

***Academic Specialists Or Pathway Providers:  
The Changing Roles of Secondary School Teachers  
in Regional Queensland, Australia***

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# ***OVERVIEW OF SEMINAR***

✓ **Background to the research project**

✓ **Outline of the research project**

✓ **Selected findings**

✓ **Suggested implications**

# ***BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT***

**The postcompulsory dimension of secondary school education has been subject to unprecedented pressures, in response to the radical changes to employment and training associated with late capitalism and globalisation (Gorard, 2002). In Australia, as elsewhere, students are staying at school longer but they are also involved in a more complex set of relationships with education and employment than a decade or so ago (Australian National Training Authority, 2003).**

**These changes have had, and continue to have, a fundamental impact, not only on the learning and opportunities of students and their families, but also on the work and identities of secondary school teachers. Like their colleagues in the vocational education and training sector (Harreveld, 2004), these teachers are subject to the requirements of increasingly corporatist and managerialist curricula and assessment regimes. They are also in the 'frontline' of an educational battleground, as governments and other stakeholders demand more from schools while providing them with less.**

## ***OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT***

**These broader issues are illustrated and interrogated in this paper by means of mapping the perceptions and aspirations of 55 teachers from secondary schools in the Central Queensland region of Australia. Participants completed an open-ended, qualitative survey questionnaire about their understandings of the purposes of senior schooling, their own roles in achieving those purposes and their degrees of satisfaction in doing so.**

## **Some details about the questionnaire:**

**✓Trialled with eight secondary vocational education and training (VET) specialist administrators/teachers (all members of the Industry Reference Group for the Bachelor of Learning Management (Secondary Vocational Education and Training at Central Queensland University) in September 2003**

**✓Completed by 47 ‘general’ secondary teachers in Central (Western) Queensland schools in the last quarter of 2003**

**✓Demographic data; six open-ended questions, “Anything else?”**

**✓Focus in this paper on open-ended Questions 1 and 2:**

**“1. How have schools and school programmes changed since you commenced teaching?”**

**“2. How have these changes affected you and your role as a teacher?”**

## ***SELECTED FINDINGS***

- Findings point to considerable tensions in teachers' work and identities between the role of academic specialist, facilitating the entrance of students to university, and that of pathway provider, helping students to broker among available alternatives of higher and vocational education and employment. In the process, teachers varied widely in their judgments of the eventual success and worth of those pathways, particularly in regional communities away from the resources of metropolitan areas.

# **“1. How have schools and school programmes changed since you commenced teaching?”**

## **Academic specialists**

**“Programmes (units) are generally common now in contrast to syllabus teaching was more prescriptive. Today – provided the units fit within KLA [Key Learning Area], and the goals are defined – there is much more flexibility allowed in the delivery. Assessment is well linked to outcomes”**

**“More relaxed about content than in NSW [New South Wales] where I trained”**

**“Changed/changing to the outcome based syllabus. A gradual move away from content based teaching. A move towards ‘relevancy’, ‘why’ are we teaching what we do”**

**“Little”**

**“Teachers appear to have lost autonomy in terms of their teaching practice. A plethora of paperwork and administration prevents teachers from using valuable planning and preparation time. Teachers require extensive individual time to plan and prepare, not engage in documents and readings that are ultimately irrelevant”**

## **Pathways providers**

**“Individual pathways introduced to students and more choices”**

**“Introduced ‘individual pathways’ where students make a choice. More subject choices”**

**“Emphasis on multiple learning pathways. Vocational education has grown in popularity/need”**

**“Teacher responsibilities have increased while authority and support have decreased. Programmes have changed to be more relevant to students and the world they live in. while a great idea, resources, training and support for teachers has not been sufficient resulting in stress on teachers. Paperwork has increased with more devolving on teachers with no increase in time available to complete. Many programs have been introduced, rushed through and then abandoned.”**

**“Much busier. Much more paperwork. VET stuff is a huge load. Behavior problems increased. Parents not so supportive as used to be.”**

# **How have these changes affected you and your role as a teacher**

## **Challenges**

**“Students cannot or find it difficult to remain focused on tasks for longer than 10 minutes at a time. I find students challenging authority a lot more and not easy to accept criticism. They are also judgmental and outspoken, not very tolerable and not easy to convince”**

**“More time needed in planning. More accountability towards important documents – variation to school routine and incorporating productive pedagogies. More teacher responsibilities. More pressure/stress”**

**“Much more demanding role. Busier; less chance to have a balanced life”**

**“Not a great deal except to move with advanced technology used, e.g. calculator. Not as many students know their tables etc very well.”**

**“Immensely → need to maintain knowledge and understanding of changes and be able to implement them. There has never been a period of consolidation (where there is no change) so the workload is large. Keeping up to date means less time is spent on preparing lessons and working with students”**

## **Opportunities**

**“It has made me able to adjust my teaching style for different S’s. This has been extremely interesting and useful as a teaching”**

**“Yes they have created more preparation and correction time for me, and more upskilling, e.g. at TAFE [Technical and further Education] at night”**

**“Different ways of teaching. Changing how we structure courses”**

**“More freedom to teach what I am interested in and (hopefully) better at teaching”**

**“Made me evolve as a teacher. More accountability needed – more paperwork. A better teacher. Stopped me getting stale”**

## ***SUGGESTED IMPLICATIONS***

**This paper has important implications for the current trials and 2006 implementation of the Queensland Government's (2002) *Education and Training for the Future* (ETRF) agenda. While this agenda will be posited on all people between the ages of 15 and 17 who will be expected to be 'earning or learning', teachers are crucial to the attainment of such a vision. Their complex engagements with that vision are fundamental to its success, as well as to understanding the changing roles of the teachers themselves.**

## **In particular...**

- **‘Academic specialist’ and ‘pathway provider’ a false dichotomy**
- **Some respondents who focus on subjects report updating their teaching techniques; some VET specialists overwhelmed by workloads and/or pessimistic about benefits**
- **Postcompulsory pathways only one among a complex array of ongoing and fundamental changes to secondary schools and to teachers’ roles and responsibilities**

- **Distinctive ambivalence about challenges and opportunities in engaging with these changes in regional and rural areas**
- **The ETRF agenda's ultimate success depends upon the aligned constellation and the concatenation of events whereby multiple stakeholders (students, their families, teachers, schools, policymakers, educational institutions, educational systems, communities, employers, late capitalism, globalisation and localisation) are a) able and b) willing to engage with and transform that agenda**
- **The interplay among change, work and identity for students, teachers and other stakeholders is a crucial element of that constellation and concatenation**

## ***References***

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