



## The Evolution of Social Closure in School Education in New South Wales, Australia

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### **Abstract**

*This paper provides a case study of the evolution of social closure as experienced within the teaching profession in public school education in New South Wales, Australia. It charts the changing development of social closure mechanisms, from state-sanctioned, formalized, collectivist mechanisms, to organization-based formal and informal mechanisms derived from individualist criteria. Drawing on an empirical research project that examined the individual experiences of social closure amongst a group of school teachers, this paper finds that there is potential for both collective and individual resistance, or the development of ‘usurpatory’ strategies, at both the formal and the informal level. Detailed study of changing social closure strategies, and the strategies employed to resist social closure, can provide a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of how discrimination continues to operate in workplaces despite the existence of anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation in Australia.*

### **Keywords**

*Social closure, casual employment, teachers, NSW, Australia.*

### **Introduction**

Social closure is a dynamic and evolving process. This is clearly demonstrated in the changing strategies and mechanisms of social closure that have developed within the teaching profession in public school education in New South Wales, Australia. During the twentieth century exclusionary mechanisms directed at the collective group ‘married

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women' were institutionalized through legislative action in the arena of the state. Over time these mechanisms have been eroded, but forms of social closure continue to operate within the profession. This article argues that a range of mechanisms and strategies are currently employed, both at the formal level of organizational policies and procedures and at the informal level of everyday interaction through language, symbolic acts and physical control. Current strategies are more likely to be based on individualist criteria such as 'family responsibilities' or 'casual employment status' than collectivist criteria such as 'married women' that may have been utilized in the past. Despite the changing nature of social closure strategies over time, the impact remains relatively consistent with social closure mechanisms operating primarily to exclude women with caring responsibilities. Teaching professionals respond to these exclusionary strategies, both on a collective and an individual basis, developing usurpationary strategies to resist their exclusion from the profession.

By analyzing the changing strategies and mechanisms of social closure, and the strategies of resistance employed in the teaching profession we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how discrimination is produced, maintained or reduced in the workplace.

This paper provides a case study of the changing nature of social closure strategies experienced by casual teachers employed within the New South Wales Department of Education and Training. It begins by detailing the evolution of the concept of social closure, and providing background into the New South Wales public education system and the role of casual teachers within the system. It focuses on the experiences of a group of casual teachers, drawing on a number of in-depth interviews designed to explore their perceptions of social closure in the workplace and the strategies they have developed to resist social closure. The paper concludes with a discussion how the concept of social closure illuminates continuing discrimination in the workplace despite institutional processes aimed at its removal.

### **Evolution of the Concept of Social Closure**

The concept of social closure was originally formulated by Weber (1978, pp. 43-46) as the process of monopolization of resources by individuals and groups using rules of exclusion 'designed to create legitimated social inequalities' (Lee, 2010, p. 2). These inequalities are created by singling out certain physical or social attributes such as gender, ethnicity class or education. The concept of social closure has most commonly been used in the sociology of professions, particularly to examine the processes of professionalization (Larson, 1977; Witz, 1990) in order to establish how the boundaries of professional occupations are drawn.

Parkin (1974, 1979) and Murphy (1984, 1985, 1986) have further developed the concept of closure to analyze how power is mobilized by groups to stake claims to resources and opportunities. Parkin (1979, p. 45) identifies two distinct forms, or modes, of closure that operate amongst groups. Exclusionary closure 'is a form of collective social action which, intentionally or otherwise, gives rise to a social category of

'ineligibles or outsiders', that is it is a downwards use of power to create a subordinate group, or class, of inferiors. In reaction to this downwards application of power, Parkin suggests that 'countervailing action by the "negatively privileged" on the other hand, represents the use of power in an upward direction' and he terms this 'usurpatory power' or the 'collective attempts by the excluded to win a greater share of resources'(1979, p. 45).

Parkin distinguishes between two types of criteria which underlie all types of exclusion. Collectivist criteria rely on group features such as race, ethnicity or gender, while individualist criteria include aspects such as property ownership or educational credentials. Over time, collectivist criteria of exclusion have tended to be replaced by individualist criteria. This does not represent an elimination of exclusionary practices, rather a modification of the legal and political foundation of exploitation (Parkin cited in Murphy, 1986, p. 25).

Witz (1990) takes the models developed by Parkin and Murphy and builds in the gender dimension, emphasizing the importance of gender in professional projects. She suggests that professionalization is the project of 'class-privileged male actors at a particular point in history and in particular societies' (Witz, 1990, p. 675). Witz finds that it is in the sphere of civil society where male power is organized and institutionalized and where gender exclusionary strategies operate to sustain patriarchal modes of occupational closure. In her study of the relations between doctors and nurses she traces the movement of occupational strategies of closure from the institutional arena of the state into the arena of modern universities and professional corporations (Witz, 1990, p. 680).

Rosigno and colleagues (2007) demonstrate the usefulness of social closure models for understanding institutional exclusion and dominant group positioning, as well as the context of everyday interaction through language, symbolic acts and physical control or force. They find that examining social closure 'directs us towards an in-depth understanding of the processes through which stratification hierarchies are both defined and maintained'(Rosigno, et al., 2007, p. 21). Their study of workplace discrimination recognizes the roles of extra-organizational structures, organizational and institutional practices and the intervention of the state in dominant and subordinate group interaction. They also use a social closure approach to examine how individuals or actors produce, reduce or maintain inequality within the workplace, the labour market and or within spatial or political organizations.

Metiu (2006) examines how social closure processes and strategies are used between status groups working within the same occupation in a single workplace or team environment. She suggests that the focus of social closure research has tended to be on the formal closure mechanisms performed at the macro level among large segments of society, with fewer studies focusing on the informal strategies used by high status groups within the workplace.

This paper examines how social closure has evolved within the teaching profession in New South Wales, Australia. It draws on Parkin's concepts of the exclusionary and usurpatory modes of closure to examine both how social closure

operates in the profession and how the targets of social closure may develop strategies of resistance. It also draws on Parkin and Murphy's discussion of the transition from collectivist to individualist criteria of social exclusion to understand the changing nature of social closure over time. It is informed by Witz's understanding of the gendered nature of the professional project and the movement of social closures strategies from the arena of the state into other formal arenas. The paper takes up the challenges suggested by both Roscigno and colleagues and Metiu to examine how the actions of individuals or high status groups within workplaces operate to perpetuate social closure. It investigates how discrimination has been produced, reduced and/or maintained through both formal processes of organizational policy development and through the informal processes of everyday interaction through language and symbolic acts and how these processes are resisted.

### **Casual Teachers in New South Wales**

The New South Wales public school system is the largest education system in Australia. It provides school education to more than 700,000 students at 2,234 government-funded schools across a geographical area of 809,444 square kilometres. While other education systems in Australia may cover a larger geographical area, New South Wales school education provides services to the largest number of students and employs the most education professionals of any school system in Australia.

The particular focus of this article is on those people employed by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) to teach in state-funded primary and secondary schools across the state (note, this does not include those employed by the Department to teach at the vocational level in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges.)

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training Annual Report for 2008 shows that the Department employs 59,680 permanent and temporary full-time and part-time teachers (NSW DET, 2009). Of these, approximately 49,000 (83 percent) are employed on a permanent basis and 10,680 (17 percent) on a temporary basis, while approximately 47,081 (79 percent) are employed full-time and 12,599 (21 percent) are employed part-time. There may be some overlap in these categories due to the number of teachers working on a temporary part-time basis. It is therefore difficult to ascertain the exact number of employees with permanent part-time status, however it is relatively small compared to the total number of teachers.

The Department does not include all casual teachers listed on the casual register in its staff count, but the Departmental website reports that in 2008 there were 30,393 teachers registered as available to teach casually. This represents approximately half as many teachers again as the total number of employed teachers in the New South Wales public education system (NSW DET, 2007). This figure is also more than double the number of teachers who have access to ongoing part-time work. While only a limited number of casual teachers would be teaching at any point in time, research has shown

that a significant proportion of those available for casual work would prefer permanent part-time work (Bamberry, 2006; Pocock, Prosser, & Bridge, 2004).

Permanent teachers in the New South Wales education system are employed on an ongoing basis and have access to the full range of employee entitlements including access to paid forms of leave such as annual leave, sick leave, carers' leave, parental leave (including maternity and paternity leave) and long service leave. Permanent employees also have access to ongoing employer superannuation payments and good access to training and professional development. Permanent part-time teachers have access to these conditions on a pro-rata basis.

Temporary teachers are employed on short to medium term contracts, from at least one month full-time or two terms (approximately four months) part-time up to a full school year (February through to December in NSW schools). These employees accrue annual leave, sick leave and carers' leave entitlements for the duration of their contracts and these entitlements are 'paid out' at the completion of the contract. Temporary employees do not generally have access to paid parental leave as there is a twelve month qualifying period and their contracts generally run for less than twelve months. Temporary employees receive employer paid superannuation contributions for the duration of their contracts and may have limited access to training and professional development, depending on the decisions of the colleagues.

Casual teachers are employed on a day-to day basis, dependent on the relief needs of one or more schools. Casual teachers do not have access to any forms of paid leave such as sick leave, carers' leave or annual leave. Like temporary employees they generally fail the qualifying provisions of twelve months service to be eligible for paid parental leave. Casual teachers do not have access to professional development.

Casual relief teaching is seen as short-term relief and involves very short notice. It is usually initiated by a request to fill in for a permanent, teacher for one to three days in a single week. Teachers are usually informed before 8:00 am on the day they are needed and they have no employment stability, as there is no guarantee of ongoing casual work within a particular school. This form of casual work can lead to more regular employment if an ongoing relationship with the school community can be developed.

Casual teachers share key points in common with permanent teachers. For example, casual teachers in New South Wales must hold the same formal teaching qualification or credentials as permanent teachers. They are assessed for personal suitability through an interview with a senior departmental officer. Further, they must undertake a criminal record check, and for those trained in non-English speaking countries, an English language proficiency test is necessary. These processes are the same as those required of applicants for permanent teaching positions (NSW DET, 2008).

## **Research Methodology**

An empirical study that explored the gender dimensions of casual employment and social closure provided the opportunity to explore the experiences of 20 casual school teachers in the New South Wales public education system. While a small-scale study may not

provide evidence that can be readily generalized to the whole population; it can provide in-depth understanding of particular experiences of social closure.

Life-history interviews were conducted with teachers currently working in New South Wales public-sector schools in a casual capacity. Each of the teachers identified as a casual teacher. All of the teachers had experience of casual and/or temporary teaching.

The study recruited both men and women teachers, with and without family responsibilities, in urban and rural areas of New South Wales. Interviewees were recruited initially through the network of family and friends of the interviewer and subsequently through the snowball method (Neuman, 2003, p. 214). That is, participants were asked to recommend colleagues and associates who had experiences of casual employment. This process, combined with a focus on secondary schools, allowed the interviewer to locate a significant number of men who worked as casual teachers. The process also allowed for the recruitment of participants across a broad range of age groups and in different life-cycle phases, that is, both with and without family responsibilities. Eleven women and nine men ranging in age from 26 to 61 years (mean of 43.8 years) participated in the project. Twelve of the participants had family responsibilities (three of these were men, nine were women) eight did not have family responsibilities (six of these were men, two were women).

The recruitment process enabled the researcher to gain a nuanced understanding of how age, gender and family responsibilities contribute to social closure processes and how casual teachers experience the closure process.

Interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes or in neutral spaces such as a public library or a cafe. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Topics covered in the interviews included:

- demographic data, including age, sex and marital status
- career data, including years employed as teacher, modes of employment over time, promotions and levels attained, and union membership
- reasons for working casually
- experiences of school management practices and formal mechanisms of closure
- experiences of informal processes of closure and local gender relations in the workplace.

Interviews were recorded or, in two cases, where interviews could not be recorded, detailed notes were taken. Recorded interviews were transcribed and all transcriptions and notes were indexed against the major research questions. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the participants, and identifying factors such as the names of schools, suburbs or towns have been removed from all quotations.

This article reports on one part of the results of the study. It considers the subjective experiences of casual teachers of a range of formal and informal closure mechanisms as well as the strategies developed to resist social closure.

## Formal Mechanisms of Closure

During the twentieth century exclusionary mechanisms within the teaching profession were explicitly directed at the collective group of women, particularly married women. These mechanisms were embedded in the institutional spheres of society and directly enforced by the state through the operation of the *Married Women (Lecturers and Teachers) Act 1932*. This Act specified that married women teachers could no longer be employed by the then Department of Public Instruction. Those already employed in the Department were required to relinquish their positions. This Act was repealed in 1947 and more recent legislation such as the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* has actively outlawed not only the collective exclusion of women from employment, but also collective exclusion on the basis of race or ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation. State-based exclusionary closure became an obvious target for countervailing or usurpatory action, for resistance by those collective groups most heavily impacted. Collective groups have utilized State-sponsored legislation, not only to remove formal exclusionary mechanisms within the teaching profession, but also to actively promote the inclusion of these formerly excluded groups.

As Witz (1990) suggests, the removal of these formal mechanisms of collective exclusion from the institutional arena of the state, did not result in the complete removal of formal mechanisms of exclusion in the teaching profession. Alternative formal mechanisms of exclusion have developed, and continue to exist, within the arena of the Department of Education and Training.

Due to the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation, the collectivist criteria of gender cannot be utilised in any formal organisational policies. Instead, more recent social closure mechanisms have targeted individualist criteria such as teachers with family or caring responsibilities. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training has developed a range of formal policies that operate to encourage workers with family responsibilities to relinquish their permanent positions and accept work on a casual or temporary basis. Further formal mechanisms of social closure operate to maintain the secondary status of casual and temporary employees.

Access to permanent part-time work is limited within the New South Wales public education system. There are tight quotas on its use and decisions about access are left in the hands of school principals, most of whom are reticent to take on the apparent planning issues surrounding part-time work. Many staff are unaware of the availability of permanent part-time work. As a result, many of those who would prefer to work part-time feel that their only option is to resign from a permanent position and accept work on a casual basis despite the lack of entitlements that come with casual status. This process, which is formalized in Departmental policy, and reinforced in by daily practice within schools represents a formal process of closure.

The experience of Penny is typical of many of the teachers in the study. Penny commenced work with the Department in 1974 and fell pregnant with twins in 1976. She attempted to return to full-time work after the completion of her paid maternity leave. She notes:

There was no option in those days to take leave without pay, well you could, but you lost your [status]... there was no real provision for it, they didn't encourage it, you basically went back or you resigned... And so I went back and I guess I thought I'd go back and I would just do my classroom teaching and I would cope fine, and I walked back into 'oh and of course you'll be year nine year advisor won't you', and all this sort of stuff ... I worked for about another oh seven or eight months and then I found that I was so tired that I was doing things like driving through red lights when I was picking up the kids, so I just marched in one day and resigned...

There wasn't the mention of part time or any...?

No not in those days no.

While the lack of access to part-time work might be expected for workers starting their families in the 1970s, Penny's experience was echoed by Dagma's experience in the late 1980s and by Rachel's experience in the late 1990s.

Guy also discussed the fact that there did not seem to be a formal system of applying for part-time work, rather access to part-time work seemed to be based on grace and favour:

Actually, when I was at Q there was a very good teacher, an English teacher... and she had two children and she opted from full time to do three days a week, the [head] teacher just made that happen you know.

Would that have been because she had been on maternity leave and was coming back from maternity leave?

No she wasn't on maternity leave, no she just, I don't know she just wangled it so that she could have three days instead, I have never actually personally done that...

In fact, the Department only developed a system-wide, formal system of permanent part-time work in 2003, according to the Teachers' Personnel Handbook (NSW DET, 2011). The part-time work policy allows for three approaches to accessing part-time work. Permanent part-time work allows a teacher to make long-term variation to work patterns, but reversion to full-time work is only possible through the transfer system. Teachers can also access part-time leave without pay for a maximum of two years or part-time maternity leave which is also of limited range and availability. The policy also specifies:

The creation of a permanent part-time work position must have regard to the maximum number of positions that may be created state-wide and at the school level. The maximum number of positions that can be established is reviewed by the Department on a regular basis (NSW DET, 2011).

That is, the total number of part-time positions across the Department is capped and kept under strict control by the Department. This process operates as a form of closure to ensure that access to part-time work is limited.

The policy developed in 2003 still appears in the Personnel Handbook in 2011, despite significant changes to Australian workplace legislation since that time, including the introduction of a 'right to request permanent part-time work' for employees with

family responsibilities (*Fair Work Australia Act 2008*). The lack of access to permanent part-time work, career break schemes and other forms of support for teachers with family responsibilities is a major mechanism that drives many teachers with family responsibilities to resign from their permanent positions and accept casual status.

Once a teacher has accepted employment on a casual or temporary basis, the Department's transfer system provides a further formal closure mechanism that maintains their secondary status. The system allows staff to accrue 'priority status points' based on years of service and service in rural and remote locations or in 'difficult to staff' schools. Teachers whose permanent positions have been deleted and those seeking compassionate transfer are also given priority status. When a permanent position arises, central staffing services must identify if there is a suitable candidate on the priority transfer list before seeking further afield. Teachers who give up a permanent position lose any previously accrued priority status points and casual teachers find it difficult to accrue these points given the haphazard nature of their employment.

The participants in the project who had given up their permanent positions and their priority status to work casually also found it was difficult to transfer to a permanent position within a particular local region. The prospect of having to accept a position in a more remote school – in one case a teacher with children under five years was expected to accept a position at a school 100 kilometres away from their home and to commute on a daily basis – was a major barrier to returning to a permanent position within the Department.

The experience of the teachers interviewed was that although there is relative freedom to choose to move from permanent work to casual or temporary work, there is less freedom to choose to return to permanent work. The choice to work part-time is constrained by the lack of access to permanent part-time work. These factors create a situation where permanent staff are compelled to accept ongoing casual employment.

The secondary status of casual and temporary teachers is reinforced formally through the Department's pay scale. Teachers' pay is contingent on their years of experience in the job, with a pay scale based on the number of years of employment. A new teacher starts on step five of the scale (\$50,522 per annum as of 1 January 2008) and may rise to the maximum level of step thirteen (\$75,352 per annum as of 1 January 2008). However, for casual teachers, the pay scale is capped at a lower level. When the initial research for this project was undertaken in 2004, the maximum level for casual teachers equated to approximately step nine of the scale. However, in 2008 the maximum rate for casuals (\$61,247 per annum) equated to step eight with the five percent loading noted above. That is, over the period from 2004 to 2008, the maximum rate for casual teachers dropped relative to that for permanent teachers.

Under the casual pay scale, a teacher who was at the top of the salary scale prior to their decision to work casually, such as Guy, was required to take a cut in pay and could not progress to a higher level of pay. Guy noted that in one year he missed only a few days of work, but this was not recognized in terms of salary progression. Similarly, Penny had worked as a regular casual on a full-time basis for more than ten years, but could not progress beyond the casual salary cap.

The lack of access to training and professional development reinforces the secondary status of casual and temporary workers. Almost all the teachers interviewed noted that as casual or temporary teachers they did not have any access to professional development, training or in-service days. Even when working on a temporary basis, access was severely limited. Susan's experience sums up the difficulties faced:

Have you ever been invited to do any training while in a school on a casual basis or in any of the blocks?

No, there was an in-service that came up just a couple of weeks ago and my two colleagues went and I [thought] 'I would like to go too' but there was only casual cover for one teacher from each school... I've found as a casual teacher you do miss out on all that stuff... I mean if you are lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time you will get copies of you know the new syllabus or a support document if you just happen to be there at that time in the [faculty] department ... but otherwise you just don't know what is out there.

The lack of access to this training and development creates a situation where casual teachers' skills are undermined, which in turn reduces their ability to gain a transfer back to a permanent position.

These Departmental policies and practices provide formal mechanisms of social closure to the teaching profession. The mechanisms clearly communicate their second-class status to casual teachers. The mechanisms do not target collective groups such as 'married women', but instead target individualist criteria such as family responsibilities and casual or temporary employment status. They do not directly exclude women from the profession, but such mechanisms do have a greater impact on women, as women are more likely to take responsibility for family care and therefore more likely to accept employment on a casual or temporary basis.

Formal policies and practices do provide a target for usurpatory closure strategies, and casual teachers have attempted to resist their exclusion from the profession and their second-class status within the Department.

### **Resistance to Formal Mechanisms of Social Closure**

The main mechanism of resistance to formal social closure for casual and temporary teachers is union membership. The teachers' union for public school teachers in New South Wales is the NSW Teachers' Federation. Membership of the Federation amongst permanent and temporary teachers is relatively high by Australian standards at approximately 67 percent, while the rate of membership for casuals is significantly lower at approximately 23 percent (Bambray, 2008).

The New South Wales Teachers' Federation has won a number of concessions from the Department of Education and Training to improve the status of casual and temporary teachers. In 2001 they achieved agreement on the new category of 'temporary teacher' which allowed casual teachers on blocks of relief employment of more than four weeks full-time, or two terms on a part-time basis to become temporary

contract teachers (Patterson, 2005). This status granted these teachers access to paid sick leave entitlements during their period of relief teaching and entitled them to paid annual leave between terms. However, Junor, O'Brien and O'Brien (2004) suggest that there have been difficulties associated with movement between temporary and casual status, particularly around priority status for transfer amongst long-term casual teachers.

In addressing the issue of casual rates of pay, the union achieved the establishment of a five percent loading under the Crown Employees (Teachers in Schools and TAFE and Related Employees) Salaries and Conditions Award from December 2000. This loading was to be 'inclusive of the following incidents of employment: sick leave, family and community service leave, special leave and leave loading'. A casual loading is relatively common in many industries in Australia; however, the usual rate for casual loadings is 20-25 percent. Research on casual loadings (Watson, 2005) has shown that loadings rarely compensate workers for the overall lower rate of pay and the level of job insecurity casuals experience.

Further action by the Federation to improve casual pay rates included legal action taken against the Department. In 2004, a ruling by the New South Wales Court of Appeal (15 November 2004) declared the capped pay scale to be discriminatory. The Court found that 13 women who were long-term casual state school teachers were subjected to indirect discrimination when they were denied access to the permanent pay scale which provided earnings of up to \$10,000 per annum higher than those available to casual employees (SMH, 2004). The women in the case described employment situations similar to those of Rachel, Dagma and Penny in this study. Each teacher had worked permanently for the Department but had given up full-time work to meet their family responsibilities. Later they had returned to teaching as long-term casuals. Each had found that as casuals they were on lower pay than during their previous permanent employment. Some had unsuccessfully tried to gain permanent employment within a limited geographical area constrained by their family responsibilities. The 13 women were awarded a damages payout totalling \$200,000 plus interest. However, the Department of Education and Training appealed the decision to the High Court. In 2006 the High Court decided in favour of the state on the grounds that 'there was no requirement or condition on casuals that potentially contravened the Anti-Discrimination Act' and that 'the grounds for differentiating between casual and permanent teachers had not been shown to be unreasonable' (HCA Amery & Ors v State of New South Wales (Director General NSW Department of Education and Training), 2004; Seymour, 2006). The results of this action has had limited results for casual workers.

The Teachers' Federation has been constrained in its attempts to improve the Department's transfer system. Given that the transfer system is designed to protect the rights and entitlements of permanent workers, and the majority of members of the Federation are in fact permanent employees, it has been difficult for them to argue for changes to the transfer system to recognize the service of casual workers.

Resistance to formal mechanisms of social closure have had mixed results for casual and temporary workers. More than half of the teachers in the study were union members and many saw union membership as a crucial strategy for addressing both the

high level of risk they felt in the workplace and the material exclusion of casual work (Bamerry 2008).

### **Informal Mechanisms of Closure**

Formal mechanisms of closure are relatively visible in the workplace and can be targeted through legislative change, union campaigns and other forms of formal resistance. Informal mechanisms of closure, on the other hand can be more difficult to identify and label. These informal mechanisms do not specifically target the collective group of women, nor are they consciously designed to penalize casual and temporary workers. Rather the mechanisms undermine casual teachers' authority and reinforce their secondary status. Those using the mechanisms may not even be consciously aware that their language and symbolic acts are reinforcing discrimination in the workplace. The message received by casual and temporary workers, however, is clear – that they are second class workers and that their views and opinions are undervalued.

The casual teachers in the study had experienced a range of treatment by other teachers that was designed to reinforce their secondary status within the school. An initial phase of social closure operates in the informal processes of casual recruitment within a school. Once casual teachers have Departmental approval to teach on a casual basis, they must also gain access to their local schools through a relatively informal process of approaching the Principal or Deputy Principal. Five women participants (Ann, Dagma, Rachel, Susan and Glynis) described how these informal mechanisms of social closure had made it difficult to gain access to casual work in schools, particularly if they had been out of the education system for a number of years with family responsibilities (Rachel) or had moved to a new geographical location (Susan). Dagma described how one 'ratbag deputy' had given work to his 'favourites' rather than sharing the available casual work more equitably. Similarly, Glynis, who had worked in health and higher education for most of her career, and therefore did not have strong social networks in the school sector, found it quite difficult to break into the casual network amongst local schools. She said 'oh I think most schools have their regulars, and they just don't want to try anyone new'.

Many of the participants of the study observed that, as casuals, their opinions or views were discounted or not considered relevant to organizational decision-making processes. Val noted that other teachers did not take much notice of what she said; as if, being a casual, she didn't count.

In the respect that they're not really interested in my opinion, at say perhaps, a staff meeting. Or I can say what I like but nobody seems to listen... whether it is because they know that I won't be there after this date or it is the 'how would you know?'

Casual teachers are given very little opportunity to provide input into school decision-making processes. Many feel that even when they voice an opinion, their perspective is ignored or undervalued. This use of symbolic acts by permanent teachers communicates the second class status of casual and temporary teachers, whilst also

reinforcing permanent teachers' membership of the higher status group. A further tactic employed by permanent teachers is, through everyday interaction, to use their physical control of assets to undermine the authority of casual teachers and to demonstrate a lack of trust in their abilities and even their integrity. Scott described an incident where as a casual he was not given access to the resources he needed to do his job, and where casual teachers were blamed for problems within the school:

A teacher left me some work to do in the science computer labs ... I walked past another teacher and he said: 'Oh look, we can't let casuals use that room'. Even though he knew how capable I was in the laboratory, making sure no one knocks off a PC out the side window. But there has been a recent problem with things going missing, and the first line of defence: 'Oh maybe some casual did it'.

Similarly, Penny described her relations with other teachers and supervisors as generally amicable, except in a couple of situations where her treatment as a casual was very poor. In one case she was employed ostensibly for a full year, but her appointment was suddenly cut short. She said that although she knew that someone could be permanently appointed, she had begun to assume that she would be there for the whole year. She stated:

The head teacher of the department told me that I wasn't needed as he passed me on the stairs. 'Oh they're appointing someone tomorrow you don't need to come in any more'. And I thought, 'it wasn't the not coming in that was worrying me', it was just the way he said it.

In this case the language used in this interaction reinforced Penny's status as a second-class teacher. In another incident, Penny had been working as a regular casual at one school for seven years when the Principal made a speech to a staff meeting which demonstrated his lack of respect for casual staff. She said:

At a staff meeting [he] basically said 'some of our casual and part-timers have been bad-mouthing the school' and I knew it wasn't me but just the way he said it in the staff meeting I thought that is disgusting. And he said 'and if there is anybody here that doesn't like teaching here they can come and get a transfer form'. And I thought 'that is a good idea I will go and get a transfer form'.

Carmen also told a story of language being used to reinforce her status as a 'non-person' as a casual teacher. She had been employed to teach one day per week for a whole term, only to turn up one day half-way through the term to find a new teacher in the classroom. The school had employed a new full-time, permanent teacher and had not informed Carmen. When she went to the Principal to discuss the issue, she says that he looked at her blankly and asked, 'Who are you?'

These informal processes of closure frequently operate between teachers within the staff room. Permanent teachers use language, symbolic and physical actions, in the context of everyday interaction, to exclude casual teachers and reinforce their dominant

group position (Roscigno et al, 2007). While these actions are not necessarily directed at one particular gender group, they are experienced, both individually and collectively by casual teachers. Resistance to such informal mechanisms on a collective basis is difficult. While there is a collective experience of exclusion amongst casual teachers, the specific acts and language are focussed on individual respondents. As a result, resistance to this form of social exclusion tends to rely on individual rather than collective action.

### **Resistance to Informal Mechanisms of Social Closure**

The teachers in this study identified a number of strategies that they used to mediate informal mechanisms of social closure. One of these was to use social networks both to gain access to the workplace and to strengthen their connections once they had gained access.

Two men teachers described how they had used their social networks to help overcome social closure and gain access to ongoing casual work. Guy noted that many of his friends from university or from the schools where he had previously worked were teaching at schools in his local area and frequently called him in for work. Darren described how he played cricket with the deputy principal of a central school 40 kilometres from Regional Centre, who said to him ‘Why don’t you come out and work for us when you finish up your course?’

These men utilized their social status and social connections as men to over-ride their lower status as casual teachers. Such social networks, based on a gendered social hierarchy, can operate to create multiple layers of exclusion for women casual teachers. However, two women in the study were able to gain access to these types of masculine networks vicariously. Marika started working casually when she was approached by a member of her husband’s squash team who happened to be the Principal at a local school. Similarly, Penny was approached by a neighbour who was a full-time teacher to fill in for a couple of days per week. Although favouritism and informal networks are not necessarily gender-based, they can create avenues through which casuals could experience multiple levels of social exclusion.

Many of the teachers attempted to overcome some aspects of informal social closure by mobilising their social skills to gain acceptance. They attempted to work mainly in one or two schools in order to get to know the students, other teachers, and the systems in place in those schools. Darren described his ability to ‘get along’ to ‘help out’ and to participate in staff room social activities. He took an approach that appeased two competing factions in the staff room. He joined two lunchtime groups - the ‘gourmet club’ a group of women, who brought salads and other foods to share at a weekly event, and the ‘fish and chips club’, held by the men teachers as a response to the gourmet club.

The casual teachers had to undertake the emotional labour required to maintain these social relationships. Some of the teachers achieved this more successfully than others, becoming part of the school (Bridget) and turning up for work almost every day of the year (Guy, Penny). Lawrence and Corwin (2003, pp. 930-931) suggest that participation in such ‘interaction rituals’ is essential for the acceptance of part-time

professionals, and that a lack of participation, due to the scheduling of events outside their regular hours may undermine the acceptance of these workers within a workplace.

Even where a high degree of emotional labour was undertaken to counteract informal mechanisms of social closure, there was a tenuousness of these relationships that could be easily destabilized. Val, who had been a regular casual at one school, and described herself as a favourite, told of an experience where she had asked the Deputy not to call on her for the first two weeks of term as she needed to help her daughter search for employment. As a result Val had been offered only five days work for the whole term. She felt that she had moved from being a favourite to being on the outer because of a simple request for two weeks off. Bridget also described how positive relationships she had developed in one school had changed with the arrival of a new deputy principal. Her response to the changes was to seek work in another nearby school.

Individualised strategies of resistance to social closure can be seen to have mixed results for casual school teachers. A number of teachers successfully utilized their social power and influence to create a space for themselves and demand recognition of their professional status as teachers. However, other teachers have found that informal processes of social exclusion are as effective as formal processes in limiting their full participation in the profession.

## **Conclusion**

Within the New South Wales public education system, formal processes of social closure have moved from the arena of the state into organizational policy and institutional practices in a process similar to that described by Witz (1990). Explicit legislative closure has been replaced by closure mechanisms based on organizational policy documents such as the Teachers' Personnel Handbook. Social closure strategies have also moved into the sphere of everyday interaction through language, symbolic acts and physical control as suggested by Roscigno and colleagues (2007).

Social closure mechanisms based on collectivist criteria have been replaced by mechanisms based on individualist criteria as initially described by Parkin (1979) and Murphy (1986). Rather than directly targeting married women as a collective group, the policies and practices of the organization penalize workers with family responsibilities – an individualistic criteria. As a result, teachers, particularly those with family responsibilities, face a range of social closure mechanisms. Their opportunities for permanent part-time work are limited, driving many to accept casual or temporary status with its attendant poorer levels of workplace entitlements.

Once employed on a casual basis, the teachers experienced a range of informal strategies that reinforce their secondary status and undermine their professional identity. This research supports the findings of Metiu (2006) who suggested that high status groups within the workplace utilize informal strategies and mechanisms to achieve the social exclusion of lower status group workers.

The casual teachers are not entirely powerless in the face of these social closure strategies and have developed a number of usurpatory strategies, as described by Parkin (1979), designed to recover power from the dominant group of permanent teachers. Many of the teachers in the study have resisted formal strategies of closure by joining the New South Wales Teachers' Federation. Through the union they have instigated legal and industrial action against the Department to improve their pay and conditions. The teachers in the study have also demonstrated resistance to informal strategies of closure by marshalling their social power and influence in order to gain greater connection and social credibility within the workplace.

The case study of casual teachers within the New South Wales public school education system demonstrates that social closure is a multi-faceted, dynamic and evolving process. While formal, state-sanctioned mechanisms of closure have provided obvious targets for usurpatory strategies, the evolution of social closure mechanisms into the formal organisational sphere, and into the informal sphere of everyday interaction have been more difficult to resist. Strategies of resistance to both formal organisational, and informal everyday, mechanisms of closure have had mixed results for this group of teachers to date. However, it is possible that informal forms of usurpatory social closure have the greatest potential to address discrimination and inequality into the future.

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