

## TEACHERS' STORIES OF CHANGE: STRESS, CARE AND ECONOMIC RATIONALITY

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*Abstract: The impact of economic rationalism on teachers' working lives has been documented extensively, particularly in the UK. This article provides a case study of its impact in the early 1990s in a small Australian state, Tasmania, to illustrate that although the particular institutional forms through which it is expressed may differ its impact is similar. We do this by focusing on teachers' stories of change that have stress as a major theme. Stress is partially explained by increased workloads, teachers teaching outside their specialist areas and a changing student population. However, the ideology of economic rationalism has heightened stress because of the perceived lack of administrative care. A major stressor is trying to maintain a professional ideology of caring while, concurrently, accommodating to economic rationality. The clash of ideologies leads teachers to reduce commitment by leaving teaching, moving to part-time employment, withdrawing into classroom teaching and/or rationalising their workload with, they perceive, a decrease in the quality of teaching.*

### Introduction

Tasmania has an educational system, shared in Australia only with the ACT, whereby public students complete years 11 and 12 of their education in senior secondary colleges. These colleges were originally conceived as precursors to university and called matriculation colleges to indicate their function as a preparation for university. As in a university, students attend college only when they need to study their subjects and take part in any elective activities, such as sport and, with the exception of a recently founded catholic college, they do not wear uniform.

In the 1980s it became apparent that more and more students were staying on in education rather than entering the workforce. The colleges adapted to this change in student intake by broadening their curriculum and as a signifier of this change the word matriculation was removed from their title. In 1984 there were 4046 full time equivalent students in the eight colleges in the state. These numbers peaked in 1992 at 7562. After that date, due to demographic factors they began to decline so that by 1994 there were 6744 full time equivalent students. What this meant for teachers in the colleges during those ten years was a changing student composition, a changing curriculum, an initial large expansion in both student and teacher numbers followed by a sharp contraction in numbers for both students and teachers. Although the private schools were not affected as strongly by these changes as the colleges, they too had to deal with a changing student composition and a changing curriculum.

When Tasmanian teachers of grades 11 and 12 were asked, in 1994, to comment on the changes they had experienced in the previous ten years a recurrent theme was their experience of stress. In this article we provide a forum in which their anguish can be expressed, an accounting of the manifest factors we, and they, believe caused that distress and an analysis that links those manifest factors to a deeper, latent cause- a clash between the administrative ideology of economic rationalism and the professional ideology of care.

We use Kyriacou's (1987, p. 146) definition of stress, repeated in his 2001 article as 'the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression, resulting from aspects of work as a teacher'.

As Munt (2004) has shown there has been an increasing rise in reports of teacher stress in Australia and increasing media interest in that rise. Tasmania was no exception to this trend in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Several weeks ago [a reporter] wrote...that on figures available the level of stress among public servants appeared to have reached epidemic proportions.... The provocative observation resulted in many public servants contacting the writer. *All came from one Department, Education*, and all said stress in teaching was at abnormally high levels. (*The Sunday Tasmanian* 23, 10. 1994: 4-5, emphasis in original)

Psychological studies seeking to locate the factors causing individual stress reactions, despite their individualistic orientation, identified structural or social factors as stressors. For example, O'Connor and Clarke (1990) point to social factors such as time and workload issues, student issues, administration, staff tensions and community attitudes as stressors, and Tutteman and Punch (1992) suggest social support and the need for recognition and autonomy are important.

Studies which see the source of stress in the social situation of teachers locate stress in a conflict of educational values (Cole, 1989), changes in the education system (Dinham, 1993), time demands and powerlessness (Otto, 1986), a heavy workload (Kyriacou, 1987) and the working environment (Pierce and Molloy, 1990). [A useful summary of all these factors is given in Kyriacou, 2001].

Despite such clear evidence that stress is socially created there is a stigma associated with stress that attaches to the individual (Hepburn and Brown, 2001). However, stress can no longer be seen as an individual problem in Tasmania, with questions about teacher stress being asked in Parliament. (Mrs Milne MHR 13.5.1993 Question No 62). Also, the cost to the state government of stress claims for teachers has made it a major management issue.

## **Methodology**

The twenty teachers in the study taught grades 11 and 12 in Tasmanian State Secondary Colleges (17) or private schools (3).<sup>1</sup> They were all Behavioural Studies teachers who, like the first author, taught a range of subjects including pre-tertiary Sociology and Psychology (subjects recognised for university entrance) and non pre-tertiary subjects such as Introduction to Sociology and Psychology and a range of Child Development subjects.

The teachers' responses were elicited either by in-depth interviewing (I) or focus groups (FG).

In the interviews 'flashcards' with words such as 'students', 'stress', 'workload' and 'administration' acted as an initial projective device and then each teacher was invited to select some key words to discuss in depth.

In focus groups, teachers were asked to talk about 'the changes you have seen in teaching in the last ten years'. Teachers, asked this 'neutral' question about changes, indicated experiencing a major increase in stress. Stress as a theme thus arose spontaneously from the focus groups.

The interviews were audiotaped, the focus groups videotaped and responses transcribed. Analysis using grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) generated 7 major themes with the theme that generated most data being stress.<sup>2</sup>

Such methodology has enabled us to indicate individual, communal and structural aspects of stress. Importantly, we also bring to the fore some of the consequences of stress which may not, as yet, be perceived by administrators.

### **The Causes of Stress**

While some students caused concern because of their lack of motivation most stress was perceived by respondents to be caused by administrative issues. This emphasis on the structural and administrative causes of stress contradicts earlier American studies such as that of Sutton (1984, p. 24) who states 'lack of supervisory support is not a significant predictor of strain' but is congruent with recent research on primary schoolteachers in Britain (Woods, Jeffrey, Troman and Boyle, 1997; Troman, 2000) and secondary schoolteachers in Australia (Munt, 2004).

The manifest causes of distress were the rapidity of the changes experienced, the reduction of teacher numbers leading to increased workloads, the administrative policy of involuntary transfer, changes in the student population and the lack of support teachers received both from college administration and also from fellow teachers. (for a study of the effects of these changes on workload in Tasmania see Easthope and Easthope, 2000).

Before we look at what we believe is the underlying cause, a clash of ideologies, we will examine each of these manifest causes in turn and allow the teachers to tell their stories.

#### **Rapid Change**

The amount and the intensity of change since 1984 has been enormous. Cole (1989, p. 164), describing British education, refers to 'sweeping, radical, rapid and comprehensive change, and change not simply in the machinery of state education but also in its fundamental aims'. This is equally true in Tasmania.

SUE : I think just that we are really worn out with all the new things that keep coming all the time.

NANCY : (private school teacher) Would it be the same story in February next year..... it is the end of the year and we are all tired?

SUE, JO, SARA Yes!

JO : It will be worse in February.

SUE : I will be angrier because I won't want to come back.

SARA : I mean morale is at its lowest ebb.

JO : Yes.

SARA : And has been for the last twelve, eighteen months, two years and the cynicism! And the cynicism is just rampant! (FG2)

### **Reduction In Teacher Numbers**

As a result of a consultancy enquiry (CRESAP, 1990) it was recommended that 82 teaching positions be made redundant in Senior Secondary Colleges achieving a saving of \$2,886 million in a full year.

SARA : That would probably be the, well it is not even a straw, but it is enough to break people totally I think.

JO : Well it has already! Talk about grief upon grief!

SUE : Well it had a big effect upon us last year it was terrible.

CE : How many did you lose?

SUE : We lost twenty something?

JO : Twenty two.

SARA : Really?

JO : I mean it was devastating! I mean people were crying.

SUE : I didn't even want to go into the building. (FG2 )

### **Increased Workload**

The reduction in teacher numbers led to an increase in the work of those remaining. Some teachers no longer feel able to satisfy their own standards that they could once maintain with lower teacher/pupil ratios:

GWEN : Okay, teacher stress ... is one of the things where if you increase the workload and don't provide teachers with methods of dealing with the increased workload, simple sort of practical; of how can you manage your extra twenty five students, and your extra hours in front of the classroom? How can you manage that? You can't manage while retaining the same methods of teaching and the same methods of presentation and the same amount of marking and things. (I)

### **Involuntary Transfer**

An administrative decision to consider the involuntarily transfer of teachers when they completed five years at one school caused considerable distress (for a similar account of the stress caused by a different form of insecurity, contract appointments in the UK, see Troman, 2000). The rationale from the Education Department was to give teachers more chance of teaching in 'favourable' schools. The reality was to greatly increase teacher stress and uncertainty, especially as in some cases teachers were required to move house, travel long distances, or teach age groups or subjects of which they had no experience or training. Some teachers saw involuntary transfer as a control mechanism:

MICHAEL : At the present moment I suspect involuntary transfer's not a philosophical idea; it is just a convenient threat from the Department to force people to move at someone else's demand, someone else's pace, someone else's tune. (I)

Teachers felt threatened by the possibility of involuntary transfer and were therefore more conforming and less likely to make their views known to the senior staff in the colleges.

BRIAN : Ten years ago if the principal in our college said 'Wouldn't it be a great idea if we did so and so ?' A lot of people would say 'Phew, pathetic idea, you know, forget it!' Now you have to look at what the principal and the other leaders in the college are suggesting and you have to say 'Yes there is something good about that' because otherwise what are you going to be doing? You are not going to be part of the plan, the program, the change that is going on in the college, you get marginalised and the next stop is out of the college perhaps in some way. (FG 1.)

Conformity before the principal echoes the 'secret stories' of Clandinin and Connelly (1996, p. 28): 'The story of school and the school stories kept the teachers' stories silent as they lived and told a cover story'. Teachers feel unable to tell alternative stories to the approved 'school story'. This is a subtle but very effective means of control. This increased control might achieve compliance and may be perceived by administration as acquiescence to imposed changes, but in reality it is fear, it is deprofessionalising, causative of avoidance of discussion and debate and it increases stress.

CE : You were talking to me about teachers who might be going to be transferred and I can't remember the word you used. You did not use stress?

JOAN : Anguish.

CE : Anguish. Do you think there is an increase in the anguish teacher's feel?

AVRIL, JILL, RUTH, BRIAN, Yes!

RUTH: And it decreases your motivation to want to do a good job because you know that in twelve months time you are going to go to Hightown School.

Truly, they don't care where they put you, especially if you live in our area. (FG1)

The teachers were concerned that involuntary transfer would have adverse effects on students as well as being a source of stress for them:

BILL: I think it will really reduce the quality of the education kids are receiving. Not only that, ... let's say you go off to Clydesdale or one of those supposedly 'difficult to staff' schools, then you are going to end up with a whole lot of stress. You are just spreading the stress around, you are not really addressing the problem, you are just passing it around, and it does nothing for anybody, and the absenteeism, stress related illnesses, all of that sort of thing it will skyrocket, really go up and just have a very negative effect, and people are arguing on educational grounds that it's very good for people to be moved around, and renewal, and all of that sort of rubbish... It does not do anything for anybody, and I think the educational arguments just don't stand up. (I)

Teachers were also angry because of the incompetence with which the administration carried out the policy:

According to the policy, teachers to be transferred were to be notified in July, with appeals finalised by the end of August. However most teachers were not informed of their change of location for 1995 until mid-November. This makes it extremely difficult for those teachers required to change residence or for those who will be changing the subject(s) and/or the class level(s) taught in 1995. ... District superintendents were also told that 'these transfers follow dialogue and negotiation with the staff involved'. This has not been the case. (Letter to the Editor, *Mercury* 22. 12. 1994: 20)

### Changes in Student Population

Although discipline was mentioned by some teachers in relation to stress it was not a major cause. Most teachers felt that many of the problems they had with students were caused by structural factors over which teachers and students alike have little control because they result from decisions made by administrators rather than teachers. A particular cause of concern was the policy of 'mainstreaming' students with disabilities, the 'inclusion policy':

GWEN: Things like inclusion of you know, the kids from special schools, this has, for some teachers, not for all, but for about half a dozen teachers, this has caused, I mean I probably can't exaggerate the extra teacher stress that has caused. One of the teachers, I think it has totally broken him, I don't think he will come back to teaching. Simply because he was not really given enough support with an inclusion kid. The inclusion kid caused or demanded 90% of the attention; which caused the rest of the kids to feel, rightly, left out. Then they hit back at the teacher by trying to sabotage his car and putting spikes in his work gloves, which I mean real sort of sabotage. The teacher went on stress leave and he is on long service leave now but my betting is that he will never come back or if he does he will be a sort of totally broken teacher. (I)

Teachers were more concerned with their inability to relate with their students in preferred ways, because of time and workload constraints, than they were concerned with misbehaviour. Blase (1982, p. 109) explains the situation well:

the teacher will become less involved, less motivated, and will expend less effort in student directed activity. As teachers 'give less' to their work with students... the possibility of subsequent ineffective interactions will tend to increase. This, in turn, tends to increase the probability of burning out despite the fact that involvement has been lowered.

When teachers decrease their involvement with students, their stress increases because they know they are not doing their job properly and because decreased interpersonal interaction with students is less rewarding; interaction with students as the most rewarding part of teaching for teachers.

Nevertheless, whilst teachers felt they must decrease interaction with their students to protect themselves, structural imperatives were forcing them to undertake increased responsibility for social care of students. As the range of student ability and interests increased, the result of both inclusion strategies and increased retention of difficult students, teachers found it increasingly difficult. They were concerned that the 'ordinary' students may be disadvantaged because of all the extra non-teaching, but caring, duties they feel obliged to carry out:

BILL: Satisfying the needs of all students is becoming increasingly difficult, ... It is an increasing source of stress I think, particularly with things like inclusion policies... for instance a major issue at Northdale recently was ... an English class with nine wheelchair kids in it, four of them requiring constant help. They had an aide there for their physical needs but as far as academically, special needs kids are demanding an inordinate amount of time at the expense of the rest of the class and colleges are increasingly getting a whole range of special kids with different needs; you have got homeless kids; kids who are disruptive; or from a disruptive background. Increasingly those sorts of things are impinging on academic work. Very difficult I would say. (I)

Policy makers argued that inclusion is good for the students with special needs because it does not stigmatise them and encourages interaction. It is also good for 'normal' students to experience and support students with special needs. However, in the present climate teachers can be forgiven for perceiving it to be just another money-saving policy which fails to take into account their needs and the needs of their students, both 'inclusion' and 'ordinary'.

### **Lack of Support From the College Administration**

When teachers did become stressed the structural causes were often ignored and weakness in the individual was given as a cause. College senior staff solved, or fail to solve, problems on an individual basis only when matters became urgent: a 'band-aid' solution:

JO : I am leaving. So we are trying to figure out how to sort out the department and what kind of people to get in so Sue is not left carrying the bag

...

So I spoke to the principal and said, you know, this is the situation. It is just not a tenable situation because when I was away, on long service in term two this year, it was a good test to see what happened, and what happened was Sue got driven into the ground with nobody really taking up any of the slack and it all fell on her shoulders.

She is very good and she tries her hardest, but there are limitations about what she can do and so Sue really got pretty close to breaking point.

When I spoke to the principal and said 'Look we know what happened. This can not happen; she is brilliant but she is not God'. He said 'Yes sure, sure' and he said 'Well she will just have to go off on stress leave on worker's comp' and I said 'I beg your pardon?' and he said 'That is the only way these people will get the message that we just can't function this way any more'.

I said 'Just hang on a minute!' I said 'This is your way of coping with this problem?' I said 'Sue goes off on stress leave with worker's comp? What happens to her? ... I said 'This is an absolutely unacceptable position to hold that someone has to go over the edge before someone will do any thing'. (FG2) Jo, aware of the tendency to 'blame the victim' contests it:

JO: ... I said [to the principal] 'Look who is going to say that if she were a more competent person she would be able to handle that?' I said 'I could name people who would say that' and I said 'Now you tell me that that wouldn't be said; tell me that it wouldn't be said!' and then he changed the subject. (FG2)

The principal, constrained by economic and managerial imperatives, felt he was unable to anticipate problems only solve them. The consequences of his inability to act were clear to the teachers and his unwillingness to act was perceived as a lack of care for the teachers on the part of the college administration.

The failure of this principal to support teachers was not an isolated event, as Dinham's research showed (1993, p. 12): 'There was no evidence to suggest that those interviewed had been assisted by school or departmental superiors to overcome their stress, let alone identify and deal with its causes'. Similar accounts are provided by teachers in the UK (Troman, 2000).

Just as the victim is blamed for experiencing stress, so solutions to stress are sought through individual acts: a teacher can take sick leave, stress leave, apply for workers compensation,<sup>3</sup> ask for a year's leave without pay, leave teaching, take another job, retire or become unemployed.

### **Lack of Support from Other Teachers**

The teachers said they valued their relationships with other teachers and that these relationships were now severely curtailed.

BILL: ... relationships at work are very important and I think that is something that has suffered as a result of change and I think that is just one more thing to add to the feelings of lack of satisfaction, feelings of stress... I think that must impact on the level of service that is offered to kids. The fact that teachers aren't even getting time to talk about subject based matters, so everyone is sort of beavering away in their own sort of cubbyhole and there is a loss of that sort of sharing of information, that sort of sharing of resources, all of that sort of thing that is an informal but very important part of the teaching process. (I)

During the period 1993-1994, when the number of teachers was declining as student numbers fell and the Cresap recommendations were implemented, teachers felt in competition for positions and talked of 'being stabbed in the back' by other teachers. Until this time, teachers had helped each other, now they had to see themselves as competitors for the scarce resource of promotion and, in some cases, jobs.

Further, as workloads increased and teachers were transferred to teach in areas outside their expertise, some were no longer willing, or able, to help their colleagues.

RUTH: It is stressful when you are teaching a pretertiary [subject] ... and you have never taught it before and everyone, and everyone, is too busy to help you and it is just grrr ! (FG1)

Many teachers said that time to talk to colleagues had been seriously eroded. We were surprised at the number of teachers who nominated reduced interaction with fellow teachers as a significant cause of concern. Given that 'the most important resource for improvement is time with colleagues' (Bird & Little, 1986, p. 504) the loss of such time is educationally significant. As with the lack of support from administration described above this declining collegial support is also documented in the UK (Troman, 2000).

### **A Clash of Ideologies**

Teachers saw it as their professional *raison d'etre* not only to train but to educate and to care for, and about, their students. Care assumed major importance in our research. Teachers believed that the changes they experienced denote reduced care both for their students and themselves.

Hargreaves (1994, p. 145) points out that care 'has many possible meanings'. Here we present several interpretations of care:

- 'Feminine' care:- Care as an extension of the familial (see Acker, 1995).
- Professional care:- The care of teachers who have been socialised over a long period of time by colleagues into a tradition of caring.
- Administrative care:-The care expected of a person occupying a position. 'Duty of care' would be in this category.
- Personal care:-The care which teachers and teachers, and teachers and students, develop when they interact with each other and choose to spend informal time together.
- Responsible, structural care:-The care which teachers feel management should have for them and their students.

Teachers reported that there was an increasing lack of care for the students that adversely affected both the teachers' attitudes and the students' attainment:

JOAN: There is a definite perception that students' needs are very low on the agenda. There is all this political correctness and stuff in the atmosphere, but when it comes down to the wire you feel as though students' needs are no



longer predominantly eminent, so consequently you feel that nobody else gives a stuff about the kids so why should I? I mean that is being very cynical and you probably wouldn't stoop so low, but nevertheless there is that feeling in the air. (FG1)

Teachers frequently made comments such as 'the kids come last'. They wanted students to be the most important part of their work but reported that increasingly, the needs of the students came after the requirements of the Education Department. They also felt that they were not receiving responsible, structural care. Many, but not all, teachers felt that the allegiance of the senior staff in colleges was towards the Education Department rather than their own staff and college.

GWEN: Yes I think the general feeling is that if it actually came to the crunch you'd get no support from him. Which is a pretty poor way to feel when you consider the sort of things that people are up against in a day-to-day teaching situation. (I)

Teachers believed that the administration should care for them:

JILL: ... they just don't care. They just don't give a damn.

RUTH: No they don't, I think that is quite right.

JO: And I feel that if that were different, if, as I used to, feel like people who were actually running education in this state knew what they were doing and really genuinely appreciated the work that we did, I would give that bit extra that didn't have anything to do with money, like I used to, but I don't any more. (FG2)

This extract dramatically displays the teachers' expectation of care, of an expressive response from the administration. When they realised that an expressive response was not forthcoming and that, rather, they were being treated instrumentally by the administration, they felt increasingly stressed.

JO: You don't get backed up. There is just constantly this feeling that you are hung out to dry, and the people in positions that could do something about it are just not. They are sitting on their hands and worrying about, you know, profiles, or some new thing and then there are more new things coming down with more money. (FG2)

They watched responsible structural care being replaced by 'contrived care'. Contrived care was exemplified by the actions of one Tasmanian principal who, with good intentions, sent birthday cards to staff in an attempt to be seen as caring. Staff reacted angrily when they were later involuntarily transferred or scheduled to teach outside their area of expertise. They pointed to the cards, and asked: 'How can you do this to me?'

There are other examples of management fabricated 'caring'. The teachers were aware of these processes and it hurt them because they are seen as being contrived and manipulative. As one teacher said, 'It is like the "Have a good day!" training of some American companies' (I):

SUE: I don't feel that David Jones (a senior Education Department official) appreciates what I do and any of his little typed comments on my pay cheque at Christmas time wishing me Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year I treat with contempt, because the decisions that follow and are made by them, are not consistent with my experience of that following through, to me as a teacher in the classroom. (FG2)

Teachers are not fools; they can tell the difference between contrived 'care' and the real thing. The problem is that contrived 'care' is likely to endanger the care which comes from professional commitment and interpersonal interactions. Some teachers responded to this by saying, 'I don't care', when in fact they cared very much and were distressed by their situation.

A detailed analysis of the teachers' responses indicates that anger is frequent; anger directed toward both the college and Department administration: <sup>4</sup>

SARA: Bureaucracy gone mad!

SUE: I go home very angry often because of everything extra we have to do. (FG2)

Public expression of anger increased the likelihood of teachers receiving support from other teachers and of their anger being seen by college and Departmental administrators. However most anger was hidden because of control factors, demonstrated earlier. Further, teachers were and are expected to present a 'professional' and united front to protect their students from uncertainty. Anger was therefore rarely publicly expressed.

Tuttemann and Punch (1992, p. 50) write that, in Australia, 'when teachers are faced with potentially stressful situations, the extent to which they experience psychological distress is closely related to the extent to which they perceive themselves to be effective, supported by their colleagues, and given adequate autonomy and recognition'. Similarly, research by Sarros and Sarros (1990, p. 150) indicates that 'lack of support from the principal, faculty head and friends predicted personal accomplishment burnout'. Tuttemann and Punch (1992, p. 50) describe what teachers need: 'The more they have support, see themselves as effective, receive praise and recognition and are given autonomy, the less destructive, in terms of psychological distress, are stressful factors in the environment'. Many teachers in our research indicated that they had not experienced such support.

Halpin, Harris and Halpin (1985) and Hipps and Malpin (1991) have shown that teachers who felt they were in control reported less stress than those who felt they were not. A decrease in control was also associated with increased stress by teachers in this research.

Teachers expected the principals and assistant principals to act as their spokespersons. This has not happened. Otto (1986, p. 122) writes of the 'stress producing incompetence of administrators'. However, as Sarason (1971) points out principals are expected to introduce change but rarely have the requisite training or experience. Many principals are also likely to be under stress and they would probably agree with the Applied Psychology Research Group (1990, p. 31) who found in their study in Victoria that 'expectations from the Ministry have gone mad, as extensive changes involving additional work are forced on schools.... The rate of change is too great and there is too much change'. However, principals have far greater control over their situation than teachers.

For their part, teachers failed to explain the impact of change to the managers. They indicated their concerns to senior staff in the colleges but the senior staff did not pass them on to the Education Department because to do so would imply that they were not coping well with change and this could have affected their advancement or made them seem inferior to other colleges' senior staff.

The fundamental problem appears to be one of ideology. The managers want to manage: to streamline, save costs and increase productivity. The teachers want to teach and are concerned for the overall well-being of their students.

Teachers find it difficult to relinquish or diminish their professional ideology. This ideology is encouraged in teacher education courses and expected among groups of teachers. It becomes internalised, part of them. Some teachers therefore try to maintain their professional ideology whilst *at the same time* taking up some aspects of the ideology of economic rationalism. If economic rationalism appeared to succeed in colleges it was only because it was adopted *in addition* to the professional ideology that was already in place. Teachers carried on 'coping' without the administrators being aware of many of the problems. This 'coping' is a feature of the professional

orientation of teachers (Woods, 1973). They are not trained or experienced in 'putting their problems in a memo', which is what managers expect.

As long as teachers 'cope', managers will let them cope. However, teachers were increasingly worn down by coping. Teachers believed they were protecting students by coping, but in reality they were encouraging further rationalisations as the initial rationalisations seemed successful.

Implicit in the definition of ideology - which Giddens (1989, p. 727) defines as 'Shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups'- is the question of power. Educational policy makers and administrators have always had the capacity to exert their power. In the last decade or so they have decided to use it to ensure education serves the economy.

Cole (1989, p. 161) suggests that 'a major and often unrecognised source of teacher stress in the 1980s has been the political battle being fought over the values that should be enshrined in our education system'. The ideology of economic rationalism is embraced by Education Department administrators and by some college senior staff. It is the ideology of those in power. As Munt (2004, p. 583) has cogently argued, many teachers '[e]ducated in an era in which educational discourse had revolved around *child-centred* ideas...were alienated by the new language games of corporations, as the "science" of corporate management infiltrated and was constituted as a field of knowledge within the world of public education.' (italics in original)

Pusey (1991, p. 154) also points to the power of administrators to impose their ideology and indicates the comparative lack of power of those who would contest their definition of the situation:

Those who drive this process of rationalisation believe in it and deploy it very powerfully as an evaluative framework that throws a difficult onus of justification on anyone who seeks to oppose them with defences premised on social needs or values such as equity, compassion, common sense, wisdom, courage, and integrity.

Teachers are uncertain. *Should* they stand in the way of change? *Can* they stand in the way of change because economic imperatives require change? Many teachers feel all is not well, but are unsure, and ambivalent, concerning their response. Some of the economic rationalist arguments seem sound and some change may be needed. As Cole (1989, p. 166) points out, some teachers have 'an image of themselves as dedicated, altruistic professionals'. This image is threatened by policy makers who contest the *meaning* of education for teachers and teachers then experience stress because of the conflict between the ideology of economic rationalism and their view of themselves as caring professionals.

Teachers become stressed when they are no longer able to do their job satisfactorily; when they can no longer provide care to their students. James (1992, p. 504) writing of the health care system concludes, 'The real challenge is not just to recognise emotional labour and its significance as a component of care, but to build upon the emotional labour which is already part of our health care system without destroying or "commercialising" the social fabric upon which it depends'. The same could be argued for education: 'Emotions are at the heart of teaching' (Hargreaves, 1988, p. 835). Both health care and education are predominantly 'female' occupations and this compounds the problem. Caring is still seen as a predominantly female characteristic and it is hard to produce an economic evaluation of 'care'. Also, care is seen as part of the process of socialisation for teachers; it is part of their 'personality', not something that can be isolated and described to managers as a criterion to 'add value' to their job.

Teachers who try to fulfil their obligations to students, in seriously reduced circumstances, and who perceive the administration as not caring for them or their students, seem more likely to suffer stress. Webster (quoted in Acker, 1995, p. 24) has described the burden of caring as a 'palpable creeping exhaustion'. Dinham (1993, p. 7) quotes June, a resigned, stressed teacher, as saying 'people who care about teaching are likely to drop out first... it matters too much to them'. Woods (1989, p. 93) writes of stress affecting

those teachers who are highly committed, vocationally orientated and 'caring', for there is no escape route open to them. They will not compromise or adulterate their teaching; nor will they change or weaken their commitment. There is nothing left to give way but themselves. The best teachers, arguably, are the most vulnerable.

Certainly, some of the most impassioned critics of the situation in Tasmania were dedicated, articulate teachers who reported increased stress levels as they tried to maintain their interaction with their students at the same time as complying with the imperatives of an administration dedicated to economic rationalism.

## Conclusion

Trying to be both a professional caring teacher and an economic rationalist is not a long-term solution. The demands in terms of increased workload and teacher stress are such that teachers were forced to adapt to changes imposed upon them. The attempt to satisfy the requirements of both ideologies created in some teachers' minds a realisation that it was impossible to maintain the level of teaching they previously enjoyed. In these circumstances many began, themselves, to be rationalisers. They looked for ways of minimising strain. Amongst the ways adopted were leaving the job or a move to part time work. Less drastically there was an increase in sick leaves, a withdrawal into the classroom and significantly, for the continuing operation of the education system, a withdrawal of good will.

## Leaving the Job

When teachers were offered the possibility of redundancy packages in 1993 1200 of the 4,200 teachers expressed interest in redundancy. (*Mercury*, 4. 12. 1993, p. 21). These figures may over-estimate genuine interest because the SSCSA (Senior Secondary Colleges Staff Association) did suggest that all teachers enquire about redundancy to cause the Education Department concern. However, as I (the first author) was teaching in a college at this time I know that many teachers were very disappointed when their redundancy requests were not successful.

SUE: I loved my job, I don't love my job any more I would do anything to get out.

SARA: Yes, I think that is a general feeling.

SUE: I'd say 60% of our friends aren't in there any more.

CE: So have a lot of people left?

SARA: Oh yes and if they could leave, they would leave. It is a question of finding something else, but this being Tasmania it is very difficult to find something else, so people are quite often trapped. (FG2)

Bruce and Cacioppe (1989) found that 40% of the resigned teachers they studied moved into teaching in the private sector. This suggests that they were not

disillusioned with teaching as such, but more likely disillusioned with the government educational system.

### **Moving to Part Time Work**

EILEEN: This year has just been horrific for me and so next year I am dropping a line, I am going to .75 because I just can't cope!

LEENA: But that would be a normal load last year three lines ?

EILEEN: Yes that is what the old normal load would be. (FG3)

Eileen's comments support the findings of Bruce and Cacioppe (1989) that females are stressed by teaching encroaching on family and social lives. Many of the female teachers were part-time so that they could 'cope' with family and work. We acknowledge that males have families too, but it was the females in our research who were also mothers, who felt responsible for the care of their own children.

### **Increased Absence Because of Sickness**

Teachers talk of 'coping' (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 30) and the need for increased sick leave:

RUTH: They just cope, that is the word for it.

AVRIL: There has been a lot more in our place this year of people taking sickies.

CE: More sick-leave?

RUTH: There wouldn't be any member of staff who hasn't had a couple of days off this year just because they have got to screaming point and think 'I can't go tomorrow I just have six lines on in six different subjects'. Truly I believe that. (FG1)

Michael argues that holidays are now becoming a necessity, rather than an attraction, of teaching.

MICHAEL: I would argue that it might even be becoming a necessity, because you are going to get teachers who are stressed and one of the methods of coping is to simply delay any reaction and say 'Well I've got two weeks holiday coming up or three weeks holiday coming up' and it becomes a release for that sort of stress... (I)

### **Withdrawal Into the Classroom**

AVRIL : .... the transfer policy has been in place this year and I think that the teachers that are most under threat are in fact suffering quite considerable anguish because of the situation they are in and there are teachers in my college who say they would rather go into the classroom and not worry about anything else because there they don't have to think about it. They are doing what they are being paid to do, teaching. (FG 1 )

Erdman (1990) sees this retreat into the classroom as a response to teachers' lack of power to influence administrative changes.

MICHAEL: ...people are diving for cover.... I have moved to part-time to solve my own stress problems...but for these other people who have got commitments, they need the money, they can't see any way to reduce their

workload,.. and... you go in your classroom, you shut your door, you teach your class and the devil take the hindmost. (I)

This 'fortress classroom' reaction is completely understandable but it is also a factor in the lack of support teachers feel they are obtaining from other teachers.

### **Disillusion and withdrawal of goodwill**

Teachers talked of being demoralised, becoming cynical and withdrawing goodwill. As Bohm (1985, p. 46) writes 'Emotion and thinking are almost inseparable. They are different levels of the same thing'. These teachers' thinking and emotion combine to produce disillusion.

JO: You want to do a good job. I think a majority of teachers, vast majority of teachers are in this service because they want to teach. They are attracted to the job from that point of view, and when they feel like their ability to deliver a quality service is just made impossible from all the constraints around it is utterly demoralising, it makes you cynical. You have no goodwill. (FG2)

This withdrawal of goodwill makes the teachers feel bad. As Blase (1982), Kyriacou (1987) and Hargreaves (1994) point out, teachers feel guilty for reducing their workload. They feel guilty about reducing their commitment but it is a form of self-protection. This guilt can then lead to anger at the administration for placing them in an untenable position, but for some teachers the guilt increases the likelihood of stress.

The effects of the withdrawal of goodwill, as yet little noticed, could have serious long-term effects on the Tasmanian education system:

BILL: I think... a lot of that stuff that people do on goodwill will just disappear, and it just won't be done any more, and people will go in, they'll do their job, go out and I think it will really reduce the quality of the education kids are receiving. (I)

The bottom line, to use a phrase beloved of economic rationalists, is that the application of economic rationalism to college education in Tasmania has succeeded. It has produced teachers who are forced to be rational economisers with their time and commitment. However, the result, from the teachers' viewpoint of professional care is that 'it will really reduce the quality of education kids are receiving.' 5

### **Notes**

1. All quotations are from college teachers unless otherwise specified. Names of people, schools and colleges are fictive for ethical reasons.
2. For a full justification and account of methods see Easthope, C. (1997)
3. The Tasmanian Education Department has sought to control stress claims from teachers by the medicalisation and bureaucratisation of teacher stress hoping to solve problems by using superior expert knowledge in legal and quasi-legal situations. Most teachers making stress claims are required to see the Department's psychiatrist but, even before psychiatric results are available, they are likely to be told their claim will be contested before the Commissioner for Workers' Compensation. This is distressing to already stressed teachers. However it is successful in limiting stress claims, as teachers prefer to use ordinary sick leave rather than claim workers' compensation. The procedures divert or contest problems rather than solve them. Also see Hepburn and Brown's (2001) warning to unions not to use stress as a medical issue in bargaining. Note also that stress cannot be used to claim workers' compensation in the USA (Nisbet, 1999)

4. Ozga (1988, p.1423) points out that 'what has been labelled "burnout" is in fact 'anger and frustration'.
5. Their worries may well have been justified. A recent report of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs comparing student performance in 2004 found Tasmanian year seven students were below the national average in reading, writing and numeracy and only the Northern Territory performed worse than Tasmania for writing skills (Tasmanian Mercury, 13.3.2006, pp1-2). These figures are an improvement on the scores in 1999 when such data were first collected. Unfortunately there are no comparative figures for 1994.

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