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Chapter 5

Teachers as Learners: Change, Identity and Relationships in Public Schooling.

Gillian Vogl

Introduction

In the last few decades, there have been massive cultural and structural changes in the workplace across the globe. These changes that have occurred to the labour process have been complex and varied. However, some general trends can be identified with regard to a neo liberal Australian workplace.

This chapter is part of a much larger qualitative study which explored the impact of workplace changes on the day to day working lives and social relationships of employees across a range of private and public sector workplaces.

This study was influenced by my own subjectivity as I watched the impact of neo liberal policies on the learning environment in which I was involved. I observed how destructive workplace changes, such as 'funding cuts', work intensification and dwindling staff numbers impacted negatively on staff relationships.

Over the last decade there have been major changes to the public education system as a result of neo liberal capitalism. This chapter considers the question of how these macro structural changes and ensuing micro work processes have impacted on the day to day teaching experiences and social relationships of teachers in a secondary public high school in NSW, called Edith High and how these teachers have negotiated, resisted and adapted to the environment in which education is taking place in new times. This question is explored through in-depth interviews with teachers at Edith High school and has been placed in the context of the relationship between neo liberalism, the state and public education.

One of the major factors which has influenced the social relationships and identities of teachers has been the media's portrayal of teachers and public education, as in crisis. To illustrate this atmosphere of crisis with regard to teachers and public education, examples in NSW newspapers, such as, The Daily Telegraph, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian are outlined, in addition, to various qualitative studies which have focused on both media, and other extrinsic and intrinsic factors which have impacted on the environments in which teachers work.

The Media

Blackmore and Thorpe (2003, p. 579) carried out research which focused on how teachers and principals managed the media's negative portrayal of public education and teachers in Victoria. While their study took place in Victoria and was focused on public education in Victoria, teachers in NSW were portrayed similarly.

Through interviews with teachers, Blackmore and Thorpe (2003, pg 582) found that media portrayals of both public education and of teachers had impacted negatively on these teacher's relationships with friends, family and the wider community. Some teachers hid the fact that they were teachers when attending social gatherings.

Blackmore and Thorpe (2003, pg587) claim that during the time prior to and during their study, teachers not only had to cope with restructuring, deregulation, work intensification and curriculum and assessment changes but also with media concerns which were conflated into parental concerns.

This was also the case in NSW. It was not long after a large industrial campaign in NSW over education policies and teacher's pay that I carried out interviews with teachers at Edith high. Essentially media coverage of this campaign provided a negative portrayal of teachers, the Teachers Federation and Public education. Teachers were pitted against other teachers, against students and against parents. The Teachers Federation was pitted against teachers, and public education was deemed inefficient.

The worst offender in the negative portrayal of teachers and public education was The Daily Telegraph. The Daily Telegraph carried headlines such as, *Teachers strike risks pupil safety* (10 November 1999), *Parents to teachers: do your job* **(**3rd February 2000**)** and a front page article titled, *The cap fits/teachers led into a pointless, stupid strike by an uncaring dunce* (9th February 1999). This front page article was an article which stated that teachers were striking because both the state government and its opposition had refused to release their policies on education before the March 27th election. In this article it was pointed out that although health and law policies had not yet been revealed, nurses and police were not striking. It included comments from the Education Minister John Aquilina who remarked that the NSW teachers strike over a 30 per cent pay rise was pointless as they were already the best paid teachers in Australia. This article concluded by citing comments made by teachers who either disagreed with or didn't understand why they were striking. In another article run by the Daily Telegraph, entitled *'Putting market forces at the top of the class'*(12th August 1999) Barry Maley, a senior fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies, stated that at present the education system suited teachers and bureaucrats at the expense of parents and children. The article progressed with Barry Maley listing all of the merits of

privatising public education. There were also articles which suggested that striking teachers were putting parents jobs at risk (3rd of May 2000**)** and then a very sensational article entitled '*Nightmare looms for Linda* (17th November 1999). This article focused on the difficulties Linda, a parent, was facing due to having a premature son in one hospital and a husband recovering from a spinal injury in another and now having to take her three primary school aged children with her to the hospital to feed her baby and see her husband, as a result of the teachers strike. *Don't ruin my only chance-a school girl's message to her teachers-back to school the battlefield* (30th of January 2000) was the title of an article which appeared in the Sunday Telegraph. In this article a school girl pleads with her teachers to stop striking.

During this time period The Australian provided a slightly less biased representation of the teachers' industrial campaign**.** In articles such as, *'Crisis in the Common room'* **(**12th February 1999), Catherine Armitage informed readers that teachers had been their own worst enemies with regard to community sympathy but also cited academic, Dr Andrew Spaull, who explained that there was a lack of community awareness over the increased complexity and work intensification involved in teaching. In another article in the Australian, *Teachers strike mayhem* (9th February 1999), John Stapleton initially considered how both sides of the political realm viewed the strike as unreasonable but then went on to state that the Parents and Citizens Association support the strike as teachers salary and status had been declining over the years in relation to other professions.

Articles also appeared during this time in the Sydney Morning Herald which suggested that both the Teachers Federation and teachers did not care about students. Other articles in the Sydney morning Herald extolled the virtues of privatization. Padraic Mcguiness (20th November 1999) in an article titled, **'***Teach em a lesson'* stated that the problem with education, was not funding, but rather that the Federation knew they could get away with abusing the system and the kids, who he called their "cannon fodder". He suggested that job tenure was too secure, allowing for the retention of incompetent teachers. Director General of the NSW Department of education, Ken Boston (17 November 1999) argued that the Teachers Federation had no idea about the concerns of parents as consumers and that they should listen to these concerns and accept the new award.

The media's portrayal of public education as bad and privatisation as good, with a focus on students and parents as clients, is indicative of the broader neo liberal changes taking place in learning environments.

Neo liberalism, the state and public education

According to O'Riain (2000, pp188,193), three different types of economies emerge in neo liberal globalisation, depending on whether a nation state is liberal, a social rights state or a developing state. In

Australia the nation state is liberal. The purpose of the liberal state is its endorsement of the market into all areas of society and even into the state itself. The state is needed to generate the conditions that allow for a free market society.

Since 1983, the Australian Labor government started to move toward a neo liberal economic agenda (Kaptein, 1993). Both Hawke's (1983-1994) and then Keating's (1994-1996) adherence to the free market programmes became stronger and stronger in the latter part of Labor's time in government (Quiggen, 1998:5). The advocacy of a free market ideology in the Labor party was a result of the dominance that the right and centre left had in the Party.

The neo liberal pro market Howard government was elected in 1996. Since then Howard has produced policies that have severely curtailed the power of unions in relation to employee rights and protection. Labour-market programmes and public service employment have been greatly reduced (Quiggen 1998, pg13). Bryan (2002, pg 2) argues that Howard's neo liberalism is not just based on a free market philosophy but also on social conservatism. Social conservatism is regulatory. Neo liberalism needs to be explained in terms of a political agenda.

While Howard initially promoted a free market resulting in increased privatisation, and the corporatisation of large parts of the public sector, his underlying philosophy is one of individual responsibility focused on the family unit. Self–reliance and the dominance of entrepreneurship are the driving force within this philosophy. Bryan provides a number of examples of Howard's regulatory policies (Bryan 2000, pg3). Far from promoting de-regulation, in recent years the Howard Government has regulated in favour of capital and at the expense of labour (Bryan 2000 pg7). For examples of these policies see Bryan (2000).

Not all employment relations are capitalist in a capitalist society. There needs to be an awareness of the difference between these employment relations, such as between state sector and private sector employment. This does not mean that state sector employment relations can be disregarded. This sector is crucially important to contemporary capitalism (Thompson 1990, pg110). Publicly owned sectors, such as the education system, have been significantly influenced by general trends shaped by neo liberal capitalism

Public education which traditionally functioned as a system for the transmission of culture (Munt 2001, pg1) and was once perceived as a common good (Reid 2002, pg573) has increasingly become commodified (Munt 2001, pg1). Since the 1980's, publicly owned infrastructure such as water, transport, welfare and education have increasingly been viewed as better managed through the private sector (Reid 2002, pg 577)

The consequences of massive funding cuts to public education have been obscured by the mass media who have essentially apportioned all blame for any public education deficiencies to teachers and the inefficiencies of the public education system (Munt 2001, pg 3, 7). The allocation of blame to teachers and the portrayal of education as a commodity have had a significant impact on the working lives of teachers (Munt 2001, pg1) and thus the environment in which learning takes place.

In her qualitative study on how changes in education have impacted on the lives of teachers, Munt (2001, pp11-15) discovered that teachers have essentially lost all control over the content and practices of their work with regard to the curriculum. Many found out about new policies through press releases or through brochures which they received from the Department of Education, once the policies had already been developed. While many of the teachers remained committed to public education, they believed that the government had forsaken its obligation to public education.

Dinham and Scott (2003, pg84) claim that both the educational and social environment in which teaching takes place is crucial to how teachers view their worlds. In 2000, Dinham and Scott (2000, pg 380) in a project entitled 'The teacher 2000 project', focused on how teachers were coping in the present educational climate. Through a self-report questionnaire, Dinham and Scott (2000, pg380 and 2003, pg84) found that, generally, teachers experienced satisfaction with regard to their own teaching and the achievement of their students. Teachers were less happy about factors within their schools, such as decision making (Dinham & Scott 2003, pg84). However, the least amount of satisfaction which they experienced was with regard to the wider realm of society, governments and the Department of Education. They were upset by both the rapid policy changes to public education which were imposed on them and the increase in their workloads. Work load had increased simultaneously with a decrease in their status. Community perceptions of teachers were negative with many people in the community believing that teachers working conditions were very easy. Negative perceptions about teachers and public education were largely cultivated by the media (Dinham & Scott 2000, pg389; Dinham & Scott 2003, pg84).

This was the macro political economic and social context in which teaching was taking place at the time I carried out my interviews. There is much evidence to suggest that while social relationships, particularly friendships, have been viewed to be a result of essentially individual voluntary choices, friendships and other social relationships are in reality influenced by both cultural and structural factors (Fine 1986; O'Connor 1998; Sias & Cahill, 1998).

Social relationships in the workplace

The importance of friendships and camaraderie in the workplace has been noted by a number of social scientists (Fine 1986; Marks 1994a; Marks 1994b; Andrew &Montague, 1998; Sias &Cahill 1998). Marks (1994a) carried out a number of different types of studies in order to explore intimate friendships in the workplace. Generally, people appear to share workplace friendships and perceive these to be a source of support, advice and companionship, which often fill in the gaps for those who are alone or for those who have unrewarding relationships in the private sphere (Marks, 1994a, pg 849). Fine (1986, pp185,191) claims that both instrumental and emotional relationships exist in the workplace, in addition to solidarity among those in the who have little or no control over their work. Evidence from Pocock's (2003, p86) study highlights the importance women placed on camaraderie in the workplace, seeing work as a basis of community and social life. Deyo's (1980, pg80) interviews with 24 women textile workers in Singapore in 1976 were intended to explore the nature and motivation underlying workplace friendships. Sixty seven percent of the women stated that the best thing about their jobs was their friends and co-workers. Nineteen out of twenty four stated that if they left work the thing that they would miss the most was their friends. The workers placed a lot of significance on mutual help, humour and dealing with superiors (Deyo1980, pp80-81).

Edith High

The school was a public secondary school situated in a lower middle class, ethnically diverse area. The table below outlines some of the demographic characteristics of the staff whom I interviewed from the school, which I have called Edith high.

Sex	Age	Occupation	Education	Marital status	Income	Household Income	Child/ No/Age
M	45-54	Head Teacher-Creative Arts	Tertiary	Married	Over 45 000	Over 45 000	One/11
M	55+	Deputy Principal	Tertiary	Married	Over 45 000	Over 45 000	Three/17,25,28
M	45-54	Councillor	Tertiary	Married	Over 45 000	Over 45000	Two/15,17
M	45-54	Teacher	Tertiary	Married	Over 45 000	Over 45 00	One/12
F	35-44	Head Teacher	Tertiary	Married	Over 45 000	Over 45 000	Two/11,13
M	35-44	Teacher	Tertiary	Married	Over 45 000	Over 45 000	Three/1mth,4,7
F	45-54	Teacher/PT	Tertiary	Married	25-34 000	Over 45 000	Two/14,16
F	45-54	Principal	Tertiary	Married	Over 45000	Over 45 000	Three/13,15,19
M	25-34	Teacher	Tertiary	Single	Over 45 000	Over 45 000	No
M	35-44	Teacher	Tertiary	Married	Over 45 000	Over 45 000	Two/2,5

F	25-34	Admin Assistant	Higher school Certificate	Married	0 - 14 000	Over 45 000	Two/6,9
F	35-44	Admin Assistant	School Certificate	Married			Two/15,18

The interviews with teachers and other school staff were carried out between August 2000 and September 2001. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between one to two hours. I had set open-ended questions. However, if the participants brought up issues that were of relevance to my research, I would question them further about these issues. I would then ask the next respondent the same questions. For example, the first teacher that I interviewed talked about the negative portrayal of teachers by the media as a result of an industrial campaign the year before. We then discussed whether this had created more solidarity or conflict among teachers. The issue of how demoralised teachers felt was brought up by a few teachers and I was thus prompted to ask other teachers about how they felt as a result of the media's portrayal of teachers and how the industrial campaign the previous year had divided and united teachers. All of the interviews took place at the school, with the exception of one, whom I interviewed in his home.

The year prior to carrying out interviews at the school there had been a large industrial campaign over teachers' pay. The mainstream media had portrayed the teachers very negatively in the reporting of the campaign which had left many of the teachers feeling angry towards the government (at both a state and federal level), the education department and the media. They felt the media representation of the campaign had led to very negative public perceptions of teachers which had left many of the teachers feeling very demoralised. While some of the teachers, particularly the school principal, did not appear to be affected by these perceptions or at least did not allude to it in the interviews, the general consensus among those that I interviewed at the school was a feeling of demoralisation. Feelings of "resentment towards the media" and "a lack of status and support in the wider community" made some wonder "what they were working so hard for" when their efforts were so unappreciated. Two of the teachers said that they did not admit to being teachers in public. When I asked Martin, a science teacher, about the changes that had occurred in the last five years and how these changes had affected him, he claimed that the:

Work load has increased dramatically. Community expectations have changed dramatically. The standing within the community has changed dramatically. All for the worse. It affects me in that I don't talk too much about what I do for a job because people don't like teachers in general. I have always had to work two jobs to get myself to a point where my mother and father were with only one job. And generally the job is more, I don't like to use the word stressful, because that's such a throw away phase these days, but its definitely a lot more strain in the way that you go about your job.

Roy, a head teacher supported Martin's claims:

Work load has increased significantly. Actual pay has decreased. In my view if I go out now and once again I blame the current government, I tend to hide the fact that I am a teacher because of their manipulation of the media and the projection that they put across of the sort of things that I do. I get that regurgitated by the non thinking masses out there and some times it can get very unpleasant. That has certainly deteriorated under the current government.

William the deputy principal of the school was also dismayed by the way in which teachers had been portrayed in the media:

I think the recent industrial turmoil we have had, like 18 months over the last pay case has been fairly stressful. Fairly damaging of the image of teachers in the community and I think it has also soured a lot of teachers sort of thing. The sort of lack of perceived support from people they thought should have been supportive. I guess they are the biggest stresses and changes that have taken place in the last five years. You know you feel angry, and resentment at times about unfair generalisations, that are made in the media. You feel tired. You do at times think, what are you doing all this for? I think that is natural, I think that everybody feels that at some point about their work.

According to Tony, the school counsellor, the negative treatment and portrayals of teachers had led, "to a level of solidarity among the teachers in general". There was, however, conflict between teachers who were union members and those who were not.

Many of the teachers found their jobs very stressful due to demands made by the Education Department. Restructuring and conflict over duties and responsibilities had left many of the teachers feeling very strained. This had united some of the teachers who felt that they were in the "same boat" and that the common enemy was the Education Department. Some of the teachers felt that they had considerable autonomy in their classrooms, and some at the school level, but none in relation to decisions handed down by the state Education Department. Other teachers felt that they had very little autonomy both at the level of the school and the education department. The leadership of the school had also changed, which while embraced positively by some, was experienced very negatively by others. While the Principal sincerely believed in teamwork and employee participation and felt that this was reflected in her approach to running the school, some of the teachers I interviewed felt that they had very little control with relation to issues at the school level. Wendy, a head teacher, reinforced this claim:

> *Quite often, no, and that relates to the Department of Education and to the management of the school. I often feel fairly powerless. You know that you not necessarily being listened to. That is fairly frequent.*

Another teacher explained that while his opinion was routinely asked for, he never really felt that he was listened to. He suggested that while someone needed to "take the bull by the horns," to get some things done, you did need to get everyone's agreement on other things for them to work properly. However, others had greeted the changes in school leadership with enthusiasm, feeling that changes in the

leadership had resulted in greater value being placed on their subjects, which had been downgraded by some executive members prior to the arrival of the new principal.

Some of the teachers felt that major decisions were made by the government which had no contact with them whatsoever. This made them cynical towards the decision making process. It was frustrating as many worked very hard to achieve particular things which would all be “dumped down the drain and you had no control over it whatsoever”. As a result, many teachers had simply given up and this led to further conflict between staff.

At an even more micro level, many of the teachers were happy with the amount of autonomy which they were given by the head teachers of their staff room. Roy, a head teacher at the high school, talked about the importance of flexibility as a manager. He said that you “needed to work out what people need from you and then deliver that”. He said that some young inexperienced teachers needed lots of direction and others did not need any at all. One of the teachers, who worked under Roy, in response to a question about how he felt about his work, mentioned that one of the most positive aspects of his work was the amount of autonomy which he exercised. He later said that a good manager was one who was able to delegate in a truly autonomous manner. This teacher believed that everyone worked better together because of Roy’s attitude.

The feeling that one had a certain amount of control and autonomy appeared to be a positive influence on the development of good workplace relationships Participants’ experiences of autonomy and empowerment with relation to their work also influenced how they got along with others. It was the participant who felt like they experienced a higher level of autonomy who enjoyed their work most.

Another factor influencing worker satisfaction in the larger study which I carried out was status. Many of the teachers felt demoralised by the lack of status which was now afforded to teaching. Angus, a drama teacher, who enjoyed the work that he did, stated that:

> *I don't enjoy the lack of status that teaching now has. There are times where it had higher status than what it does at the moment, so it’s a bit of a low point. I enjoy it in terms of what I am actually doing, because of the function of imparting knowledge to other people, to other people's minds, trying to make people think. I enjoy the process of teaching, I enjoy the process of communicating things, I enjoy the process of realising somebody else understanding what you are communicating to them. So I get a buzz out of all of that. I wish it had higher status, only because I think all human beings to some extent, most people, can't extricate themselves totally from a public perspective of themselves.*

All the teachers that I spoke to were very committed to the ideal of public education. Some were particularly dismayed at the lack of funding given to public education and the governments underlying

motives of privatising education. They claimed that teachers within the state school system saw themselves as “having a duty to every kid who walks through the door here”, as opposed to the private school system which “had a business mentality”. There was also dismay expressed at the way in which the media had represented public education. Wendy, a head teacher stated that:

> *The perception of public education out there, you know every day I pick up the Herald, and another article basically bagging public education. I find that very frustrating when I know there are a lot of people in the system who are very dedicated, hard working fantastic teachers.*

Tony, the school councillor who also worked in a number of very disadvantaged schools, felt passionately angry at the government’s agenda to privatise education, which he felt that many in the community were unaware of. According to Tony:

> *Yeah, well they have a corporate mentality and the way they view education, you have to question their motives. They don't really care. I mean their policy in terms of privatising education is just for the elites. I am not against people in private schools, I am just saying that people in private schools have excellent networking, for industry etc.. and they are taken care of. Kids from public education certainly kids from disadvantaged backgrounds are not able to network. They don't have parents who work as professionals and they don't have those links. If we end up with a two tiered system where we have the growth of heaps of private schools and a decline in public schools, that by definition will marginalise kids from being able to access things which are just mainstream for the kids from private schools and for kids from public schools in more affluent areas.*

In comparison to other employees a majority of school teachers in NSW still experience fairly high rates of job security. They do however face the threat of having to transfer to other schools. As Hannah, the school principal explained, “public sector schools are shrinking and many of the schools that I have been in are experiencing a reduction in staff. Staff are being forced to move”. Thus as Hannah and some of the other teachers commented, they always had the underlying worry that they may be transferred to another school. This was also the case for the administrative staff who I spoke to who had already had their hours cut back. While their hours had been cut back their work load had increased significantly.

Many of the teachers relied on both formal solidarity in terms of the union and informal types of solidarity to cope with changes which had occurred to their working lives at both the macro and micro level. These relationships were both shaped and constrained by workplaces changes.

A lack of time, as a result of work intensification and segregated departments, constrained social relations across faculties but created closer relationships within faculties. There was a lot of camaraderie in some staff rooms which stemmed from working together in a small space, lack of resources in comparison to other faculties, annoyance at the hierarchy within the school and the good management style of some head teachers.

A number of the teachers and counsellors believed that the type of work that they did influenced how they related to their co-workers in that they shared a common situation and thus an empathy with one another. One of the teachers stated, that her job did affect how she got along with her co-workers because, “teaching is very people orientated” and another said that, “although teachers are diverse, there is a similarity”.

The majority of the teachers had families and thus trying to balance their working and private lives did not leave them a lot of time to develop friendships. However, many saw good social relationships and friendships as being very effective for both the workplace and the staff. Quite a few of the teachers talked about the importance of friendships in the workplace, stating that, “if some people require intimacy to help them get through the day and work becomes part of their social, then I guess it could be important”, and that “ having friendships, I don’t think you could avoid, I mean if all you are doing is relating to your colleagues in a totally dry, professional basis, I think it is a very dehumanising environment” and “it kind of makes you look forward to coming in here on a Monday morning”. Other teachers saw friendships in the workplace as less important and were more focused on their family relationships in the private sphere. Quite a few of the male teachers at the school had fairly close friendships that were often confined to people in their faculties. While some teachers did have friendships that spanned across faculties, there seemed to be less opportunity for people to develop friendship across faculties, as discussed previously. Some of the teachers met together for drinks on a Friday afternoon while others had close relationships with one or two co-workers. One of the other teachers spoke of how they had become close in his faculty due to the dwindling number of people left in the faculty. He believed that “lack of time” prevented a lot of socialisation across faculties. One of the drama teachers at the school talked about a friend in the workplace that he saw occasionally and with whom he had a trusting relationship. He said that they could have “deep and meaningful” conversations outside work but not at work as “this type of work did not allow for that”. Audrey, a casual teacher at the school, had close friends in the workplace with their relationships being based on common interests and activities, such as craft.

Essentially, the teachers seemed to focus more on collective relationships for dealing with stress. While there was not a lot of socialising among the teachers across staff rooms there were some organised social events that teachers went to such as ‘farewells’, but these appeared to be seen more as an obligation than a voluntary fun outing. One of the teachers, Ian, said that there was a common room which hardly ever got used as most of the time the teachers were too busy and thus had very interrupted lunchtimes in their staff rooms.

The administrative staff had experienced work intensification, which meant that they had to co-operate with one another to get their work done. Many sat together for morning tea which allowed for the development of some camaraderie. Relationships became strained among staff who appeared not to be doing their full workload or that “bit extra”, as this made things harder for everyone else. Instead of feeling resentful towards the school hierarchy or Education Department for increasing workloads or lack of staff, it was workers “who did not do that bit extra” that were blamed. Therefore, there were factors in the school that both facilitated and constrained good workplace relationships and friendships.

A few of the teachers believed that there was a basic camaraderie or solidarity among teachers as a result of the recent attacks by the government and media on teachers, and the resulting negative public perception of teachers. The persecution of teachers by the public as a result of their portrayal by the media led to the creation of an informal solidarity among the teachers. More organised forms of solidarity were also used. Teachers have increasingly relied on the union to resist neo liberal workplace changes.

Conclusion

In recent years both the federal and state government have pursued changes to public education which have diminished the autonomy and status experienced by teachers. Despite the efforts of many teachers, these changes have also impacted negatively on the life opportunities of students who attend public schools. Evidence from this study suggests that the negative media portrayal of teachers, resulting in overwhelmingly negative community reactions to teachers, resulted in many teachers feeling very demoralised, undermined and resentful towards an unthinking public who were unaware of their dedication and hard work. The school at which I carried out interviews had also experienced changes in the leadership of the school which had been perceived as both empowering and disempowering by different teachers within the school. All of the teachers were very dedicated and committed to public education with regard to its importance in providing opportunities to all students regardless of their backgrounds.

Dominant neo liberal ideologies promulgated through the media have increasingly conjured up an association of privatisation with efficiency while simultaneously blaming the deficiencies created in the public education system, as a result of a lack of funding, on the system itself.

The media crises created around public education and the media’s portrayal of teachers led to some conflict among teachers who were union members and those who were not. However, the above study suggests that public teachers as ‘learners’ have essentially coped with this media onslaught and community reactions to it, through developing both informal and more formalised forms of camaraderie

and solidarity. While informal relationships were a great source of support to many teachers, it was a more formalised type of solidarity, in the form of the Teacher Federation which was instrumental in the protection of teachers' rights and to some extent public education.

Data from the larger study of which this is a part, suggests that teachers have resisted negative workplace changes in a much more collective way than their middle class counterparts in privately owned organisations. Ideologies associated with neo liberal workplace changes have increasingly encouraged a reliance on individualistic strategies to cope with structural workplace changes. The teachers in this study were able to see the commonness of their situation much more clearly than many employees in other types of occupations, regardless of the media's attempt to pit teachers against one another. The importance teachers have placed on public education is rivalled by both an unrelenting government and media who persistently devalue public education and the work done by teachers.

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