developments such as these are indicative of “the shift ... away from principles of engagement and social democracy that might serve cultural ends towards principles of corporate management directed to economic ends” (2007, p. 6).

Changes in *organisational practices* referred to as New Public Management (NPM) is another element of new forms of production associated with the knowledge economy. Ball describes this new management style as a “‘one-size-fits-all’ model for the ‘transformation’ and ‘modernisation’ of public sector organisations and systems. They ... reconstitute social relations, forms of esteem and value, sense of purpose and notions of excellence and good practice” (2008, p.42). Strategies associated with NPM include: competition, regulation, accountability plus an increase in surveillance and control, all of which lead to a burgeoning in work demands for the university

lecturer. As Singh et. al. noted, we are “doing much, much more with much, much less ...” (2005, p.14).

Two further consequences emanating from NPM being imposed on teacher educators have been identified by Blackmore. The first is a reduction of “professional autonomy, changing the nature of what it was to be professional and be a professional in education” (2000, p. 22). The second relates to increasing accountability measures which “have led to an emphasis on performativity - being seen to perform – that in the long term detracts from the core work of teaching, researching and leading” (2000, p. 22).

The fourth element, *innovation*, is the focus of the work of Korres (2008) who argues strongly how the need for constant innovation is a major driving force for the new economy. He links new management practices and a highly skilled workforce as vital elements for innovation. This leads him to conclude that the essential factor for innovation lies in human resources. Korres further argues, “In this respect, initial and ongoing training plays a fundamental role in providing the basic skills required and in constantly adapting them. Many studies and analyses show that a better-educated, better-trained, and better-informed workforce helps to strengthen innovation (2008, p. 38).

The drive for innovation in the tertiary sector is evidenced by the new style of academic who is subjected to “performativity regimes of corporate education [which aims] to produce ‘designer’ employees, who continuously ‘re-invent’ themselves for organisational purposes (Blackmore, 2000, p. 22). Given Rifkin’s observation that “Information and communications [are] the raw material of the high-tech global economy” (1996, p. 237), it is not surprising the teacher educators find themselves constantly reinventing themselves through work practices that are technologically dependent. Professional development sessions abound on topics such incorporating Wimba into one’s teaching, utilising ipads to assist students learning and applying the latest platform for delivery of online units.

In 2008, Denise Bradley completed her review into the higher education sector in Australia. The mandate she was given was to “examine whether the sector is structured, organised and financed to position Australia to compete effectively in the new globalised economy” (Santoro, Reid, Saltmarsh, & McMaugh, 2009, p. 137). Missing from the Commonwealth Government’s mandate and consequently the Bradley report was the personal impact on university staff of the changing role of higher education. The following section of this paper seeks to redress this silence through an examination of the impact of change on teacher educators.

### **Methodology: Life histories**

The inclusion of life histories requires the researcher to weave the subjects’ life experiences between the development of his or her own biography and the correlating external factors. As Goodson writes, “Life history and historical methods link the personal, the practical and the theoretical in new ways that operate at all three of these levels” (2008, p. viii). He relates this approach to developing ‘middle ground’ theory, “the arena between structural organization and policy of political contexts and the micro-detail of daily life in classrooms and teaching. Middle ground theory seeks to combine the view from below with a focus on strategies and organizational forms that respond to changes in macro-level organizational structure and policy context” (2008, p. viii). Despite Goodson’s work centring on teachers and classrooms, his work has much relevance for the contemporary developments in teacher education.

Three life histories of three teacher educators were gathered over a three year period. Each lecturer was interviewed on three separate occasions thus giving a total of nine interviews. The participants consisted of two males and one female. Nicola is a senior lecturer who teaches and researches in the area of science education. Aldo is also a senior lecturer and his discipline area is LOTE (languages other than English). The third interviewee, Peter, is a professor whose background, teaching and research are in mathematics education. All three are employed at the same University and each of them has been at their current place of employment for over twenty years.

After multiple readings of the life history interviews the researchers identified a number features that the three teacher educators have incurred in their workplace since the advent of the new economy. Thus this study becomes an exemplar of Goodson's notion of 'middle ground' theory as it highlights the tensions between macro structural forces impacting on teacher education and the micro-detail of daily life for teacher educators.

### **The interview data**

The three teacher educators interviewed spoke of the glut of accountability measures which has led to a detrimental emphasis on their performativity – being seen to perform – that detracts from their essential work of teaching. They deplore the reduction in their professional autonomy; the narrowing of the purposes of teacher education; the decline in the quality of teacher education courses; and the flagging of their morale.

The real teaching is suffering given the constant list of things that we are measured against. How many professional development things have we gone to?; how many are we giving?; how many things have we attended?; how many grants have we applied for?; do you do research?, etc. We have now such high workloads that we do not have time to do things where there is real quality. I could actually produce all my pieces of paper to say that my work is really high quality, but I know deep down it isn't, because it hasn't had the time spent on it, because I'm too busy producing the pieces of paper. I am writing about my teaching rather than actually doing quality teaching. (Interview with Nicola, June 19, 2008)

The point being made by this interviewee is that appearances have become more important than the quality of the work done.

The centralisation of courses and units across multiple university campuses, with shared assessment items and quality control measures – requirements of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) – have meant that there has been little acknowledgement of the differing skills of educators between campuses (Interviewee B, interview, May 2, 2008 & Interviewee A, interview, date).

This actually drums us down in our areas of expertise and makes us produce a very bland, middle ground type of curriculum that doesn't have any sort of fire or passion or excellence about it. The focus on constant assessment where you have to fill out the one green sheet and you have got to have x number of high distinctions and all the rest of it, again squashing everybody into a template is an accountability measure, where no one is actually making judgements about whether the content is good or bad or indifferent. (Interview with Nicola, June 19, 2008)

The case being argued by this interviewee is that accountability measures are dumbing down intellectual expertise and undermining professional judgement.

A further argument pertains to the content of disciplines being transformed by the meta-value of the new economy – economic efficiency and effective competition in a globalised economy. For example,

in science in the late 1980 there was still a fair bit of freedom and quite a progressive notion of social justice and bringing science to the masses. In the early 1990s a sort of neoliberalism (or economic rationalism) came in and you went to scientific concept development and an appropriate science for our economic development...people who have an interest in science for economic progress have a very large say in what constitutes science. (Interview with Nicola, June 19, 2008)

Hence, cheaper ways to do teacher training, by making teachers technicians rather than free thinking professionals, have been proposed. But according to a third interviewee, finance is the least of it:

I think that those who want to control society in a very conservative sort of way have actually come to the realisation that unless you... deal with teachers in a very different way, they are not going to get their agendas through. So I actually think it's not only about finance but a way of manipulating society that we have seen happen in the States. It's the idea that there is a group within society who is born to rule and everybody should get out and do what they are told. It is in opposition to the view that everyone has a voice, an important voice, to be listened to, and some sort of compromise needs to be made among the different voices. (Interview with Peter, June 10, 2008)

Thus teacher education that trains teachers in a manner congruent with the advancement of the democratic state is in jeopardy.

There is a sense of the decline in worth of education courses caused by the reduction in units, the advent of online units – ‘a bitter death knell of quality’ – the increase in the number of casual and sessional lecturers, and the fact that due to their work commitments, students have little time to be university students (Interview with Peter, May 2, 2008).

The morale of teacher education academics is faltering in the face of less and less consultation on important issues; the constant pressure to reskill in new technologies, and the lack of money for essentials:

I am witnessing the falling in the sense of belonging of staff, their sense of being valued and appreciated in what they do and a decrease in their sense of loyalty to the university...we are losing what was one of our best characteristics. (Interview with Aldo, May 2, 2008)

### **Interpreting the data using the concept of disenfranchised grief**

The aforementioned losses that the three teacher education academics experienced can be best understood as disenfranchised grief, which is defined as “the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported” (Doka, 1989, p. 4).

At their best, universities are environments that focus on intellectual achievement, growth and excellence. Within the context of the knowledge economy that focus has altered to emphasise

accountability, competition and performativity. An environment with a focus such as this is definitely not a place for grief. It provides no prospect for teacher education academics to acknowledge and articulate their grief over the radical changes and losses that they are facing in their working lives.

Furthermore, the reinvention of universities as corporate identities with corporate structures under the new economy has cast academics “in the role of an academic proletariat and administration in the role of New Public Managers” (Grimmett et al. 2009, pp. 11-12). In this new context, “faculty are too often seen as self-interested individuals” (Grimmett et al 2009, pp. 11-12) unlikely to act with professional responsibility. All in all, academics come to be viewed in a reductive manner, as a sort of low-class input for corporate production. This reductive view of teacher education academics is wholly opposed to their needs. It gives no credence to legitimate human emotions and personal experiences, and, in particular, it gives no weight to the intelligible grief of these academics – a conflict which leads to the disenfranchisement of their grief.

The grief is not only “silent, unexpressed, unnoticed or forgotten” (Corr, 2002, p. 40), it is actively refuted and renounced by university managers and those that identify with them – an active disavowal being part of the nature of disenfranchised grief (Corr, 2002). The process of rejection is crystallised at education faculty staff meetings, where, instead of being able to debate the changes and name the losses, academic staff tend to be talked at and their concerns dismissed. Consensus is the new means of oppression and the individual who persists in trying to address the issues is considered ‘not a team player’ or ‘a trouble-maker’. And, of course, it is clear to all that “acquiescence is ... a condition of access to the higher echelons” (Maier, 2006, p. 109).

The difficulties inherent in the disenfranchised grief of academics are best articulated in a paradox. The very nature of their disenfranchised grief creates additional problems for them, while minimising their sources of support (See Doka, 2002). Grief is often a painful ache but, in reality, includes a wide range of feelings – anxiety, discouragement, frustration, powerlessness – to name but a few. For psychological health, grief has to be acknowledged and worked through. We touch on a second paradox here: it is only through acceptance of our feelings by ourselves and by others that we are able to move beyond them. In disenfranchised grief, feelings are discounted and disallowed and, therefore, intensified. The low morale of academic staff in education faculties is a probable consequence of disenfranchised grief.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the strengthening of the relationship between education and national economic goals has led to a new metavalue subsuming other values in education – that of economic efficiency. This has impacted upon teacher education and upon academic staff in adverse and demoralising ways. Teacher educators are faced with workplace losses, which cannot be openly acknowledged and which tend to be actively refuted by university management. This disenfranchisement of their grief obstructs debate about the big issues in education when debate is exactly what is required in the face of the fact that economics is now king not citizen in the realm of values. For the advancement of democracy, the creation of a socially just society and the goal of self-actualisation have all been radically demoted. “This is Humpty Dumpty at his most brilliant demagoguery, inverting reality to make nonsense appear to be commonsense” (Saul, 2001, p. 58). It is the grief of teacher educators that could act as a signpost leading to new insights about the changing role of higher education.

Lord Byron (1817), the great Romantic poet, had it right: “grief should be the Instructor of the wise / Sorrow is Knowledge: They who know the most / Must mourn the deepest”

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