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**PART-TIME WORK AND  
THE CULT OF INDIVIDUALISM:  
A NOTE ON THE ANTICIPATORY SOCIALISATION OF INTENDING  
TEACHERS**

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**INTRODUCTION**

A considerable body of research in the sociology of teachers and teaching focuses upon what has come to be known as the "cult of individualism". The individualist pedagogical style is said to arise from the deeply held conviction of many teachers that professional freedom and autonomy are necessary prerequisites for effective teaching (Denscombe, 1982). The concept of teacher individualism is central to a number of studies dealing with such wide-ranging concerns as teacher occupational culture (Hargreaves, 1980), team teaching (Hatton, 1985), teacher education (Denscombe 1982) and teacher self-concept (Nias, 1984).

A common theme emerging from these investigations is that preoccupation with pedagogical independence is closely linked in the minds of teachers with professional self-concept as well as with the imperatives of coping and survival. At the same time, it is claimed that this preoccupation also hinders the development of progressive practices and is an obstacle to school reform. According to this interpretation, the teacher as individualist can easily become the teacher in isolation who avoids contemplation of, or involvement in, the "big issues" of contemporary educational debate, instead preferring the security of known classroom expertise and routine. This "retreat to the classroom" and tendency to shy away from collegial effort (Tye and Tye, 1984) thus contributes to the remarkably persistent and conventional ways of viewing and going about the daily job of teaching.

The purpose of the following article is not to take issue with such critical theorising about the implications of teacher individualism for conservative practice. Instead, the present concern is more with the origins and reinforcement of the individualist orientation. A range of potential contributing factors emerge explicitly or implicitly from the literature. Some of these factors include references to the socialising influence of family behaviours and values which are supposedly characteristic of the middle class (or "aspiring" working class)

backgrounds of intending teachers (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett, 1982). Other factors relate to the early professional socialising experiences of preservice field studies and the initial years of teaching when initiates perceive quickly the premium placed upon individual effort and competence in the classroom (McArthur, 1981).

An influential line of theorising during the latter 1960s and throughout the 1970s, and one which often incorporated those factors mentioned above, developed the concept of the "anticipatory socialisation" of intending teachers (Mardle and Walker, 1980). Research into anticipatory socialisation has tended to focus upon the institutional context of socialisation. "Institutional context" is here used as an umbrella term to encompass the two main approaches to anticipatory socialisation. One approach indicates that major socialisation occurs before entry to teacher training while the other stresses more the experiences during preservice teacher education (Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1984). That is (integrating the two approaches), the research and theory suggest that intending teachers often emerge from their own schooling imbued with an idealised vision of the competent teacher as confident practitioner who is able to stand on his/her own two feet from the very beginning, apparently always secure and certain about what to do in classrooms. This is the pedagogic model seen and favoured by teacher recruits over their long formative period in school; future professional behaviours and attitudes are thus anticipated and carried with them into training college or university. This pervasive (and often perhaps essentially subconscious) individualist orientation is then further reinforced in a host of ways and at a number of levels throughout preservice training. In this manner the cult of individualism is reproduced across generations of teachers..

There have been some critiques of this interpretation, including criticism of its rather over-socialised and deterministic view of the induction of people into a very complex profession (see Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1984). However, the concept of anticipatory socialisation did initially open the way for a number of interesting enquiries into the professional socialisation of teachers. Yet the theory-building and research into the anticipatory socialisation of teachers does not appear to have maintained momentum (Atkinson and Delamont, 1985). Referring particularly to symbolic interactionist research during the 1970s, Atkinson and Delamont (1985: 311) claim that one reason for

...The loss of vigour of...studies of professional socialisation is the overemphasis on the discreteness of training institutions. Too many of them treat the training locale (of) teachers college as if it were one of Goffman's archetypal "total institutions".

The following study moves beyond the discreteness of the "training institution" to examine an important agent of anticipatory socialisation into teaching. Through an examination of the part-time work experiences of a group of intending teachers, the argument developed here is that the participation of this group of student teachers in the secondary labour market, and the attitudes

and values arising from such experiences, are also powerful ingredients shaping an individualist orientation both to the wider world of work and specifically to their chosen careers.

Explorations of the wider socio-cultural experiences of student teachers are not common in the literature of teacher education. Indeed, this is true even for research into the lives of tertiary students in general. Only rarely does one find studies (for example, Aggleton and Whitty 1985) which deal with the wider family and cultural experiences of students in higher education and the socio-political ideologies shaped by those experiences. It is almost as though tertiary institutions, and the lived experiences both in and around them, have assumed the "black box" mantle once said to bedevil educational research on schools and schooling (Apple and Weis, 1985: 50-52). That is, research on higher education, specifically teacher education in the following case, tends to consist of investigating problems and issues conceived as "educational" phenomena (administrative, organisational and selection procedures, teaching-learning strategies, and to some extent access, equity and student welfare considerations). Much less attention has been given to the complex interactions and relationships between the rhetoric, aims and intentions of higher education and the daily lives of the clientele. Yet, as the following study demonstrates, part-time work emerges as a fundamental concern in the lives (or biographies) of these student teachers, and more importantly such pursuits clearly shape and constrain other social, personal and professional perspectives.

### **Background to the study**

This article builds upon a study which began as an attempt to find out more about the parameters of the part-time employment of student teachers - the what, how and when of their work patterns, and which then went on to explore the coping strategies developed by them in order to contend with the competing demands upon their time and energy (Wimshurst, 1987). Thirty-nine volunteers were surveyed at the end of their sixth and final semester in a College of Advanced Education. The participants were young women who were completing a programme in primary teacher education.

Data were derived by two means. First, an open ended questionnaire was used to gather quantitative information on work patterns and then asked for descriptions of coping strategies. Later items, which provide the basis for the following study, asked for respondents' comments on and opinions about such matters as: features of employment that they like and disliked; the positive and negative influences of part-time work on their college careers and upon personal development; feelings about people encountered in the workplace; and a request for a brief statement of the participants' thoughts about current employment opportunities and levels of unemployment. Second, because these volunteers were drawn from three classes taught by the researcher, it was possible to check, verify and follow-up written responses to the questionnaire. The participants

constituted 64.0 percent of students in three classes of a core subject and so they are quite representative of the approximately 70.0 percent of students in the college who engage in regular part-time work throughout their studies. Participants showed a readiness to write and talk at some length about their employment experiences - perhaps because the topic represented neutral ground removed from more usual academic and professional staff-student concerns, but also it seems that the participants wanted to reflect and talk about their working lives. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations below are from questionnaire manuscripts.

Most (79.5 per cent) of these student teachers had held part-time jobs while still in secondary school. The majority of them entered teacher education straight from secondary school and they had thus already had at least five or six years experience of the world of work before becoming qualified teachers. Their patterns of employment while attending the CAE displayed considerable variation between individuals in terms of the number of jobs, total hours of work, and when they work (see Wimshurst, 1987). The median hours worked per seven day week for this sample was nine hours; some worked much longer hours while engaging in two or three concurrent part-time or casual jobs. Yet despite these surface variations, there was evident consistency in the reported values and meanings that these students derived from their participation in the secondary labour market. They have developed very definite views about and an orientation towards the individualist work ethic and the importance of individual endeavour in the workplace.

### **Meanings of work**

The great majority of these young people feel that their part-time work has contributed to their personal growth. This is true even for those who have not particularly enjoyed the actual work itself or who have merely tolerated their jobs over the years. They refer to gaining confidence and 'growing self-assurance'; 'I am more sure of who I am and how others see me'. Many feel that they have developed the qualities of patience, self-discipline and "people-handling" skills: "Situations arose where I had to determine the best way to resolve them, especially with distraught or irate customers...I guess public relations skills were developed, to be polite, courteous and of the best assistance to people'. Not all of the respondents make explicit the links between their personal development and their professional development as teachers, indeed some claim initially that college and work are separate, though parallel, realms of day-to-day experiences. However, most point to the advantages for their teaching careers of such people-handling skills.

A number of these young people mention their previous "sheltered" lives and they describe the ways they were forced to contend with often conflicting demands upon their time and attention when confronted with differing (adult) attitudes and behaviours in the workplace - "the job was a real eye opener".

The positive meanings and benefits, in addition to earnings, described by these intending teachers are generally consistent with findings from other studies of student workers (D'Amico, 1984; Hill, Woolmer and Harris, 1987; Steinberg and Greenberger, 1981; Wilson, Wyn, Reeders and Woock, 1986). The participants held favourable views of fellow workers and of their employers. Certainly there are reported instances of disagreeable and unsettling incidents, but overall there are few negative comments about fellow workers. In fact, one is struck by the sensitivity of some observations. Not only is sympathy felt for others (non-students) seen to be caught in dead-end work situations, but also admiration for their toughness and resilience. In particular, these intending teachers admire the independence of their workmates.

Generally the people won't give you a second chance. In a job like waitressing you do your job and you do it well or else you are out. The girls I worked with were aged between 18 and 25. They were either married or living out of home. Very independent and realistic. They didn't depend on their family or security. They stood on their own two feet right from the word go.

Through their employment, the student teachers have been encouraged over a number of years (and sometimes from a quite early age) to develop a growing sense of independence, take increasing responsibility for their own welfare and, as the above quote suggests, learn to stand "on their own two feet". The participants will readily acknowledge the boring and repetitive aspects of jobs that many of them have pursued for five or six years but they choose to emphasise the personal benefits that they have derived from the world of work. There is no doubting the quality of many of these experiences and perceptions - but limitations begin to emerge from such strong individualist dispositions. The narrowness of the individualist ethos is articulated especially through the typifications of "non-workers" espoused by these intending teachers.

The sympathy for fellow workers outlined above does not readily translate into empathy with the unemployed. In a state where, at the time of data gathering, youth unemployment was the highest in Australia, nearly three-quarters of these student workers steadfastly maintain that work is always available for those who "really want it". They then elaborate with comments of two sorts. First, the qualities required to find jobs and hold them are described; "keep trying", "be hard working and honest and present oneself suitably for the job", "don't take rejection personally, keep searching", and "be patient and really willing to work". Second, there are statements about why the unemployed will not or cannot find jobs. The majority view is that the unemployed lack perseverance and effort and a common accusation is that many job seekers are too "fussy", rather waiting for the ideal position and refusing what is on offer. It is claimed that there are plenty of avenues for self-improvement through gaining skills and credentials in order to become more marketable and thus overcome any "background disadvantages".

There are instances of more balanced and sympathetic views: "I used to think employment was there if you really wanted it, but after my best friend who has every desirable attribute was unable to get a job, I've changed my mind". However, the following view, while more virulent than most, typifies the views of the majority of these intending teachers.

I believe that anyone who wants a job can get one. There are many people like myself a college student who can find a job if they wish. There are a number of jobs displayed outside the student union involving tutoring etc. My father in charge of a business is continually advertising for unqualified people to work. A friend works in a supermarket night packing and they always have vacancies. It's not that there isn't enough work it's that people don't want to work. You can ask a large number of students who have jobs if they had problems getting them and I think they will say NO.

### **Work and individual effort**

In beginning to theorise about the participants' rather overwhelmingly negative views of the unemployed, some of the factors discussed earlier in relation to anticipatory socialisation into teaching might have explanatory power. The extract above makes references to obvious family influences and implies social class location (51.2 per cent of the respondents claim to come from professional or managerial families). The institutional context of teacher education and previous schooling also is relevant - the student teachers in this study, despite exhortations to the contrary in the rhetoric of "progressive" teacher education programmes, are very aware that individual effort and competition remain endemic to their chosen careers in the "real world" of classrooms. However, a core component shaping their outlook is suggested by this student's reference to her personal experiences of working life. Her tendency to confuse and conflate the secondary labour market of part-time and casual employment with the very different situation of full-time work is also a common theme in many student responses.

It is important to stress the powerful role of lived work experiences in the formation of the individualist perspective. That is, these young people are not simply reflecting the beliefs of their parents, social class membership, or mass media diatribes against welfare or dole "cheats". Rather, they speak of wearing "best clothes and uncomfortable shoes" as they have searched suburban shopping centres for jobs. For others, employment came easily but they still pride themselves on having prepared the ground beforehand: "I have recently done a bar and silver service course which has shown me there are a lot of jobs in the area. I was offered a job in a restaurant after dining there". When successful, they feel that they are both diligent and loyal employees, even to the extent that they will criticise fellow workers (whom they like) for "cutting too many corners" and "slacking off when the boss is not around".

A number of these intending teachers have been promoted to part-time supervisory positions. Indeed, half the sample were at pains to explain that their jobs involved a relatively high degree of trust and responsibility, through comments like; "manager of the camera department", "front-end-controller of (supermarket) checkouts", "in charge of fund raising for charity", "relieving manageress while the boss was overseas for a couple of months"; and "senior staff member responsible for the shift". For some of those initially not imbued with the work ethic (over and above their desire for earnings), there is evidence that a strong sense of individual responsibility was nurtured in the workplace:

...with my other part-time job that I started while in school I am taking my work more seriously, perhaps because I am in charge of the deli section part-time and I need to be looking at the job in terms of better sales for the store. I am finding the job more rewarding for myself than just enjoying the money I earn.

In their supervisory roles, and even for some in more mundane positions, these student teachers have often had to learn to cope on their own with the stresses and strains of "people problems" such as troublesome customers or disgruntled junior staff. Some have had to adapt quickly to the demands of positions for which they feel they were given inadequate training (again sometimes because of rapid promotion). Thus the getting and holding of part-time work, increasing responsibilities in the workplace, and the ongoing struggle to cope with this along with study and personal commitments, consistently reinforce the strong individualist ideology and independent orientation of these student teachers.

They insist that plenty of jobs are available, they know this through their own experiences. They might examine, discuss and debate structural unemployment in their sociology classes, but ultimately personal experiences count for more. When pressed, student workers will also admit to an awareness that much of their work is dead-end, not "proper work", and that they themselves will be quite happy to walk away from it on completion of their studies. But the belief remains strong that the unemployed should embrace any opportunity in the hope of future advancement; "not all jobs are glamorous but you have to start somewhere". Ironically, one respondent voiced some concern about the prospect of the young unemployed encroaching upon "student jobs". While this is unlikely to happen to any great extent, such comments illustrate how these student teachers take-for-granted their store of cultural capital, the possession of which makes them especially attractive employees in the retail and service industries where the bulk of student part-time work is located. Another irony to note is that while exhorting the unemployed to settle for second best, some of the participants in supervisory positions have a say in the hiring of juniors and casuals and they tend to agree with management policy of not hiring "toughs", other young people apparently identified as such by tatoos, abundant cheap jewellery and the like.

## Conclusion

The highly individualistic perspective upon the workplace and the premium placed upon independence and "standing upon one's own two feet" discussed above are not characteristic of all of the intending teachers who participated in this study. However such beliefs are typical of the majority of them. Theory and research into the anticipatory socialisation of teachers over the past couple of decades have suggested a number of causal factors. The research reported here has attempted to move beyond the institutional context of what is learnt by the participants during their own schooling and later in teacher education programmes. It has also attempted to take a different approach from (while not incompatible with) interpretations which emphasise the individualistic values orientation usually attributed to social class and family socialisation. In the literature on anticipatory socialisation the term "biography" is often used to incorporate background factors such as previous schooling, family and social class influences. The above study has emphasised a further biographical component - early experiences of the world of work.

It has been demonstrated that the keen sense of independence and individual coping espoused by these student teachers has been nurtured and reinforced through their experiences of part-time employment. This is not to deny that other factors might also have played an important part in the professional socialisation of these young people. Rather what needs to be finally stressed is the stabilising role of work in the lives of the participants in this study.

While there appears to be a definite correspondence between values developed in the workplace early on and later attitudes and behaviours said to be typical of teacher individualism, what ultimately determines the strength of such convictions is the fact that their part-time employment has offered these young people a consistent or stable point of reference over the years. Their youthful employment has in this sense eased the transition from one stage of life to another stage during late adolescence and early adulthood. It is the bridging and transitional function of their earlier work experiences which accounts for the anticipatory potency of part-time student employment in the socialisation of these intending teachers into the cult of individualism.

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