

Life as a Lab Rat

Who I am

David McLean

- Senior Educator @ Kangan Batman TAFE
- Printing & Graphic Arts (Multimedia)
- Interactive Digital Media
- Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)

Qualifications

- Currently enrolled in PhD Work and Learning Studies @ Monash
- Masters in Work and Learning Studies
- BA Media Studies – Edith Cowan

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My Study

Research Method

- Institutional Ethnography as Developed by Dorothy E. Smith
- Focuses on the every day work that people do and how that is structured and restructured via texts
- Also considers how a single text can influence multiple work places in different locations (the Translocal)

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Institutional Ethnography

IE Method & Data Collection

- Identify and describe a 'problematic'.
- Something has happened, how has it occurred? What changes has it made to the way people work?
- Interviews and conversations with practitioners about their work while looking for texts that organise.
- Follow and map the trail of texts

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IE eyes & ears

Spotting an opportunity to apply IE

- IE makes you more aware of the 'texts' that shape and control the work we do. All of a sudden IE is everywhere!
- When something new is proposed you wait for the cascade of texts to arrive...watch the trickle become a flood and see the change it makes to the everyday work that people do...
- But what about those that aren't watching? When & how do they become aware of change? What new texts appear that (re)shape the everyday work that people do and at what pace do the texts arrive?

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Key text

Victorian Vet Policy

Jobs for Your Future: Skills for Victoria

People and Place of work

Victorian TAFE Teachers & Senior Educators

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Current 'state of play'

Funding

- Very clear private and public provider divide
- Bulk of government subsidised funding is sectioned to TAFE
- Priority areas shape funding

Student Access

- Most students studying at TAFE can access government subsidised courses at any AQF level, max to pay \$1100
- No funding restrictions to the number of qualifications you can achieve

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State of play post July 31st 2009

Funding

- Decreased fees for Cert III & Below
- Increase in fees for Diploma & above (staged implementation)
- Students can only get govt subsidy for a qualification higher than what they have already obtained.
- If you have a Diploma and want another one in a different field you will have to pay full fees (\$6K to \$10K)
- Student loans via Fee Help
- Removal of training priorities

Contestability

- All state government funding will be open to both public and private providers (staged from June 1 2009 onwards)
- TAFES will eventually receive no fixed funding and will have to openly compete with the Private Sector.
- Are there unlimited funds?

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What is driving research?

IE has significant potential for this project as the every day work of TAFE teachers & administrators is about to undergo significant change.

IE looks at how change has occurred when those most affected by change were not aware of the change.

IE also recognises how change is structured and communicated through texts, and how texts are interconnected through a mapped hierarchy.

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Why "life as a Lab Rat?"

- Great deal of this change has been encouraged in Victoria by the Federal Government
- Change is backed by extra PPP funds for Victoria to experiment with their VET sector
- Policy has several reviews built in and space for modification
- While these directions are tested and modified TAFE teachers and administrators will be at the forefront of the experiment
- It is those at the 'forefront' of the experiment that this study is interested in

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Maps of texts

A second part of interest to this study is the density of texts that will need to be created to shape work practices to the aims of the policy documents.

I will use contemporary genre analysis to examine controlling texts at different locations spawned from the policy document, looking for similarities and differences in how control is established via translocal texts to enact the policy.

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Maps of texts

Smith (1999) problematises Michelle Foucault's (1981) notion of discourse as brilliant but overtly theoretical and dependant on abstraction rather than application. A theoretical decontextualised concept of discourse from Foucault does not account for the location of people and the relationships between texts and people i.e.: the content of the texts that establishes the ruling relations. The place of the individual within the discourse is crucial to Smith's concept of ruling relations and constructing a 'sociology of what is actually happening'

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Maps of texts

Baudrillard comments "Discourse is discourse, but the operations, strategies, and schemes played out there are real (2007, p. 33)".