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"I ONLY CAME HERE FOR ONE REASON TODAY, AND THAT'S TO SPIT ON
THE DOORSTEP OF THIS FUCKIN' JOINT" (GRADUATING STUDENT).

COPING WITH THREATENED IDENTITIES: THE TRANSITION

FROM TRADESPERSON TO TEACHER

Robert J Mealyea

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the problem of an external threat to occupa-
tional identity and its maintenance faced by tradespersons in the
transition from tradesperson to teacher. In mid-1985, seventeen
tradespersons, fifteen males and two females, chose a mid-career
change and entered secondary school teaching in Victoria. Unlike
most prospective teachers, each tradesperson entered teaching
from a former occupation. They were skilled tradespersons of many
years experience employed in industrial settings, predominantly
in what are known as the `building trades'. They shared back-
grounds in plumbing, sheetmetal, carpentry and electrical trades.
Some came from trade backgrounds other than the building trades,
such as motor mechanics, fitting and machining, and horticulture.
Many were self-employed; all entered teacher training possessing
highly developed trade skills and an extensive knowledge of in-
dustry. Thus they had ample time to develop a healthy occupation-
al self-identity. Among other problems, the decision to change
careers meant considerable financial loss and domestic strain.
Statistical details indicate the group shared mainly working
class backgrounds, worked an average of 16.4 years in industry
and suffered an average loss of $4,800.00 per annum entering
teaching. Their ages ranged from 26-40 years on entry to teach-
ing. Most were married with families. They found Teachers' Col-
lege onerous and they quickly bonded together into a tightly-knit

group to ward off attacks on their occupational identity of
tradesperson. They also used humour in great doses as a way of
strenuously fighting to maintain a former occupational status
(and thus identity) as they passed through the Teachers' College.

THE CONTEXT: THE TEACHER EDUCATION MODEL
The internship model of teacher education as practised at the
Teachers' College, situated in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne,
means that trainees take up positions of full-time classroom
responsibility upon entering the programme. This means that
everyone goes into schools immediately, both as trainees and as
teachers totally accountable for the welfare and instruction of
their own classes. Accordingly, the members do not undergo the
usual anticipatory socialization in relative institutional isola-
tion from the work context. Rather, they learn simultaneously
workplace occupational norms and credentialling norms. The latter
they find at odds with the former, with the result that the
trainees experience considerable dissonance and role strain.

The students taking part in this study were enrolled in an in-
stitution undergoing rapid and discomforting ideological changes
due to emerging issues within the Victorian Ministry of Education
such as the demise of Victoria's secondary technical schools, and
an emergence of curricula proposals aimed at reforming trade
teaching in secondary schools. The Education Ministry envisaged
relocating the subject as an integral rather than a peripheral
part of each school's curriculum, thus hoping to bring about fun-
damental changes in the thinking of trade teachers concerning
their role in secondary education. In short, the employing au-
thority, the Ministry of Education, wished to move from narrow
vocationalism teaching to a focus on what they termed Technology
Studies, encompassing a broad, general approach to teaching prac-
tical subjects in secondary schools.

However, experienced trade teachers (the trainee's school super-
visors) perceived the proposed curricula changes as a watering
down of their subject area, thus threatening their specific aim
of education as vocational job-preparation to becoming, in the
words of more than one critic1, `teaching wishy-washy academic
wank'. Such utterances (and there were many more) can only sug-
gest that not only do the trade teachers perceive a difference
between working with the hands and the head, but they see working
with the hands as far superior to working with the head. This was
based on their perception that secondary schooling should provide
students with skills leading to direct access to vocational work.
Theirs was a perception of education which differed substantially
from the new emphasis in secondary schools of courses concerned
with skills and competencies which, although related to working
life (Hughes 1987:12), are not of a particularly vocational na-
ture in the direct sense of leading to an apprenticeship in

industry.

Trainees themselves enter teacher education with a well-defined
`presenting culture', so clearly reflected in the words of one of
the cohort: "I very nearly wore my overalls to the interview. I
didn't want to dress up in any way, it's just not me". On the
whole, their talk is of cars and motorcycles, and of jobs done on
industrial building sites. Their point of reference is the work-
shop, making and doing things, solving problems of a certain
practical type.

Among the tradespersons quoted here, some are licensed by exter-
nal authorities (to the trade), for example the Melbourne and
Metropolitan Board of Works, and the State Electricity Commis-
sion. This serves a number of purposes for the worker, not least
of which are a higher salary compared with other trades, and
therefore high status. It also makes possible a monopoly over the
type of work done and control over admission to the particular
trade. The State-sanctioned licence to operate as a tradesperson
also implies that only those in the particular occupation are
considered competent to do the work and to judge when the work is
carried out properly. These are issues crucial to the self-
identity of tradespeople.

Humour was the language of resistance for the group, and they
used it in great lashings to cope with tension and stress raised
by what they perceived to be an attack by the credentialling au-
thority on their occupational identity (Mealyea, 1989).

Humour in various forms indeed helped sustain the group through-
out the trials of the training period. They frequently resorted
to anti-feminist, sexist, and racist jokes and used humour to
relieve the tension of confronting challenging ideas. The joking
induced strong solidarity and served as a powerful mechanism of
adaptation to the demands of the College.

Thus the group's humour functioned as a panacea, for it was
through laughter that group members gradually neutralized the
alienating effects of the College who were mediating the Educa-
tion Ministry's wishes for a change from vocationalism to Tech-
nology Studies. Due to the perceived attacks on their identity,
humour in its various forms helped the group to regain that iden-
tity through a collective triumph over the enemy, the College.
What resulted was mateship.

GROUP BONDING: A MECHANISM OF IDENTITY DEFENCE
Group Culture Versus The Teachers' College
The data clearly shows that following a period of adjustment to
teaching and the College which lasted for about six months, the
trainees began to perceive conflicting advice about practical

workshop teaching from various staff within the College. At about
the same time the trainees also began to listen to, and conse-
quently mirror, disparaging comments made of the College by their
school colleagues. Initially they were somewhat confused by the
apparent inconsistencies in the advice given, which was manifest
in long and loud complaints to each other. They experienced this
ambiguity as stressful.

`Splitting'
But as the course progressed and the months ticked by, they began
to reject the College advice, and at the same time began to lean
heavily toward the school's advice (advice which mainly took
vocationalism for granted and consisted of hostile and negative
views which focused on the College staff) more or less uncriti-
cally. This led to further trainee disenchantment with aspects of
the College. As they began the second year of their program,
however, they became slightly more discerning in their views,
selecting only specifically what they wanted from the advice of
the College and the school in establishing their role as teachers
in practical studies. It follows that if trainees are making dis-
cerning judgements about potential role-models, then the pos-
sibility exists that they can also make selections from the com-
peting College and school advice about vocationalism. This was
indeed the case, and was the beginning of a `split', i.e., the
trainees divided the College itself into good and bad parts,
while at the same time affirming the school as good (see Diagram
One [to obtain a copy of Diagram One, see end note]; a split
within the school culture emerged months later). Understanding
this splitting of the College into good and bad components, and
what enabled them to do this, explains a great deal about their
behaviour while becoming teachers.

During training they fought hard to sustain the occupational sta-
tus they brought to education. They felt they had a justified
status in their own right as tradespersons (a status also in-
creasingly recognized in the eyes of the community as evidenced
by `status-creep', a significant change in occupational social-
class backgrounds of apprentices, a phenomenon occurring in the
industrial building trades in Victoria.1 The trainees also spoke
of a begrudging respect from the community which was based on the
earning potential of tradespersons). Reluctance and (in their
eyes) unnecessary attendance at the College put their feelings of
status at risk. As a result, they fought against the influence of
the College all the way, aided by the enormous strength provided
by the cohesiveness of the group:

    You know, if we didn't have each other to fall back on,
    this'd be a prick of a place all round....The only good
    thing about coming to the mushroom farm is the others
    really, we can sit and have a rap about our problems and

get it all off our chests, I see that as the main func-
tion of the College, really. Well it has been for me,
anyway.

Concepts associated with Kleinian psychoanalysis (Klein,
1932,1955; Klein and Riviere, 1964; Jaques, 1955) present a
felicitous theoretical framework for understanding group pro-
cesses in an organizational context. The aim of the following
discussion is to provide a vantage point from which the group
processes which were adopted by the cohort as a sanctuary and
support in a threatening situation can be further understood.

Wells (1980:165-199) writes that one way of studying a group is
to focus on the group as a whole, studying the behaviour of the
group as a social system with the co-actor's relatedness to that
system. Concentration on group-level processes is one means of
moving towards understanding the basis of the group formation and
the nature of the interaction between it and the Teachers' Col-
lege. The following discussion of the group's cohesive spirit
endorses and extends the significance of the role of humour and
mateship already described within the cohort.

The essential core of the trade group, in Bion's (1961) term, the
group's elan vital, is that of tradesperson. This is the sub-
stance of how they view themselves. "In the long run, we're
tradies, always will be and always want to be", was a comment
universal to the cohort.2 Bion posits that a group's way of
thinking about itself bonds the group members together. In
describing this process, Gibbard (1975:7) believes that the
group's mentality is best understood as:

> ...a process of unconscious collusion...`a machinery of
> intercommunication'...which is at once a characteristic
> of groups and a reflection of the individual's ability or
> even his propensity to express certain drives and feel-
> ings covertly, unconsciously, and anonymously.

Groups can behave in many ways. They can be effective problem
solvers, they can demonstrate infantile, regressed qualities
(Wells, 1980:170) or they can behave in a non-rational way, as
suggested by Jaques (1955) by using infantile coping strategies.
For instance, they can adopt projective identification to cope
with overwhelming ambivalent feelings generated in the course of
social relations. It is the mature-age cohort's propensity to
display infantile coping strategies that the following argument
addresses.

Group-As-Mother
Klein's (1932;1946) work, drawing on her intensive observations
of mothers and infants, posits the infant experiencing inner ten-

sions and conflicts while feeding at the breast. Klein inferred
that sometimes the baby experiences good feelings toward the
mother and sometimes bad. These feelings are based on the mother
as the source of nurturance and comfort. When the nipple is with-
drawn (for whatever reason), the child becomes frustrated and
experiences bad feelings towards the breast. When the milk flows
the baby experiences good feelings. Accordingly, the infant ex-
periences good and bad feelings towards the breast. As a result
of its breast feeding one strategy for coping which child learns
is to split its world into `good' and `bad' parts.

The transmission of good and bad feelings is facilitated by pro-
jection. Thus bad feelings like anger, hatred, and enmity are
expelled. Introjection is the taking in of goodness because it
is sustaining and warm. A simple transposition can be made, from
the infant vis-a-vis its mother, to the trainees, vis-a-vis their
group. By fighting the Teachers' College (the `Alma Mater' or
bounteous mother), at a primitive level the group was splitting
the College into good and bad objects. The `good mother' was the
group, the nurturing object. The school was, in the main, another
`good object'. The College was split off to become the `bad ob-
ject'; it was scapegoated, a classic form of projection. Via
splitting, the group psychologically and successfully resisted
officially imposed change. It was the view of the group members
that the College, by attempting to alter their former occupation-
al selves, was also questioning their concomitant educational
ideology and values. Their status was threatened by people for
whom they they had little respect, so obvious in the language
they constantly used to caricature academics, such as `yak-
kademics', `whackademics' and `stick-wankers'.

Anxiety, Coping and Defence Mechanisms
The hypotheses Klein (1946:99-110) put forward relating to the
very early stages of development were derived from her early work
(1932; 1935) with children and adults, arguing that in early in-
fancy, anxieties characteristic of psychosis arise which cause
the ego to develop specific defence mechanisms. Klein believed
(1946:99) that it is in this period that the fixation points for
all psychotic disturbances are to be found.

Klein believed that object relations are in evidence from the
beginning of life, as presented in the argument above that the
first object encountered is the mother's breast which is `split'
from time to time into a good (gratifying) and bad (frustrating)
breast. Splitting is "...the division between love and hate"
(Klein, 1964:99). The term `splitting' (Klein, 1946:101) is used
to define the earliest ego coping mechanism, used as a defence
against anxiety.

In states of gratification, the ego accepts the mother (and the

breast) as loving and bountiful; when frustration and hatred
arise then the reverse sentiments attach themselves to the ob-
ject. Thus splitting is a two-way process. As a result, aggres-
sive impulses are experienced by the infant, such as the urge to
attack the mother's breast (for example, by biting) which further
develops into attacks of a similar nature on her body because it
is viewed by the child as an extension of the breast. According
to Klein this happens even before the mother can be conceived of
as a complete person. Phantasized3 attacks on the mother occur,
with oral impulses "...to suck dry, bite up, scoop out and rob
the mother's body of its good contents" (Klein, 1946:102).

Object-Relations Theory and the Mature-Age Cohort
Object-relations theory (Klein, 1946; Mahler, 1972) posits that
in the early stages of development, an infant is unable to make a
distinction between what is inside the self and what is outside
the self. The infant, at this early stage of development, lacks
an `ego' to differentiate itself from the rest of the world and
experiences self and the world as fused; everything is self.
Thus, to the infant, self is omnipotent. Omnipotence is rein-
forced by the parent fulfilling every need. As the infant matures
some needs are frustrated. Upset by these frustrations the infant
develops a strategy to cope with this condition by projecting
`good' and `bad' feelings into outside objects (Wells, 1980:171).
In the same way, the hostile verbal attacks of the threatened and
frustrated trainee teachers were directed toward academics, the
Teachers' College or any other threatening object, as a defensive
impulse. It is the group-as-mother paradigm that characterizes so
well the cohort's hostility toward those particular aspects of
teacher training which threatened them.

Thus, through the mechanism of projecting good and bad feelings
into an object, the infant learns to both love and hate its
mother. Experiencing difficulty in coping with powerful ambiva-
lent feelings the infant uses splitting and projective iden-
tification (Klein, 1946) to maintain psychological balance and to
cope with any life-threatening anxiety generated by encountering
both bad and good in the same object. In this manner the cohort
approached and dealt with the College and indeed their training
schools (see Diagram One).

Klein (1946) uses the term `projective identification' to indi-
cate a slightly different process than the straightforward expul-
sion that is `projection', by which parts of the self are split
off and projected into an external object or part object. Split-
ting is a primitive psychological mechanism used where indi-
viduals disown parts of self that are undesirable. In splitting
the object, the frustrating and persecuting phenomena are kept
apart from the idealized or desired object. Thus Klein (1946:102)
prefers the word into rather than onto to express the infant's

unconscious process of phantasized attacks on the mother which
she claims follows two main lines:

> ...one is the predominantly oral impulse to suck dry,
> bite up, scoop out and rob the mother's body of its good
> contents....The other line of attack derives from the
> anal and urethral impulses and implies expelling dan-
> gerous substances (excrements) out of the self and into
> the mother. Together with these harmful excrements, ex-
> pelled in hatred, split off parts of the ego are also
> projected ...into the mother...the mother is felt to be
> the bad self.

To summarize Klein's (1946) position: at infancy, anxiety is ex-
perienced as persecution which in turn produces certain
mechanisms and defences which Klein believed characterize the
paranoid and schizoid states. Dominant among these defences is
the mechanism of splitting internal and external objects, emo-
tions and the ego. While these mechanisms and defences form the
basis of later schizophrenic illness, Klein believed they are
also part of normal development. She described the processes
underlying identification by projection as a combination of
splitting off parts of the self and projecting them into another
person, and detailed the effects this identification has on nor-
mal and schizoid object relations. The onset of the depressive
position is the juncture at which schizoid mechanisms may be re-
inforced by regression.

The cohort complained consistently of hating the College. Indeed,
one particular trainee's desire to project his bodily excrements
into the `bad' object was poignantly obvious in an incident which
occurred during the trainees' Graduation Day ceremony at the Col-
lege. Extremely hostile toward the College, Dave steadfastly
maintained he would not attend the graduation ceremony. But
surprisingly, on the appointed day he travelled hundreds of
kilometres to do so. Asked when walking into the hall for the
ceremony why he had bothered to come, he remarked: "I've come all
the way here for only one reason today, and that's to spit on the
fucking doorstep of this joint". Such are the feelings evoked
when the self is threatened.

Regression
At the group level, according to Wells (1980:170), while groups
can behave in effective problem-solving ways, all groups can re-
gress at some point in their lives. Often when competent people
are brought together in a group (as was the case in this study),
they can regress to infantile behaviour and are unable to perform
tasks at which they are normally competent. They may become emo-
tionally segregated and blame others for their failures. For the
group in this study, the tension generated by the threat of a

possible loss of their occupational identity, and therefore per-
sonal status, was intense and long lasting, spanning the entire
course. The tension created strong ambivalent love/hate feelings
toward the new situations in which the trainees found themselves
immersed. Strong ambivalent feelings, argues Wells (1980:170),
unconsciously return adults to their infant roots: "There is a
need to resolve these ambivalent feelings, thus relieving the
frustration about the same object - for the infant it is mother,
for the individual-in-group the group".

Influence of Membership Groups
The trainees defined their experience at the College in terms of
fear and loathing. They felt they were being forced to attend,
being made to `put in time' against their will, an unwelcome of-
ficial requirement of gaining a diploma. They rarely discussed
the experience in terms of value, of increasing their knowledge
and personal understandings towards becoming professional
teachers. Thus the Teachers' College staff sometimes described
their behaviour as lazy, ignorant or stupid, often implying that
because they disliked furthering their education it followed they
were victims of their industrial backgrounds. One senior member
of staff called them "knuckle-dragers". It is more accurate,
however, to describe the behaviour of the trainees as outcomes of
the influence of their membership group which was formed by them
in the context of strains encountered during status passage tran-
sition within teacher education, rather than simply labelling
them as victims of their social-class background.

Membership groups exert a strong influence on the attitudes and
actions of individuals (Sherif and Sherif, 1967). Indeed, the
trainees reported over and over again that they were able to
function effectively only as a result of the group's support
while attending the College, primarily because the group served
as a secure sanctuary, allowing them to preserve their previous
industrial workplace values, obvious in comments such as: "We are
all tradies, doing the same thing and going through the same
sorts of experiences, I don't think I could have made it without
the others, or at least knowing I had their support". And: "I
find real strength in the group, they are all like me, have my
interests, it's a great help to be part of the group".4

While examples of the way in which the group attained solidarity
and thus presented a united front to the world were explained by
describing their use of humour, they also adopted other means of
bonding. They quickly fended for themselves during the early set-
tling-in days by organizing outings, barbeques and activities for
the stated purpose of forging a group identity. The role the
group performed for the individuals is also apparent in the way
they resisted any attempt at division caused by the vagaries of
the timetable and circumstances, e.g., although they sometimes

attended different sessions in the College they always sat
together in the cafe. In short, they became active, enterprising
and then supportive agents of their own group solidarity.

Grouping had its purpose, it aided the strategy of projecting
good and bad feelings into the socializing agencies, the training
schools and the Teachers' College, and had one essential charac-
teristic: it served to bolster and support each trainee's identi-
ty in the face of pressure to change. They used projection to
confirm the identity with which they entered teaching, and thus
sustain their substantial selves. By establishing their own
reference group, they then used the support provided to attack
the College as a negative reference point; the College served the
purpose of a container into which they could project their fears.

In constantly describing compulsory College attendance in the way
they did: "It's like serving another apprenticeship"5 the group
meant that as adults they were again and, worse unexpectedly,
locked into living through something which they had previously
passed as youths and wished to leave behind as a `one-off'
finished part of their lives. In defining the College experience
negatively, they are stating that they have `served their time'
once already, and would not willingly choose to repeat the pro-
cess. They also used a telling analogy to pinpoint and describe
their feelings by likening the College to a prison: "It's like a
goal, somewhere where you have to serve your time".6 This feel-
ing is evident in a trainee's response, a bit of repartee direct-
ed at other members of the cohort as he was leaving early one day
to attend a dental appointment:

    Charles: Hey, where are you off to?

    Paul: I'm escaping, mate.

    Mario: Yeah, he got an early release for good behaviour
    (loud laughter).

By defining the College as a place of incarceration, it follows
that it then became a place from which to seek to escape.

Splitting the School Culture
The trainees felt such an acute need for personal affirmation
that when they perceived it was lacking in the College culture,
they actively sought it elsewhere in the institution, principally
by forming a solid supportive group. While preliminary analyses
of the data indicated no evidence of the same process occurring
in their schools, it became increasingly clear as the course pro-
gressed that the same process of splitting and projection into
the school was indeed emerging. This bifurcation was based on
exactly the same reason behind the College split: fighting status

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disconfirmation within the training school settings, principally
between the academics (the `accos' as the tradies call them, see
Gleeson, in progress) and the `tradies'.

While settling into the training schools the former selves were
retained, reinforced and subtly shaped by the trainees' interac-
tion with their immediate colleagues, i.e., the other trade
teachers. As with the College, they formed their various
reference groups at the school level. But they universally dis-
paraged the `accos' within their schools, and in so doing
received ample and enthusiastic support from the other tradies,
with negative results regarding their development. While a
reference group has the power to promote the professional
development of the individual within it (Khleif, 1975:301-308),
in this study the experienced trade teachers at the school level,
the `old hands', tended to successfully impede any such profes-
sional development of the individual trainees as far as the Col-
lege viewed their personal development as teachers.

This process was aided and compounded in another way by one sig-
nificant feature of secondary technical schools, the style of
architecture. The physical layout of the buildings isolated the
practical workshops from the scrutiny of other teachers. Thus,
during their teaching the trainees are `streamed', or kept
together in what amounts to ghettos for most of the day in their
training schools, just as they are while attending the College.
Now, the College streaming takes two forms: the manner in which
they are handled administratively keeps them isolated from other
trainee teachers from non-industrial backgrounds, and the
peculiar way in which they group themselves. In addition, they
are isolated in the training schools from the influence of other
subject teachers with differing views, thus their vocationalism
cannot be challenged; nor can the individualistic teaching be-
haviour of workshop teachers be threatened by any outsider with
different and competing educational ideologies.

Power of the Reference Group Within the School Culture
The cohort participating in this study sought to transmit their
industrial worldview to their pupils. In this sense they are very
individualistic in their pursuit of a certain sort of teaching
content as an end in itself. By forming a reference group at the
College they were able to share and defend certain taken-for-
granted assumptions about teaching. This obstructed the open dis-
cussion of other, competing educational values. Those in the
cohort who entered teaching because of a wish to pass on their
industrial work values were less likely than those few in the
group whose educational aims developed gradually away from
vocationalism to enter into any practical discourse with other
colleagues.

The main purpose of the group while attending the College was
sustenance and succour in a time of stress, and as such it con-
tributed in a powerful and significant way to the maintenance and
protection of each individual's former self, and the same process
occurred in their training schools. Few of the trainee's immedi-
ate school colleagues in the practical workshops acknowledged any
commitment to educational goals other than those associated
strictly with a narrow vocationalism. They too spoke consistent-
ly in terms of identification with the occupational trade identi-
ty which they themselves brought to teaching. Thus it became
apparent that another reason why the trainees largely allowed
their behaviour in school to be shaped in a similar fashion to
their colleagues was that, apart from wishing to pass the formal
teaching cycle programme, there was the important need to survive
socially with their teaching colleagues.

From the point of view of those interested in reform in the prac-
tical workshop areas, this is a disturbing conclusion. Uncriti-
cal allegiance to, and acceptance of, the vocational values which
formed the basis of the group's coherence leads to further
ideological isolation already suffered by these teachers within
education. The result is inward looking teachers with little in
the way of divergent educational aims. Little sense of an open
debate by the teachers on the goals of practical education
emerged in this study and so the highly individualistic, voca-
tional nature of trade teaching persists.

Sharing Uncertainty
Used to defining the former industrial workplace as `clear-cut',
`black and white', and the `real' world, the trainees had dif-
ficulty adjusting to the uncertainties found in teaching. They
attempted to adjust by drawing on the emotional resources pro-
vided by the group's support, and as mentioned a strong al-
legiance to the group emerged. This strategy of sharing and dis-
cussing problems helped the trainees to recognize, like the stu-
dent physicians in Fox's study (1957:235-236), that if the uncer-
tainty is shared by fellow trainees, then this enables them to
meet it by at least knowing that other fellow trainees are in the
same predicament. The trainee teachers drew enormous confidence
and affirmation of the existing self from each other in the face
of threat.

At the same time, a distinction can be made within the group
between a small minority who always wanted a career as some sort
of teacher (and those whose self-image included the possibility
that, although they were in trades, they might one day become
teachers), and the majority who entered teaching with a sense of
identity which incorporated a well-defined core of industrial
work values and attitudes. Thus, for the majority of mature-age
tradespersons, the defence of their substantive former selves was

more important to them than the acceptance of the credentialling
authority's educational norms and values which in the trainees'
view presaged an unacceptable change to their self-identity.

BASIS OF STATUS CONFIRMATION
Compliance: a Coping Strategy
Superficially, the trainees appeared to comply fully with certain
techniques about developing lesson plans given them by their
teaching experience supervisors and the College staff. Their ac-
ceptance of what they were told was reflected in the painstaking
way they wrote out lesson plans in the required format. In this
way the trainees were giving back or reflecting to the superviso-
ry staff what they believed it was they wanted. Whilst they ap-
peared to follow directions on the surface, a great deal of
trainee hostility simmered below the surface. While they went
along with the supervisor's wishes concerning the proper conduct
of classes at school, their compliance was often a strategy to
avoid conflict. They often plotted how to do things in their own
way. Thus a form of individualism based on resistance surfaced.

In the privacy of research interviews they proffered reasons for
also seeming to adopt not only the College's, but also their
supervisor's advice, although they were often strongly opposed to
it. The main reason for trainee compliance centred around the
fact that they saw the school supervisor as crucial and impor-
tant, not so much to their personal progress as professional
teachers for they considered that being fully-rounded, competent
tradespersons was sufficient, but for the supervisor's imprimatur
necessary to the phase one part of their teaching supervision
contract. In the words of one: "He's my lifeline really, although
I can't accept some of the things he does or tells me. For exam-
ple, often he's wrong about some of the trade things he shows the
kids without realizing it. But I'm not going to rock the boat, I
bloodywell need his signature".

Here we see a common approach adopted by the trainees, the
evaluating and selecting from information and advice given them
by those around them, sorting and evaluating it on the basis of
determining what will assist them in the process of status pas-
sage transition. In this, and the other ways already described,
they constantly evaluated those actors around them. Indeed, this
process included even each other. The interesting point is that
the trainees rarely perceived any criticism they sometimes
received of what they were doing incorrectly as at all relevant
to their own sense of competence in becoming teachers. Indeed,
their confidence in their competence as vocational teachers was
so strong they used it to filter and sift every bit of informa-
tion, selecting this or rejecting that depending on how they per-
ceived the situation and its impact on the former self and on
`getting through' College.

These three outcomes, that the trainees place considerable em-
phasis on their own self-evaluation, that they have an indi-
vidualistic streak, that they commonly disparaged criticism
received from others, would seem to defy common sense. Identity,
it has been argued, is constructed in interaction with others7
and if a person is criticized by a supervisor who is important
and influential to one's new career, then it would seem only
natural that one modifies one's behaviour into a more acceptable
pattern. The finding of this study seems to contradict this par-
ticular description of the socialization process. Since this is
what the study uncovered, further discussion of the theoretical
implications of the findings is necessary, and these are present-
ed below (and diagrammitically represented in Diagram One).

Clearly, the basis of the trade teacher identity is located in
the core of the industrially-formed self. However, it seems that
if tradespersons are not challenged in ways sufficient to disturb
the identity they bring to the process of becoming a teacher,
then they tend to simply evaluate and judge their new experiences
in a manner that favours, supports and maintains the old identi-
ty. Through the agency of the school culture, the internship mod-
el of teacher education unwittingly supports such a process, thus
exerting a powerful confirming effect on the trainees.

The College fought and lost a battle with the school culture; it
failed to remould the trainees in ways that seriously challenged
their identity. Not once during the course of the teacher educa-
tion program, from the pre-entry interviews through to the
graduation ceremony, did the trainees ever define their change
from industry to teaching as entering a new career, rather they
believed themselves to be involved in a career switch, crystal
clear in their description of the process and what it meant to
them: "Let's face it, in this new job we're doing the same old
things we always did at work, but this time around it's done with
kids. Alright, the conditions are better than in industry, and
there are different problems like [student] discipline to worry
about, and a lot of the bureaucratic bullshit the school goes on
with, but the actual teaching's as easy as having a shit, and
that's not too bloody hard". By defining what is happening to
them as a career switch rather than a career change no room is
allowed for any challenge to affect the self.

A DIAGRAMMATIC MODEL OF OCCUPATIONAL STATUS PASSAGE
The process of becoming a teacher as experienced by the trainees
is represented by the model (Diagram One) derived from the data
which incorporates the major components of the occupational tran-
sition. The diagram may be read in this way: Following a long and
successful participation in trade roles, the tradespersons pres-
ent for entry to teaching with aspects of the occupational self

which influenced them to become teachers. The diagram shows them
undertaking a career switch, rather than a career change. They
enter two formal organizations within which the teacher education
program is located: on the left is the Teachers' College, on the
right the School. Each of these two components of the teacher
education program were embedded in larger formal organizational
networks: the College as part of the CAE system, the schools as
part of the Victorian Ministry of Education, each situated within
their local communities. At the top of the diagram is the Former
Self, the tradeperson prior to teacher education, working and
living outside of the particular educational institutions.

The figure depicts the two major structural components of the
teacher education program impinging on, and in turn being acted
on, by the trainee teacher. Both the teacher education college
and the schools attempted to place formal constraints on the au-
tonomy of the trainees. The resulting bifurcation of these two
cultures by the trainees is represented in each box and italics
are used to represent the dominant definition of the situation,
as perceived by the trainees.

Embedded within these two parts of the teacher education course
are such things as the number and types of other actors present
in each situation, their interrelationships with each other,
their biographical details such as prior work experiences,
ideological beliefs and cultural backgrounds, and the nature of
their participation in the organizations and in the lives of the
students and the trainee teachers. Each actor is wedded to
either vocational or reformist ideologies. What became obvious as
the study unfolded was that each situation was composed of a num-
ber of actors seeking to influence the trainees in various ways.
Depending on their differing educational ideologies, each actor
sought means of influencing the trainees as they were becoming
teachers. However, the trainees themselves drew on past experien-
ces to overcome their overwhelming and debilitating sense of con-
fusion in an effort to stabilize their situations; they were
interpreting events to suit themselves.

It is an expectation and hope of teacher educators that par-
ticipation by novices in a teacher credentialling program will
determine certain outcomes in terms of teacher identity and com-
mitment. However, it is apparent that for tradespersons, the im-
pact of the two contexts, the College and the school, is not at
all uni-directional. And although seeking to `get through' the
College as painlessly as possible, nevertheless, mature-age
trainees do not simply passively react to events unfolding around
them. Rather, they evaluate those events and construct their own
purposeful responses to them.

These outcomes of the trainees' responses, presented below, are

also represented in the diagram by use of the reciprocal arrow
between the various categories dominating the top and the right
hand side of the diagram: the Former Self, the School Culture,
the Emerging Self, leading to Status Maintenance. The solid and
broken lines represent the varying strength of the influence, and
the arrows the direction of that influence.

Mature-Age Trainees' Responses to Teacher Education
While simultaneously under the influences of the College and
school cultures, each trainee is actively appraising and defining
both situations, and determining how he or she will construe the
events. The teacher training course provided potential models of
teachers, but the trainees evaluated each before deciding whether
to accept or reject them as ways of becoming a teacher. This is
reflected in the finding that the trainees are highly selective
in choosing attributes of role-models to emulate or reject. The
trainees also constantly evaluated each other, reflected in the
strong finding that they consistently believed the main benefit
of the College to be a meeting place for their group to discuss
and evaluate the course they were experiencing. It is also clear
that another of the peer group's main functions was to serve as a
comparative reference group for the trainees to determine how
well they were functioning. It was a `good-enough' mother.

However, concerning teaching experience supervision, the trainees
assessed what they were told, used some of this capital where
they deemed it appropriate and necessary to gain a pass mark, or
otherwise ignored it in favour of their faith in an unalterable
belief in what students need in schools, i.e., vocationalism; a
belief in fact reinforced by their own students.8 The logic of
this process allows us to describe the trainees maintaining their
occupational identities by either utilizing or rejecting the
resources provided by the teacher education program, principally
by drawing on the strengths of their own personal biography, and
each other.

As newcomers to teaching, trainees take up certain positions in
education, and their `presenting culture' (Goffman 1968) can be
expected to be modified to a certain degree to take account of
the existing cultural patterns in education. However, Jaques
(1951:253) points out that these existing cultural patterns are
not immutable, and are themselves changed by interaction with the
new `presenting cultures'.

The trainees coped with impending status disconfirmation by
developing both group and individual strategies. They did not
make themselves students in the role desired by the credentiall-
ing authority although one or two attempted in the face of stiff
opposition to do so. Becker et al's (1961) study of medical stu-

dents provides an instructive example of student adaptation to
the demands of medical school. Becker's students had a strong
commitment to a common aim - becoming doctors. As a result of the
`impossible' pressure of medical school, they possessed a greater
commitment to learning to become students than learning how to
become doctors. The intense pressure to pass examinations result-
ed in the students placing their aim of becoming practising doc-
tors to one side and to develop the short-term aim of keeping
their heads above water in medical school.

Becker used the term `time-perspectives' to describe the medical
students' cynical short-term measures devised to cope (while at
the same time preserving their long-term aim of becoming doctors
after graduation). The tradespersons discussed herein, however,
developed no such short/long-term disjuncture necessary to com-
promise; each proudly retained their former identities as
tradespersons, a self-identity also firmly tied to how they
viewed their occupational futures. For this mature-age cohort
continuity of self-identity is paramount, and in this sense, ex-
cept for the tentative explorations of the one or two reformers,
there was no status change, for there was no full status passage
transition.

Becoming a Teacher
The transition from tradesperson to eventually becoming a teacher
is the outcome of a particular sequence of events that begins
with a student serving an apprenticeship in a trade, working as a
successful tradesperson in industry, entering teaching and cul-
minating in the graduation ceremony at the College. The most sig-
nificant aspects of this career are moral ones in Goffman's sense
(1959), for a successful apprenticeship, and industrial ex-
perience culminating in teaching are matters closely linked to
conceptions of status, intimately connected to a tradesperson's
conception of self.

Becoming a teacher is, for tradespersons, not a simple transition
in status passage, it raises and calls into question the kind of
person the teacher was and is. Important, if not central to the
moral career of a teacher, are the social agencies with which the
person comes into contact as a result of transition status, for
they provide and enforce interpretations of the person's current
situation, of the past that led to it, and the possibilities that
lie ahead.

As the trainees passed through the training course, an early
sense of confusion gave way to an increased sense of mastery over
their own activities and development as teachers, based on their
self-evaluation of events. They learnt to be selective and relied
primarily on their own judgement. Further, the supporting and
therefore strong influence of the school culture predominated

over the College culture. With its very clear tendency to dis-
count the College's influence the school culture enabled the
trainees to be self-validating and autonomous.

Thus, while the interrelated levels in Diagram One are represent-
ed by double-arrowed lines, the primacy of the School Culture,
well in existence before the trainees entered the course, mir-
rored the identities the trainees brought to the course. However,
note in the diagram the lines representing the possibility that
the trainees as graduates feed back into the system, and while
their identities may be similar to those of the other actors in
the situations (primarily the official significant others who
along with their early, pre-entry mentors had the most influence
on the trainees), they represent the potential for change in the
system for they evaluated the system as they passed through it.
But although the possibility exists for trainees and graduates to
bring about changes in the system, it seems likely that trainees
in the internship model are affected more by the school culture
rather than by the College culture, for the reasons indicated.

While it is important not to overgeneralize the effects of prior
socialization (Wrong 1961:183-193), the tradespersons in this
study had a sufficiently homogeneous occupational past to make
resistance to resocialization almost universal for the cohort.
Only two or three quickly adapted (although all shared similar
reasons for entering teaching) and one reason for their particu-
lar response lies partly in the fact that they found themselves
in relatively novel situations in their training schools. Such
individual variations in response, while they can be attributed
to differences in training school experiences, can also emerge
from their own personalities, and for two of those reformers who
were immersed in traditional practical workshops, their own set
of personal motives were critical. Indeed, Van Maanen and Schein
(1979:254) advance similar arguments by adding to their theory of
organizational socialization the qualification that outcomes such
as accepting innovation in one's role: `...will probably only
occur when an individual who is innovative in orientation at the
outset encounters an essentially benign socialization process'.
In this particular study, occupational transition was shaped
largely by the trainees' motivational orientations. Indeed,
during an address, critical in tone to the staff of the Teachers'
College concerning the types of tradespersons selected for teach-
ing, a local Regional Education Director familiar with the Col-
lege and its clientele, stated: "...tradespeople who come in to
do teaching are the inappropriate kind of people for the new en-
vironment. They are people who have breakdowns; who cannot cope;
who are resentful of change; who rely on their subject expertise
for their survival, and can't cope with a school environment
which looks for something different".

SUMMARY
The findings in this study form a comprehensible pattern, namely,
that occupational identity is fundamental to the way tradesper-
sons view themselves and, as a result, any attempts to alter this
perspective are risky, and will be resisted by the group. They
enter teaching with a `presenting culture' (Goffman 1968) an
understanding and an evaluation of their position in the world,
which is used as the basis for interpreting their new
environment.

Their former worldview cannot be lightly discarded; the new can-
not be instantly put on. In this study, the `tradies'' resistance
towards attempts to alter occupational role was tenacious. They
did not offer resistance in order to change the situation towards
some desired end, notwithstanding Aggleton and Whitty's (1985:60-
72) recent claims; rather it was a reactive way of distancing
themselves from events. Role confusion is an unconsciously moti-
vated defence to which individuals have recourse in order to
avoid the anxiety produced by disjunctions between their per-
sonalities and the demands of the roles they carry (Jaques
1951:300). If Jaques' picture of role confusion is correct, one
would expect to find in the data strong opposing forces to the
College program. Indeed, this is what was uncovered.

When human beings face any form of change, tensions are sure to
arise. It is possible to make certain general assumptions con-
cerning people's anticipated responses when undergoing occupa-
tional transition. Examples of retraining programmes in which
these propositions may provide a starting point to investigate
where trainees are moving from a regularly ordered, tightly or-
ganized `black and white' occupational world into a more loosely
coupled, much more labile workplace lacking a unified worldview -
indeed, experiencing conflicting views about the nature of the
occupational tasks - might include: early-retirement armed ser-
vices personnel seeking retraining outside of the services; law
enforcement personnel (police officers, corrective services per-
sonnel, by-laws officers, industrial safety officers, etc,)
undertaking retraining; nurses and para-professional personnel
undertaking retraining; or any group of adults seeking to take
part in a long-term retraining programme where there is disparity
of occupational ideology between the new occupational task and
that previously held.

This article concludes that, given situations similar to those
examined, programs such as adult retraining programmes and adult
education, internship models of training, or indeed where any
mature-age cohort undertakes occupational redirection, will only
change the outlooks or worldviews of the mature-age cohort if the
following three factors are present: 1) a programme must be
ideologically tight, with little perceived goal-disparity between

the training institution and the internship institution; 2) there
has to be mutual commitment to certain particular occupational
ideologies so that there is minimal dissonance experienced and;
3) the whole programme has to be sufficiently attractive and in-
tellectually and practically demanding to cause those undertaking
retraining to disavow their former occupational selves in favour
of new preferred definitions.

To obtain a copy of Diagram One mentioned in this article, send
request to Dr Robert Mealyea, Lecturer in Education, Hawthorn
Instititue of Education (Affiliated with The University of Mel-
bourne), 442 Auburn Rd, HAWTHORN, Victoria. Australia. 3122.

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                            NOTES

1   See details in Mealyea, R., (1985:27-36). A phenomenon called
     `status-creep' i.e., trade apprentices from the middle, up-
     per-middle and professional class socio-economic backgrounds
     are increasingly presenting for apprenticeships once the
     traditional area of work of working class students. One of
     the root causes behind this phenomenon is partially explained
     in Hughes (1987:5) who argues it is an employers' response to
     the problem of high unemployment: "...employers become more
     selective and put their selective criteria in the shape of
     higher educational requirements. These may be general, in the
     form of more years of education. They may be specific, in the
     demand for higher levels of basic skills. Students and
     parents, formerly seeing education as a direct access to
     work, express disenchantment when the link fails to work.
     Dissatisfactions formerly unexpressed become substantial com-
     plaints. For their part, teachers feel aggrieved as they see
     themselves being blamed for a shortage of jobs, a shortage
     they would explain in terms of structural changes in employ-
     ment, and not a lack of appropriate skills". I am indebted to
     Dr Peter Gronn, Education Faculty Monash University Melbourne
     for the label `status-creep' to describe the phenomenon.

2   This comment was made frequently, it emerged almost from day
     one, gaining in repetition until Graduation Day, two year's
     later.

3   Spelling Phantasy beginning with `ph' denotes a sense of com-
     pletely unconscious intrapsychic activity. See Jaques, in
     Klein, et al (eds.) 1955. p 482.

4   Comment universal to the group.

5   Ibid.

6   Ibid.

7   McCall & Simmons, 1966:77-78.

8   Research interviews with secondary students taught by the
     trainees in this study invariably came up with the same
     desire as an outcome of schooling, especially those in years
     11-12.

NB Although not part of this particular paper, it is only natural
that the reader will wonder about what finally happened to the
members of the cohort. In all, 8 no longer work in teaching: 2
males resigned during teacher education claiming "it wasn't for
me", 1 female left during the first year to travel to the UK with
her spouse, 2 males resigned approximately one year following
graduation, another one year later, 2 more recently. It would be
correct to say that to date 50% of those remaining express strong
dissatisfaction with teaching, but remain teachers for altruistic
and other reasons. Their allegiance to the subculture and the
findings in this paper remain powerful; feelings of marginality
prevailed throughout the two-years and showed little sign of
reformulation along the way.

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