Political control, subversion and survival: a grounded theory of the disempowerment of a profession

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NOTE

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CHAPTER 6
EXPLICATING THE THEORY

I hope that much about the grounded theory is revealed in the presentation of the data in the analysis chapter, through the words of the informants. It remains, however, to explicitly detail the framework of the grounded theory constructed by the grounded theory procedure. This section of the thesis explains the grounded theory in conceptual terms. The conditions of the grounded theory, as revealed by the analysis of data, are described and the relationships among the conditions are discussed. The grounded theory is also sited within the socio-political-historical contexts of the NSW secondary education system, as discussed in the background, rationale and literature review of this thesis.

This study set out to examine the relationships between three key areas of NSW secondary school literacy education in subject English, namely:

- Teacher practice
- NSW DET policies
- Teacher preservice education

The grounded theory developed in this study synthesises the relationships between these components of the NSW education into a grounded theory. The framework for the presentation of the grounded theory is the theory itself, as outlined in previous chapters. The explication of the theory is presented in three major sections, which represent the conceptualisation of the ‘process’ of the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Those processes are presented as the ‘phases of the disempowerment of a profession’, namely:

- The Professional Phase
- The Institutional Phase
- The Personal Phase

Each phase of the grounded theory is comprised of the major categories conceptualised during the analysis of data. Those categories are, for the purpose of discussing the
grounded theory, labelled as the ‘conditions of the disempowerment of a profession’. Each condition of the grounded theory is shown within the relevant phase in Figure 6.1:

**Figure 6.1:** Phases and conditions of the grounded theory

Grounded theory procedure revealed the theory to be self-perpetuating and as such the conditions of the grounded theory are also represented in Figure 6.2:

**Figure 6.2:** The cycle of the disempowerment of a profession
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THE PROFESSIONAL PHASE OF DISEMPowerMENT

The professional phase of disempowerment represents the processes involved in undermining the criteria of a profession within NSW Secondary English teaching, particularly relating to the teaching of literacy and language. Those criteria are that a profession be:

- Client-oriented
- Knowledge-based
- Internally accountable
  (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995)

The three conditions of the professional phase of disempowerment were found during data analysis to directly undermine the ability of teaching to meet the criteria common to professions. The three conditions of the professional phase of disempowerment are:

- Political control
- Professional powerlessness
- Theory deficit

Table 6.1 presents the conditions of the professional phase of disempowerment alongside the criteria for a profession, aligning each condition with the criteria it most undermines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for a Profession</th>
<th>Conditions of the Professional Phase of Disempowerment</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client-oriented</td>
<td>Political Control (Employer policy oriented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Accountability</td>
<td>Professional Powerlessness (Accountable to employer &amp; political masters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge based</td>
<td>Theory Deficit (Employer policy based)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Darling-Hammond et al., 1995, p.16-17)
The professional phase of disempowerment appears to be self-perpetuating. The cycle of the professional phase is represented in Figure 6.3:

![Figure 6.3: The professional phase of disempowerment](image)

It is argued that the relationships among the conditions present serious challenges to the ability of Secondary English teaching to function appropriately, as an empowered profession. Rather than arguing that teaching is not a profession, it is argued that teaching has been prevented from meeting the criteria of a profession by the relationships among the conditions of the professional phase. The conditions are self-perpetuating and cyclic in that, where the conditions are present, they prevent a profession from developing strategies aimed at meeting the very criteria by which it might be so defined.

**Political Control**

The analysis of data, literature and archival data revealed that NSW secondary education has evolved and grown considerably since the Second World War. The boom in post-war enrolments, the development of a uniform, comprehensive secondary education system and the subsequent rises in retention rates meant that secondary school education became a major expense for both Federal and State Governments. Despite growth overall, in Federal Government funding of State Government schools, the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) spent on education steadily declined for almost three decades, while enrolments and retention rates soared. As the Australian
Federal Government began funding schools it increasingly tied funding, both directly and indirectly, to accountability at the political level. In recent years this accountability has been achieved through increased bureaucratic and Ministerial control and the tying of funding to Federally regulated conditions. Those conditions, and the ideologies behind them, appear to be tied to international political and economic trends and influences.

Over the same period the Federal Government also assumed control and funding of teacher preservice education, through the merging of the various institutions with Federally-governed universities. Teacher shortages during the 1970s led to a lowering of standards as teachers without specific training were allowed to enter the NSW secondary system. Similar shortages are again looming in NSW at the present time. The control of funding by the Federal Government of teacher preservice education led to the abandonment of programs leading to degrees in secondary education for prospective secondary English teachers. Numerous studies and commentators have raised concerns about the quality of secondary teacher preservice education since the 1970s.

As government spending on education has grown so, too, has political control of NSW education policies. The NSW state government has, over the past three decades, increased its control of the two bureaucracies which govern NSW school policies – the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Board of Studies NSW (BOS). The DET and BOS are separate, politically structured and controlled entities. The NSW Minister for Education and the NSW Premier (the elected head of State Government) have regularly exercised control of membership of the governing bodies and have intervened in policy decisions. The Minister for Education has taken control of policy making bureaucracies and maintained the right of veto over DET and BOS policy decisions. Indeed, the Minister retains absolute power in policy decisions. This has particularly been evidenced through the issuing of compulsory assessment procedures and syllabus documents.

The teaching profession has little input to, or control over, policy development in NSW schools. Professional associations are given only the same opportunities to comment on draft policies that community groups and individuals are afforded. The political control of the systemic bureaucracy appears to have held teachers accountable for ELLA, School Certificate and Higher School Certificate results. Teacher practice, therefore, appears to be bound, to some degree, to accountability to the political controllers of the system through those assessment procedures.
Political control of the system also appears to operate at the level of ideology. DET and BOS officials aligned to particular ideologies and educational pedagogies engage in manipulation of policies in order to further their ideological objectives. This political control of policies and teacher practice, through ideologies, has operated at both the government and bureaucratic levels during policy development. This is particularly evidenced by the implementation, subsequent withdrawal and re-writing of Functional Grammar in NSW policy documents. Government directions to remove the grammar appear motivated by political needs rather than educational aims, while the resistance to its removal by policy developers appear to be motivated by ideological imperatives.

The NSW State Government in recent years has also assumed direct control of the nature and content of professional development in NSW schools. The provision of ‘in-house professional development’ and the imposition of ‘assessment oriented professional development’ by the DET and the withdrawal of funding for external professional development illustrates the extent of the political control of teacher professional development. That political control appears to be reinforced by the willingness of professional associations to provide professional development specifically for DET and BOS policies rather than in professional knowledge-bases.

The NSW DET, in the absence of a regulatory professional body, has assumed control of the accreditation of secondary English teachers. Departmental officials and the Minister set the standards prospective teachers must meet in order to enter into teacher preservice education or the NSW school system as graduate teachers. DET guidelines control university standards of entry to teacher preservice education and DET approvals for individual students to undergo teacher education are required by every university in NSW.

Universities also adhere to DET guidelines as the only guidelines for compulsory content in teacher preservice education programs. Entry to teacher education programs also appear to be controlled by government demand for teachers rather than by professional guidelines. Standards appeared to be secondary to the need to supply a maximum number of teachers. The extent to which political imperatives direct this is illustrated by the ‘Targeted Graduate’ system, whereby the majority of student teachers are ‘targeted’ and accelerated into positions within schools.

The political control of the structure and nature of teacher preservice education programs also has serious implications for teacher practice, through impacts on
educational research in literacy and language in secondary English. Federal control of universities and the Australian Postgraduate Award Scheme (APA) means that student secondary English teachers can rarely, if ever, graduate with Honours First Class in Education and obtain prestigious research scholarships in Education at Australian universities.

The political control of the NSW education system undermines the ability of the teaching profession to remain ‘client-oriented’. (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995)

Teacher, student-teacher and lecturer informants openly state that DET and BOS policies are a major influence on their educational practices. The profession has little input or control over those policies and they appear to be manipulated for ideological and political purposes at a number of levels. As such, it would be difficult to argue that the policies are driven by a focus on student needs. Certainly, there appears to be no systemic, democratic process by which the teaching profession can ensure that policies reflect teacher concerns for student needs.

Professional Powerlessness

As the secondary education system has expanded in NSW political control appears to have replaced professional autonomy and power. During the post-war expansion of tertiary education other professions, such as medicine and nursing, established more rigorous professional structures to safeguard professional power, autonomy and quality. When compared to other professions, no such professional structures exist in teaching. The political control of the school education system, including teacher preservice education, ensures that teachers have no means for self-regulation of entry to the profession or for professional standards of practice.

Teacher professional representatives have complained of a ‘whitewash consultation process’ whereby they are consulted only after major policy directions have already been determined. The profession is not represented at the highest levels of the BOS and DET and has no control over final decisions of either bureaucracies or those of the Minister for Education. The inability of the profession to resist the issue and withdrawal of major policies, including syllabus documents, during the study illustrated the extent of the professional powerlessness of teachers. Major decisions have largely been controlled by politicians, officials and academics, while the English
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Teachers’ Association (ETA) has repeatedly reported to its members that it has been unable to satisfactorily address teacher concerns with new policy directions.

Teacher educators have turned to policies, issued by the politically controlled state employing authority, to fill the void in professional guidelines for teacher preservice education. Universities use NSW DET and BOS policies, in the place of professional guidelines, to regulate the following crucial areas of teacher preservice education:

- The selection of candidates for teacher preservice education
- The requirements for entry to teaching in NSW schools
- Compulsory course content in secondary English teacher preservice education programs
- Course content specific to the teaching of literacy and language in secondary English

The lack of professional power in self-regulation of these areas, along with the area of professional development, appears to have severely impacted on the knowledge-base of the profession, producing a theory deficit among teachers.

Theory Deficit

The political control of NSW school education and the inability of the profession to self-regulate has impacted considerably on teacher access to the knowledge-base which might inform the profession. Policies, teacher practice and teacher preservice education appear to be denied the benefits that access to the theoretically rich conceptualisations of literacy and language education developed in the past fifty years might offer the profession.

NSW policies relating to the teaching of literacy and language have generally reflected cutting-edge theories and pedagogies. In recent years, however, the lack of control by the profession has led to a single approach to teaching literacy being prescribed for NSW teachers of English. Policies have openly stated that all literacy practices in NSW schools are to be based on a Functional View of Language. The pedagogy outlined in policy documents is based on the curriculum cycle and follows the Systemic tradition. Few professions could tolerate a situation where professional practice is supposed to be controlled by one approach or theoretical orientation. Professional knowledge bases need to be informed from a number of sources and must
obviously be capable of incorporating new research and developments in theory and
practice as they evolve.

In this manner NSW policies, while incorporating innovative approaches, appear
deficient in meeting the needs of an empowered profession. The policies lack detail of
their theoretical orientation and deny teachers the opportunity to enhance new
approaches with either newer or older orientations. It has often been difficult to identify
the knowledge bases on which NSW policies draw. This point is illustrated quite clearly
by the use of a Functional View of Language and Functional Grammar in English
syllabus documents. None of the documents openly state the theoretical framework on
which they are based. Indeed, where the policies state that they utilise traditional
grammar they, in fact, utilise a disguised Functional Grammar.

Despite being acknowledged within the school system as playing a special role in
literacy development teacher education has remained based firmly in the Arts. The vast
majority of secondary English teachers in NSW train through Bachelor’s Degree with
add-on Graduate Diploma in Education (GDE) or equivalent. English teachers’
academic experience is based in the study of literature and rarely encompasses the study
of language or literacy education.

Few English teachers appear to hold detailed understandings of the major
conceptualisations of literacy and language to have evolved over the past fifty years.
Teacher knowledge about Process Writing, Whole Language or a Functional View of
Language appears particularly poor. This lack of knowledge of the theories
underpinning literacy policies means that secondary English teachers have been poorly
equipped to meet the challenges of the burgeoning education system or of our changing
understandings of literacy education.

Secondary English teachers appear to have retained a preference for approaches to
English education based on the study of literature. Their lack of knowledge of the
conceptualisations on which policies have been based in the past 50 years has led to
situation where literacy is considered as a discrete set of ‘language’ skills, separate from
the study of subject English. Changes in literacy and language education policies have
been largely perceived by English teachers as ‘new names’ for ‘old approaches’.

The focus in recent policies on a Functional View of Language and Text Types
appears to have been interpreted as requiring a return to the traditional approach of
focusing on grammar and ‘language skills’ in isolation. This misinterpretation of
policies appears similar to the ways in which Whole Language was interpreted during
the 1980s and 1990s. Lack of professional development in the complex social and language theories underpinning the new approaches adopted in policies appears to lead to simplistic, prescriptive implementation of complex, contextualised, holistic theories and pedagogies. The problem appears to be that the theories and policies were not so much misinformed, but that teachers were under-resourced to be able to understand and implement them in schools.

This problem has manifested itself recently in the ways in which Pro-forma Text Type Scaffolds have been implemented. Genre Theory is a theoretically rich framework which depends on language education through explicit, rhetorical discussion about language achieves particular social purposes. The lack of understanding of the theoretical framework informing Genre Theory has led to decontextualised, prescriptive implementation, where the focus is on arbitrary, sequential textual structure, rather than on the ways in which language might achieve its social function. A renewed emphasis on traditional grammar and prescriptive structure appears to be the consequence of the lack of teacher understanding of the new policies.

That secondary English teachers have little knowledge of the conceptualisations which have informed policies is not surprising, given the nature of teacher preservice education programs. It is virtually impossible for new graduate teachers to have detailed knowledge of the conceptualisations of literacy and language which have informed NSW literacy policies. There is a long history of teacher dissatisfaction with the nature of teacher preservice education in NSW. Such perceptions appear common among teacher educators, student teachers and teachers. The short nature of GDE-style programs ensures that it is almost impossible to give even the newest graduates the theoretical grounding needed to give them control of recent policies, much less access to the wider knowledge-base of the profession. The continuum of professional development is severely hampered by a situation where even new graduates have little understanding of the latest policies.

The political control of the school system and the lack of professional development for teachers ensures that older, more experienced teachers have little opportunity to develop their understandings of the theories which underpin new approaches. Professional associations appear to be dominated by a need to resource the employing authorities’ policies with teaching resources rather than with the promotion of research and true professional development and further education. Indeed, many
secondary English teachers appear to hold theory in low regard and do not consider it important in informing their everyday teaching.

Theory deficit completes the circle of the professional phase of the disempowerment of teaching as a profession. The political control of school education and teacher powerlessness to deal with it mean that they often encounter policies based on theoretical frameworks they are not able to fully understand. It is possible to argue that the inability to understand policies fully restricts teachers’ ability to resist and argue against new policies, further weakening their ability to fight against their own professional powerlessness and political control.

**The Institutional Phase of Disempowerment**

The conditions of the professional phase of disempowerment of the profession of secondary English teaching govern the systemic context within which schools and teachers operate. Those conditions are part of and intertwined with the conditions conceptualised as the institutional phase of the disempowerment of the profession. The institutional phase of disempowerment is represented in Figure 6.4:

![Figure 6.4: The institutional phase of disempowerment](image)
Specifically, the additional conditions of disempowerment which contribute to the institutional phase of disempowerment are:

- Professional Isolation
- System Overload

**Professional Isolation**

Professional isolation is both physical and temporal. English, as the core subject in the NSW curriculum, places high demand on staffing, housing and classroom facilities. These demands have increased dramatically since the introduction of the comprehensive secondary education system in 1964 and the subsequent rapid growth in retention rates. Classroom teachers and school executives report that the system has grown to a size where they feel isolated from their immediate supervisors.

English faculties in NSW high schools are invariably the largest teaching department in each school. Split staffrooms, inconsistent timetabling of rooms and the use of non-English department staff to teach subject English mean that English staff are often spread across campus, particularly in large schools. The demands of timetabling and extra-curricula activities make it difficult for teachers to meet and support each other. Both classroom teachers and executive staff report that they find it increasingly more difficult to stay in touch with colleagues and modern advancements in teaching practice.

Classrooms can also be isolating places for teachers. Few teachers appear to be given the opportunity to visit other classrooms or to share knowledge or experience with colleagues. This situation is exacerbated by the political control of funding for professional development. Few teachers are able to obtain relief from class to attend professional development. Professional development has increasingly come to mean training in employer policies rather than development in professional practice by peers.

As the raft of new policies of recent years have been released teachers have been largely left to deal with new theories and pedagogies on their own. Teachers in NSW are not required to be members of any professional associations or support networks. Without the support of professional peers and informed, planned professional
development teachers often feel that they do not understand new policies and that they have been abandoned to cope with an ever burgeoning system alone.

The English Teachers’ Association (ETA) has attempted to address this increasing isolation during the past three decades by increasing the quantity of units of work (lessons) it publishes in *mETApHor*, the ETA journal. English teacher membership of the ETA, however, remains quite low. The low membership of the ETA contributes to the powerlessness of the profession and means that classroom teachers remain largely isolated from policy development, teacher accreditation and teacher preservice education.

In addition, teachers are also isolated from the very mechanisms which determine the knowledge-base of the profession. The nature of the GDE (or equivalent) teacher education system precludes secondary English teachers from engaging in the most direct, best supported and most prestigious postgraduate research paths. Secondary English teachers cannot access the Australian Postgraduate Award scheme for doctorate scholarships to pursue research pathways in education and are restricted to access to their subject disciplines. For teachers of English this means they are able to pursue scholarships at the doctorate level for research in the study of literature but not language and literacy education.

The impact of professional isolation on the institutional phase of disempowerment has been exacerbated by the ever increasing demands of the NSW education system.

**System Overload**

As the NSW secondary school system has expanded the nature of teacher work has also changed. School populations have not only increased rapidly but the nature of secondary education itself has become far more demanding. Since the introduction of uniform compulsory comprehensive secondary education in 1964 both school populations and retention rates have climbed steadily. Teachers are now called on to cater to a far wider range of students throughout the senior school than they were only a few years ago. Most importantly, the senior years (years 11 and 12) are no longer the domain of elite, high achieving students. Indeed, it is common today for many senior students to be only semi-literate in regards to reading and writing skills.
There are also a far wider range of courses and curriculum content to be covered in the teaching of English. Teachers have been inundated with literally dozens of new policies in recent years, totalling thousands of pages of policies which are based on emerging theories but which often fail to explicitly specify the theoretical frameworks on which they are based. Modern policies have incorporated conceptualisations of language and literacy in which the majority of teachers have received no education. The lack of professional development within the school system appears to have exacerbated the sense of overload teachers have felt about the introduction of these new policies. The general perception is that the increased demands of the system have been imposed at the same time that resources and support have been reduced. As such there often appears to be a sense of frustration, bordering on hostility, by teachers towards the school system and the demands it places on them.

The lack of understanding of new policies also appears to lead teachers to believe that it is the educational bureaucrats, researchers and academics who are responsible for policies are out of touch with the realities of the classroom. This appears to contribute to a devaluing of educational theories by teachers.

One of the key contributors to teacher preference for practical lesson ideas over theory appears to be that the DET and BOS do not distribute any units of work or lesson material. Quite literally, every teacher in NSW must ‘reinvent the wheel’ every teaching day when preparing lessons. Teachers appear preoccupied with the creation and provision of material to meet the increased demands of the classroom. Professional associations such as the English Teachers’ Association also appear preoccupied with this quest, at the behest of their members, and so are diverted from more traditional roles of fostering educational research and professional development based on new theoretical orientations and understandings. Instead, the ETA strives to meet the demands of its members in their quest for survival within the overloaded system. Journal and professional development material produced through the ETA invariably focuses on educating teachers in BOS and DET policies rather than the knowledge-base of the profession.

Teacher preservice education also appears to be severely affected by system overload. Education faculties appear to be under pressure to graduate as many teachers as possible and obviously feel some responsibility to meet the global shortage of teachers which appears to be developing. The short ‘ad-hoc’ nature of GDE-style programs means that the broad spectrum of educational theories are compressed into
very short courses of study. Both students and lecturers involved in GDE-style courses complain of the pressures and difficulties such restrictions cause. Similar complaints have been expressed during a number of studies into teacher education during the past four decades.

The problem of overloading in GDE-style programs is exacerbated by DET and BOS dominance of teacher accreditation. Besides education-related theories and pedagogies, education faculties in universities are expected to address DET and BOS policies in their courses. In short, GDE type courses are expected to educate prospective teachers not only in the professional knowledge-base but in the operating policies of one employer. The obvious conclusion is that such pressure is placed on universities in order to reduce the cost to the future employer of some of the graduates of teacher preservice education programs. The savings to government must be considerable. One of the most vivid examples of this evident during this study was that student teachers received one lecture addressing the notion of metacognition yet had to complete a lengthy series of lectures and tutorials on DET child protection and physical education, personal development and health policies, including obtaining two low-level sports coaching certificates aimed at improving teacher involvement in compulsory school sport in the DET system. Students also appear to receive more tuition in DET and BOS policies relating to the teaching of English than they did about conceptualisations of literacy and language education.

The overcrowded nature of GDE-style programs appears to lead to confusion among student teachers about the role and value of theory in the classroom. Graduating student teachers appear to hold little knowledge about the theories which have informed the very policies NSW state school teachers are meant to implement. Teachers, student teachers and lecturers appear to hold GDE courses, and often those involved in them, in low regard. The overloading of the system of preservice education appears to be a contributing factor in shaping teacher responses during later practice.
The personal phase of disempowerment

The political and institutional phases of disempowerment create contexts within which individuals act. This individual action within such contexts is conceptualised within this grounded theory as the personal phase of disempowerment. In many ways the personal phase represents individuals’ action/interaction strategies which are aimed at usurping the political and institutional controls on their personal professional lives. The existence of the personal phase, however, ensures that the cyclic nature of the disempowerment of teaching as a profession becomes self-perpetuating. The conditions of the personal phase of the disempowerment of teaching as a profession are:

- Survival
- Visibility
- System Subversion
- Alienation

The personal phase is also, within itself, cyclic in nature and is represented as such in Figure 6.5:

![Figure 6.5: The personal phase of disempowerment](image-url)
Survival

The increased demand by the system on teachers has led to a perception that it would be impossible for them to meet all the expectations of the system. In order to cope with the conditions found within the education system teachers, executive staff, teacher educators, student teachers, and policy developers enter into a ‘survival first’ mode of operation. Inherent to survival is the notion that teachers must subvert policies in order to ensure that their own practice is sustainable within the overloaded system. They ‘get by’ within the conditions which exist by developing survival strategies and allocating priorities to the aspects of policies and practice that they consider to be most important.

An important aspect of survival is that teachers appear to believe that policies are largely dictated by political concerns and will eventually change with political tides. Survival in the face of such dynamic policy development often consists of merely maintaining the status quo and out-lasting each initiative until the next comes along. Such views lead to a conservative adherence to traditional views of language and literacy education.

Teachers appear to be concerned largely with the survival of their students in the face of rapid policy shifts, particularly in the area of syllabus development and compulsory assessment procedures. By adhering to that which they know best, teachers feel more secure with the content they teach to students and the pedagogies they adopt in the classroom. A major strategy for teachers in attempting to assist the survival of students is the adoption of prescriptive teaching approaches, or what teachers often call ‘spoon feeding’ students. By identifying skills valued in assessment tasks and focusing on drilling students with ‘correct’ answers teachers often hope to ensure that their students survive assessment procedures that they consider invalid or unfair.

The lack of resources and funding have led a number of teachers to abandon professional development in order to relieve some of the pressures they face. Membership of professional associations remains low and teachers report that they are not attending professional development in their own time, as a defence mechanism against the increased demands of the system. Teachers also report that they no longer wish to engage in professional development involving examination of professional knowledge-bases but prefer to be ‘professionally developed’ in employer policy documents and in practical assistance such as units of work addressing compulsory assessment tasks. Professional associations, such as the English Teachers’ Association
and the Primary English Teachers’ Association, appear to be responding to teacher needs and are increasingly publishing material aimed at specific DET and BOS policies, assessment procedures and classroom lessons. This, in turn, helps to ensure the survival of the professional associations by maintaining membership levels.

Another key survival strategy appears to be the adoption of the NSW Teachers’ Federation as a pseudo professional association. In the absence of true professional power many teachers have come to view the union as the only organisation capable of representing their professional interests. This is also reflected in the high membership numbers for the NSWTF when compared with the low membership ratio of the English Teachers’ Association. (ETA).

Policy writers also appear to adopt survival strategies to ensure the survival of favoured ideological and theoretical orientations in the face of the political control of policy development. Strategies centring on the conditions of visibility and system subversion appear to have been an integral component of the steps taken to ensure the survival of approaches such as a Functional View of Language and Functional Grammar after political intervention in syllabus and policy development. Survival strategies included the compromise of theoretical frameworks and the denial of theoretical frameworks underpinning new policies.

The absence of professional self-regulation has led most universities to adopt DET and BOS guidelines and policies as a means of ensuring the marketability (and, thereby, the survival) of their teacher preservice education programs. Individual lecturers also appear to have adopted DET and BOS policies as course material as a survival strategy in the face of perceived threats of sanctions if they do not.

The nature of the GDE also appears to incite student teachers and lecturers to adopt a survival mentality towards the program. The short duration and all-encompassing nature of the program appear to inhibit the kind of involvement one might expect for a post-graduate program of study in education. A number of student teachers, teachers and teacher-educators have blamed the ad-hoc nature of GDE-style programs on the prevalence of a ‘survival mentality’ towards classroom teaching for beginning teachers.

An important part of survival strategies appears to be the need ‘to be seen to be doing the right thing’ regarding policies and other guidelines.
Visibility

Teachers often tie changes in policies to political trends and cycles, particularly regarding compulsory assessment in literacy-related areas. They appear pragmatic about their lack of power or control of the profession, particularly policy development. Many teachers openly state that the need to appear to be visibly meeting policy and assessment demands often drives their teaching practice. They also devise methods to appear to be meeting policies while actually subverting the intention of policy developers.

Literacy assessment has increasingly been tied to accountability and teachers often perceive a need to appear to be meeting the demands of policies and assessment tasks even if they actually are not. They appear to perceive the need to placate political masters, educational officials and parents, through visibility, as more important than the need to preserve the educational integrity of assessment procedures. The manufacturing and manipulation of assessment procedures and results for purposes of visibility appear to be more widespread than might be thought.

The need for visibility in some schools appears to override educational concerns. This includes the implementation of new policies and approaches in the early stages of policy implementation and the reversion later on to older, more traditional approaches. Such subversions in the name of visibility appear to be exacerbated by theory deficit and system overload. As new theoretical frameworks, with which teachers could not hope to be fully conversant, have been implemented in new policies teachers have responded by using teaching methods with which they are conversant in an attempt to meet the demands of the new policies.

For example, the introduction of Functional Grammar and a Genre-based approach to writing appears to have been met largely by the prescriptive teaching of traditional grammar and a renewed focus on structure and correctness in language use. Teachers often genuinely perceive the old, more traditional, approaches as meeting the demands of new policies which call for implementation of new theoretical frameworks and pedagogies. As such, the new approaches have brought a renewed focus on the use of grammar sheets and ‘language work’ in isolation from ‘real’ English studies as a means of appearing to meet new literacy policies.

The use of a Genre-based approaches to writing have also been implemented through the use of prescriptive, simplistic Pro-forma Text Type Scaffolds as arbitrary
writing exercises where students are expected to memorise the ‘correct’ structure for each Genre. Teachers have adopted an approach whereby they merely work through a list of ‘Text Types’ in a short period, in order to be able to claim that they have met the demands of the new policies. Such approaches to grammar and structure hark back to traditional, Skills-based Approaches to the teaching of literacy.

Policy developers also appear to have developed strategies of visibility when designing syllabus and other policy documents. When forced to design policies based on political imperatives by government officials policy writers appear to have colluded with DET and BOS officials to make it visibly appear that they were meeting the demands of political masters while subverting the imposition of such political control.

Visibility in the case of policy development is perhaps best illustrated by the invisibility of Functional Grammar within policy documents. NSW policy documents clearly state that the grammar underpinning all approaches to teaching English is traditional grammar. The reality is that the grammar used in syllabus documents is clearly Hallidayan Functional Grammar. The imposition of traditional terminology over the grammar makes it visibly appear to the non-expert to be a traditional, Latinate grammar. Nowhere in policy documents does it explain that the grammar used is Functional Grammar or that the framework informing the Genre-based approach to writing prescribed is the Systemic Functional Linguistic Framework. The academic responsible for developing the grammar has openly stated that the imperative was to satisfy the demand of political masters that Functional Grammar be removed from policies, while actually retaining Halliday’s Functional Grammar as the prescribed metalanguage.

Further evidence of the condition of visibility is evident in the adoption of a Social View of Language in recent policies, rather than a Functional View of Language. The use of the terminology ‘Social View’ is not in keeping with the recent literature which espouses the value of a Social View of Language over that of a Functional View. Policies quite openly state that a Functional View and a Social View are the same thing, yet there are obvious and important differences. The use of the term ‘Social View’ appears to be aimed at meeting the demands imposed by political masters that all traces of Functional Grammar be removed from policies and school practice. Indeed, no trace of the terms ‘Functional’, ‘Functional Grammar’ or ‘Systemic Linguistics’ appear in policy documents, despite the Systemic Functional framework being the major theoretical framework underpinning all the documents. Policy developers appear to
have gone to considerable lengths to hide the framework on which all literacy teaching in NSW is meant to be based.

Teacher preservice education also appears to be affected by the condition of visibility. Several studies have shown that there are perceptions in the educational community that the standards of secondary teacher preservice education programs have traditionally been quite low. It appears that such concerns might be well-founded. While there are no professional guidelines for teacher education programs, beyond those imposed by the DET and BOS, it appears that universities face pressure to fill courses and to pass the greatest number of graduate teachers possible. Students are rarely rejected from entry to GDE-style courses based on academic merit.

Student and teacher perceptions of low standards within courses also appear to have some merit. Grading of students in some teacher preservice education programs appears to be abnormally high. Students are almost universally given high grades, despite having reported that they have submitted low quality work. Additionally, some university lecturers appear to refuse to fail students, regardless of the quality of their work or even where serious issues, such as plagiarism, exist. Lecturers appear to be under pressure within the university system to ensure that all student teachers pass their courses, regardless of ability or work completed. It appears to be of more concern to universities that they visibly appear to produce quality teachers than to ensure that such is the case. This appears to be widespread and of great concern to practicing teachers involved in the teacher preservice education system.

One of the key ways in which the players involved in school education ensure survival and visibility is through what is conceptualised within this grounded theory as system subversion.

**System Subversion**

Faced with the conditions in which the profession exists teachers, student teachers, officials and teacher educators appear to develop strategies and actions which subvert the intention of policies, theories and professional practice. Teachers, DET and BOS officials, policy developers, student teachers and teacher educators all appear to adopt methods of system subversion almost hand-in-hand with the other conditions of the personal phase of disempowerment of the profession. Some of these subversions are
intentional, while others appear unintentional spin-offs related to the other conditions of
disempowerment outlined in this grounded theory.

Faced with a virtual mountain of new policies and systemic demands in recent
decades educators in general appear to have adopted, as part of their survival strategies,
the practice of ‘selective implementation’ of policies and systemic demands. Both
bureaucrats and teachers appear to focus on those policies for which they are most
accountable or which they perceive as being of most benefit to their students. Others
appear to be either ignored or undermined to varying extents. Some are partially
implemented, while others are corrupted but made to appear to be implemented.
Assessment tasks are sometimes corrupted or manipulated to give the desired
appearance or affect. Subversions in assessment practices include the deliberate
falsification of government sponsored literacy tests and uniform assessment procedures
such as the Higher School Certificate (HSC) course results.

The professional powerlessness of the profession appears to be a major
contributor to system subversion. Where educators feel that assessment or policy
demands are unrealistic or irrelevant they appear to turn to subversion of the system and
the creation of the condition of visibility rather than to professional mechanisms which
might be able to challenge that with which they disagree. This type of practice would
appear to be relatively widespread. Of course, it is possible to argue that teachers, in
particular, have little choice given the lack of professional self-regulation within
teaching. There would appear to be few other courses of action which teachers could
take, other than system subversion, if they wish to keep their practices based on their
understandings of the needs of their clients rather than on what they see as unjustifiable
systemic demands.

When forced to implement literacy policies which they did not fully understand or
agree with, teachers sometimes develop strategies to make it appear that they are
implementing the new approaches. These strategies were closely linked to the other
conditions of the personal phase of disempowerment: survival, visibility and alienation.
Not surprisingly, when faced with such demands teachers revert to the approaches
which they do understand, which are generally more traditional Skills-based
Approaches to teaching literacy. Such methods appear to lead to more fragmented,
decontextualised (and, therefore, less effective) ways of teaching language and literacy.

The new NSW literacy policies issued under the Agenda 97 Literacy Initiative,
which are based on a the Systemic Functional Linguistic framework, appear to have
been severely affected by system subversion. Theory deficit and system overload appear to play a large role in such subversions. Many teachers appear to be implementing the ‘Functional’ approaches using traditional, Latinate grammar with its prescriptive orientation, rather than the advocated rhetorical Functional Grammar. Few secondary teachers appear aware that the grammar on which policies are based is actually a Functional Grammar, much less have a working knowledge of the way in which the grammar functions. Conformity has become the aim in both teacher practice and much of the published resource material regarding a Genre-based approach to writing. The reliance on traditional grammar and arbitrary reliance on Pro-forma Text Type Scaffolds appears to contradict the aims of a Functional View of Language, which is inherent to all the new policies.

Just as a lack of understanding of the principles of Whole Language led many secondary teachers to believe that Whole Language approaches banned the explicit teaching of grammar so, too, have many teachers constructed simplistic understandings of the pedagogies inherent to a Functional View of Language. Modelling and joint construction, for instance, appear to be often taken to mean that the teacher must simply write a piece for students, who must copy it down and that replication of the teachers’ form is students’ aim. Such subversions of theories and pedagogies are not intentional, but more a result of theory deficit and a perceived need for survival and visibility – the new methods are implemented in the easiest, quickest form teachers can devise, in order to be seen to be meeting the demands of new policies. Not surprisingly, teachers gradually come to the conclusion that the new theories do not work but remain oblivious to the fact that they are not implementing them in appropriate ways. Academics and policy makers appear to be aware of such subversion of theories and policies but seem content to allow them to continue, in order to ensure the survival of their favoured ideologies within NSW policies.

Indeed, system subversion appears to have been adopted whole-heartedly by policy developers in NSW. DET and BOS officials appear to have colluded with academic consultants to ensure that Functional Grammar has been retained in NSW policies, despite government and DET policy statements claiming that it had been removed. These subversions appear to be able to exist largely due to the lack of a system of professional self-regulation in NSW teaching. Individuals appear to be able to manipulate their way into positions whereby they are able to dictate policy matters to teachers who remain quite removed from the entire policy making process. Such
individuals appear to compete with their political masters for control of policies and system subversion appears to be one of the major tools at their disposal.

The subversion of standards at the GDE level held serious implications for the profession. It appears that it is difficult to fail secondary teacher preservice education in GDE-style programs, indeed some lecturers claim it is almost impossible. Results in GDE subjects indicate that results are greatly inflated and that standards are low. University regulations regarding standards appear to be disregarded in the bid to meet teacher demand in NSW. Teachers and lecturers are critical of the standards of GDE-style programs and perceive them as a threat to the quality of teaching in NSW.

The acceptance of the policies of but one employer as criteria for entry to the profession and as guidelines for teacher preservice education also represents a major subversion of the professionalism of teaching. The use of DET and BOS policies as guidelines for teacher preservice education appears to subvert the knowledge-base of the profession regarding literacy and language education and usurps self-regulation of the profession. Even newly graduated secondary English teachers often have virtually no knowledge of the theories and pedagogies on which new literacy and language policies are based. The knowledge base of the profession is subverted at the very beginning of the continuum of professional development. When combined with the other conditions presented in this grounded theory such subversions have serious implications for attitudes towards and involvement in professional processes.

**Alienation**

The conditions which exist in the professional lives of teachers appear to alienate them from a number of the processes which might enrich the profession regarding literacy and language education. The lack of professional self-regulation appears to have diminished the knowledge-base of a number of secondary English teachers regarding the teaching the literacy and language in English. Theory deficit, in turn, diminishes the ability of a professional to meet the needs of their clients. Such conditions would appear to alienate secondary English teachers from professional practice relating to literacy education. The alienation of teachers from the criteria which define a profession combine to create a more powerful, far-reaching condition of alienation which appears to ensure the perpetuation of a cycle of disempowerment for teachers.
Many secondary English teachers appear to hold educational theories, particularly those relating to literacy and language education, in low regard. The lack of professional self-regulation or accreditation means that there is no formal system in place to ensure that teachers receive teacher preservice education or ongoing professional development appropriate for literacy and language education in subject English. This means that many teachers appear to have little understanding of theories or policies and hold a variety of limited misconceptions and misunderstandings about them. Teachers appear to separate theory and practice and de-value the worth of theory for informing teacher practice. Teacher perceptions about the worth of theory appear to be confused and complicated by the conditions under which teachers work. The need to survive, remain to visibly meet the demands of the system while subverting it appear to combine to taint teacher appreciation of the value of the conceptualisations of literacy and language education which have sought to inform policies and teacher practice in recent decades.

The alienation of teachers from the knowledge-base of their profession includes a certain disdain for GDE-style courses and the involvement of universities in teacher preservice education. Much of that disdain for teacher preservice education stems from teacher involvement in their own GDE-style teacher education and a perception that it was inadequate to the task of preparing them for the realities and complexities of the classroom. This appears to be exacerbated by poor teacher understandings of the nature of knowledge and the role of theories in building understanding. Universities are also perceived as being removed from the school system and their appears to be widespread belief among teachers that the theories offered in universities are unsuitable for informing teacher practice.

There is a paradox here. Conceptualisations of literacy and language have grown from a long evolution of rich, rigorous educational research. It is reasonable to assume that the theories do offer much to the professional educator. However, given the nature of teacher preservice education teachers generally could not, as a matter of course, hold detailed knowledge of the theories which underpin conceptualisations of literacy and language education. Such detailed knowledge simply is not regulated or systematically addressed. The alienation from theories and universities expressed by teachers appears to grow from their very lack of access to the academic disciplines of literacy and language education. It also follows that, if teachers do not have access to the knowledge-base which informs policies that they probably are also alienated, to some degree, from debates and processes which contribute to policy directions.
Teachers associate theories with their preservice education and university GDE-style courses and, as such, de-value the participation of universities in teacher education. Negative experiences with GDE students and lecturing staff also appears to have contributed towards negative perceptions of teacher education. There is a widespread impression that teacher education programs are of low quality and have low standards. There is some evidence that such perceptions are justified. In addition, there is evidence that the use of schools to conduct ‘data raids’ or ‘blitzkrieg ethnography’ has also alienated teachers and executive staff, who feel they are used by universities when conducting research and that little is offered in return.

Given the conditions which exist within the profession, teachers also appear to be alienated from traditional perceptions regarding professional development. Research and theoretical frameworks are de-valued in favour of information regarding employer policies or for units of work which meet employer policies. These demands appear to drive the major professional association for the teaching of English, the English Teachers’ Association (ETA). The ETA has come to serve as a major provider of resource material, rather than as a promoter and developer of the professional knowledge-base. There is some evidence that these focuses appear to promote the view that the ETA does not actually represent teacher interests.

Professional representation appears to be a major factor in the alienation of teachers from normal professional structures. Membership of the ETA, as a percentage of the entire number of secondary English teachers, is low. A number of teachers view the NSW Teachers’ Federation (NSWTF), the major teacher union, as representing their professional interests. Indeed, the only sites on the internet which store details of teacher accreditation requirements are the DET site and the NSWTF site. The ETA is unable to even provide details of its membership numbers in NSW.

Recent moves to introduce teacher accreditation and professional regulation appear to be in danger of further alienating teachers from professional processes. In attempts to establish teacher accreditation schemes the NSW Minister for Education has sought to maintain the status quo by proposing to base the regulatory body on models similar to the structure of the DET and BOS. In the proposals the Minister sought to retain ultimate control of professional processes and to deny the profession democratic representation through a professional association or other structure. At the time of writing a review was being conducted, with the ultimate decision for action resting with the Minister. Such actions by the Minister are in direct contravention of
recommendations from educational institutions such as the Australian College of Education (ACE).

It is important to note that, in variance with the findings of the ACE, this study has found that rather than teacher actions being compliant and directed along with their alienation from profession processes, that teachers actively seek to survive through strategies of visibility and system subversion. Teacher motivation to meet the needs of their clients appears to be high and they develop strategies which enable them to attempt to meet student needs, as well as protect their own interests. Such attempts at subversion would appear to necessitate alienation from professional processes rather than alienation merely being an end product of a lack of professional processes. In many ways alienation is an attempt to salvage a sense of professionalism within a disempowered system.

The alienation among teachers, student teachers and teacher educators appears counter-productive to the development of collegial, empowering professional relationships. The lack of appropriate professional structures appears to restrict the communication between the groups and inhibits the building of professional relationships which might further the criteria for professionalism among the various groups of the profession.

Alienation appears to be a major contributor in preventing positive action among the various groups representing the profession to address shortfalls in meeting the criteria of a profession, particularly self-regulation. Without a healthy respect for the work of theorists, policy makers and teachers the profession, as a whole, appears reluctant to come together to develop democratic processes which might address the problems of professionalism inherent to literacy education in secondary English. It would appear almost as if teachers remain unaware to the potential for them to form professional structures and the benefits those structures might offer them as both individuals and as a profession. As such, alienation is a key factor in the perpetuation of the cycle of disempowerment of teaching as a profession. Without an agreed mechanism for forward movement the status quo of political control, professional powerlessness and theory deficit remain and the cycle continues on its disempowering way.