

Dissonant discourses

**Othered voices from Australia's workworld
1994-2002**

Amanda Pearce

B.A., Dip. Ed., M.Ed. (TESOL), RSA Cert. TEFL, RSA Dip. TEFL,
RSA Dip. TESL (Further, Adult and Continuing Education)



A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Victoria University, Victoria, Australia.

March 2004

FTS THESIS

331.620994 PEA

30001008599534

Pearce, Amanda, 1951-

Dissonant discourses :
othered voices from
Australia's workworld,

Abstract

This thesis arose from a series of questions about a group of retrenched non-English speaking background (NESB) workers whom I interviewed in 1994-95 and again in 2002. NESB workers lost jobs in large numbers in the 1990-92 recession, but in the recovery period and as employment improved over the 1990s, the employment figures for particular groups remained comparatively poor. Yet there was little public and policy debate about the fate of these people as a group. The reason, I argue, lies in a discursive transformation that has occurred since the 1980s through the formation and implementation of policy in the areas of work; education and training; English language and literacy, race and ethnicity; and the role of the state. Through dominant discourses that shape what it is possible to say, do and even think, NESB workers as a group have been constructed as ‘other’ and thereby marginalised and problematised. Through this process their exclusion from social citizenship - entitlements to employment, education and welfare – has been normalised.

The discourses of neo-liberalism have dominated public policy since the mid 1980s. Using a Foucauldian conception of discourse and a social constructionist method, I delineate the major ‘narratives’ associated first with the neo-liberal discourses of neo-classical economics, human capital theory, globalisation and social contractualism, and then with dominant discourses relating to English language and literacy, race and ethnicity. These dominant discourses have constructed the participants in the study as deficient ‘others’. I analyse the increasing dominance since the mid-1980s of these discourses in policy text, the narratives of some of those who implement policy, and material practices relating to work; education and training; English language and literacy, race and ethnicity; and the role of the state. From this analysis also emerge what I have called ‘contending discourses’ within policy.

I then examine the participants' discursive engagement with the narratives associated with dominant and contending discourses, both in the interviews and in their accounts of practice. This engagement is analysed first in general and then through five illustrative case studies. I find that the workers themselves use some of the dominant narratives. However, most narratives are acknowledged, critiqued and countered, often through drawing on the participants' own contending narratives: those of individual and social well-being, which is constructed in terms of equity, security, pluralism and social mutuality; what I term an 'industrial discourse' relating to work; and the discourse of the multilingual community of practice.

I conclude that the dominant neo-liberal meta-discourses, moving into the terrain of existing inequality based on racist discourse, have normalised and legitimated the erosion of NESB retrenched workers' entitlements to social citizenship. NESB workers are 'othered' by discourses, instantiated in both linguistic and material policy practices, about age, ethnicity, language and literacy, credentials and work itself. This 'othering' increases the likelihood of unemployment; then they are further 'othered' as unemployed and unemployable social parasites. Thus the way that NESB workers are constructed within these policy discourses undermines the seemingly ameliorative initiatives that the policies instituted. Although these discourses are drawn upon by participants, they are often countered and transformed, as this group of workers resist the silencing of their voices that accompanies this 'othering'. In the process, discourses of a previous time survive – discourses of humanism and pluralism that found their high point in the texts of an earlier policy period and that construct language in terms of human identity, culture, and social well-being rather than in the disembodied, reductionist, instrumental way of the neo-liberal meta-discourse that has overwhelmed public life.

Contents

Acknowledgements	7
List of acronyms	9
Chapter 1: Introduction	11
Chapter 2: Data sources and methods	22
Introduction	22
Interviews with retrenched NESB workers	23
Foucault's 'discourse' and some of its critics	25
Agency, dominance and contestation	31
Resistance and change	36
✓ Policy as discourse	39
The method of discourse analysis in this thesis	42
Terminology and data analysis	49
Conclusion	52
Chapter 3: Globalising neo-liberalism: dominant discourses	
about work, education and the state	53
Introduction	53
The discourse of neo-classical economics	54
Human capital theory	62
Globalisation and 'the pathology of over-diminished expectations'	73
The discourse of social contractualism	77
Conclusion	84
Chapter 4: Dominant discourses about English language	
and literacy, race and ethnicity	86
Introduction	86
Narratives relating to English language and literacy	87
Narratives relating to race and ethnicity	98

<i>All for Australia</i> : narratives about English and employment	106
‘White Australia’ – then and now	110
The discourse of multiculturalism	112
The ‘new conservatism’	114
Material practices associated with NESB immigrants and employment in Australia	116
NESB workers in the ‘labour market’	119
Conclusion	127
 Chapter 5: Policy discourses at work	 130
Introduction	130
Policy discourses under Labor 1987 – 1996	131
Policy discourses under the Liberal-National Coalition 1996-2002	167
Conclusion	175
 Chapter 6: Policy discourses in implementation	 176
Introduction	176
Material practices under Labor 1987-1996: Working Nation and the NTRA	177
Material practices under the Coalition: Centrelink and the Job Network	181
Provider discourses under the Liberal-National Coalition 1996-2002	184
Conclusion	207
 Chapter 7: Worker discourses engaging neo-liberalism	 209
Introduction	209
Narratives relating to work	210
Narratives relating to education and training	245
✓✓✓ Narratives relating to English language and literacy	252

Narratives relating to the state	261
Conclusion	273
Chapter 8: Case Studies	275
Introduction	275
Case study 1: Homayoun: ‘Who benefit that?’	276
Case study 2: Alf: ‘You cannot have your cake and eat it too’	281
Case study 3: Tome and Stoyne:	
‘I like to work, not to go to school’	285
Case study 4: Nadia: ‘I am born to look after people’	293
Case study 5: Phuong and Tram: ‘My name was on the list’	300
Conclusion	309
Chapter 9: Implications of discursive engagement	311
Introduction	311
✓ Discourses of the policy context	312
The construction of the ‘other’	317
Discursive engagement by workers	319
Contending discourses drawn on by workers	325
Implications	329
The future	336
Glossary	338
Appendices	341
Appendix 1: The original sample	341
Appendix 2: Sample interview data	349
Appendix 3: Unemployment in Australia and the western region	376
Appendix 4: Major areas discussed at interview	377
Reference list	379

Acknowledgements

I thank all the participants in this study: the retrenched workers who gave me their time and shared their perceptions of this period of change, and the providers and community workers who spoke to me about their understandings. My academic supervisors were briefly Jenny Stephens and Dr Julie Stephens, and over the last three years Dr James Doughney of Victoria University. I would like to thank Jenny and Julie for getting me started. Particularly, I want to thank Jamie Doughney for his unstinting support, wise advice and practical assistance when I needed it most. Jill Sanguinetti provided crucial assistance at a point where I was starting out on a new direction.

Staff and associated personnel at the following organisations provided me with invaluable information and assistance: Inner Western Region, Westgate and North Western Region Migrant Resource Centres; Community Jobs Program; Yes West; Employment Plus; Australian Greek Welfare Society; Maltese Community Council of Victoria; Melbourne's West Area Consultative Committee Inc.; Centrelink; Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES); Victoria University; Uniting Church, Sunshine; Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia; Maribyrnong, Brimbank and Wyndham Councils; Western Region Health Centre; Djerriwarrh Employment and Education Services; Australian Red Cross; Australian-Polish Community Services Inc.; Workplace English Language and Literacy Program; Life After Bradmill Project; Westgate Community Issues Group; JobFutures.

Many friends and colleagues have provided support over the time it has taken me to write this thesis, and have wisely allowed me to neglect them when I needed to write undisturbed. I would like to thank Lynn Beaton, Kate Dempsey and Jo Pyke for many collegial chats and their support and interest as I worked through my ideas. Jenny Cameron provided much-needed help with the bibliography. Wendy Owen helped me enormously with editing and pulling the thesis together; without her assistance I could not have finished writing it. My colleagues at the Centre for Educational Development and Support have allowed

me to take time to work uninterrupted, and I would particularly like to thank Julie Dixon for protecting my time from the many encroachments of my other duties over the last months.

Lastly I would like to thank my father, John Pearce, for his patience in tolerating my neglect, for his unflagging interest and for providing me with a space to write over the summer. My partner, Meryle Findlay, has given me enormous moral support and encouragement, without which this thesis could never have been undertaken.

List of acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Services
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ALAC	Adult Literacy Action Campaign
ALLP	Australian Language and Literacy Policy
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMES	Adult Migrant (now Multicultural) Education Services
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
ASF	Australian Standards Framework
AWT	Australians Working Together
CBT	Competency Based Training
CCM	Contracted Case Management
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
DSS	Department of Social Security
EAA	Employment Assistance Australia
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
EGL	English as a Global Language
EIP	Early Intervention Program
ELL	English Language and Literacy
ES	English-speaking
ESB	English-speaking background
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESRA	Employment Services Regulatory Authority
FECCA	Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
HC	Human Capital
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
HRM	Human Resource Management
IA	Intensive Assistance
JM	Job Matching
JNP	Job Network Provider
JSCI	Job Seeker Classification Instrument
JST	Job Search Training
LAP	Labor Adjustment Package
LGA	Local Government Area
LLNP	Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program
LOTE	Language other than English
LTU	Long-term unemployed
MAA	Mature Age Allowance
MES	Main English-speaking (country)

MO	Mutual obligation
MO/RO	Mutual obligation/Reciprocal obligation
NAIRU	Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment
NAMA	National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia
NEIS	New Enterprise Incentive Scheme
NES	Non-English speaking
NESB	Non-English speaking background
NOOSR	National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition
NPL	National Policy on Languages
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NTRA	National Training Reform Agenda
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
OMA	Office of Multicultural Affairs
PAYE	Pay as you Earn
PMV	Passenger Motor Vehicles
PMV LAP	Passenger Motor Vehicles Labour Assistance Program
PP	Parenting Payment
RCC	Recognition of Current Competence
RO	Reciprocal obligation
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SEN	State Enrolled Nurse
SEUP	ABS Survey of Employment and Unemployment Patterns
SIP	Special Intervention Program
SJS	Social Justice Strategy
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TCF	Textile, Clothing and Footwear
TCF LAP	Textile, Clothing and Footwear Labour Assistance Program
UB	Unemployment Benefit
VDP	Voluntary Departure Package
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WELL	Workplace English Language and Literacy
WfD	Work for the Dole

Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1995 the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research published *Surviving Retrenchment: Experiences of NESB¹ Immigrant Workers in the Western Region of Melbourne* (Pearce, Bertone & Stephens 1995), based on extensive interview data I had collected through 120 individual interviews. In conducting these interviews I was concerned to establish what experiences of retrenchment, unemployment and re-employment were reported by participants, and to gauge their implications for policy. As the sample was a large one, I wanted to establish what patterns of experience might characterise the group and particular sub-groups where appropriate. The interviews collected a significant amount of data relating to participants' perceptions and understandings of their situations and experiences, but the framing of the study did not permit this data to be analysed in great depth.

Surviving Retrenchment was published in 1995. Then the 1996 election brought the Coalition government to power. The policies of Working Nation were swept away and the Job Network (JN) and Work for the Dole (WfD) introduced. Throughout the 1990s the workworld seemed to be changing rapidly, and changes to the education and training systems were consolidated. One Nation and John Howard's 'new conservatism' reframed the debates about ethnicity and immigration. But employment figures were, by all accounts, improving. 'Cutting edge' workplaces were the object of studies that celebrated new technology and new working arrangements.

¹ Non-English-speaking background.

I decided to try to trace the original participants in order to find out what was happening to them in this context, and to interview some new workers about their experiences. In order to gain a better understanding of the discourses of the current policy environment, I also interviewed a number of professionals in the areas of employment placement services, education and training. Most of the workers that I interviewed did not appear to be engaged in exciting work in ‘cutting edge’ workplaces, or studying interesting courses that would lead them into stable, well-paid jobs. Nor were they involved in innovative relationships with small, flexible Job Network providers who were able to give them the help they had been unable to obtain through the big, bureaucratic Commonwealth Employment Service (CES). Some English language teachers whom I interviewed told me there was an air of hopelessness and desperation among their students: ‘Please help me find a job, teacher, I’ll do anything!’ Others told me that their students supported Mutual Obligation (MO) policies – coming to ‘school’ was better than sitting at home.

Moreover, as I reviewed the results of the first study and gathered new data, I became increasingly curious about my own assumptions in analysing the data of the first round and about some of the anomalies that had appeared. Why did some of those I interviewed refuse to undertake training courses? Why, when unemployment had declined steadily from its early 1990s peak, were employment figures for particular NESB groups still poor, particularly in relation to the long-term unemployed (LTU)? Why was there not more policy debate about the fate of these people and others who had been ousted from paid employment during the 1990–92 recession and were unable to return? The answers seemed to lie in the concept of discourse, the way that these things, and these people, were talked about, the way that dominant discourses² shaped the things that it was possible – and impossible – to say. I began to wonder how it was that the discursive transformation that I perceived to have occurred since the 1980s had been effected

² I will explain below and in Chapter 2 how I use the term ‘discourse’ and the related terms ‘ideology’ and ‘hegemony’.

through policy formation and implementation and how those workers whom I had interviewed experienced the discursive environment that surrounded them.

My first purpose, therefore, in re-examining the data and the background of the earlier study was to understand the discourses that were present in the policy context in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. I wanted to focus on four areas: work; education and training; English language and literacy, race and ethnicity; and the state. I wanted to know how these discourses constructed the participants in the study, as workers, as learners, as retrenched/unemployed, and as NESB. Secondly, I wanted to understand how the participants engaged with the dominant meta-discourse of neo-liberalism in the interviews, in relation to the four focus areas. Lastly, I wanted to know what other discourses, if any, the participants drew on in relation to these areas. This thesis is constructed around these questions. Underlying these questions is a more fundamental one: how could I explain the silence and invisibility surrounding the situation of this group of people in public and policy arenas?

Chapter 2 examines the concept of discourse and describes the methods of analysis used in the thesis. Discourses are sets of meanings encoded in linguistic or material practices, ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak ... they constitute [objects] and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention’ (Foucault 1972, p. 49). Discourse produces and constructs, regulates and controls knowledge, social relations and institutions, delimiting what can be said, done and even thought within those fields. Discourses carry power; however, power is not the preserve of any one group or discourse, but capillary, implicit in discourse itself.

Foucault’s concept of discourse has been criticised for its determinism and its failure to account adequately for agency or to theorise possibilities for change (e.g. Fairclough 1992). He says little about how certain discourses come to be dominant in practice, despite the presence of other discourses, in a particular historical situation. The work of Fairclough and others offers space for agency within Foucault’s conception of discourse and proposes a Gramscian notion of ideology and hegemony to theorise change. Thus social practice or action that

embodies certain ‘conceptions of the world’ may take the refined form of philosophy or ‘the simpler, spontaneous, and contradictory form of “common sense”’ (Kenway 1990, p. 177). There is a struggle for dominance between contending discourses, which form, reform and are absorbed and appropriated by each other (Kenway 1990, p. 179). Change can be brought about by resistance through a deconstructive approach to dominant discourses, which may take the form of intentional, conscious resistance, or of less deliberate and obvious behaviour, including the use of counter-discourses, evasion or defence. Thus ‘discursive work’ is done by a very wide variety of social agents.

A number of writers have suggested that Foucault failed to provide an explicit and detailed analytical method (e.g. Jones, 1990; Marshall 1990). In this study, I have drawn selectively on a range of methods. Text-based methods drawing on the work of Fairclough are used in some cases, particularly in a deconstructive approach to policy. However, they are unsuited to analysis of a very large body of interview data from speakers of English as a second language, some of which is in the form of translation by bilingual workers. For this purpose I have found it more useful to draw on approaches to interview data in which the answers of respondents are seen against the background of ‘cultural stories’ or narratives. Participants engage with such narratives either by allowing them to remain unchallenged or by presenting their own narratives that directly (although often implicitly) challenge them (Silverman 2001, p. 100). Narratives are used to construct an identity within the interview situation – which in itself is ‘located within a context of public debate and argument’ (Burr 1995, p. 165). They are characterised by terms, descriptions, figures of speech (including metaphors), vivid images and stories (see Wetherell & Potter 1992, p. 90). Narratives represent smaller units than discourses, but are the specific areas of discourses with which informants engage. Delineation of these narratives also provides a way to relate policy texts to interview data.

Chapter 3 focuses on work, education and training and the state. It examines the dominant meta-discourse of neo-liberalism and its more specific discourses of neo-classical economics, human capital theory, globalisation and social

contractualism. The specific narratives that form the elements of each of these discourses are complex and contradictory, and their emphases have to a greater or lesser degree shifted since the late 1980s. In general, neo-liberal meta-discourse constructs as 'other' certain groups that are designated as unable to contribute economically and it legitimates their punishment and exclusion. The theoretical bases of these discourses have been critiqued extensively in academic circles and have been the subject of struggles in the public domain both at the level of policy and in public debate in the media and elsewhere. Such struggles have involved contending discourses and narratives, including discourses of equity, justice and social democracy. However, the discursive effects of neo-liberal meta-discourse continue to dominate public policy.

Chapter 4 investigates the dominant discourses around English language and literacy, race and ethnicity that relate to the policy category Non-English Speaking Background (NESB). Narratives concerning English Language and Literacy (ELL) in the global context are first examined from the point of view of their place within human capital discourse. The chapter then examines the 'unofficial' dominant discourses of racism and colonialism that construct NESB immigrants as 'other' and attribute particular characteristics to them. These discourses have a long history in Australia and are form a background to policy shifts from White Australia to multiculturalism and its aftermath. Neo-liberal discourses legitimate and rationalise them. The chapter then reviews the material practices associated with the employment situation of NESB immigrants and the discursive practices that 'track' them into particular types of employment. This chapter provides a historical context for the examination of labour market, education and training and language policy discourse in the following chapter.

From my consideration of the dominant neo-liberal meta-discourse in Chapter 3 and racist and colonial discourses in Chapter 4 emerges a series of narratives that form part of these discourses. In order to demonstrate how the discursive transformation I had observed since the 1980s had been effected through policy and reflected in the narratives of the interviewees, it was necessary to examine closely the policy framework. As outlined in Chapter 2, policy discourse is

enacted through both policy as text and policy as practice. Chapter 5 focuses on policy as text, analysing the discourses present in a number of fundamental policy texts pertaining to employment, labour market programs, education and training, ethnicity and language produced by the Hawke and Keating governments. In addition, the chapter focuses on a report that illustrates the enactment of neo-liberal discourses relating to English language and employment during this period. These documents are instantiations of dominant and contending discourses at the time of the first study, *Surviving Retrenchment*. The policy discourses of the Coalition government in relation to the same areas are then analysed.

Policy discourses are also instantiated in policy as practice, through implementation by policy actors, in this case the gatekeepers to employment, education and training for the unemployed. Interview data from employment-assistance and English-language providers and community advocates are examined in Chapter 6. These data are important for the perspective they provide on policy change. Employment assistance providers are, at one and the same time, part of discursive change – agents, bearers and communicators of it – and able to critique it. Their perspective is thus both engaged and abstracted; able to overview the discourses at work but also necessarily engaged with them. The focus of analysis in Chapter 6 is upon the ways in which these workers engage with the discourses and narratives that have emerged thus far, with particular reference to the way in which the providers construct their own role within the dominant discourses and, in consequence, the part they themselves play in furthering those discourses.

Chapter 7 closely examines the ways in which the NESB workers who participated in the study engaged with the dominant narratives instantiated in policy and public discourse³. It divides these narratives into four focus areas: those relating to employment; to education and training; to English language and literacy; and to the state. Each focus area explores the ways in which the participants engaged with the meta-discourse of neo-liberalism and its sub-discourses and narratives insofar as they relate to that area. There are five types

³ Further illustrative material from interviews is provided in Appendix 2.

of engagement: engagement by simply acknowledging dominant narratives; by drawing on those same narratives to construct their own identities in the interview; by explicitly critiquing or ridiculing them; by countering them, often by drawing on narratives from contending discourses; or by giving accounts of forms of material resistance including evasion, refusal or ‘narrative swapping’⁴. The focus of the chapter is on the variety of narratives that are present in the interview data and how they relate to dominant discourses. However, the chapter also provides a broad indication of how widespread were particular ways of engaging with the discourses. In a few cases where such analysis is helpful in understanding the discursive work being carried out through a narrative, the chapter analyses ways in which that narrative combined with other narratives to form hybrids.

The first focus area examines the dominant narratives of the ‘labour market’. In the discourse of neo-classical economics, the market is constructed as rational and efficient, an impartial way of distributing the costs and rewards of work. These costs and rewards are reduced to a purely economic calculus that is captured in the wage bargain. Work is constructed as pain or ‘disutility’. Individuals have perfect knowledge and foresight about the ‘labour market’. Labour and capital are free and mobile and the metaphor of ‘shopping around’ is invoked to model the way in which these factors of production are allocated to their most efficient alternative uses. So long as the wage is free to adjust there will be no unemployment. In this construction of the workworld, trade unions and regulatory mechanisms are ‘distortions’ impeding an equilibrium based on the otherwise equal power of employers and employees. The discourse of human capital theory offers a slightly different version of the world of work, with the narrative of the ‘new workplace’.

In the dominant narratives of the second focus area, individuals make rational choices about the acquisition of elements of ‘human capital’ using knowledge and foresight about the ‘labour market’. ‘Human capital’ is formed prior to, and

⁴ That is, choosing a course of action associated with a different dominant narrative that would provide a more advantageous subject position.

independently of, a period of employment, normally in the formal classroom. The elements of 'human capital' are 'within the individual's control or readily acquired' (Bertone 2000a, p. 55). They are objective and measurable and their acquisition is systematically rewarded in the 'labour market', to which they are linked through formal standardised credentials. Education is only valuable when it is linked with employment and best dealt with as a commodity distributed through the market. This discourse locates the blame for unemployment in the poor quality of available labour and the skills of the workforce are central to international competitiveness.

In the English language and literacy focus area, dominant human capital discourse constructs those workers with less command of English language and literacy as unemployable and untrainable 'others'. English language and literacy are constructed in terms of 'crisis' and blamed for low productivity. The discourse locates the responsibility for successful communication and language learning solely in the NESB worker and constructs English merely as a work skill, one that is a necessity for employability, that can be acquired at will to an unlimited degree by anyone. Moreover, it constructs knowledge and competence as textual and normalises linguistic assimilation. I argue that neo-liberal discourses enter into a field of existing inequality and through their disembodied nature legitimate and naturalise that inequality. A major feature of the neo-liberal construction of language as skill is a form of racist discourse founded on a cultural conception of race in which linguistic practices are central.

Lastly, narratives from the discourse of social contractualism about employment, welfare and the state attribute unemployment to social parasitism – the unemployed as not wanting to work and dragging down the society. Within this are the 'bludgers', the 'job snobs' and the 'double dippers'. Welfare recipients are constructed as proven parasites, a burden, receiving something for nothing. The solution to unemployment is compulsion and punishment through the welfare system, which is thus constructed as social control for the benefit of the hardworking majority. Welfare reciprocity is constructed as demeaning dependence. A second group of neo-liberal narratives construct the welfare state

as inimical to individual well-being, which is better provided by the market through choice; thus ‘small government’ and the privatisation and marketisation of state functions are preferable.

The case studies that comprise Chapter 8 are not only different in form from the discussion of interview narratives in Chapter 7, they are also different in content. They serve a different purpose. In Chapter 7, my intention was to document the variety of narratives used in the interviews and to explore the relationships between them and between these narratives and the dominant discourses. Chapter 8, instead, aims to understand the ways and the contexts in which an individual might draw on contending narratives and discourses in different circumstances. These case studies are intended to provide a way of understanding the ‘discursive work’ that is done by people in constructing particular identities through engaging with dominant and contending narratives.

In Chapter 9, the implications of the later chapters are considered in the theoretical context of the earlier chapters. The chapter analyses the ways in which the narratives drawn on by workers relate to both dominant and contending discourses. The contending discourses are those of individual and social well-being, which is constructed in terms of equity, security, pluralism and social mutuality. Work is constructed primarily through what I term an ‘industrial discourse’ (see Chapter 9) whereby it is part of a fair exchange with society as a whole. Work and learning are commonly constructed through a discourse of the multi-lingual community of practice, within which knowledge is constructed as embodied and embedded in practice and learning as closely related to purpose. English language is constructed as situated and contextual, meaning as negotiated between people and responsibility for communication as shared. However, these workers widely acknowledge racist narratives about language and ethnicity that shape their workworld. The state is constructed as responsible for community and individual well-being and job creation is a part of its responsibility.

NESB workers are ‘othered’ by discourses, instantiated in both linguistic and material policy practices, about age, ethnicity, language and literacy, credentials and work itself. This ‘othering’ increases the likelihood of unemployment; then

they are further ‘othered’ as unemployed and unemployable social parasites. The contending discourses are part of the resistance of those who are ‘othered’ by neo-liberal and associated discourses by being constructed as unemployable, untrainable and excluded from entitlement to social citizenship. However as well as drawing on contending discourses, participants accepted and used some of the dominant discourses even though these discourses constructed them as ‘other’. These discourses included HC narratives about language and neo-liberal narratives about belonging and contribution. The implications of this are explored in Chapter 9.

To recapitulate, my aims in this thesis centre on the notion of discourse, in my attempt to explain the silence and invisibility surrounding the situation of this group of people in the public sphere. Specifically my aims are:

1. To investigate the discourses present in the policy context in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s in relation to four focus areas: employment; education and training; English language and literacy; and the state; this investigation focuses on how these discourses constructed the participants in the study, as workers, as learners, as retrenched/unemployed and as NESB.
2. To analyse how the participants engaged with the dominant discourses of neo-liberalism in relation to the four focus areas: how they were subjectified by them, how they resisted them discursively or materially and to what extent they drew on these discourses themselves.
3. To consider what contending discourses, if any, were drawn on by these workers in relation to the focus areas.

Hence, I will first discuss discourse and discourse analysis (Chapter 2) in order to accomplish three overlaid tasks. The first is to present and analyse the meta-discourse of neo-liberalism and dominant discourses in Australia surrounding English language and literacy, race and ethnicity (Chapters 3 and 4). These chapters then allow me to analyse (deconstruct) the discourses evident in policy on the Australian labour market, immigration, ethnicity and language, welfare and

education and training policies since the late 1980s (Chapters 5 and 6). Then, using the work of Chapters 2-6 as a manifold, I analyse the dissonant discourses emerging in interview data collected in two phases (1994 and 2002) from immigrant workers in Melbourne's Western region who had experienced retrenchment (Chapters 7-8). I conclude the thesis with a discussion of the complex ways in which participants engaged with dominant and contending discourses and a discussion of the challenging force of the counter-discourses I found in these othered voices.

The focus of the thesis is broad. It includes an analysis of policy texts, discussions with policy actors and interviews with retrenched workers. Thus the thesis is about the state, about employment bodies and about workers. The link between these apparently disparate foci of analysis is the concept of discourse, and specifically the narratives that form threads through text, speech and material practices.

Chapter 2

Data sources and methods

Introduction

In this chapter I will do three things that will explain what I aim to accomplish in this thesis, how I will go about the task and why my approach is appropriate. First I will set out my research aims. Second I will describe my original data sources and how I went about obtaining the data. Third, and most extensively, I will explain my approach to the method of discourse analysis I have used and I will argue why this method was appropriate. That is, I will argue why the method could best answer the questions I wanted to answer and why it was well suited to the data at my disposal.

The objectives of the research may be presented in the form of three interrelated questions. These are:

1. What discourses were present in the policy context in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s in relation to four focus areas: work; education and training; English language and literacy, race and ethnicity; and the state? How did these discourses construct the participants in the study: as workers, as learners, as retrenched/unemployed, and as NESB?
2. How did the participants engage with the dominant discourses of neo-liberalism in relation to the four focus areas; how were they subjectified by them, how did they resist them discursively or materially and to what extent did they draw on these discourses themselves?

3. What contending discourses, if any, were drawn on by these workers in relation to the focus areas?

These questions raised a number of methodological issues. What conceptualisation of discourse would enable me to address these questions effectively, while allowing the agency of those I interviewed to emerge? What methods might I use to analyse such a variety of data both in policy text and practice and in interviews with people who did not, in general, objectify such discourses? The answers I found led me to draw selectively on features of several types of discourse theory. In the rest of this chapter I will outline the approach to discourse that I have followed in this thesis and the methods I used to analyse the data. First, however, I will explain in more detail my data sources.

Interviews with retrenched NESB workers

The primary data used in the study were gathered in the course of two rounds of interviews. The first round involved detailed semi-structured interviews conducted in 1994-95 with 120 retrenched NESB immigrants resident in Footscray, Sunshine and Werribee in the western region of Melbourne, an area of significant NESB immigrant population and high unemployment. The majority of these retrenchments occurred during or after 1991, reflecting the widespread labour shedding associated with the recession. Less than one-third of the participants were currently re-employed. They were interviewed as part of a study that aimed to analyse their post-retrenchment experiences in the labour market and the personal, social and economic effects of retrenchment upon them (Pearce, Bertone & Stephens 1995).

The second round was conducted in 2002. It involved individually re-interviewing, either face-to face or by telephone, all of those 1994-95 interviewees still below retirement age who could be contacted and whom it was practically possible to interview – 36 in all. In addition, supplementary face-to-

face interviews were carried out with 11 other retrenched NESB workers from the area who had not been interviewed previously; six of these were interviewed individually and five in a group at a community centre. These people were located through similar methods and using the same criteria as in the first interviews. More information about the samples is provided in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 reproduces a sample of the interview data. Appendix 3 contains charts that situate the two interview rounds in the context of employment rates for Australia and the western region of Melbourne over the period. Appendix 4 contains a list of topics that were discussed at interviews.

Contact was made with potential interviewees through community and education sources and by approaching them in the street near employment-assistance agencies, markets and other venues. Statistics available on retrenchees in 1994 were insufficiently detailed to allow a fully structured, stratified sample to be constructed. However, a sample matrix was designed for the first interview round that reflected estimated proportions of retrenchees in particular major categories. Criteria for selection of interviewees were that they had lost their jobs at some time in the previous 10 years, lived in one of the three Local Government Areas (LGAs) and were born in a non-main English speaking (MES) country. These factors, as well as work histories and basic demographic characteristics, were established at the outset through a preliminary questionnaire completed by telephone. Those interviewed in the first round were those who also met the requirements of the sample matrix, especially with regard to gender, country of birth, English ability and education. Interviews were extensive and in some cases all or part of the interview was carried out with the assistance of an interpreter. In the first round, all of those interviewed were paid a nominal amount for their time. In the second round this was not possible.

At the time of the second round, major Job Network providers (JNPs) and Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) providers servicing the area were located by telephone or through contacts. Each was telephoned, the study described and a request for participation made. Written material was subsequently provided where requested. A staff member from all of those

agencies that responded positively was interviewed, either as part of a small group interview or individually. As a result, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six JNPs (individually or in small groups) representing six agencies that currently or previously had won tenders under the Job Network and worked with unemployed people from the western region. A number of other informants were also interviewed, including senior staff from two LLNP providers working in the region.

Foucault's 'discourse' and some of its critics

The concept of discourse that I will use is based on that of Foucault. For Foucault, discourse produces and constructs, regulates and controls knowledge, social relations and institutions. Discourses are sets of meanings encoded in linguistic or material practices, 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak ... they constitute [objects] and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention' (Foucault 1972, p. 49). Discourses both define disciplines and 'discipline' the identities and practices of those who operate within them, delimiting what can be said, done and even thought within those fields. Discourses constitute people as subjects by operating both as 'technologies of power', enforced by official authorisation, and as 'technologies of the self', as they are internalised and used to form identity and self-discipline practice. Discourses carry power. However, for Foucault, power is not the preserve of any one group or discourse but capillary – immanent in all social relations and implicit in discourses themselves. Discourses may be situated within a broad range of social formations, from small groups such as occupational groups to 'the apparatuses of entire nation-states' (Watts 1993/4, p. 136).

The emphasis in Foucault's conceptions of discourse shifted significantly between his 'archaeological' work (especially Foucault 1972) and his later, 'genealogical' work (especially Foucault 1979, 1980b) (Davidson 1986). In the 'archaeological' work, Foucault's emphasis was on discursive formations as rules

for constituting areas of knowledge. According to this work, discourse provided rules of formation for 'objects' (the entities which particular disciplines take as their targets of investigation – examples may include 'madness', 'nation' and 'race', 'freedom' and 'enterprise', or 'literacy'); 'enunciative modalities' (discursive activities which position subjects, both those who produce them and those to whom they are addressed, in particular ways); concepts; and strategies (Fairclough 1992, pp. 41-49). In the genealogical work, discourse is to some extent decentred (Fairclough 1992, p. 49). The central concept now is the mutually constituting relation between 'truth' and power, or power/knowledge. However, '... it is in discourse', Foucault suggests, 'that power and knowledge are joined together' (Foucault 1980b, p. 100). Thus a genealogical approach to discourse analysis focuses on the forces and relations of power embedded in discursive practices.

Modern power has emerged in the form of governance, focusing on the 'control of populations to ensure political obedience and a docile and useful workforce for the demands of an emerging capitalism' (Marshall 1990, p. 15). Within 'disciplinary institutions' such as the prison, the workplace and the school, knowledge has been developed about people in the exercise of power and this knowledge has been used to shape and control individuals, through both language and material practices. The discourses so developed have in turn been used to legitimate further exercise of power, as the knowledge they embody has been deemed to be 'true'. These discourses form the epistemology of 'knowledge' in the various disciplines and broader institutional contexts. Thus discourse is constitutive as well as expressive. Disciplinary institutions function through the control of space and time and operate to produce 'docile bodies' (Foucault 1979).

One of the major considerations in the working of power is Foucault's concept of normalisation, 'the establishment of measurements, hierarchy, and regulations around the idea of a distributionary statistical norm within a given population – the idea of judgment based on what is normal and thus what is abnormal' (Ball 1990, p. 2). The concept of 'normalisation' is thus the process of construction of subjects within discourses as either 'normal' or in some way 'other', and

concomitantly of a regime of rehabilitation specifying what those ‘others’ must do or be to be classified as ‘normal’. People are objectified by forms of classification and division through the use of ‘dividing practices’. In education and related areas these include ‘testing, examining, profiling, and streaming, ... the use of entry criteria for different types of schooling, and the formation of different types of intelligence, ability and scholastic identity in the processes of schooling’ (Ball 1990, p. 4). These are often, paradoxically, linked to ‘humanitarian rhetoric of reform and progress’ such as remedial classes and special educational needs (Ball 1990, p. 4). Subjects within such a discourse of education may be constructed as ‘unemployable’ or ‘at risk’ (Marshall 1990, p. 24) – both forms of ‘otherness’.

Three main criticisms are made of a Foucauldian approach to discourse by those concerned to theorise social change. The first of these is the assertion that there is nothing outside discourse, in other words no knowable final ‘truth’ towards which we may hope to move through the exercise of reason. Such a claim is argued to imply the relativism of all argument (Blaikie 1993, p. 211-216). The other two relate to the determinism of the theory. They are its failure to account for agency, to provide a space in which social subjects may choose to act in a way that is not simply determined by the ‘discourse’ that constructs them; and its failure to theorise possibilities for change.

Many of those committed to an emancipatory politics view with concern the postmodern assertion of the impossibility of an appeal to a knowable ‘truth’, accessible through reason independent of the constitutive function of discourse. They argue that such an idea appears to lead to a relativism that would logically have the effect of incapacitating such politics. If we cannot claim that one account of reality is nearer such a knowable ‘truth’ than another, how can we claim that it is superior? And if the rules of ‘reason’ do not apply, what basis is there for argument? For example, Norris argues that there is such a thing as ‘historical truth’ that is a ‘verification transcendent’ truth (Norris, C. 2000, p. 20), which does not involve the ‘grand narratives’ of progress and reason. Instead, Norris argues, there is a truth that is ‘the sorts of truth that historians find out through patient research, through careful sifting of the evidence, through criticism

of source-texts, archival scholarship and so forth' (Norris, C. 2000, p. 19). Norris is concerned to salvage the idea of reason, of enlightenment critique and in fact argues that aspects of the postmodern, including Derrida's project of deconstruction, involve a furtherance of that critique.

Many feminist theorists have found a postmodern framework more useful than a traditional Marxist one, which has indeed been found to constrain analysis within a context of economic class relations thereby marginalising other frames such as gender and ethnicity. For these writers, a postmodern approach has by no means meant an abandonment of emancipatory politics. An examination of their engagement with postmodern theory suggests that the situation is more complex. Firstly, Lois McNay, in her investigation of the implications of the work of Foucault for the feminist project, found significant shifts over the period of Foucault's writing.

In his early work, Foucault maintains the priority of discourse through the argument that 'socio-historical factors are ordered around the episteme rather than vice-versa' (McNay 1992, p. 27). At this stage, however, he already acknowledges the existence of non-discursive factors, which he defines as 'an institutional field, a set of events, practices, and political decisions, a sequence of economic processes that also involve demographic fluctuations, techniques of public assistance, manpower needs, different levels of unemployment, etc.' (Foucault 1972, p. 157). McNay argues that Foucault's shift to the genealogical power/knowledge approach means, in fact, that the primacy of discourse is 'refuted'. 'Discourse or a particular discursive formation is to be understood as an amalgam of material practices and forms of knowledge linked together in a non-contingent relation' (McNay 1992, p. 27). What Foucault actually does is to 'bracket' the question of validity and truth (McNay 1992, p. 25; see also Wetherell & Potter 1992, p. 80-1), by simply defining the problem differently:

The problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within

discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false (Foucault 1980a, p. 118; discussed in McNay, 1992, p. 25).

McNay is critical of Foucault's work, however, for the same ethical failure as Norris identifies in Lyotard: his failure to 'establish any basic normative guidelines or collective aims for practices of the self' (McNay 1992, p. 8). Along with other postmodern theorists, he is reluctant to do so due to a mistaken belief that to lay down norms for ethical conduct invariably constitutes 'the imposition of inappropriate demands and aims on individuals' (1992, p. 8). Those involved in emancipatory politics, McNay argues, must not abandon normative perspectives: '... it is not clear how a postmodern position of laissez-faire could ensure against an environment of hostility and predatory self-interest in which the more powerful repress the less privileged' (1992, p. 8).

Feminist writers remain concerned about relativism (Harding 1987; McNay 1992). But whether analyses resulting from a postmodern position on 'truth' are in fact as 'relativist' and 'subjectivist' as is commonly argued is open to question. Dugdale (1990) argues that relativism 'understood as equivalence of all personal assertions or as anything goes, is not necessarily the outcome of recognizing that all knowledge-claims are moves in power strategies, rather than moves towards truth' (Dugdale 1990, p. 61). Social constructivist positions such as Haraway's, Dugdale argues, 'in recognizing the stakes involved in the conversion of knowledge-claims to facts ... undermine[] the universalist perspective usually attributed to science and open[] science up as a field of political struggle'. The result by no means precludes the production of 'accurate description and powerful theory' (Haraway 1986, p. 81; discussed in Blaikie 1993, p. 214). Such positions as Haraway's are not inherently relativist; some 'stories' are better than others because they offer a better account, a 'fuller, more coherent vision' of what it is to be human (Haraway 1986, p. 80-81). Such an approach is not only relevant to those researchers concerned to expose the way 'science' has been constructed along a masculinist paradigm, but to any researcher interested in the relationship between science, including social science, and power.

Dant (1991) agrees that the abandonment of the idea of an absolute 'truth' in favour of the acceptance that 'all perspectives [are] ideological and socially situated' (Dant 1991, p. 5) does not necessarily imply an 'anything goes' relativism. Rather there is a need to evaluate knowledges on the basis of their emancipatory potential: 'Knowledge produced within the theory of ideology does not claim a transcendent or scientific status but is founded in 'critique' and the emancipation from domination' (Dant 1991, p. 188).

Yeatman argues that 'a postmodern emancipatory politics does not abandon the values of modern universalism and rationalism, but enters into a deconstructive relationship to them' (Yeatman 1994, p. vii). In answer to those who see Foucault and other postmodern theorists as caught in a 'performative contradiction' whereby they use the tools of reason while claiming to have rejected them, she argues:

It is specious to suggest that Foucault wants to overthrow the tools of reason. This is not the line of fracture between postmodern and modern(ist) thought. Instead it concerns the authority and the nature of reason. Where moderns turn their enquiry on the question of the conditions of right reason, postmoderns interrogate the discursive economies of the different versions of right reason that we have inherited. Postmoderns insist on the exclusions which these different economies effect. They desacralize reason, they do not reject it. Specifically they attempt to work reason and difference together. (Yeatman 1994, p. viii)

It is this insistence on the 'exclusions' effected by universalist discourses that can render audible the voices of women, NESB people and people with disabilities designated as 'special needs groups' within these discourses (Yeatman 1994, p. viii). The experiences of these 'others', 'suppressed, denied and devalued', may thus become salient (Somers & Gibson 1994, pp. 53-4).

Agency, dominance and contestation

Although dominant discourses have power to delimit possible action, talk and even thought, the people I interviewed were not deterministically constructed within neo-liberal discourse. Their relationship with dominant discourse was far more complex and shifting, involving a broad range of responses. How can the active agency of ordinary people be conceptualised within a Foucauldian approach to discourse?

Foucault has been much criticised by feminists and others (see for example Watts 1993/4, p. 122) for his focus on power as fundamentally prohibitory and repressive and his strong emphasis on the structural side of the structure-agency debate, both of which present major difficulties for an emancipatory politics. McNay argues, however, that Foucault's final work, including *The Use of Pleasure*, *The Care of the Self* and some late interviews and articles, provides an elaboration of the notion of the self that to some extent overcomes these limitations. Acknowledging the analytical limitations of his previous work, he complements his earlier analysis of domination with an analysis of technologies of subjectification, through which individuals may actively and autonomously fashion their own identities and may therefore to some degree escape transformation into the 'docile bodies' of *Discipline and Punish*. McNay thus argues that Foucault's later work is an attempt to rework such Enlightenment categories as autonomy and emancipation and thus supports Foucault's own assessment of his later work as running with, rather than counter to, a tradition of Enlightenment thought (McNay 1992, p. 3-5).

This work, however, is relatively underdeveloped. There is a need, therefore, to complement Foucault's still rather determinist account of the self with a further theoretical account of agency. Control or dominance can never be total, it will inevitably be eroded and subverted by the embodied agency of the people upon whom it is exerted (Ball 1994, p. 11).

Critical Discourse Analysis theorist Norman Fairclough draws heavily on Foucault but argues that social agents use creativity in meeting the 'demands and

contradictions of real social situations' (Fairclough 1989, p. 39). Accordingly, for Fairclough, the relationship between discourse, in the sense of actual practice, and discourse types, in the sense of the rules that discourse follows, is not a deterministic one. Discourse 'draws upon discourse types rather than mechanically implementing them' (Fairclough 1989, p. 39). In the process, importantly, discursive practice by social agents actively produces social structures as well as being produced by them. Thus discourses are 'reproduced' through being drawn upon. However, this process of reproduction may be conservative or transformatory (Fairclough 1989, p. 39); social agents may 'draw upon' discourses in a way that actively transforms them.

This way of conceptualising the 'use' of discourse, which in a sense parallels Foucault's notion of power as 'capillary', opens up the question of the formation, transformation and contestation of discourse. Who are the social agents engaged in the process of discursive reproduction? As Bacchi argues, discourses 'are not the direct product of intentional manipulation by a few key political actors, but neither are they transhistorical structures operating outside of human intervention' (Bacchi 2000, p. 52). So who produces discourse? Social agents in this sense include both ordinary people in their everyday lives and professionals and the 'intellectually trained'. However, there is a different level of power involved in these levels of discursive production. The most authoritative discourses or 'constitutive abstractions' (Watts 1993/4, p. 138) are produced by the 'intellectually trained', particularly those associated with the state. The model Watts proposes for the relationship between the discourses produced by these groups is Giddens' 'double hermeneutic', whereby the discourses of the life-worlds of ordinary people are systematically and recursively reworked and reintroduced into the life-world by the professionals and the 'intellectually trained' (Watts 1993/4, p. 138). However:

The state ... has a privileged position ... because of the capacity of its agents to develop and maintain collective categories and consciousness through the discursive and technical reach it has over constitutive abstractions. Here it enjoys a symbiotic yet ambiguous relationship with the intellectually trained not directly

employed within the state. Many of the intellectually trained are employed in its own agencies or on a consultancy basis, whilst the rest of what has been called 'the chattering classes' are spread throughout community, statutory and private sector organizations in schools, unions, hospitals, small and large businesses, child-care centres and transport systems. At once part-employer of, and hostage to this vast sprawling mass of 'masters of discourse', the state is the most privileged and best placed of the agents implicated in the double hermeneutic (Watts 1993/4, p. 145).

Watts thus raises the issue of the differential power of the 'users' of discourse. Certainly, the state has a privileged position. But the dominant discourses of the state may shift and change over time, in response to contention and contestation by other subjugated discourses, knowledges and voices. A number of writers criticise Foucault for not adequately addressing the accumulation of power in particular discourses and groups associated with them. For example, Dant (1991) points out that 'the power exerted by institutions, by bureaucracies, the state, classes and other groupings is more than the sum of micro-power relations' and asks how discursive practices 'bring about powerful effects on people' (1991, p. 133). Questions such as these raise the issue of discourse and ideology.

A number of writers, including Fairclough, use a Gramscian notion of ideology and hegemony to fill this gap in Foucault's conceptualisation of social structure and social change. Kenway, in her study of the discursive politics of the 'state aid' debate, argues that Gramsci offers a far more complex definition of ideology than that attributed to classical Marxism. Rather than the notion that 'each class has its own fixed and closed ideological paradigm' and that social dominance is achieved through 'ideological distortion, mystification, and imposition', Gramsci suggests that there exists a 'universe of different ideological elements' which are selectively articulated by members of each class in different ways in order to produce class ideologies (Kenway 1990, p. 177). This work of forging class ideologies is carried out by particular groups of intellectuals. Ideology consists of social practice or action that embodies certain 'conceptions of the world'. These 'may take the highly developed and systematic form of "philosophy" or the

simpler, spontaneous, and contradictory form of “common sense” (Kenway 1990, p. 177).

Fairclough also uses Gramsci’s notion of ‘common-sense’. Such ‘common-sense’ assumptions underlie sociolinguistic conventions, they are invisible because ideological power is ‘the power to project one’s practices as universal and “common sense”’ (Fairclough 1989, p. 33). In this sense, Fairclough uses the verb ‘ideologise’ to describe a process by which certain sets of beliefs, values and practices (discourses in Foucauldian terms) succeed in a struggle for dominance and become powerful within the society or social institution (Fairclough 1989, p. 92; Fairclough 1992, p. 87). For such dominance Fairclough uses the Gramscian term ‘hegemony’. It is distinguished from domination by its mechanisms, which involve the construction of alliances and the winning of consent, and by its temporary and unstable nature, as it is contested across the institutions of ‘civil society’ (Fairclough 1992, p. 92). These include ‘churches, trade unions, the family, schools, the mass media, and political parties’ (Kenway 1990, p. 178). In this way, ‘... discourses may be formed and reformed. In the process of debate and persuasion, social groups and movements all seek to absorb and appropriate elements of the other’s discourse’ (Kenway 1990, p. 179). Foucault rejects the concept of ideology for three reasons:

The first is that, whether one wants it to be or not, it is always in virtual opposition to something like the truth ... The second inconvenience is that it refers, necessarily I believe, to something like a subject. Thirdly, ideology is in secondary position in relation to something which must function as the infrastructure or economic or material determinate for it (Foucault 1980a, p. 118; cited in Jones 1990 p. 93).93].

Dant makes a useful distinction between a ‘particular conception of ideology’ and a ‘total conception of ideology’ (Dant 1991, p. 5). Analysis based on the former is a discursive political strategy pointing to the ‘social situatedness of opponents’ views (their basis not in “truth” but in class or self interest)’ in order to discount them, and assumes that its own perspective is not socially situated.

The latter, however, involves ‘the recognition that all perspectives [are] ideological and socially situated’ (1991, p. 5). This is the position of the sociology of knowledge, which ‘does not need to contest the validity of knowledge because the perspective is agnostic as to truth or falsehood’ (1991, p. 5).

Foucault’s dismissal of the idea of ideology relates to the first of these conceptions. In fact, policy-as-discourse theorists such as Watts (1993/4) who reject theoretical approaches that see the knowledge used by the state as “‘ideological” in that it is epistemologically unsound or in some sense “unscientific” and/or untrue, and/or that it is contaminated by surreptitious and malevolent social interests’ (1993/4, p. 112), also accept a version of the struggle over discourse that is similar to Fairclough’s: ‘... the meaning of power hinges on the power to mean ... People who possess power do so partly because of their capacity to make their definitions and their meanings more authoritative’ (Watts 1993/4, p. 121).

This study proceeds from the position that all perspectives are ideologically situated - Dant’s ‘total conception of ideology’. However, rather than a complete relativism, this position leads, I believe, to the possibility of evaluating and comparing narratives in two ways: first in that certain narratives simply offer a better – fuller, more coherent - account (Haraway 1986, pp. 80-81); and second in that particular narratives benefit certain social groups at the expense of others (Bacchi 2000, p. 44; see below). Thus it is necessary to ask not ‘is this discourse/narrative true?’ but ‘does the account offered by this discourse/narrative encompass everything that is relevant?’ and ‘in whose interest is this discourse/narrative operating?’⁵

⁵ This is not to say that people always identify their ‘interests’ simply according to their membership of a social category (Somers and Gibson pp. 66-7).

Resistance and change

While we may accept Foucault's position that power does not essentially belong to a single powerful group or discourse but is 'capillary' and 'immanent' in discourses, struggle, resistance and discursive change are undertheorised in his work. He does provide some references to a 'politics of discourse' (Yeatman 1994) between social groups: '... in its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, discourse follows the lines laid down by social differences, conflicts and struggles' (Foucault 1971, p. 46).

His 'principle of discontinuity' highlights the capacity for a discourse to contain within itself the seeds of its own discursive challenges, often by different social groups:

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable powers whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy (Foucault 1982, p. 101)

In this sense discourse has an ambiguous relation to power. By giving a discursive form to power, by laying out a narrative, an account of the world which can be challenged, discourse makes power more obvious and thus 'undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it' (Foucault 1980b, p. 101; see also McNay 1992, p. 39).

In this approach to theorising change, the development of reverse or counter-discourses is the key to the process of resistance. Another approach to change is the proposal of deconstruction. Within Fairclough's model, resistance and change are possible through a form of deconstruction, although Fairclough does not use this term, referring instead to 'people developing a critical consciousness of domination and its modalities, rather than just experiencing them' (Fairclough 1989, p. 4). This deconstructive approach appears to be shared to some extent by Foucault, who said in an interview in 1988 that '...people ... are much freer than they feel, ... people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been

built up at a certain moment during history, and ... this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed' (Martin, Gutman & Hutton 1988, p. 10; see also in Ball 1990, p. 1-2). Thus explicit critique of dominant discourses is another mode of resistance. While deliberate critique and the use of contending discourses, however conscious, are broader, more integrated forms of resistance, in the responses of ordinary people to totalising discourse there also exists a myriad of smaller, less conscious resistances that are more difficult to delineate. As Gordon (1980) puts it:

If one turns ... to the question of what it is for real people to reject or refuse, or on the other hand in some manner to consent to, acquiesce in or accept the subjection of themselves or of others, it becomes apparent that the binary division between resistance and non-resistance is an unreal one. The existence of those who seem to rebel is a warren of minute, individual, autonomous tactics and strategies which counter and inflect the visible facts of overall domination, and whose purposes and calculations, desires and choices resist any simple division into the political and the apolitical ... account must be taken of resistances whose strategy is one of evasion or defence – the Schweijks as well as the Solzhenitsyns. (Gordon 1980, p. 257; cited in Sanguinetti 1999, p. 71)

However, despite his hints at a theory of discursive struggle, and despite his insistence on power as a productive and positive force rather than a totally repressive one, Foucault's historical work tends to present power as a 'centralized, monolithic force with an inexorable and repressive grip on its subjects' (McNay 1992, p. 38). *Discipline and Punish*, for example, relies on the point of view of the official representatives of the institutions, rather than representing the possible other voices of the inmates (Dews 1987; discussed in McNay 1992, p. 39) and fails to 'take into account any 'other' knowledges – such as a prison subculture or customs inherited from the past – which those in control may have encountered and come into conflict with' (McNay 1992, p. 39). Resistance is theorised simply as a product of repression, without which repression would not exist; it is in a sense internal to power. This is clearly inadequate and Stephen Ball urges us to

go beyond the dominance/resistance binary, 'not to erase it but to extend it'. He notes that much of practice occurs outside of the confines of this binary, in 'a third space – other concerns, demands, pressures, purposes and desires' (Ball 1994, p. 11).

If discursive change occurs through the assertion of other discourses and narratives, those discourses that are currently dominant are constantly in contention with other discourses and narratives (Fairclough 1989, p. 35). This implies that there are contending discourses and narratives present alongside the dominant discourses at any one time. If this is so, where are those other discourses located? As we have seen, they may be present at the public level, advanced by other 'factions' of the 'intellectually trained'. As such, they may contend with the dominant discourses in influencing the development of policy, both 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse'. This context will be examined in the next section. However, they may also be found in the minutiae of the daily lives of those subject to dominant discourses, in the way in which discourses are combined or 'hybridized', drawn upon, modified, or actually subverted in the context of the construction of identity in various social contexts. As Luke (1999, p. 166) suggests, genealogical studies and work that 'attempts to write and hear historically marginalised speakers and voices' give rise to a demand for the creation of public space for the critique of dominant discourses and also for silenced 'subaltern' voices and stories. It is at this point that the notion of an 'open epistemological politics of voice and representation' (Yeatman 1994, p. xi) becomes possible, whereby the voices and discourses of those 'othered' by the dominant discourses on which our institutions are based can be brought into the 'contest of discourses'. The way in which this is attempted in this study will be outlined below.

Policy as discourse

In this study, the presence and interaction of dominant and contending discourses will be traced through both policy texts and interviews with providers of government services, specifically employment assistance and education and training. Underlying this approach is a construction of 'policy as discourse' as opposed to 'policy as text'. The 'policy as discourse' approach involves a conceptualisation of policy as including the various influences on policy development from both inside and outside political parties and the institutions of the state, the policy text itself and its associated processes and outcomes and the operation of all of these elements of policy as constituting, knowledge-producing discourse.

First, public policy documents are 'written in such a way as to deny the politics of discourse (Yeatman 1990, p. 160) and to 'reinforce policy production-implementation dichotomies' (Gale 1999, p. 400). However, the formulation of policy as text is already a discursively complex process. It occurs through struggles and compromises, multiple influences and agendas, 'ad hocery, negotiation and serendipity'; it is subject to 'authoritative public interpretations and re interpretations'; and then it is decoded 'via actors' interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context' (Ball 1994, p. 17). Influence on policy production derives from not only state agencies officially entrusted with the making of policy, but also discourses, dominant and contending, outside the policy area. Politics, public and professional discourse and policy writing and talk co-constitute each other, forming adjacent and overlapping fields of interest and contest (Luke 1997, p. 8).

Stephen Ball demonstrates that policy does not simply consist of texts but also of processes and outcomes. Policies 'shift and change their meaning' as representations, key interpreters, problem definitions, purposes and intentions change over time. These representations and re-representations 'sediment' and build up, creating confusion and a space for response and for 'the playing off of meanings'. Moreover, policy texts 'enter existing patterns of inequality' – policy

is not exterior to inequalities; even though it may alter them, it is also 'affected, inflected and deflected' by those inequalities. As a result the impact or take-up of policy as text may be very different from what was intended (Ball 1994, p. 17).

Thus policy 'consists of texts which are (sometimes) acted on' (Beilharz 1987, p. 394; discussed in Ball 1994, p. 18). But this acting on is not determined by the text.

Policies do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes are set. A response must still be put together, constructed in context, offset against other expectations. All of this involves creative social action, not robotic reactivity. Thus, the enactment of texts relies on things like commitment, understanding, capability, resources, practical limitations, cooperation and (importantly) intertextual compatibility (Ball 1994, p. 19).

Such a notion implies agency and also a capillary understanding of power. Power is not, according to Foucault, exterior to other types of relationships but immanent in them. Thus new policies provide a 'restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations, so that different people can and cannot do different things' (Ball 1994, p. 20).

However, in addition to even this broad understanding of policy as text, it is necessary to understand how collections of related policies exercise power through a production of 'truth' and 'knowledge' as discourses' (Ball 1994, p. 21). In this sense, 'we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies' (Ball 1994, p. 21). Such policy ensembles as the market, management, appraisal and performativity can be seen in these terms as 'regimes of truth' that constrain what is sayable and thinkable and underlie the struggles over the interpretation and enactment of policy. In this sense the state is decentred; it is 'the product of discourse, a point in the diagram of power' (Ball 1994, p. 22).

Ball is insistent that 'in practice in complex modern societies we are enmeshed in a variety of discordant, incoherent and contradictory discourses, and

'subjugated knowledges' cannot be totally excluded from arenas of policy implementation' (Ball 1994, p. 23). 'Policy settlement' is thus 'a moving discursive frame' (Ball 1994, p. 23) which 'at a particular historical and geographical moment defines the specifics of policy production' and which is 'asymmetrical, temporary and context-dependent' (Gale 1999, p. 401).

Bowe, Ball and Gold suggest that there are three 'contexts' of policy making: the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of practice (Bowe, Ball & Gold 1992). Gale (1999, p. 404) suggests that we see these three contexts as 'embedded in each other'. Thus the influence of discourses within and around the institutions of the state where policy as text is prepared, the text itself and what might otherwise be thought of as sites of policy implementation, such as employment placement agencies, training organisations and workplaces, all form a part of 'policy as discourse'. Therefore policy may change as a result of subversion or contestation in these sites, from which 'subjugated knowledges' cannot be excluded.

In contexts of practice, 'policies from 'above' are not the only constraints and influences upon institutional practice' (Ball 1994, p. 24). Instead, they 'pose problems to their subjects, problems that must be solved in context' (Ball 1994, p. 18). Solving them involves capillary exercise of power and further 'contests of discourses', perhaps including the 'subjugated knowledges' present at implementation sites. Policy actors located in different sites of text production compete for control of the representation of policy. Gale notes that 'individuals with more social control over material aspects of contextual relations tend to generate greater acceptance for the discourses they mobilise' (Gale 1999, p. 403). For example, key mediators of policy may exist in various settings; they will exercise power through their function of relating policy to context or gatekeeping. For all these reasons, when policy changes 'we should not ignore the way that things stay the same or the ways in which changes are different in different settings' (Ball 1994, p. 20; see also Gale 1999, p. 403).

A major insight of the policy-as-discourse approach concerns the discursive construction of social 'problems' and 'crises'. Rob Watts (1993/4, pp. 116–8)

criticises what he calls the ‘deep-seated assumption found in both social liberal and radical readings of the modern state that in state policy intervention there was/is a discovery process which uncovers/ed “real” social problems as a prelude to state policy interventions’ (Watts 1993/4, p. 116). In his view, such an exercise ‘deploys categories in such a way as to ignore the possibility that the “discovery” of problems requires the discursive constitution and abstraction of categories of social practice’ (Watts 1993/4, p. 117). Watts argues that both liberal and radical state theorists share an ‘excessive faith placed in the structural-functionalist meta-narrative about social order and social integration’, which assumes that state intervention is, as it claims, rational and that the state is indeed able to successfully manage ‘social, economic, cultural and political systems integration’ (Watts 1993/4, p. 115). In contrast, the policy-as-discourse approach ‘frames policy not as a response to existing conditions and problems, but more as a discourse in which both problems and solutions are created’ (Goodwin 1996, p. 67; discussed in in Bacchi, 2000, p. 48). Such an approach underlies analyses of the ‘literacy crisis’ discussed in Chapter 4. Policy-as-discourse enables discussion not only of what governments do, but also of what they do not do, or of what they define as ‘simply inappropriate or not an issue’ (Bacchi 2000, p. 48) through what Bacchi (2000, p. 48) calls the ‘contours of a particular policy discussion, the shape assigned a particular “problem”’.

The method of discourse analysis in this thesis

In studying the policy context in which the retrenched workers found themselves, I wanted to trace the neo-liberal discourses present in policy and any other discourses that might also be present in an interdiscursive relationship with them. My aim was to understand in what ways NESB retrenched workers were constructed by the discourses present in the policy context from the late 1980s on. I then wanted to investigate the ways in which those interviewed engaged with

these same discourses. Although my study was informed by a Foucauldian conception of discourse, I needed a method that would enable me to delineate specific aspects of a set of shifting, sometimes contradictory and often interrelated dominant discourses, and to identify the points at which both policy and interview data were drawing on them, even when those discourses were not directly objectified or named. Such a method would also need to enable me to examine discourse as instantiated both in language and in material practices.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) offers a procedure for discourse analysis that it is suggested will 'operationalize' the theoretical positions on which CDA is loosely based (Fairclough 1989, p. 13). The traditional procedure of CDA draws heavily on Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1985; Halliday & Hasan 1989) and involves detailed analysis of sections of text. This reflects the emphasis in traditional CDA on discourse as written or spoken text (Kress 1990, p. 85), i.e. as a linguistic phenomenon. The detailed analysis of sections of text is in some cases extremely useful for the present study, in a deconstructive approach to policy texts, for example. However, traditional CDA procedures have been criticised as being highly technical and too limited to actual text to be able to adequately capture broader social and historical processes (Threadgold 1997; Watts 1993/4). Terry Threadgold, for example, argues that rather than reconstructing the context from linguistic aspects of a text, as in a Hallidayan approach to CDA, 'the context needs its own complex analysis' involving separate research and the use of insights from a multiplicity of theories (Threadgold 1997, p. 449). From a practical point of view in relation to this study, the method does not lend itself to analysis of a very large body of interview data from speakers of English as a second language, some of which is in the form of translation by bilingual workers.

Watts claims that much discourse analysis 'displays little sense of change or embeddedness in history and relatively little evidence of the real work of actors in revising and amending and using discourses, and little sense of the contest between discourses' (Watts 1993/4, p. 123). Somers and Gibson (1994) propose a conceptualisation of what they call 'narrativity' that provides a strong concept of

agency as individuals choose between available 'ontological' and 'public narratives' to construct narrative identities embedded in the context of '(breakable) rules, (variable) practices, binding (and unbinding) institutions, and the multiple plots of family, nation or economic life" (p. 67). However, I wanted a method that would also enable me to understand the 'discursive work' that individuals do as they engage with dominant and other discourses, and the way specific elements of those discourses relate with other elements and with elements of different, and sometimes contending, discourses.

Discourse in the Foucauldian sense is instantiated in language, including the language of everyday use. To the extent that this occurs, examining instances of language such as interviews in search of specific terms clearly relating to particular discourses is useful. However, the absence of such terms or other explicit linguistic references to discourses does not mean that those discourses are not acknowledged and do not form the basis of the 'meaning making' that occurs in talk. A broader social constructionist approach to talk is necessary to study other ways in which talk relates to discourses.

Wetherell and Potter (1992) use the term 'interpretative repertoires' as the basic unit in their analysis of discourse. Interpretative repertoires are defined as 'broadly discernable clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images' (Wetherell & Potter 1992, p. 90). They are used by interviewees as the 'building blocks' for 'manufacturing versions of actions, self and social structures in talk' (1992, p. 90). Although they are coded in language, interpretative repertoires are 'pre-eminently a way of understanding the content of discourse and how that content is organized' (1992, p. 90). They represent 'sets of taken-for-granted and commonly used value terms in a culture'. Used in conversation, their use provides the speaker a 'basic accountability' in the sense that 'having constructed a version in these terms no more need be said, no further warrant need be given' (1992, p. 92). It would appear that the reason for this 'accountability' is that such a version is grounded in a discourse that is assumed to be shared by the interlocutor because it constitutes

what the speaker believes to be a generally accepted basis for thinking about the world.

Potter and Wetherell acknowledge that the concept of interpretative repertoires was developed for a similar purpose as the concept of discourse (Potter & Wetherell 1995). Edley (2001, p. 202) suggests, however, that interpretative repertoires are less 'monolithic' and emphasise agency rather than the processes of subjectification that tend to be more central in a Foucauldian analysis. Edley also describes interpretative repertoires as 'much smaller and more fragmented' than discourses, 'offering speakers a whole range of rhetorical opportunities' (Edley 2001, p. 202).

Wetherell and Potter (1992) point out that different interpretative repertoires can be used by the same person to do different kinds of discursive work (Wetherell & Potter 1992, p. 91). An example of this given in Wetherell and Potter is Pakeha New Zealanders' use of 'culture as therapy' and 'culture as heritage' as fundamental to their accounts of the relationship of Maori people to Maori culture, accounts which ultimately reproduce discourses that further the interests of Pakeha New Zealanders. The concept of informants doing discursive work as they manufacture versions of actions, of social structures and of their own identity⁶ in their interviews (and elsewhere) draws heavily on a social constructionist approach to interview data. Social constructionist analysis involves a consideration of the way in which interview respondents are 'using culturally available resources in order to construct their stories' (Silverman 2001, p. 100). In this approach, the answers of interview respondents are seen against the background of 'cultural stories' or 'public narratives' (Somers & Gibson 1994, pp. 53-4). Respondents engage with such 'cultural stories' either by allowing them to remain unchallenged or by presenting their own stories that directly

⁶ I am adopting Harraway's concept of identity as 'fractured', as 'narrative identity' and thus temporal, spatial and relational (see Somers and Gibson 1994, pp. 59-61). As Somers and Gibson put it:

... all of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making* (p. 59; italics in original).

(although often implicitly) challenge them. For example they may assert the normalcy of their activities in order to counter prevailing notions of the 'deviancy' of such activities. It is important to understand that the relationship between such stories and the dominant discourse is often implicit.

A social constructionist approach also implies a view of identity as constructed through discourses, not so much through subjectification as in the strict Foucauldian position but allowing for some degree of agency (Burr 2003, pp. 106-9; Wetherell & Potter 1992, pp. 75-9; (Somers & Gibson 1994, pp. 53-4). Wetherell and Potter describe 'identity in talk' as 'a construction, an achievement and an accomplishment'. Identity is constructed from 'the stories and narratives of identity ... which are available, in circulation, in our culture'. Identity 'instantiated in discourse' at a particular moment should be seen as 'a sedimentation of past discursive practices'. Such identity construction is both public and private; self-description and 'private accounting for oneself' are no less instances of discourse than talk (Wetherell & Potter 1992, p. 78).

Like Wetherell and Potter, Silverman sees the interview itself as an instance of identity construction and proposes an analysis based on paying attention to the way in which this identity construction is carried out within the interview. In other words, the interview is seen as socially situated and both parties' contributions refer not to an objective external 'reality' in a positivist sense but to 'cultural stories' and 'commonsense' knowledge of the world (Edley 2001, p. 198; Silverman 2001, p. 104).

An approach along the lines proposed by Silverman highlights the way in which interpretative repertoires may also involve narrative. This may occur at two levels. On the one hand, participants may recount stories for particular purposes, as they engage with discourses. On the other hand these stories may be seen as accepting or challenging broader 'cultural stories' or narratives that form part of discourses. I have chosen to add the term 'stories' to Wetherell and Potter's list of significant types of discursive practice by informants. The list of these types of linguistic discursive practice which must be examined in the search for links to discourses now consists of terms, descriptions, figures of speech

(including metaphors), vivid images and stories. However, we are also left with the 'clusters' that Wetherell and Potter term 'interpretative repertoires'. These represent smaller units than discourses but form the specific areas of discourses with which informants engage. On the one hand we have Wetherell and Potter's term 'interpretative repertoires' and, on the other, Silverman's two terms, 'cultural stories' and 'narratives'. I understand these as fundamentally similar and for the sake of simplicity and clarity I have chosen to use the term 'narratives' for these clusters.

Bacchi argues that both the effects of discourse (the ways in which these discourses construct individuals) and the uses of discourse (the benefits to certain groups whether consciously sought or not) tend to be applied selectively by policy as discourse theorists. In other words, there is 'a tendency to emphasize the effects upon those who are considered to be lacking power, and an equal tendency to insist that discourses can be used but by those "holding" power' (Bacchi 2000, p. 51). For Bacchi, this amounts to an undertheorisation among policy-as-discourse theorists of 'the meaning and uses of discourse among those at the receiving end of decisions' or, in other words, of the 'possibilities for challenge and change' (Bacchi 2000, p. 54).

The above account implies an understanding of discourse as something that is used by all, not only by those 'holding' power in Bacchi's terms. Bacchi defines the 'use' of discourse as power and benefit. Individuals 'use' discourse to try to harness the power of discourses in ways that gain, or regain, some power, no matter how small, for themselves. They construct subject positions that may benefit them and the social groups with which they identify. Of course, not all individuals have equal power. A worker of 56 who reads and writes only to a very basic level and has been retrenched due to a work injury that causes her constant pain and prevents her from carrying out even domestic work, has very little power. But she does have some. On one hand, she has power to create a version of her identity and actions and a version of social structures that enables her to live with herself, her family and her peers with self-respect. On the other, she has the power to reproduce, further and strengthen a discourse that may

benefit her and people like her in a number of ways by entering into a field of public policy debate.

In what sense can this individual person be said to be in a field of public policy debate? Many participants in this study were actors in such a field through memberships of political parties and community, ethnic and religious organisations, as shop stewards and union members, through direct political action around employment issues and through telling their stories and making their critique to teachers, social workers and workers in various social agencies. As Billig (1990) argues, all of the accounts individuals construct in talk, even in everyday conversation, are in fact rhetorically constructed and located within a context of public debate and contention. However, the very fact of participation in this study indicates that those interviewed perceived themselves as within a public context. Information was provided to potential participants making clear the purposes of the study and the intended outcomes. The following represents the type of explanation given to participants about the purpose and audience for the interviews in the study:

Well what happens is that I put all the information together ... I'll sort of summarise what people tell me ... and say, well, you know, 'there seems to be a problem about this, there seems to be a problem about that', and maybe I'll leave a few individual comments or stories ... but I won't say who that happened to or anything like that, you know ... and that'll all get together into a book And then it'll be printed by the government, and we hope politicians will read it, and people from CES will read it, and people from Social Security will read it ...

Therefore, part of the identity construction of the interviews occurred in relation to the interviewer as a conduit to the 'government'. Thus the stories people told were told in the context of illustration of a point to the government – even if they did not state what that point was, other than through narrative. Thus, in participating in the study, the interviewees were using discourse as participants in policy debate.

Terminology and data analysis

The term ‘labour market’ is probably one of the more successful examples of the embedding of the discourse of neo-liberalism into public discourse. Strictly speaking, however, it is part of the discourse of neo-classical economics, which in turn forms a major component of neo-liberalism. In an analysis such as this one, it will be useful to distinguish between the ‘discourse’ of neo-liberalism and the ‘discourse’ of neo-classical economics, for example, which are operating at different levels. This is because there are both overlaps and dissonances between the various discourse components that function together to form neo-liberal discourse, but of which each could be considered to form a discursive whole. For example, human capital discourse relies on many of the narratives of neo-classical economics, to the extent that the two cannot really be distinguished in several respects. On the other hand, the discourse of neo-classical economics and the human capital narrative of the ‘new workplace’ differ to some extent in the explanations they offer for why people work, through their narratives of ‘work as pain’ and ‘work as personal fulfilment’. However, the discourse of neo-liberalism allows such contradictions to sit easily within a larger, looser collection of ideas in the public sphere.

For this reason I will use the term ‘meta-discourse’ to describe neo-liberalism, with its general neo-liberal values of economism, performativity, competition, marketisation and individual responsibility. I will use the term ‘discourses’ to describe its component discourses, delineated for the purposes of this study as the discourses of neo-classical economics; human capital; globalisation; and social contractualism. As outlined above, I will then use the term ‘narratives’ to designate smaller elements of these component discourses (see Chapter 3). Narratives are instantiated in policy text and interview data as *terms, descriptions, figures of speech (including metaphors), vivid images and stories*.

To answer the first of my research questions, I attempted to establish the major narratives of the discourses associated with neo-liberalism from a reading of the literature and my own understanding of the public discourses over the period.

This was no easy process; it involved a number of simplifications and rather arbitrary decisions, particularly as to whether a narrative was a feature of the public discourse or an element of, for example, economic theory. The results are outlined in Chapter 3. I then did the same in relation to public discourses about English language and literacy, race and ethnicity. Those discourses and narratives are outlined in Chapter 4.

I then surveyed a number of policy and related documents of the late 1980s and early 1990s in order to select for more detailed analysis a small number that best represented the range and development of policy discourse over that time. In my analysis of the selected texts, in order to answer the first question, I looked for discursive instantiations of the dominant neo-liberal discourses and of other discourses that might be termed ‘contending discourses’. I found that the policy documents reflected, as anticipated, a policy process of struggles and compromises, multiple influences and agendas, ‘ad hocery, negotiation and serendipity’ (Ball 1994, p. 17). This was evidenced by the presence of a variety of discourse traces within the texts, which interrelated in ways that changed from one text to another. I therefore attempted to delineate these and describe the interdiscursivities evident within the texts. In the case of the policy ensembles relating to employment assistance and the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA), I also drew on the literature to attempt to delineate briefly the material practices associated with each. At a later stage, when I had carried out an analysis of my interview data, I revisited the policy texts in order to look for instantiations of the specific narratives that had emerged from that data. In relation to the interviews with providers, I looked for ways in which the providers engaged with dominant discourses in the four focus areas, also relating this, where possible, to the narratives of the contending discourses.

The interview data with which I

In my analysis of the qualitative interviews, I used the qualitative data analysis package NUD*IST to code and store data. However I found its text searching capacities unsuitable for my purposes, which involved locating complex units such as metaphors and stories as well as individual words that could be predicted

and searched for. I therefore created categories within NUD*IST reflecting what appeared to be the major narratives about each focus area contained within the neo-liberal meta-discourse. I read my notes and transcriptions from both rounds of interviews and categorised material relating to the four focus areas. I then re-read the material I had categorised in each focus area, looking for narratives - *clusters of terms, descriptions, figures of speech (including metaphors), vivid images and stories*. First I looked for narratives that were instantiations of neo-liberal meta-discourse and its various specific discourses. In doing so, I asked the questions 'What 'cultural stories' or narratives are being drawn on in this material?' and 'In what way do these 'cultural stories' or narratives relate to those that form part of neo-liberal discourses?' In some cases, particularly where the speaker was fluent in English, these were indeed characterised by certain expected terms from neo-liberal discourses; for example, one interviewee referred to immigrants as a 'burden' and as not 'contributing to the economy'. In others, such as advocacy of military service for the young unemployed, it was necessary to read carefully to understand the complexity of the interviewee's meaning-making in the context of their life circumstances and the interview context itself.

In assessing the material that did not appear to instantiate neo-liberal discourses, I then tried to group the ways in which the material related to those discourses. I began by looking for for examples of discursive and material resistance to these discourses. However it became clear that the answer to my second research question (see p. 21) was far more varied than simply instantiations of and resistance to dominant discourses.

In some cases, participants responded to these narratives by naming (objectifying) and explicitly critiquing or ridiculing them. However in many cases dominant narratives appeared to be taken for granted, and participants told stories or made statements that did not name these narratives but stood in clear opposition to them. I began to realise that these were the narratives that drew on contending discourses, and decided that the term 'counter' was the best description of their relation to the dominant narratives. I followed a reverse procedure for these contending discourses whereby I first catalogued terms,

descriptions, figures of speech (including metaphors), vivid images and stories that drew on non-dominant narratives and then attempted to group these narratives in terms of specific contending discourses.

Lastly, some participants gave accounts of forms of material resistance including evasion (such as embarking on a training program to evade construction as a 'dole bludger'), refusal (such as refusing particular employment arrangements) or 'narrative swapping' (such as using neo-liberal discourses to construct a more powerful identity than that constructed socially within racist discourse).

I found that individuals used what appeared to be contradictory discourses and narratives in the course of 'manufacturing versions of actions, self and social structures' (Wetherell & Potter 1992, p. 90). In analysing individual interviews, I was struck by the way in which the workers used narratives associated with particular discourses in combination with narratives of other, seemingly contradictory discourses, and by the way individuals' resistance to being constructed in certain disadvantageous terms by one discourse led them to choose to take up a subject position within another equally disadvantageous discourse. I therefore decided to present the results of my analysis of the discourses across the interviews as a whole (Chapter 7), but to illustrate some aspects of this individual interdiscursivity by means of a series of case studies (Chapter 8).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the concept of discourse and the methods of analysis that I will use in this thesis. Central to the method is the concept of narratives, representing the elements of discourses with which informants engage. In the next chapter I will examine the meta-discourse of neo-liberalism and its constituting discourses. I will delineate the particular narratives that will be of use in understanding how NESB workers are constructed by and engage with these dominant discourses.

Chapter 3

Globalising neo-liberalism: dominant discourses about work, education and the state

Introduction

The late 1980s and 1990s in Australia were characterised by a dramatic strengthening of public discourses of neo-liberalism, also known in this country as economic rationalism. Inspired by the work of Hayek, Friedman and the Chicago school, neo-liberal discourses had become dominant in the UK under Margaret Thatcher after her election in 1979, in the US under Reagan and increasingly in the OECD⁷. Many ideas consequent upon the theory form the basis of Australian policy and popular discourses about work and the labour market, language and education and training. Central aspects of neo-liberal economic theory have become naturalised through their academic application, their espousal by politicians and their promotion through the press.

I do not intend in this chapter to engage in a detailed examination of the underlying economic theory. Rather, my aim is to delineate the major discourses and narratives of neo-liberal meta-discourse in order to trace them through policy documents and through the interviews with providers and NESB retrenched workers in later chapters. I will roughly divide the neo-liberal discourses into the discourses of neo-classical economics, human capital (HC) theory, globalisation and social contractualism. These divisions are for convenience only, as the

⁷ Marginson (1993, pp. 55-80) provides a succinct but comprehensive account. Examples of influential works in the neo-liberal tradition are: Friedrich von Hayek (1944, 1961), Milton Friedman (1962), Milton and Rose Friedman (1980), James Buchanan (1975), Robert Nozick (1974) and Gary Becker (1976).

discourses overlap, build on and in some cases contradict each other. Each of these will be discussed separately below. At the end of the chapter I will summarise the various narratives comprising the neo-liberal meta-discourse.

The discourse of neo-classical economics

Michael Pusey's 1991 study underlined the economism and utilitarianism of the new generation of policy makers in Canberra. Pusey's work is something of a placemark for the ideas prevailing at the time of my first round of interviews in 1994. For Pusey's policy makers, 'the strength and vitality of Australian society ... resided in the strength and vitality of its economy' (1991 p. 40). Social values were redefined as economic values, and people as economic units – and often deficient ones.

It was in this context that what was perceived as the 'failing work ethic' (1991 p. 35) of Australians was constructed as a major problem. 'The common good was somehow cast ... as the total of exchanged economic values, as the gross domestic product, and in a way that defined all withheld effort and unpaid activity as selfish, reprehensible and "antisocial"'. (1991 p. 40) Within this economism were also located particular constructions of the education system, industrial relations, 'institutional inertia' and political leadership. The education system was seen as insufficiently 'attuned to the specific demands of the labour market' (1991 p. 35): in other words, wholly in relation to the economic system and in terms of the production of human capital. Industrial relations matters were not constructed as issues concerning 'assigning fair shares, and still less as matters of exchange and agreement between two constituencies of equal legitimacy' (1991 p. 36). Rather, trade unions were characterised as the major component of the 'vested interests' that damaged the economy with excessive pay claims, challenged the restructuring of the economy and impeded attempts to improve the competitiveness of Australian industry. Institutional inertia also involved the rigidities of the central wage-fixing system. Failures of leadership were

associated with being ‘soft on unions’ and ‘soft’ on tariff protection – in other words, lacking in ‘the vigour with which they cleared the way for economic change’ (1991, p. 37).

What were the major features of the economic beliefs espoused by policy makers at the time of Pusey’s study? Brian Toohey, in his examination of the economic theories associated with this new dominant discourse, analyses the way in which central neo-classical concepts, reflected in general equilibrium models of the economy and rational economic man (*homo economicus*) models of people, underpin the modelling used by the Australian Treasury and such organisations as the then Industry Commission (now Productivity Commission). According to general equilibrium theory, economies perform at their full potential at the point of market equilibrium. Therefore reaching the point of equilibrium is the aspiration of economic reform, and the aim of policy change is to approximate it (Toohey 1994, p. 74). Among the conditions for equilibrium are the following:

- Perfect competition exists, in which every buyer and seller is so inconsequential they can have no influence on prices.
- Perfect knowledge can be obtained at no cost by all participants about all possible prices for everything now and in the future.
- Perfect factor mobility allows total flexibility about how, where, when and in what quantities – no matter how small – labour and capital can combine.
- Markets exist for the satisfaction of every possible want, no matter how obscure or far off in the future. (adapted from Toohey 1994, p. 62)

In the new economism, the market is the most efficient allocator of resources – and, of course, undistorted markets can function with pure efficiency. Senator Peter Walsh, former Commonwealth Finance Minister, defined economic rationalism as ‘the belief that market forces will generally produce better outcomes, or more efficient allocation of resources, than government intervention’ (cited in Toohey 1994, p. 56). Consequent on this is the call for the transfer to the market of major areas of the public sector, including employment assistance,

education and training. On the same principle, the labour market should be deregulated so that 'efficient' allocation of people to jobs can occur.

In this model there are no 'price makers'. No economic actor has more power than another to influence price, including the price of labour. As the model gained normative force, however, particular institutions became the focus of the crusade to eliminate so-called impediments to the functioning of the labour market. Milton Friedman, advisor to Thatcher and Hewson (Toohey 1994, p. 100), is responsible for popularising the idea that unemployment is voluntary in the sense that if impediments to the market (such as regulation and trade unions) were removed, there would be virtually no unemployment because labour markets would 'clear' (Toohey 1994, p. 110). However, as Toohey points out, Friedman stressed this aspect of clearing markets while ignoring other impediments to perfect competition such as the cost of information and mobility, which are impossible to eliminate (Toohey 1994, p. 110). Pusey draws attention to the way in which public discourses in Australia defined regulation and trade unions as impediments in this regard while ignoring the effects of various corporate interests (Pusey 1991, p. 42). Thus this narrative of neo-classical economics discourse locates the blame for unemployment in trade unions and centralised wage fixing. In this system, the concept of waste is an 'error'. Toohey comments that, '[i]f waste is an error, then unemployment can be explained away as simply the result of society's stubborn refusal to meet the specifications of a maximising theory' (1994 p. 18).

In fact, Milton Friedman was also responsible for popularising the idea that there is a 'natural' rate of unemployment, namely the rate below which it cannot be reduced without inflation. This term originally referred to an almost zero rate that would occur if there were no market impediments. However, it was later confused with the 'Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment' (the NAIRU), the minimum rate to which unemployment could be reduced without accelerating inflation in situations of imperfect competition. The NAIRU became elastic, conveniently moving up as unemployment increased (Hamilton 2003, p.

136; Toohey 1994, p. 111). But the existence of a rate of unemployment significantly higher than zero had been naturalised in the public mind.

As the dominant discourses came to construct people as fundamentally competitive, rather than co-operative, and institutions such as governments or trade unions as fundamentally dangerous, in that they threatened to prevent society from attaining economic perfection or 'equilibrium', asserting contrary values became extremely difficult. As Toohey puts it, 'what starts off as an a priori construct designed to facilitate the building of economic models can suddenly become transformed into ethical imperatives that only the irrational would question' (1994 p. 38).

The basic unit in the model is the economic agent 'rational economic man'. 'Rational economic man' is an abstraction '[b]lessed with perfect foresight' someone who can 'sort through an infinite variety of options stretching far into the future, applying no criteria other than that of self-interest to his every action as a consumer or producer' (Toohey 1994, p. 23). Rational economic man will make choices on the basis of maximising his individual utility, conceived in purely economic terms. This calculation, fundamental in decisions including the decision to 'sell' his labour, depends on a precise balancing of the costs in terms of 'pain' or 'disutility' against the benefits in terms of 'pleasure' or 'utility'. However, what constitutes these costs and benefits, and how they may be measured is extremely problematic⁸. These difficulties highlight problems with the neo-classical account of choice.

The centrality of the notion of choice is a consequence of the primacy of markets in neo-classical economic theory. Arising from this is a fetishisation of choice in neo-liberal discourse, based on the assumption that 'it is part of the very nature of being human to want to make continuous consumer-like choices' (Marshall 1995). This aspect of the discourse is crucial for the present study because in neo-liberal economics, utility is the indicator for welfare and well-being. Neo-liberal economics assumes that people choose what they really prefer,

⁸ A thorough criticism of these problematic presuppositions of neo-classical economics can be found in Doughney (2002, chapters 6-8).

and that this 'revealed preference' maximises their own utility. Therefore the mere act of choosing by definition maximises well-being (Doughney 2002).

However, there are many problems with this account of choice. First, maximal utility (and therefore maximal welfare) may not be identical with 'the value of revealed preference' (Robeyns 2000, p. 19). Or, as Clive Hamilton puts it, 'an alcoholic would prefer more drinks, but we don't measure their well-being by the number of drinks they have' (Hamilton 2003, p. 12). Second, the motivations behind choice may not equate with the pursuit of self-interest (Sen 1999, p. 3). In the neo-classical model, preferences are given, exogenous to the model. But, as Nussbaum argues, 'preferences are not exogenous, given independently of economic and social conditions. They are at least in part constructed by those conditions.' (Nussbaum 1999b, pp. 9-10) She comments: 'Thus a preference-based approach typically will reinforce inequalities: especially those inequalities that are entrenched enough to have crept into people['s] very desires' (Nussbaum 1999b, p. 10).

Choice is only possible between real capabilities, which are constrained by both personal and social factors. This is illustrated by the 'choice' made by men and women between paid (labour market) and unpaid (care and household) work. This choice is seen by neo-classical economics as unproblematic. It is simply a free choice that reflects men's and women's preferences and thus maximises their utility. However, in fact, as Robeyns puts it, 'gender related structures and constraints convert this choice from an individual choice under perfect information into a collective decision under socially constructed constraints with imperfect information and asymmetrical risks' (Robeyns 2000). It is only by studying these constraints that a true assessment of the freedom of the choice can be made. Or, to put it another way, choice can only be seen clearly in the context of the discourses that frame it. And these discourses are, in turn, often the dominant ones of neo-liberal meta-discourse. Marshall points out that the needs and interests of autonomous choosers in the field of education, for example, are 'being shaped through ideologies and ... government agencies which emphasise the need for skills, the continual need during a working lifetime to be reskilled,

and the economic motives for both getting educated and purchasing quality education' (Marshall 1995).

Bernard Williams (1987, p. 101) suggests that it is important to distinguish between the capability to choose a brand of washing powder – what Clive Hamilton calls 'manufactured variety' (Hamilton 2003, p. 66) – and the capability to choose those fundamental material prerequisites needed to live reasonably and function socially. Adam Smith famously drew these social bases of self-respect under the metaphor of people (specifically workmen) having the capability to appear in public without shame (cited in Robeyns 2000, p. 9). The distinction between these types of choice is an important one and tends to be obscured within the current Western fetishisation of choice. In our case, the availability of choice between employment-assistance providers in a marketised system diverts attention from the lack of capability of many people to gain secure, decently paid jobs at all. Both Nussbaum and Robeyns suggest a set of 'fundamental capabilities' (Robeyns 2000, p. 9) that are beyond this superficial notion of choice; these might include 'housing and spatial living conditions; health and physiological well-being; education and knowledge; social relations and interactions; emotional and psychological well-being; safety and bodily integrity' (Robeyns 2000, p. 9).

Alternatives to the neo-classical narrative of work as disutility 'chosen' for its economic benefits are approaches that see employment as an 'institutionalised social relationship' (Fryer and Ullah 1987, Editor's Introduction). For example Jahoda, in her 1938 study, published in 1987, sees paid, industrial work as simply 'normal' for certain age and gender groups, enforced by 'no isolated incentives but a complex work atmosphere' of 'compelling force' (Jahoda 1987, p. 66). In Jahoda's model (see also Jahoda 1982), industrial work provides six unintended benefits to the employed person, as well as the benefit of income: 'imposing a time structure on the waking day'; 'regular shared experiences and contacts with people beyond [one's] famil[y]'; a link with 'transcending goals and purposes'; definition of 'personal status and identity'; 'enforce[d] activity'; and a 'control function' (Fryer 1987, p. 88).

Anna Yeatman describes the way in which the neo-liberal version of choice has been used as a response to criticism of the homogenising imperative of previous public sector systems:

Economic liberals have hijacked the positive valuation of difference and converted it into the assertion of market preference. They have made effective political capital out of a more-complex individuality's rejection of paternalistic-bureaucratic modes of operating public sector services, and have suggested market-oriented choice to be a more adequate vehicle for a self-determining and richly developed individuality. Niche marketing is the producer's response to individuality. (Yeatman 1994, p. 91)

Thus the notion of diversity may be co-opted within neo-liberal meta-discourse.

In neo-classical economic discourse, these assumptions about the characteristics of a 'perfect' economy became elevated to desired norms to which policy makers should aspire, as well as the basis for economic modelling upon which policy making was based. The crusade to deregulate and marketise acquired strong normative force. A plethora of economic problems were attributed to excessive government intervention and the 'crowding out' of the private sector by the public (Toohey 1994, p. 116). Thus, in Australia the 'social democratic welfare state' was superseded first by the 'interventionist and nation-building state' and finally by the 'economic rationalist' and 'minimalist state' (Pusey 1991, p. 112). In the process, the principle of 'performativity'⁹ (Lyotard 1984) is extended from the private to the public sector. A fundamental concern with the relationship between input and output ('efficiency') comes to dominate all aspects of the state, and concepts like democracy and social welfare are conceived within this discourse of performativity that regulates the 'competition state' (Yeatman 1994, p. 111). Performativity underlies the definition of the legitimate citizen,

⁹ Lyotard's (1984, p. 11) notion of performativity is 'the optimisation of the global relationship between input and output. For Lyotard, performativity delimits the 'classes of statements' privileged within the discourse of business (1984, p. 17). Yeatman (1994, p. 110) observes that 'performativity has the singular virtue of supplying a meta-discourse for public policy' which enables the state to 'subsume and transform substantive democratising claim within a managerialist-functionalist rhetoric'.

now constructed as a contributor. Not to 'contribute' is to be defined out of existence (Yeatman 1994, p. 111). In other words, the non-contributor is constructed as 'other', with limited citizenship entitlements unless a regime of rehabilitation is undertaken.

Another fundamental neo-liberal narrative in regard to welfare or well-being is the attack on discourses of distributional justice (Pusey 2003, p. 48) and the substitution of an emphasis on economic growth or 'wealth creation' – the notion that those worse off in society can best be helped by increasing the size of the 'pie' rather than increasing their share of it. Underlying this may be a belief that it is actually good for society as a whole for the rich to get richer, due to the 'trickle down effect'. However, in fact, this narrative has functioned as a legitimization of growing inequality, in which the 'winners' are simply those whose 'talents and abilities' are greater and must be allowed free rein:

Thatcher once said in a speech, 'It is our job to glory in inequality and see that talents and abilities are given vent and expression for the benefit of us all.' In other words, don't worry about those who might be left behind in the competitive struggle. People are unequal by nature, but this is good because the contributions of the well-born, the best-educated, the toughest, will eventually benefit everyone. Nothing in particular is owed to the weak, the poorly educated, what happens to them is their own fault, never the fault of society. If the competitive system is 'given vent' as Margaret says, society will be the better for it. (George 1999)

The idea that 'nothing ... is owed to the weak', what Martin and Schumann term 'prosperity chauvinism' (Martin, H.-P. & Schumann 1997, p. 174), had implications for both the welfare state and the workforce itself. If the 'trickle down effect' is in operation, then 'economic nationalism' (Reich 1991) – wealth creation within a given nation-state in the context of international competition – will bring about 'trickle-down prosperity', obviating the need for most social welfare. If not, however, then those dependent on the welfare state must be pressured to support themselves. Their continued dependence is noxious to the continued prosperity of the nation as a whole, which depends on remaining

globally competitive through private and public sector cost-cutting, low taxation and balanced budgets (Allan 1997, p. 2). The new discourse of welfare will be discussed below.

Finally, the neo-liberal economic model is firmly based on ontological and explanatory individualism. As Thatcher once famously said, popularising Hayek, there is no such thing as society, only a collection of individuals. It has been argued that in considering well-being, it is useful to separate ethical individualism from explanatory and ontological individualism (Nussbaum 1999a; Robeyns 2000, p. 17). Ethical individualism underlies an approach to the evaluation of different social arrangements that focuses only in terms of their effect on individuals (Robeyns 2000, p. 16). Robeyns argues that unlike ontological and explanatory individualism, 'ethical individualism is not incompatible with a personal ontology that recognises the connections between people, their social relations, and their social embedment' (2000, p. 17).

Human capital theory

A second major strand of neo-liberal meta-discourse is associated with human capital (HC) theory. Both ALP and coalition governments have been heavily influenced by HC theory in making policy regarding both education (Marginson 1993) and the labour market (Toohey 1994). HC theory is essentially a supply-side theory, incorporating most other major features of neo-classical economics: that individuals are 'utility maximisers', that they have perfect knowledge of the labour market, and that their only motivation to work is the capacity to obtain recompense above the level of their 'reservation wage' (O'Loughlin & Watson 1997, p. 141). HC theory is based on the assumption that 'education determines productivity, productivity determines earnings, and therefore education determines earnings' (Marginson 1993, p. 53). Thus it assumes that individual productivity is a result only of individual contribution, rather than of physical

capital investment, work organisation or broader economic factors, and that this individual productivity can be measured adequately – usually by remuneration¹⁰.

In the Friedmanite version of HC theory, education is defined as a free-market system, in which individuals invest in education until the costs are greater than the benefits. Although non-economic aspects of education such as personal aptitudes and preferences and the wish to be of service to others are considered, they are discarded as ‘distortions’ of the economic model. On the basis of this analysis, it was argued that individuals should pay the entire cost of education (Marginson 1993, pp. 35-6). A second version of HC theory, associated with public investment in education during the 1960s, is based on a claim that there is a link between education and economic growth (Marginson 1993, p. 40). In the late 1980s, this version resurfaced in OECD policy but with a new twist. Based on studies of farmers, it was argued that education enhances the ability to innovate and to deal with change, particularly technological change (Marginson 1993, p. 46-7). This was the version taken up by the Australian Labor government at the end of the 1980s, in the context of an egalitarian project to ‘dignify vocational knowledge’ and to ‘lift the competence of the whole workforce and not just an elite’ (Marginson 1997, p. 172).

HC theory has been extensively criticised on many grounds over a number of years. These include its neglect of ‘real world social processes’ (O’Loughlin & Watson 1997, pp. 141-2) and other forms of capital – social, cultural and material (Coffield 1999; Cox 1995); its supply-side focus, which fails to recognise the impact of shifting demand patterns (see for example Norris, G.M. 1978; Watson et al. 2003); its tendency to divert attention away from ‘structural failures and injustices’ (Coffield 1999) and to blame victims for their poverty (Hamilton 2003); its failure to address the growing polarisation in educational outcomes (Coffield 1999); the lack of correspondence between credentials and actual jobs (Berg 1971); and its inability to explain differential employment outcomes of greater human capital for NESB and ESB workers (O’Loughlin & Watson 1997,

¹⁰ For comments on these assumptions see e.g. Garnsey, Rubery et al (1985, pp. 55 – 71); O’Loughlin and Watson (1997, pp. 141 – 2); Coffield (1999); and Marginson (1993, p. 53).

p. 154). Other criticism has been directed towards the persistence of gender segmentation (Pocock 1998; Walby 1988) or the maintenance of high rates of unemployment in times of rising educational participation (Petersen 1999).

Several specific narratives important to this study are associated with HC discourse. First, the HC narrative of 'employability' locates the blame for unemployment in the poor quality of available labour (Coffield 1999; Curtis & McKenzie 2001). This may relate to the level of the economy as a whole, due to the location of responsibility for productivity primarily in the skills of the workforce, or to the level of 'victim-blaming' of particular groups or individuals (Hamilton 2003, p. 142-3). Through its assumption that individuals can predict the 'return' on their 'investment', the discourse constructs acquisition of educational attributes as systematically rewarded in the 'market'. The discourse assumes that educational attributes are 'within the individual's control or readily acquired' (Bertone 2000a, p. 55), in other words that 'investments' in training or the acquisition of labour market information are made 'easily in response to changes in relative wages' (Doeringer & Piore 1975, p. 172). It assumes that the formation of human capital attributes occurs primarily prior to, and independently of, entry into the labour market (O'Loughlin & Watson 1997 p. 141), normally in a formal classroom. Reduction of the individual's contribution to a set of measurable 'skills' depersonalises both work and education/training, excluding individual aptitudes and preferences, and excludes tacit and working knowledge.

The discourse of lifelong learning is closely related to HC discourse. Lifelong learning has been advocated within a post-industrial construction of education as personal development (see for example Jones, B. 1995, pp. 150ff, 247). However, in Australia and the UK, this version of the discourse has been supplanted in policy since the 1980s by the 'economic determinist' (Bagnall 2000) version of lifelong learning linked to economic rationalism (Candy & Crebert 1991, p. 8). As a result, many now argue that current lifelong learning discourse is essentially vocationalist, economically utilitarian from the point of view of the state, and increasingly constructed in the context of a marketised, user-pays education system. In other words, the 'progressive, ethical, liberatory nature' of the original

impulse of lifelong learning discourse has now been ‘marginalized or excluded’ from the discourse, which is now profoundly ‘counter-critical’ (Bagnall 2000; see also Coffield 1999).

Tight (1998) notes the tendency for UK policies relating to lifelong learning to assert ‘without evidence, in a taken-for-granted fashion the critical importance of lifelong learning for the economy’ and then to ‘quickly qualify this by referring to other, non-economic, personal or social (even ... spiritual) benefits’ (Tight 1998, p. 482). However, Tight notes the tendency of such documents to reduce discursively the broader view of lifelong learning for all to a focus on vocational education and training and the needs of employers – to lose or downgrade the ‘more inspirational, emancipatory and individual elements of the vision’ (Tight 1998, p. 483). In particular, Tight comments on the implications of lifelong learning’s construction of learning as formal and classroom-based:

... it is formal education and training that has turned so many people off the idea of learning. Re-engaging those with bad previous experiences of school and further education in learning will require something different from more of the same. (Tight 1998, p. 483)

In the mid-1980s, the OECD rediscovered HC theory, in the context of rapid workplace transformation and technological change. While HC theory had previously involved claims about the importance of education in contributing to economic growth, leading to significant public investment in education, the failure of education to ‘redistribute incomes or even to create equality of opportunity among different social groups’ (Marginson 1993 p. 43) led to it being discredited during the 1970s. In the mid-1980s, its ascendancy was based on the argument that education increases people’s capacity to cope with change (Marginson 1993, p. 48). However, in this version, screening theory – which sees education’s fundamental role as ‘that of a selection system for employers’ and ‘focuses on the exchange value of educational qualifications (credentials), rather than the cognitive attributes of the educated worker’ (Marginson 1993, p. 44) – was used to argue that the raising of education levels should not be funded by public but by

private investment. Individuals who invested would be rewarded by higher earnings. So the social rates of return were argued to justify educational expansion, but not to justify public funding of this expansion (Marginson 1993, pp. 48-9). Thus, public investment by the Labor government in vocational training occurred within a general context of marketisation and commodification of both education and training, involving increasing costs to individuals.

Marginson argues that, because levels of education and social status are closely related, education can 'function as a "neutral" basis for other forms of discrimination' (1993, pp. 131-132). This argument is presented in the context of tertiary education. However, it applies equally to lower levels. By 1993, Marginson notes, credentialism had 'spread "downwards" to encompass the lower status and lower paid jobs for which credentials were once not required' such as nurses and bank clerks (Marginson 1993, p. 132). Credentialism has gradually universalised the role of education as a gateway to the labour market, so that those without qualifications are far more likely to be unemployed. Credentials inflation means that often, 'everyone has to move up to a higher credential bracket just to maintain their place in the pecking order' (Marginson 1993, p. 133; see also Hamilton 2003, pp. 142-3).

Clive Hamilton sees education as the site of a shift from equality of outcomes, with a focus on reducing income inequality, to equality of opportunity. However, such a shift instantiates neo-liberal meta-discourse. He notes that to provide equality of opportunity without addressing the structural inequalities built into the capitalist economy will result in continued inequality of outcomes that can then be constructed as the fault of the individual: '... by transferring the blame for "failure" to the individuals who do not take advantage of the educational opportunities on offer, the new approach may erode public commitment to greater equality and inclusion' (Hamilton 2003, p. 142-3).

Within HC discourse is another narrative that represents a slight variation of it: the narrative of the 'new workplace'. The source of some of the ideals regarding management and work organisation that have influenced the restructuring of companies in the 1980s and 1990s is the Japanised organisational paradigm,

which came to be widely accepted as a blueprint for organisational transformation by the business schools, organisational theorists and the popular press in many countries including Australia (Waters 1995, p. 82). The belief underlying this school of thought was that the elements of this paradigm – including strategic management, just-in-time, total quality management, teamwork and managerial decentralisation as well as numerical and functional labour flexibility – had resulted in the spectacular success of Japan on world markets. These forms of work organisation, if emulated in other manufacturing nations, would solve the problem of declining profits. This position gave rise to a form of HC discourse about the ‘new workplace’ that has been associated with human resource management (HRM) discourses (Buchanan 1995; Keenoy & Kelly 1996).

In the optimistic post-Fordist position adopted by such Australian writers as Mathews (1989), the abandonment of mass production in favour of ‘flexible specialisation’ could also mean an end to the exclusion of workers from decision-making, resulting in increased employee participation and job control. Mathews (1989, pp. 79-85) linked industry restructuring to the production of higher quality products and higher levels of added value, and argued for the acceptance of the new production strategies by workers in order to attempt to control their effects, through the ‘democratisation of work’ (Mathews 1989, p. 172). Conceding that unions were ‘caught in a cleft stick’ over job losses, he argued for an attempt to ‘lead employers’ in industry restructuring, thus winning a position of influence for trade unions in the process (1989, p. 173).

Versions of post-Fordism such as that of Mathews contributed to a normative hypothesis that became part of dominant discourses in Australia and elsewhere during the period of the late 1980s and early 1990s. It may be summarised as follows:

production must focus on small batches of goods purposefully designed for specific target markets. Machinery is to be configured to facilitate rapid changes in product; and process innovations are a source of competitive advantage. These innovations produce new demand for labour: workers must be able to adapt to rapid change and to work in contexts that are no longer routine or predictable. The

workers protections of the Fordist era are redefined as rigidities imposed by unions that constrain the ability of firms to achieve the flexibility they need to compete. (Webber & Weller 2001 p. 71)

The notion of the 'new workplace' arising from the flexible specialisation thesis constructed constant change and the new workplace organisation around 'quality', teamwork, managerial decentralisation and technology as the dominant feature of work in the future. The corollary of this, of course, was that the experience, 'skills' and knowledges of the existing workforce were obsolete, particularly those that could not be named and specified within the new competencies around which education and training were now to be designed. Together with the new rationale of HC theory, with its emphasis on education as enhancing the capacity of individuals to 'cope with' technological and other change, the narrative of the 'new workplace' constructed those who had not, did not or could not participate in education as 'other', by definition unable to 'cope with change', and thus undeserving of a position in the 'new workplace'. As we will see in Chapter 4, this construction in the form of the narrative of trainability would be naturalised for NESB workers through being read in conjunction with 'commonsense' narratives about ethnicity and language.

In the 'new workplace', the ideal employee is the 'shape-shifting portfolio person'(Gee 2002, p. 75-6). The narrative of entrepreneurialism is at the centre of this construction of the employment relationship. 'Shape-shifting portfolio people' are 'free agents in charge of their own selves as if those selves were projects or businesses'. Thus the risks of the employer 'trickle down' to the individual. This entrepreneurialism is textually mediated. Both recruitment and selection and the employment relationship itself are conducted through the portfolio and the constant textual 'shape-shifting' required to establish the worker's continuing competence and worthiness in changing circumstances (Gee 2002, p. 75). This is one form of the narrative of textualisation, a construction of knowledge and competence as inhering in text. A kind of performance is at the heart of this entrepreneurialism, centred on cultural and linguistic tokens or scripts that demonstrate the employee's willingness to interact in a certain way with

others. Sennett terms these 'masks of cooperativeness' (Sennett 1998, p. 112). Graham (1995, pp. 32-35) describes a selection system that privileges not task-based skills but applicants' 'savvy' in working out what was required and their preparedness to engage in 'a kind of charade' in the selection process. It functioned to select workers who would give 'unconditional cooperation' to the company, and to generate at least initial positive feelings towards the company in those selected.

The ways in which the narrative of the 'new workplace' represents a homogenising imperative both culturally and linguistically are illustrated by several US studies. Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) document the introduction of the new 'culture' of self-directed work teams in a Silicon Valley electronics assembly company where many managers and supervisors were white and the workforce was multilingual and multicultural with a preponderance of relatively newly arrived immigrants from Asia, many of whom have limited English. Management previously recognised the linguistic variety of its workforce by offering some parts of its quality enhancement programs in four different languages and in-house ESL classes (1996, pp. 80-83). However, teamwork training was offered in English only, because '... once a company culture calls for collaboration, for cross-divisional communication, indeed for teamwork, then there is a need for a common language, English, and a shared workplace culture that crosses ethnic boundaries' (1996, p. 85).

This move from pluralism to the HC view of learning as the internalisation of a given body of knowledge involved extremely linguistically demanding training materials (1996, p. 98), which consist of highly ideological materials, customised and repackaged from vendors specialising in corporate quality enhancement programs (1996, p. 88). Training included a 'self-improvement' style lesson on the steps employees should follow in order to accept positively whatever changes the company management saw fit to introduce¹¹. Employees received the implicit message that their existing skills were not required and restricted themselves to

¹¹ Similar techniques have been common in Australia, particularly in the context of training relating to quality improvement, leadership training, problem-solving and so on where packaged materials from the US are common (Virgona et al 2003).

fulfilling the company's extensive reporting requirements and using team meetings to explain why they had not reached targets set. The authors point out the contradiction between the company's stated aims of worker empowerment and management's continuing tight control (1996, p. 121).

Darrah (1996) also studied an attempt to introduce 'teamwork'. Management blamed the workers, many of them South-east Asian immigrants, for the failure of the initiative, attributing it to their deficiency in oral and written communication skills, as well as their ability to self-manage. But Darrah demonstrates that the failure had little to do with these factors. The introduction of the scheme was hasty and ill-considered. The workers suspected that it was a disguised mechanism for downgrading them and that they were being excluded from certain types of information. Management itself lacked commitment to the logic of the scheme. When employees did as they were asked to do and identified mistakes made by others such as sub-contractors, those who had made the mistakes complained and the feedback was stopped.

Such reports suggest that the narrative that attributes difficulties with the implementation of the 'new workplace' to workers' ELL 'deficiencies' is misplaced. Jackson (2000) argues that '[t]he source of [the] "literacy problem" at work lies not in the functional skill deficits of individuals, but in the workplace social relationships in which the "local meanings" of literacy tasks are being transformed' (2000, p. 263). Where new management techniques have been implemented, they have been associated not with empowerment and workplace democracy but with increased surveillance and control and a reduction in autonomy. Thus these management techniques and the literacy practices they require contain within themselves the seeds of resistance. Through literacy practices such as quality management and assurance procedures and continuous improvement processes, workers participate in the policing of their own work, providing the evidence that may be used against them by their superiors. Thus workplace literacy practices themselves are a disciplinary regime, both in the sense of process control and in the Foucauldian sense of making workers 'subject to the text'. Resistance may take the form of non-compliance, leading managers

to seek a training solution or, if that fails, to interpret behaviour as laziness or a bad attitude (Jackson 2000, pp. 267-9).

Other studies have found that management perceptions of the need for worker literacy are often misplaced, resulting more from management assumptions about the superiority of text-dependence *per se* than to the actual requirements of a particular job (Black 2002; Gowen 1992, p. 31; Scholtz & Prinsloo 2001). Such assumptions are closely bound up with social class. For middle class, schooled professionals, an absence of interaction with print is constructed as indicative of an absence of thought, and an absence of ability to sequence in an abstract way (such as describing the steps involved in the job) as 'disorganized' thinking (Gowen 1992, p. 76). Text dependence is constructed as superior to being 'dependent on others' behaviour' (workplace educator cited in Gowen 1992, p. 77). As a result

... a functional context approach to workplace literacy is more than an attempt to teach employees to read and write. It is also an attempt to change employees' ways of constructing and displaying knowledge to more closely match those of mainstream employers and educators. (Gowen 1992, p. 74)

In its promise of democratic consultation, individual responsibility and initiative and enhanced job satisfaction, the 'new workplace' narrative constructs work as personal fulfilment. However, the flexible specialisation thesis has been criticised for its technological determinism, the assumption that new technologies would automatically bring with them better forms of work (Campbell 1990; Hamilton 2003, p. 143; Morrissey, Dibden & Mitchell 1992; Probert & Wajcman 1988). Changes such as 'team based job enlargement' only relate to a minority of already skilled workers in a few industries, including government policy making (Pusey 2003, p. 40). As a result, other changes such as casualisation and subcontracting, which have a far greater impact on the workforce at large, are underestimated (Campbell 1990). For workers other than these few, the reality of organisational change may be simply an aggregation of tasks resulting in an intensification of labour, or 'neo-Fordism' (see for example O'Donnell & Ibrahim

1994). Graham's participant observation study of US vehicle workers' responses to the Japanese model found that it was 'not equipped to deliver on its promises to workers' (Graham 1995, p. 154) and that workers' responses were a mixture of hope, which reflected a 'relatively low level of awareness of the potential gap between company and worker interests', and a sense of betrayal (1995, p. 139).

Williams (1992) argues that the emancipatory claims of HRM discourse run counter to 'management culture' in Australia (Williams 1992, p. 41). There was little evidence of the democratisation of management practices in Australia during this period; employees individually were rarely consulted or even informed about decisions about significant workplace change (Buchanan 1995, pp. 58-60). Organisations were still strongly centralised and controlled from above, despite 'new workplace' or HRM rhetoric to the contrary. Yet the new HRM discourse marginalises differences between management and employees and delegitimises the inclusion of unions in certain types of workplace decisions (Gee, Hull & Lankshear 1996, p. 90). Far from the post-Fordist vision, this discourse involves 'the restoration and legitimation of managerial prerogatives under the guise of an allegedly new approach to labour management' (Buchanan 1995, p. 62, see also p. 55; Graham 1995; Sennett 1998, pp. 110-117).

Edwards and Usher argue that the HC discourse of competence that underlies Competency Based Training (CBT) is an extension of such a discourse of surveillance and control into the training area (Edwards & Usher 1994). They argue that the narrative of 'teamwork' is a device to marginalise divergent interests of management and employees, 'with the ever-present threat that not to accept this position is to act irrationally and inefficiently and hence to make oneself unemployable'. Such 'flexibility', while often presented as both a clever approach to production and a convenience to workers, tends to transform permanent and protected working arrangements into an enhancement of management convenience (Castells 1989 p. 31).

Globalisation and the 'pathology of over-diminished expectations'¹²

A major issue for the less powerful social groups in societies becoming transformed by global change is the function of the nation-state – as a direct redistributor of wealth through welfare systems, a provider of education, healthcare and housing, a protector of jobs and a regulator of the labour market. Most writers acknowledge a decline in these functions in the industrialised nations over the last 20 years, associated with the process of 'globalisation'. The common image of globalisation is based on the idea that 'national cultures, national economies and national borders are dissolving' (Hirst & Thompson 1996 p. 1) and that, for this reason, it is no longer possible for nation-states to fulfil many of their former functions.

The belief that globalisation has dissolved national boundaries and made national governments powerless has been popularised by business writers such as Kenichi Ohmae (1990). Ohmae's book, *The borderless world*, published in 1990, is a kind of neo-liberal anti-protectionist exhortation rather than an argument. Nonetheless, it typified a kind of thinking that took hold of the public imagination, bringing with it a sense of inevitability summed up in Margaret Thatcher's doctrine of TINA – There Is No Alternative.

For Ohmae, consumers are the drivers of globalisation. Their desires are the ultimate source of the globalisation impulse, the source of those desires never questioned. 'Information' dissolves borders, and consumers' knowledge about products and their wish to source them from countries other than their own is the fundamental anti-protectionist force. Borders are thus defined simply as protectionist barriers, information as consumer product knowledge and pluralism in terms of 'variations in taste' (1990, p. 185). Ohmae asserts that '[t]oday's global corporations are nationalityless' (1990, p. 195); attempts to protect jobs are counterproductive; the role of governments, apart from demolishing protectionist barriers, is to 'educate' people (defined in terms of enabling them to access information as consumers), provide the best possible infrastructure for business,

¹²(Hirst and Thompson 1996).

make their countries attractive to business and nurture local companies (1990, p. 195). This is economic nationalism (Reich 1991).

That this discourse of globalisation operates in the interest of dominant groups is apparent in Ohmae's work, for example in his assertion that global corporations are by definition good corporate citizens that should not be resisted (1990, p. 195) and in his portrayal of the ordinary people of the world as consumers who 'travel with a Vuitton suitcase' (Ohmae 1990, p. 3). In the discourse of globalisation, the nation-state is characterised as all but obsolete, and demands that states protect their people as both foolish and irrelevant. The opening of borders and the limiting of government to its true role are predicted to result in rising living standards everywhere (Ohmae 1990, p. 15). This discourse legitimates the 'trickle down' of risk through the notions of individual choice and responsibility:

The people understand that they make choices and must accept the consequences. There are no perfect guarantees. If you choose to live in a dangerous area, you accept the risk that you may get mugged or shot down in the street (p. 185).

Counter discourses draw on discourses of democracy and equity. For example, Castles and Davidson mount a sustained critique of Ohmae's 'borderless world', pointing out inter alia that it is

bad news for anyone who believes in democracy ... Governments are increasingly powerless, so the right to elect them has little meaning. There are no democratic mechanisms in the global marketplaces and transnational corporations. The theme is not even discussed in Ohmae's book – he clearly sees it as irrelevant. Ohmae's global citizen is imbued with consumerism, not democratic values. (Castles & Davidson 2000, p. 17)

Hirst and Thompson (1996) also examine the 'strong form' of globalisation theory proposed by Ohmae and others. They argue that the popular acceptance of the strong globalisation argument leads to a 'pathology of over-diminished expectations' (Hirst & Thompson 1996 p. 6), which may lead us to ignore or

dismiss the actual possibility of making some improvements in the social and economic spheres with 'a modest change in attitudes on the part of key elites' (1996, p. 7). Webber and Weller (2001) provide an example, arguing that critical debate in Australia about economic and industry policy has been blocked by a simplistic account of globalisation as homogenisation (Webber & Weller 2001 p. 2).

Hirst and Thompson also argue that, despite the diminution of nation-state 'sovereignty' in the traditional sense, states continue to be 'overarching public powers, essential to the survival of pluralistic 'national' societies with diversified forms of administration and community standards' (1996, p. 192). 'Omnicompetence, exclusivity and omnipotence of the state' are not essential for the rule of law (1996, p. 192). The state remains the 'regulator of social action' and the only body capable of 'adjudicating between the competing claims of corporate entities and citizens' (1996, p. 192).

What Harvey calls the 'national interest' remains, but it is increasingly contradictory:

The state is now in a much more problematic position. It is called upon to regulate the activities of corporate capital in the national interest at the same time as it is forced, also in the national interest, to create a 'good business climate' to act as an inducement to trans-national and global finance capital, and to deter (by means other than exchange controls) capital flight to greener and more profitable pastures. (Harvey 1989, p. 170)

The residual powers of the state are thus largely in the area of 'labour disciplining' and 'intervention in financial flows and markets' (Harvey 1989 p. 194). Manuel Castells points out that this does not constitute a withdrawal of the state from the economic sphere, as is commonly argued, but 'the emergence of a new form of intervention, whereby new means and new areas are penetrated by the state, while others are deregulated and transferred to the market' (1989, p. 25). The activities conducted as part of this new strategy of intervention include

deregulation, privatisation, regressive tax reform, shrinkage of the welfare state, state support for research and development and fiscal austerity to control inflation.

According to Castells, there has also been a 'substantial change in the pattern of state intervention, with the emphasis shifted from political legitimization and social redistribution to political domination and capital accumulation' (Castells 1989 p. 25). This also implies a change in the form of intervention. The state attempts to 'override the contradiction between its increasing role and its decreasing legitimacy' by 'diffusing its power through immaterial information flows'. The state 'sets up a series of information systems that control activities and citizens' lives through the codes and rules determined by those systems' (Castells 1989, p. 18). Through control of this network of information flows, intervention by the state has actually increased. This increase directly contradicts the 'ideological self-representation of the restructuring process by its main protagonists' (Castells 1989, p. 26), which minimises the role of the state and stresses the activity of entrepreneurs who are at last freed from state interference.

This analysis coincides with that of many other theorists concerned with social change who, while acknowledging in most cases that individual nation states are increasingly limited in their power to defy international capital, dispute the idea that globalisation implies the 'withering away' of the state. For example, Castles, Kalantisis, Cope and Morrissey (1988), in their major study of the implications of global change for marginalised ethnic groups in Australia, conclude that

... the economically weak nation-state remains a functional political unit. It is able to a limited extent to develop and maintain national ideologies and loyalties. It can manage class and racial conflicts. It can provide systems of social security, education and training needed to develop mass loyalty and to socialize the working population. Briefly: the nation-state is still the most effective agency of social control. (Castles et al. 1988 p. 141)

The discourse of social contractualism

In neo-liberal meta-discourse, another major discursive ensemble is associated with the shift away from the discourse of the welfare state. This shift is centred upon the construction of recipients of welfare benefits as deficient, and made more so by that very reciprocity. As Sennett puts it,

The attack on the welfare state ... treats those who are dependent on the state with the suspicion that they are social parasites, rather than truly helpless. The destruction of welfare nets and entitlements is in turn justified as freeing the political economy to behave more flexibly, as if the parasites were dragging down the more dynamic members of society. (Sennett 1998, p. 141)

In Australia, the provision of welfare has traditionally been in the context of what FG Castles called the 'wage earner's welfare state' (Macintyre 1999, p. 110; see also Pusey 2003, p. 153). The system of centralised wage fixing within a context of full employment maintained equity in income distribution generally and provided a basis for improvement in pay equity for women (Probert 2002, p. 8). Welfare was therefore able to function as a residual safety net. The move to shift the costs of growing unemployment away from the state in accordance with developments in the UK and US (Macintyre 1999, pp. 104-5) has involved the discourse of mutual obligation (MO), central to the Howard government's welfare policy. This discourse is generally agreed to represent a move away from the narrative of unemployment benefit as entitlement to a more conditional granting of unemployment benefit on the basis of some form of social contractualism. Opinions vary as to whether the discourse is based on classic liberal theory (see e.g. Bessant 2000) or variants of it, such as 'stakeholder capitalism' borrowed from conceptions of company shareholders in which 'inclusion implies membership and membership implies obligation' (Macintyre 1999, p. 114). The basis of MO is that the provision of welfare benefits to unemployed people confers an obligation on them to 'give something back', in the form of regular and continuous demonstration of availability for employment and efforts to find a job

and compulsory participation in activities including Work for the Dole (WfD), training or community work.

MO discourse relies on the construction of the unemployed as deficient, and as parasitical upon 'society', damaging the national economy by 'withheld effort' (Pusey 1991, p. 40). Three associated narratives claim that unemployed people are lazy ('dole bludgers'); they are too selective ('job snobs'), or they are deliberately defrauding the system by claiming UB while working in the informal sector ('double-dipping'). In each case, they are receiving welfare benefits while failing to 'contribute to the economy'. The terms 'dole bludger', 'job snob' and 'double dipper', characteristic of popular versions of these narratives and increasingly used in populist rhetoric by politicians, are of course not used in policy documents. These terms will be used here to refer to the narratives in order to emphasise the 'fit' between the meanings of such terms and the central narratives underlying policy documents.

Kinnear comments that '[i]n assuming that the inability to achieve self-reliance is a result of the failure of individual motivation, mutual obligation is little more than an intellectual justification for the "dole bludger" myth' (Kinnear 2000b, p. 9). Peter Saunders of the Centre for Independent Studies has recently claimed that:

... nearly one-fifth of unemployed Australians [are] what Tony Abbot once called 'job snobs'. Many unemployed people will not accept a job on a lower wage than their previous employment and two-thirds say they are not prepared to move within their own state to get work. A quarter of the unemployed are drifting or have given up looking for work, and one in six have no intention of working. (Saunders 2003)

These people, he claims, are 'demotivated'. His solution is a six-month limit on unemployment benefits (Saunders 2003). Welfare recipients are constructed as further 'de-moralised' by their reciprocity (Allan 1997) – lacking in work ethic, motivation, energy, initiative or skills, or having moral weaknesses, being lazy and irresponsible and in danger of becoming dependent on welfare. Sennett traces the way in which 'dependence' is constructed as shameful in the 'new order',

arguing that such a construction in fact constitutes a failure of trust (Sennett 1998, pp. 139-41).

The coercion through threatened withdrawal of benefit is constructed in the discourse of social contractualism as benefiting the unemployed. In this way, as Macintyre puts it, 'the rhetoric of inclusion and participation is used to legitimate the transfer of responsibility from the community to the individual' (Macintyre 1999, p. 114). Macintyre argues that the reciprocity is better seen as between the community and the state, and that as members of this community who have already made a contribution, individuals have a right to assistance. If the contract is between the community and the state, it is possible to consider the welfare of the whole community, in other words of 'all those who will benefit from having as high a proportion of the population in productive employment as possible' (Macintyre 1999, p. 116).

Bessant notes that the discourse of MO involves assigning an ethical value to waged labour, and that 'dominant discourses about adolescence and recent 'discoveries' of a [sic] 'underclass' identify the absence of paid employment as a key cause of disorder' (Bessant 2000, p. 23). She argues that the paternalistic discourse of WfD is an 'attempt to draw on and reinstate the moral and social-integrative values traditionally attached to paid employment' – in other words, it is a discourse of socialisation in the 'older industrial moral-economy' (Bessant 2000, p. 23). As Bessant argues, it is inherently unethical to require people to work, and to define them as lesser citizens if they do not work, without a commitment by government to create enough jobs to make this possible. This is apparently impossible in the current 'post-full-employment society' (Bessant 2000, p. 24-5). She argues that the compulsion to work for welfare-level payments destroys the sense of autonomy and agency of individuals. It 'denies one's ability to make certain work/career-related decisions,' damages 'self-esteem and social independence' and, in a context of discourses of blame, 'compounds the guilt, anxiety and sense of incompetence felt by many people unable to find work' (Bessant 2000, p. 29).

There have been a number of critiques of MO from a philosophical point of view. For example, Kinnear (2000) argues, together with John Rawls, that for 'obligation' to exist the institutions of society must be just and the benefits received must have been freely accepted. However, she argues first that they are not just because 'Australia's system of economic management has relied on creating joblessness to sustain economic growth ... Unemployed people have therefore made an involuntary sacrifice for the economic well-being of employed people' (Kinnear 2000a, p. v) Second, they are not freely accepted because in a modern economy characterised by structural unemployment, many people have no choice but to accept welfare benefits. Thus there is no justification for the requirement for unemployed people to be penalised. On the contrary, the employed should feel 'gratefully obliged' to the unemployed for their contribution to the economy (Kinnear 2000b, p. 9).

As acknowledged by Labor spokespeople, including a previous and the current Leader of the Opposition, Kim Beazley and Mark Latham, MO is closely related to the principle of 'reciprocal obligation' underpinning the previous Labor government's policy ensemble, *Working Nation* (1994). Beazley and Latham distinguish between the 'genuine reciprocation' of Labor's policy, with its commitment to the community and to the development of social capability and social capital, and the Coalition's mere concern to save money (Macintyre 1999, p. 107). In fact, parts of *Working Nation* are characterised by a residual equity discourse. However, the essential social parasite, and thus 'dole bludger' and 'job snob' narratives are at the heart of *Working Nation*¹³ (see pp. 146 – 152). The discursive continuities between reciprocal and mutual obligation are therefore significant, and I will refer to the discourse as RO/MO discourse.

Allan Luke suggests a useful three-stage way of conceptualising the development of the discourses of HC and RO/MO since the mid 1980s. All three stages are based on the construction of a 'lack' of 'educationally-acquired skill, competence and knowledge' that constitutes 'an impediment to productivity and

¹³ The terms 'dole bludger' and 'job snob' are of course not used in *Working Nation*, as befits a policy document. These terms are used here to refer to the narratives they designate (see p. 73).

the expansion of capital' (Luke 1997, p. 11). The first, the Dawkins-era model that he calls 'human capital with a heart' (Luke 1997, p. 11), combined productivity and equity in its definition of the 'problem', and therefore the goals of educational intervention designed to compensate for the 'lack' included both improved competitiveness and social mobility. This model drew on 'redistributive discourses' that kept 'life opportunities' on the agenda (Luke 1997, p. 15). The second, characteristic of the mid-1990s 'officially sanctioned backlash against alleged abuses of entitlements and the failures of ameliorative programs' (Luke 1997, p. 12), was aimed at 'deficit-subjects', and its goal was simply economic growth, which would improve overall employment. The equity and social mobility elements were eliminated in this model, which assumed the existence of jobs and attributed unemployment to both the skill-levels and the moral character of the unemployed, who were therefore in need of discipline. The third model, which he associated with policy moves by the new Coalition government in 1997, elevated 'at risk moral order' to the status of the problem, alongside productivity.

Luke suggests that the new model locates education at the centre of strategies to 'manage' and legitimate the 'socio-economic remarginalisation' of those groups most affected by 'the dismantling and privatisation of social service infrastructures and entitlements and structural changes in employment markets and conditions' (Luke 1997, p. 15). In other words, 'the new deficit model becomes a palliative to the very social effects that it helps constitute and create' (Luke 1997, p. 15). Thus there is a shift between model 1 and 3 from 'ameliorative to prohibitive agendas' (Luke 1997, p. 15). The basic ideological statements of model 1 about economics and deficit underlie all three models, however, those of equity and social justice have disappeared and others relating to discipline and order have replaced them. However, as Luke points out, residual statements about equity and social justice in polysemous policy texts may still be used at the local level in the interests of communities (Luke 1997, p. 17).

The material practices of the discourse of social contractualism currently centre on the Job Network, a privatised system for the provision of employment

assistance. The Job Network will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6. However, Considine's study of the Job Network provides a further insight into the discourse of social contractualism. He describes the relationship between the job seeker and the agency under the new system as fundamentally

... a strategy of self-enterprise in which the job seeker [is] asked to take over and run his or her own job-finding endeavour, to become, in effect, a self-employed contractor building their job future in the manner of a one-person small business. (Considine 2001 p. 178)

The contract negotiation between job seeker and advisor is an attempt to mimic the conditions that the job seeker will find outside the agency, in the now less regulated economy. This involves 'an open acknowledgement of risk and selectivity'. Certainty about the continuation of support, including income support, is deliberately removed, and it is clear that any 'scarce opportunities' offered to the job seeker will depend on their relationship with the advisor. The threat of 'breaching' and of 'being relegated to the ever growing "parking" lot' underlie the job seeker's precarious situation, but once this precariousness is appreciated 'the adviser [can] show a path to safety' (Considine 2001 p. 178).

This new relationship is indicative of what Considine calls 'the formation of a different kind of civic persona' or 'new citizenship' (Considine 2001, pp. 180-81), that is, one which is conditional upon success in avoiding 'dependency' on the state. But Considine rightly comments on the contradictions of RO/MO discourse:

... in order to make that outcome more attractive [advisers collude] with opponents of welfare by making receipt of income support a more stigmatised condition. The longer one 'depends' on that support, the faster one loses credibility as an independent agent. (Considine 2001 p. 180)

Continuing to receive support requires people to be both very disadvantaged and at the same time 'ever more resilient, competent and resourceful' (Considine 2001 p. 180).

The strategy outlined by Considine is primarily one of 'motivating, cajoling, engaging, reviving and disciplining' job seekers (Considine 2001 p. 180). Almost all of the advisers interviewed believed that training and employment subsidies were crucial for securing employment for the most disadvantaged, but both were 'in short supply' under the Job Network. In any case they were regarded as 'an old solution and one that created too many rigidities' (Considine 2001 p. 182). However, such a strategy constructs the 'problem' as a situation where the jobs exist but the job seekers are unmotivated, recalcitrant and defiant. It is unable to benefit job seekers for whom the major problem is a lack of demand due to a skills, qualifications or experience mismatch, or various types of discrimination, and renders invisible the imbalance between numbers of job seekers and jobs.

Considine sees the jettisoning of universality as a feature of the new approach (Considine 2001 p. 2). This compares to previous conceptions of the ethical treatment of the public as 'the practice of impartiality and even indifference towards their individual identities, including class, religion or gender' (Considine 2001 p. 4). However, such inconsistencies are likely to be viewed with frustration and resentment by the recipients of 'selective' welfare.

Pusey found that few Australians accepted RO/MO discourses of blame (Pusey 2003, p. 159-161). He describes the discursive agenda of welfare policy as one of 'shifting the onus of guilt ... and the burden of obligation ... from governments and corporations to the unemployed themselves' in order to hold down labour and welfare costs and thus to continue the redistribution of national income from wages and salaries to profits (Pusey 2003, p. 160). Considine describes the way in which neo-liberal discourse of performativity leads to attempts to shift risk to other levels of government, private organisations and individual citizens (Considine 2001, pp. 7-8). Pusey concludes that this agenda has failed.

Conclusion

Discourses are elusive. They shift and change, absorb, co-opt and contend with each other. No reading of linguistic or material practices is definitive or permanent. In order to consider the ways in which policy, providers and retrenched workers engage with neo-liberal discourses, however, I have tried in this chapter to delineate a number of narratives associated with each discourse. In later chapters I will also focus on the general neo-liberal values of economism, performativity, competition, marketisation and individual responsibility. In particular, I will discuss the discourses in terms of the narratives summarised in Table 1 below. In the next chapter I will examine discourses and narratives relating to English language and literacy, race and ethnicity that construct the policy category NESB, and the implications of these for the employment situation of NESB workers.

Table 1 Narratives within neo-liberal meta-discourse

<i>Discourses</i>	<i>Narratives</i>
<i>Neo-classical economics</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the ‘labour market’ as efficient and rational• blame for unemployment located in mechanisms such as TUs and state intervention that ‘distort’ the ‘market’• employer and employee as having equal power in the absence of ‘distortion’• individuals as having perfect knowledge and foresight• labour and capital as perfectly mobile• individuals as only working to maximise their individual ‘utility’ (financial gain)• good government as small government—the ‘minimalist state’ (Pusey 1991, p. 112)• ‘deregulation’ of wages and the ‘labour market’• marketisation of the public sector as improving efficiency
<i>Human capital (HC)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• workplace change as leading towards democratic consultation, satisfying jobs and individual responsibility and initiative— the ‘new workplace’• work as personal fulfilment• constant change as dominant feature; experience, skills and knowledge

	<p>of existing workers as irrelevant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ideal worker as the self-employed ‘shape-shifting portfolio person’—entrepreneurialism • knowledge as inhering in text —textualisation • numerical flexibility (casualisation etc) as necessary for competitiveness • functional flexibility (multiskilling) as necessary for competitiveness • ‘skills’ as ‘within the individual’s control or easily acquired’, objective and rewarded incrementally in the ‘market’ • ‘skills’ as formed independently of the workplace • blame for unemployment as located in the poor quality of available labour —employability • education and training as only valuable for employment— vocationalism • formal standardised credentials (understood as delivered and assessed in English) as only reliable measurement— credentialism • learning as formal and occurring in the classroom • those who do not or cannot retrain as damaging the economy and thus ‘economic nationalism’ (Reich 1991) • workforce formally acquired ‘skill’ as central to international competitiveness
<i>Globalisation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nation-state as weak, unable to control capital • free trade • international competitiveness as main state concern— ‘economic nationalism’ (Reich 1991)
<i>Social contractualism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blame for unemployment as located in the unemployed • the unemployed as a ‘burden’ on the economy • the unemployed as social parasites—bludgers, job snobs, double dippers • compulsion/coercion through withdrawal of benefit as necessary to maintain moral order • unemployment benefit as conditional • employer as client, worker as product of state programs

Chapter 4

Dominant discourses about English language and literacy, race and ethnicity

Introduction

In Chapter 3 I have examined the discourses of neo-liberalism that construct NESB retrenchees in their role as workers, and within which the workers in this study are positioned: the discourses of neo-classical economics, human capital, globalisation and social contractualism. At the end of the chapter I identified many specific narratives that form part of these discourses. These narratives will form threads running through subsequent chapters.

Similarly in this chapter I will investigate dominant discourses that specifically relate to English language and literacy, race and ethnicity. These discourses construct the ‘NESBness’ of the retrenchees. In my consideration of policy as discourse in Chapter 2, I stressed that material practices are not separate from discourses but form an integral part of them. In terms of material practices, NESB workers suffer continuing disadvantage in the ‘labour market’, partly due to their concentration in ‘migrant jobs’. However the discourses of neo-classical economics, human capital, globalisation and social contractualism are largely silent on the question of race and ethnicity, emphasising instead individualised narratives about the acquisition, buying and selling of skill, which construct as irrelevant any suggestion of exclusionary mechanisms associated with other discourses about race and ethnicity.

Macedo (2002) points out that neo-liberal discourses are disembodied: people are constructed as physically independent of others; language is acquirable at will;

and there is no gender or visible difference discrimination, no attachment to place, no emotion. These discourses are race and gender-blind. But it is precisely through this blindness, and from the tendency of 'liberal meliorism' to dismiss racism as a thing of the past, that new forms of racism are condoned (Goldberg 1993, pp. 7-8). Goldberg argues that far from representing a shift away from racist discourse, liberalism plays 'a foundational part in [the] process of normalizing and naturalizing racial dynamics' through the ideological legitimization and politico-economic rationalisation of 'prevailing sets of racialized conditions and racist exclusions' (Goldberg 1993, p. 1).

The 'silence' of neo-liberal discourses on race and ethnicity is a legitimization of another, older dominant discourse, which I will call racist discourse. Racist discourse involves narratives about both biological and cultural definitions of race. This discourse ascribes characteristics to the groups constructed as 'other' on the basis of 'biological' or cultural categories. Within racist discourse based on culture, linguistic practices are a central marker of racist 'otherness'. This construction of 'otherness' involves narratives about 'national belonging' (Hage 1998) and 'social citizenship' (Castles and Davidson 2000) – in other words, about certain people's entitlement to work, education and welfare.

Narratives relating to English language and literacy

English language is constructed within HC discourse as a 'skill'. As we have seen in Chapter 3, HC discourse locates the blame for unemployment in the poor quality of available labour (the narrative of employability). The discourse constructs 'skills' as 'within the individual's control or easily acquired' (Bertone 2000a, p. 55); as objective and measurable; as rewarded systematically in the 'market'; and as formed independently of the workplace (O'Loughlin & Watson 1997). Through these and other related narratives as applied to ELL, HC discourse naturalises power structures based on linguistic practices, including the

allocation of educational and employment opportunities. This section will examine the neo-liberal narratives about English language a little more closely.

English as a global language

The naturalisation of English as the language of power is closely linked to globalising neo-liberalism. The discourse of globalisation includes as a major narrative English as a global language (EGL) (Dendrinos 2002). In this narrative, the use of English at both a national and individual level is indispensable for participation in world economies and thus for the attainment of well-being. The use of English is associated with progress and development, ignorance of English with poverty, famine and disease (Phillipson 1992, pp. 5-10). If linguistic minorities learn the dominant language, according to this narrative, they will not suffer economic and social inequality (Tollefson 1991, p. 10).

The EGL narrative constructs English as politically and ideologically disinterested, ethnically neutral and 'tool-like' (Phillipson 1992, pp. 5-10). This construction has become widely accepted, previously at policy level in multilingual states of the Third World and more recently in the multilingual states of the West. The narrative of EGL exemplifies the close relationship of narratives about English with the discourses of racism; it has fitted nicely with the element of racist discourse that constructs attributes ascribed to dominant European ethnic groups as not ethnic but 'standard', in contrast with the 'ethnically marked' cultural and linguistic attributes of 'others'. However, English is not disinterested, either politically or ideologically. As the language of westernization, modernization, technology and consumerism, it carries with it sets of values and practices that are by no means neutral (Pennycook 1998, p. 5; Phillipson 1992 p. 10). Australians' increasing awareness of the rest of the world as a result of globalisation might be expected to encourage the valuing of other languages in this country. However, the narrative of EGL lends weight to the old monolingual tendencies already evident in this ex-British colony.

The acquisition and use of English

The HC narrative constructs English language acquisition as ‘within the individual’s control or readily acquired’ (Bertone 2000a p. 55). According to Second Language Acquisition literature, however, there are significant limitations to individuals’ capacity to acquire another language, especially if acquisition is considered to entail not only fluency but accuracy in grammar and pronunciation.

The acquisition of a second language is now generally recognised as a developmental process rather than one of conscious learning depending on will and application (Ellis 1994; Pica 1983; Pienemann, Manfred 1980; Pienemann, Manfred, Johnston & Brindley 1988; Wode 1976). Most learners cease to learn before reaching native speaker levels and use a ‘fossilised’ variety of the second language or ‘interlanguage’ (see Ellis 1994, pp. 42, 353-4) that may be impermeable to correction (Mukratesh 1986). The age at which learning the second language commenced appears to significantly influence the levels of accuracy (as opposed to communicative fluency) that will be reached, particularly in the case of pronunciation (Ellis 1986, p. 106). Thus an individual who begins learning English as an adult is unlikely ever to acquire the accent or grammatical accuracy of a native speaker.

People who have acquired language in learning environments outside the formal classroom often develop a high level of fluency and communicative ability. Cummins (1981; 1984) has made the distinction between cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). Learners may acquire a high level of BICS relatively quickly, while the development of CALP may take many years. A high level of CALP is not necessary for many forms of less formal learning, and the development of CALP may be facilitated in those who have a higher level of CALP in their first language. However the HC narratives of textualisation and lifelong learning (see Chapter 3) construct CALP as a condition of training at increasingly lower levels, resulting in the exclusion of workers with high levels of communicative fluency.

Stereotypes of NESB workers tend to associate them with 'communication problems' (Collins 1996a, p. 43). In line with both racist and HC discourse, responsibility for these is located in the workers themselves, and attributed to low levels of knowledge of the English language. However, in a study of workplace communication between NESB and Anglo-Celtic Australians, using English as a lingua franca, linguist Michael Clyne found that accent, grammatical accuracy and the use of particular words that may not be the ones used by native speakers were not the cause of intercultural communication breakdown. / Rather, it often occurs due to factors that are not ameliorated through ESL programs. For example, in / ✓ factory employee participation groups, South East Asian workers talked far less than other groups and exhibited shorter turns and 'deferential turn-taking procedures'. A more directive and less 'democratic' method of chairing meetings resulted in more participation by these groups, in contrast to domination by other ethnic groups when the situation was more fluid. Communication breakdown also occurred due to 'xenisms' (foreignness markers) because these were not accepted by native speakers (Clyne 1994, pp. 211-3). Drawing on Jupp (1982), Clyne notes that people are classified by native speakers as simply 'knowing' or 'not knowing' English, with the result that 'inappropriate or unfamiliar language use is often misinterpreted as deliberately different behaviour' (Clyne 1994, p. 20).

Linguistic accuracy, whether in pronunciation or in grammar, is not crucial for successful workplace communication. A successful outcome depends on whether or not the communication was carried out successfully. Approaches to English language teaching based on the notion of communicative competence stress that people who make many mistakes in grammar may be highly successful communicators. Communicative competence includes grammatical, socio-linguistic and strategic competence (Brumfit 1984; Canale & Swain 1980; Swain & Canale 1982). Workers who have low levels of accuracy may nevertheless be ✓ fluent and successful communicators (Mawer & Field 1995, p. 31). In this way, ✓ negotiation of meaning – essential to all communication – is possible. However, ✓ accent or grammar is often used as a screening device by those who know little ✓ about language or who wish to place obstacles in the way of NESB workers, and ✓

this is particularly easy to do in a situation involving formal training, which tends to privilege accuracy.

Perceptions may also be based on the attribution of cultural stereotypes. As we have seen, such attribution is a characteristic of racist discourse. It was legitimated by academic analyses (e.g. Hofstede 1982, 1991) of cross-cultural communication based on contrastive descriptions of cultural 'traits', which formed the basis of much intercultural communication theory in the US and thus of many management texts (Putnis 1992, p. 9). Putnis argues that such work is of very limited use in understanding communicative interactions between people in real situations. It excludes from consideration many other relevant factors, including power relations (1992, p. 10). It cannot account for change in individual behaviour (1992, p. 4), and it is based on an essentialist reading of cultures that, even if it were true, could say little about the behaviour of individuals, particularly in contemporary globalised and 'hybridised' societies (1992, p. 11).

English language and literacy as skills

HC discourse constructs ELL as mere work 'skills' (Marshall 1995) and as unitary 'basic skills', measurable on a single, vertical, hierarchical scale. In this 'commonsense' narrative, language and literacy development is linear and its measurement is unproblematic. This concept of literacy contains within itself the implied opposite of 'illiteracy'. The HC emphasis on language and literacy as an individual attribute subject to individual choice is foremost in HC definitions (Stuckey 1991, p. 32; Tollefson 1991, p. 27). As Gee notes, such individualism 'obscures the multiple ways in which reading, writing and language interrelate with the workings of power and desire in social life' (Gee 1990, p. 27).

Further, as Beazley points out, the depersonalisation of the term 'skill' creates the impression that ELL is something that can be altered 'independently of the individual's interests and desires'. This opens the discursive potential for the construction of literacy in the context of coercion, which has been carried forward

by the Howard government (see Chapter 5). At the same time it 'stifles non-economic forms of knowledge' about how language and literacy practices are 'experienced and valued by the subject' (Beazley 1997, p. 51).

As the work of the 'new literacy' writers demonstrates, literacy is never a simple matter of encoding and decoding but always a social practice (Cazden 1992; Halliday & Hasan 1989; Kress 1985; Luke 1988). ELL is situated and contextual. It is acquired in a social context, and used for a social purpose. For these different social contexts and purposes, different types of language and literacy are required, and different rules apply. For example, Wickert argues that in fact, quite different profiles of literacy skill are required in different jobs, companies and locations (Wickert 1995 p. 37).

Thus ELL acquisition is the acquisition of a particular type of ELL, referred to in a narrower textual sense as a genre (Cope & Kalantzis 1993) or in a broader sense, involving not only written language but also oral exchange and knowledge and belief systems, as a 'Discourse' (Gee 1996 p. 131). A full range of language genres or Discourses is not naturally acquired even by native speakers. The rules relating to context and purpose are learned through apprenticeship to a discourse community (Gee 1996). If the learner cannot gain that apprenticeship through family and social networks, this requires explicit teaching in a formal context (Cope & Kalantzis 1993; Reid 1987). Contexts requiring different genres from those commonly used in everyday situations include job interviews, workplace meetings and formal education. In these situations, discourse conventions reflect the practices of dominant social groups, but these are naturalised so as to appear merely common sense.

Wickert refers to another related narrative about English language and literacy that is of central importance to NESB workers in the context of education and training. She comments on the 'misguided view that competence in language and literacy is a basic or foundation skill onto which higher order communication skills are grafted' (Wickert & Baynham 1994 p. 180). In this narrative, 'competence' in English is constructed as something that has to exist in some separate, content-free context prior to its utilisation for a purpose, such as

communicating with others, doing a job or learning something. This is a 'commonsense' narrative that results in NESB workers being 'sidetracked' into marginal or pre-vocational courses (Bertone 1995, p. 71), prevented from undertaking vocational training or entering employment until such time as they have acquired some (often unspecified) level of English language 'competence'. It provides a rationale for a failure to consider whether the English language difficulty (or indeed other sources of difficulty such as poor design or delivery) of vocational or other programs is justified or merely a matter of convenience to those designing them, and for the blaming of students' 'poor English' for any difficulties that learners may have if they manage to access such programs. The now largely abandoned move to the provision of 'integrated programs' (Courtenay 1994, p. 41), in which vocational material and English language were taught together, was an attempt to counter this narrative.

The 'literacy crisis'

According to Gee (1996, p. 26), the 'literacy myth' is 'one of the master myths of our society'. According to this myth, a vast range of claims are made for literacy. Literacy makes people 'more intelligent, more modern, more moral'; 'countries with high literacy rates are better developed, more modern, better behaved'; 'literacy ... is what makes us civilised' (Gee 1996, p. 26). In Western 'developed' capitalist societies, 'literacy crises' are proclaimed on a regular basis. However, the 'crisis' often masks deeper and more complex social problems (Gee 1996, p. 22). In other words, concern is based on literacy as a means of social control (see also Aronowitz & Giroux 1993, pp. 55-64).

The 1970s saw the 'discovery' of literacy as a public issue in Australia. The 1970s and 1980s were marked by a tension between HC discourse which saw literacy only as a work skill, and a personal empowerment discourse according to which improved literacy would benefit workers at work but would also enable them to 'read' the world, including the workworld, more critically (see for

example Durie 1991). The narrative of the literacy 'crisis' reached a peak in Australia in the late 1980s. It was created through highly emotive metaphors of 'immorality, warfare, and disease' (Hodgens 1994, p. 18)¹⁴. Educationists, unions, politicians, journalists and employers alike used the narrative. The Australian Institute of Family Studies produced a publication for the International Literacy Year (1990) that linked illiteracy with poor health, crime and the breakdown of family life (Hartley 1989).

Language and literacy teachers unwittingly contributed to the narrative by using the language of 'crusade', albeit intermingled with a 'progressivist' analysis (Green, Hodgens & Luke 1995; Hodgens 1994). This appears to be the case with *No Single Measure*, Wickert's landmark study which explicitly critiqued HC discourse about ELL and learning in general. It declined to provide an overall literacy 'score' (Wickert & Kevin 1995 p. 2), favouring a construction of literacy as social practice, based on the belief that '[l]iteracies are produced and learnt in the contexts within which they operate' (Wickert & Baynham 1994 p. 180). It found that the most significant predictor of literacy performance in adults was current literacy practice (Wickert & Kevin 1995 p. 1), particularly job-related reading (Wickert 1995 p. 37). Wickert commented:

... if the NESB population ... is over-represented in occupations such as plant operators and labourers/cleaners, then this group is unlikely to be experiencing the practice needed to maintain and improve literacy competence. (Wickert & Kevin 1995 p. 19)

However, the more 'sensationalist' findings of the report were read in the context of neo-liberal individualism and the narrative of ELL as unitary 'basic skills' and thereby co-opted in the interests of the neo-liberal narrative of the 'literacy crisis'.

The narrative of the 'literacy crisis' has been broadly challenged. Little change occurred in literacy performance over the 22 years from 1975 (Freebody 1997, p. 6). The ABS Adult Literacy Survey, which tested the literacy levels of

¹⁴ For a summary of similar developments in the US see Gowen (1992, pp. 6-18).

Australians in 1996, suggests that there was no 'large-scale causal relationship' between adult literacy levels and unemployment levels (Kamler 1999, p. 71). Rather, the narrative of the literacy 'crisis' was part of a backlash against rapid social change and the perceived decline of 'traditional' values (Green, Hodgins & Luke 1995; see also Marginson 1993, p. 148).

Language, literacy and the 'new workplace'

The HC narrative of the 'new workplace' (see Chapter 3) provided the context for a focus on ELL in the workplace. In this narrative, new management practices would require extensive formal training of workers in a number of areas including new technology. To participate in this training, and to perform as workers within the structures of the 'new workplace' workers would need far greater ELL 'skills' than they had previously needed. Gaining these 'skills' would also result in more control and job satisfaction for workers.

Some studies conducted within 'new' workplaces suggest that the 1990s were characterised by the consolidation of the narrative of textualisation in these workplaces associated with particular aspects of 'new management'. The narrative of textualisation constructs knowledge as inhering in written text. Farrell (2001) suggests that the requirement for 'team work' (Farrell 2001, p. 60) built around text-based reporting activities means that workers, some of whom have long experience in the company and a deep practical understanding of the production process, must frame their knowledge in new words if it is to be recognised as legitimate by the team. These new genres involve formal, impersonal and academic writing (Farrell 2001, p. 71). Thus the requirement is not only for literacy in the sense of the ability to read and write, but for literacy in a particular discourse. However, the issue is interpreted as a problem of functional literacy by tertiary educated managers for whom this discourse is completely naturalised (Farrell 1999, p. 7).

Farrell suggests that what is happening in the 'new workplace' might be interpreted as a struggle between two discourses. The first she calls a 'traditional work order' discourse. It is 'an amalgam of traditional craft discourses (in which knowledge is generally viewed as embodied and embedded in practice)' and union discourses, with a 'specific understanding of what counts as working knowledge'. This discourse 'relies more heavily on speaking than on writing, and the immediate work context and working knowledge is taken for granted'. Workplace texts are informal, are commonly constructed on the shop floor and make minimal demands on prose literacy (Farrell 2001, p. 68).

The second, the 'new work order' discourse of management and workplace educators, is the narrative of knowledge as text, shared 'over greater social (e.g. shop floor to management) and geographical (e.g. Australia to USA) distance'. In this discourse, 'talk becomes knowledge when it is written down' (Farrell 2001, p. 68). Individuals are required to abandon traditional individual conceptions of expertise, to learn new 'working identities' (Farrell 2001, p. 62) and to accept the 'abstract and textualised framework' (Farrell 1999, p. 11) that situates knowledge in the text rather than in the embodied worker. This is the narrative of textualisation, a construction of knowledge and competence as inhering in text.

The narrative of the 'new workplace' constructed a move to such textualised work as inevitable and as uncontestable due to its benefits for workers. It was used to argue for more training, including ELL training, for workers. This narrative also underlies the narrative of trainability. Training is assumed to involve the internalisation of a given body of knowledge presented in English in complex oral or textual forms. Therefore to be 'trainable', workers need to be able to deal with such training, in other words already to possess high levels of ELL. If they do not, then they are untrainable. In the context of HC narratives about training and ELL – 'skills' as formed independently of the workplace, ELL as unitary basic 'skills', and competence in language and literacy as 'a basic or foundation skill onto which higher order communication skills are grafted' – along with the narrative of trainability, this narrative functioned as a rationale for linguistic and cultural homogenisation of the workforce. The language and

literacy 'deficits' of employees were blamed for actual or feared failures in the introduction of new management practices.

Language and power

HC narratives about ELL mask the fundamental way in which language is implicated in the structures of power. The linguistic practices of a dominant group are constructed as 'standard' and different linguistic practices as inferior through the 'othering' of those who speak differently and the transformation of linguistic practice into virtually a moral issue (Fairclough 1989, p. 22, see also pp 56-58). Although the resulting dominance of a particular set of linguistic practices is not necessarily accepted without challenge, the dominant group gains most from language as a form of 'cultural capital' (Fairclough 1989, p. 57-8).

The domination of this form of linguistic practice is naturalised as a source of educational and labour market disadvantage through a form of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 1991 p. 51) of which no-one needs to be conscious. 'Symbolic violence' is a form of actual power that has a legitimacy that physical force does not. It is always based on shared belief, 'active complicity'; 'symbolic power requires, as a condition of its success, that those subjected to it believe in the legitimacy of power and the legitimacy of those who wield it' (Thompson 1991 p. 23). These processes are internalised (Fairclough 1989, p. 57). Thus one of the most important aspects of the resulting inequality is that it 'appears to be based on the qualities of the person alone' (Bourdieu 1991 p. 73).

The education system forms an essential part of this constitutive discourse about language; it devalues other modes of expression (Bourdieu 1991 p. 49) and distributes access to employment opportunities accordingly. Tollefson argues that the education/employment nexus that instantiates this discourse about language reproduces and intensifies power inequalities: 'Whenever people must learn a new language to have access to education or to understand classroom instruction, language is a factor in creating and sustaining social and economic divisions'

(Tollefson 1991 p. 9). Tollefson argues that language policy includes such measures as economic or institutional pressures to accept jobs before sufficient English can be learned to enable immigrants to regain their educational and employment status. This kind of pressure has been a major factor in the occupational downgrading of NESB immigrants in Australia, and the degree of state support for their English language learning and subsequent education and training has been a central aspect in shifting policy regimes since the 1980s. The discourse of which language policy forms a part is also instantiated in the allocation of opportunities for English language and other forms of training within employment (Pearce 1995). Thus the discursive naturalisation of NESB immigrants as ‘factory fodder’ (Collins 1996b, p. 83; see below) acquires its force through the ‘symbolic violence’ of discourses about language that may be accepted by NESB immigrants themselves.

Language policy in Australia has been based on monolingualism. Neo-liberal economist ‘common sense’ discourse has naturalised the idea that multilingualism and the practices that would support it are simply too costly to be practical in most contexts (Dendrinos 2002, p. 242). In this way so characteristic of neo-liberal meta-discourse, the responsibility for – and the cost of – accommodating multilingualism are located with the individual and with the ‘deviant’ community. A counter-discourse, as Dendrinos points out, may involve the social, economic and political costs associated with unilingualism (Dendrinos 2002, p. 246). But the dominant HC discourse makes these costs largely invisible, and any consideration of them has all the difficulty of a counter-discursive project.

Narratives relating to race and ethnicity

In its prioritisation of economic individualism, neo-liberal meta-discourse tends to imply the irrelevance of race and ethnicity. In the field of employment, for example, neo-classical economic theory discounts the likelihood of discriminatory practice on the basis that competitive pressures are likely to discourage

economically irrational behaviour by employers (Evans & Kelley 1986; Stromback 1988; Wooden 1990)¹⁵.

However on closer examination, there is a more insidious link between the meta-discourse of neo-liberalism and what Castles (1996, p. 17) calls the new 'racisms of globalisation'. The old discourse of biological racism is now discredited, and racism may be seen as a thing of the past (Goldberg 1993, pp. 7-8). However, a 'new racist' discourse of 'insurmountable cultural difference' - 'racism without races' - has developed, based on the attribution of 'insurmountable cultural difference' to 'others' (Markus 2001, p. 5). This new racist discourse enables principles of equal opportunity and even anti-racism to be espoused, as is required by discourses of democracy and equity, and explicitly racist incidents to be dismissed as an 'aberration' (Essed 1997, p. 131), while at the same time the 'practices of hierarchisation and segmentation which are central to the economic and social order' (Castles 1996, p. 31) can be left undisturbed. The result is a discursive location of responsibility for disadvantage with the disadvantaged themselves, which fits neatly with neo-liberal discourses. Drawing on Essed, Castles summarises this:

If some groups – especially people of non-European origin – are socio-economically and politically disadvantaged, this is attributed to cultural values which are seen as backward or inappropriate for a technologically advanced society ... immigrants and ethnic minorities can keep their own values and cultures, but they cannot complain if this leads to their marginalisation ... if ['other'] people do not do well despite all the welfare measures and equal opportunity policies, then it must be their own fault. (Castles 1996, p. 29)

What is this new racist discourse? First, racism is a discourse in the sense that discourse actively produces and reproduces the phenomena to which it refers; thus

¹⁵ However, others argue that if competition indeed had such an effect, it could be expected that the greatest degree of discrimination would occur in public monopolies which are operating under the least competitive conditions, and this is not the case (Niland & Champion 1990).

the discourse of racism constructs race and ethnicity (Castles 1996, p. 22). The discourse of racism includes both linguistic and material practices.

Racist discourse has been crucial in the development of modern societies and is fundamental to them (Goldberg 1993, pp. 4-5), and far from having been weakened in these 'new times', has simply developed in some less obvious forms (Castles 1996). In Australia in the 1990s, racist ideas are not directly stated or even necessarily consciously held. Rather, they take the form of 'ahistorical commonsense notions about the character and achievements of specific groups' (Castles 1996, p. 30). These notions are 'often disjointed, episodic, fragmentary and contradictory, and always subject to revision in light of new historical conditions' (Rizvi 1996, p. 182).

Racism 'always implies the power (which can be political, economic, social or cultural) to impose a definition of the Other¹⁶ on the subordinate group' (Castles 1996, p. 23; see also Goldberg 1993, p. 149ff). Thus racist discourse normalises the marginalisation and problematisation of the groups constructed as 'other' (Essed 1997, p. 133). The exclusions associated with this construction of the racial 'other' underpin the 'dominant discourses of modern citizenship' (Yeatman 1994, p. 86). Thus they are fundamental in shaping our sense of who is and is not entitled to the benefits of social citizenship, including education, welfare and employment (Castles & Davidson 2000, p. 110).

In an Australian context, Hage (1998) offers an important way of theorizing the construction of the cultural 'other' in a way that avoids a binary division. He explores a form of cultural capital that he calls 'practical nationality'. This is a 'national belonging', which can be accumulated and then turned into Bourdieu's symbolic capital – recognition and legitimacy in the eyes of the dominant cultural grouping. Hage describes 'practical nationality' as:

¹⁶Although in the work of foundational writers such as Lacan the capitalisation of the word "other" denotes a different meaning to that of the uncapitalised word, they are commonly used interchangeably (Ashcroft et al, 1998). I will use the uncapitalised form, but the term is capitalised in some work cited, such as this example.

The sum of accumulated nationally sanctioned and valued social and physical cultural styles and dispositions (national culture) adopted by individuals and groups, as well as valued characteristics (national types and national character) within a national field: looks, accent, demeanour, taste, nationally valued social and cultural preferences and behaviour, etc (Hage 1998, p. 53)

Linguistic practices are central in Hage's list of aspects of cultural capital that may be of use in the field of practical nationality. The 'national belonging' and therefore legitimacy accorded to a person is a matter of degree – the extent to which the person has accumulated national capital. It therefore 'negates an either/or concept of Australianness' (Hage 1998, p. 52).

Hage goes on to describe another related field, the field of 'national governmental belonging'. Accumulation of cultural capital in this field confers on a person 'a position of cultural dominance within the field [and] the power to position others within it' (Hage 1998, p. 55). This field he designates 'the field of Whiteness' (Hage 1998, p. 57). However, cultural capital within this field does not only consist of skin colour – which as he points out, is a 'more or less, rather than an either/or logic' (p. 57). Rather,

'Whiteness' is an ever-changing, composite cultural historical construct. It has its roots in the history of European colonisation which universalised a cultural form of White identity as a position of cultural power at the same time as the colonised were in the process of being racialised. Whiteness, in opposition to Blackness and Brownness, was born [at] the same time as the binary oppositions coloniser/colonised, being developed/being underdeveloped, and later First World/Third World was emerging. In this sense, White has become the ideal of being the bearer of 'Western' civilisation. As such, no-one can be fully White, but people yearn to be so. It is in this sense that Whiteness is itself a fantasy position and a field of accumulating Whiteness (p. 58).

Whiteness involves domination over what Hage calls 'Third World-looking People' – those 'with very low national capital and who are invariably constructed as a "problem" of some sort within all White-dominated societies' (Hage 1998, p. 59). There is a struggle as to the value of certain aspects of cultural capital within

this field; the values of gender, religion, and descent are disputed. Thus the discourse of racism forms part of a struggle around Whiteness. It is the discourse within which Whiteness is the centre, because it has power in the field of national governmental belonging. Those who are constructed as other by the discourse may try to accumulate Whiteness by assimilation, may discursively resist the terms in which their ‘otherness’ is constructed or may use such power as they have to attribute a degree of Whiteness to themselves and deny it to others.

As Hage suggests, much of racist discourse still has its roots in the discourses of colonialism. The close connection between Australian racist discourse and British racist and colonial discourse has been obscured by the construction of an Australian national identity in contrast to that of Britain. Ironically, this process has involved the construction of European Australians as colonised rather than coloniser. However, Australian racism was ‘shaped by the ideologies and policies towards “inferior peoples” prevailing in Britain’s global empire’ (Castles 1996, p. 19).

Fundamental features of discourses of colonialism recur in narratives about work, ELL and education. Colonised peoples were discursively ‘inferiorised’ in order to exploit their labour (Castles 1996, p. 27). The linguist Alistair Pennycook assembles the series of dichotomies, presented in Table 2, which both naturalised and perpetuated colonialism and have survived the ending of most formal colonial projects in the form of cultural beliefs (Pennycook 1998, p. 47-64).

Table 2 Colonisers’ dichotomised cultural beliefs

<i>Coloniser</i>	<i>Colonised</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • civilisation • democracy • enlightenment • industry • discipline • cleanliness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • primitiveness • despotism • savagery/viciousness • indolence • spontaneity • dirt

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • modernity/progress • inventiveness • rationality/intellect • abstract thought • theoretical reasoning • mind • adulthood • sanity • science • culture • masculinity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stagnation/backwardness • imitateness • irrationality/emotion/instinct • concrete thought • empirical/practical reasoning • body/matter • childhood • insanity • sorcery • nature • femininity
---	--

A number of these dichotomies are potentially relevant to images of immigrants as workers. For example, Pennycook traces images of China as ‘eternal and unchanging (and backward)’ but also at the same time ‘changing too fast’ (1998, p. 173). The stereotype of the colonised worker as backward, as unchanging, could not but inform the idea that such a worker might find it difficult to adapt to technological and other workplace change, while the image of a people ‘changing too fast’ implies a kind of falsity of change, a disbelief in skill levels acquired too quickly. The construction of the other as childlike demanded of the ‘adult’ coloniser the correction and management of education and discipline. The dichotomy of cleanliness and dirt relates to the ‘dirty worker syndrome’ whereby immigrant workers are relegated to the jobs other workers will not do. These dichotomies may be used selectively; for example ‘Asians’ may be hard working (the Chinese) (Pennycook 1998, p. 167) or lazy (the Malay, Indonesian and Filipino) (Pennycook 1998, p. 58) in colonial discourses, according to their willingness to participate in the exploitative colonial economy (Pennycook 1998, p. 58). Thus colonial discourses conflate ‘laziness’ with resistance to exploitation. In Australia narratives about migrants and laziness or ‘rotting’ the system have been widely used in public discourse, as in the popular 1980s narrative of ‘Mediterranean back’ claiming that Greeks and other Mediterranean migrants fabricate work injury.

Many Australian narratives about Asia have been based on the complex and contradictory discourse of Orientalism. Orientalism was and is the vehicle for the construction and domination of the 'Orient' in European thinking (Said 1979). Rizvi (1996) argues that Australian discourse about Asia until WW2 was based on a deeply imperialist version of Orientalism. 'Asians' were constructed as a homogeneous group, primitive or exotic, 'easy-going and half-witted, in need of control and care' and certainly in need of being 'civilised' (Rizvi 1996, p. 175-6). Since 1945 Australian narratives about Asia have become more complex and ambivalent, and the 'other' represented by Asia has become an object of desire as well as derision. In 'policy declarations' in the late 1980s and early 1990s previous discursive constructions of Asians were partially supplanted by the equally essentialist and Orientalist image of the 'new rich' of the newly industrialising countries. These policies constructed Asian cultures within 'an essentialist framework based on Australian economic interests' (Rizvi 1996, p. 186) in their attempts to construct new knowledge about Asia (Rizvi 1996, pp. 186-8). Thus the 'Asian Tiger' narrative was born.

The 'Asian Tiger' narrative is deeply ambiguous, however, evoking both admiration and fear through its image of industrial superiority. It mobilises old Australian memories of the threat of an industrially superior Japan, and the 1950s and 60s racist narrative of the 'yellow peril' – the 'inevitable' expansion of Asia into 'empty' Australia. Blainey is careful to mobilise such memories early in his chapter on the new construction of Asia (Blainey 1984, p. 60). The 'Asian Tiger' narrative may also inform the narrative of the 'new workplace', through its construction of Japanese management techniques as the key to improved profitability.

The hegemony of racist discourse is strengthening both globally and in Australia (Castles & Vasta 1996; Markus 2001). There has been an increasing official sanction of racist discourse in Australia since a distinct shift with the writings of Blainey in the early 1980s (Markus 2001, p. 217). Castles attributes this shift and the new racisms to globalisation and the attack on the welfare state through 'a neo-conservative model which emphasizes natural inequality,

deregulation of markets, reduced state intervention, and a return to traditional values of family and nation' (Castles 1996, p. 42). The roles of Hugh Morgan and Geoffrey Blainey in the race and immigration debates of the early 1980s paved the way for Hansonism by establishing ways of talking about race (Markus 2001, p. 146). Certainly, they led the attack on multiculturalism that foreshadowed its disappearance from policy in 1996. Markus suggests that the discourses of 'economic internationalism' and 'chauvinistic nationalism' are strange bedfellows (Markus 2001, p. 221), and offers some analysis of the way in which they have been combined (Markus 2001, pp. 51-3). Within Australian globalisation discourse, however, was a strong narrative of 'economic nationalism' (Reich 1991). This narrative, like other nationalist narratives, has strengthened racist discourse, evoking a sense of threat from both those external to Australia whom it constructs as competitors, and those internal 'others' such as NESB workers whom it constructs as damaging the economic nation by failing to 'contribute'.

A major narrative of the racist discourse of Morgan, Blainey, and later Hanson was a demand that all people should be treated 'equally' (Markus 2001). The narrative of 'equal rights' has dominated much racist discourse in Australia and elsewhere (Wetherell & Potter 1992, p. 70-1). As Markus argues, this narrative has great power. It constructs homogenising and exclusionary policy and practice as 'common sense', multiculturalism as catering to 'minorities', and diversity as signifying separatism and racial discrimination (Markus 2001, pp. x-xi). Markus counters this narrative by pointing out that it entrenches inequality because 'laws are applied to social groups in grossly unequal positions' (Markus 2001, p. xii). I will refer to this narrative as the narrative of 'equal' treatment, and a progressive narrative of equality as a narrative of equal outcomes (see for example Chapter 5).

Narratives about English language and literacy language are deeply integrated with racist discourse. Linguistic practices are central to cultural identity, and thus racist narratives about linguistic practices attribute particular characteristics to those engaging in them. Ram (1996, pp. 135-6) argues that distinctions based on culture, including linguistic practices, were very much a part of racist colonial discourses. Attacks on multilingualism have been fundamental to racist discourse

in Australia, as for example Hugh Morgan's description of multiculturalism as 'the Grassbian ideal of a polylingual, polycultural, polypolitical porridge' (cited in Markus 2001, p. 72).

To understand specific narratives central to Australian 'commonsense' racist discourse, it is instructive to examine the construction of English language and employment in what Markus sees as a foundational text of current Australian racism, Blainey's 1984 tract, *All for Australia* (Blainey 1984), published the year following the election of the Hawke Labour government. An examination of two short sections entitled 'On Speaking English' (1984, pp. 55-9) and 'The Hunt for a Job' (1984, pp. 138-41) illustrates the centrality of narratives about English language to other racist narratives about the state, skill and employment.

All for Australia: narratives about English and employment

'On Speaking English' is a short section of approximately four pages. The first narrative used in this section is immigrants as a social cost. First, these costs include English teaching (1984, p. 57). However, Blainey has already established that this may be money wasted. Most of one group of migrants (Turks, in a particular report that Blainey cites) 'attended no English course' or 'dropped out' (1984, p. 56). Thus immigrants are constructed as lazy and unmotivated. Second, there is the cost of 'a posse of well-paid interpreters', mostly in 'the courts and welfare agencies' (1984, p. 58). Third, the cost of factory production rises with the employment of NESB immigrants due to 'too many messages' being 'misunderstood'; he refers to this cost as 'another indirect tax'. Thus immigrants are constructed as costly, ungrateful, criminal and dependent. Those who are not any of these things – the 'well-paid interpreters' – are over-supplied and faintly ridiculous (a 'posse', 'galloping' to the aid of these criminal and dependent immigrants) but also unskilled in the use of language and ignorant of their own culture, according to the report on the Turks that Blainey has previously quoted (1984, p. 57). Insofar as they should be in Australia at all, Blainey's description

constructs immigrants as factory fodder (Collins 1996b, p. 83). If they are doing any other, more intellectual work, such as interpreting, they are ridiculed and denigrated as frauds.

Blainey's discursive practices are subtle. For example, he reports that the Turkish men [sic] 'sensed' that 'lack of English was their main obstacle to gaining work, especially the kind of work they *required*' (1984, p. 57; my italics). The use of 'required', unlike 'needed', 'wanted' or 'were looking for', attributes power to the person who 'requires'. It constructs immigrants as arrogant and demanding, giving orders to 'ordinary Australians', and the idea of immigrants 'requiring' a kind of work that was not the most menial as outrageous. To use more recent welfare discourse, they are 'job snobs'. It also avoids the use of phrases like 'the work they had done in Turkey' or 'the work they were capable of', making invisible the identity of these workers as people with abilities and experience.

In the later section, 'The Hunt for a Job' (three and a half pages) he raises the old racist chestnut that ethnic 'others' take jobs from legitimate citizens (1984, p. 138). He uses the same rhetorical device as in the previous example, beginning in a tone of reasonable academic debate: 'No economist has yet worked out, conclusively, whether in an economy with a 9 or 10 per cent rate of unemployment, new immigrants create more jobs than they *snatch*.' (1984, p. 138; my italics)

There is no need for the arguments he then proceeds to raise, because the discursive work is already done by the emotive force of the word 'snatch'¹⁷. By implication, NESB immigrants are rightly located last in the job queue; if they gain employment ahead of 'ordinary Australians', they are 'snatching' jobs that do not belong to them. Blainey proceeds to portray the government as unfairly favouring 'immigrants' (in fact, the 'Vietnamese', as specified in this section) for employment in 'prized' public sector jobs such as mail sorting, through the use of a purported secret list of 'applicants who were *receiving priority*' (my italics – they were not just 'shortlisted' or benefiting from a labour market program). The

¹⁷ As Rutherford (2000) notes, racist discourses typically take the form of "an accusation of theft".

last word in this later section again delivers the whole force of the statement: 'This leads, understandably, to resentment from other people who are willing to sort mail and whose knowledge of the English language and of Australian geography enables them to sort mail *skilfully*.' (1984, p. 141; my italics)

Thus the inferiority of the work skills of these 'other' Vietnamese workers is naturalised as inferior by reason of their assumed English language and cultural capital attributes in a way that is so 'commonsense' that it needs no examination. Donald Macedo refers to the African American version of this in US racist discourse:

White men lose jobs to other white men who do not say, they gave my job to an inferior white man! White male competency is assumed. African-Americans, regardless of achievement, are forever on trial (1995 article in the *Boston Globe*; cited in Macedo 2002, p. 38).

Whether the Vietnamese workers are in fact proficient at English language or whether they possess, or could very easily acquire, sufficient knowledge of Australian geography is not asked. What degree of proficiency in either of these is actually required for the job is obscured. Through these omissions, both English and cultural capital are constructed as something one either has (if one is an 'ordinary Australian') or does not have.

This appeal to the 'commonsense' narrative of English as a necessity for employability, in line with HC narratives about skill, masks an important narrative within racist discourse that I will refer to as the narrative of language practice as a 'symbol of Otherness'. In this narrative, language practice forms an essential part of a set of cultural markers that delineate the 'other' (Castles & Davidson 2000, p. 125). This narrative functions to associate language practice with economic success within the discourse of racism, as Castles and Davidson note:

[m]igrant languages and cultures become symbols of Otherness and markers for discrimination; giving them up is seen as essential for integration and success. A failure to do so is regarded as indicative of a desire for separatism. Hostility to

different languages and cultures is rationalized with the assertion that the official language is essential for economic success, and the migrant cultures are inadequate for a modern secular society. (Castles & Davidson 2000, p. 125)

Behind the use of words like 'required' and 'skillfully' are long established, global, colonial discourses about education, English language, skill and competency that simply need to be mobilised. Many have pointed out that 'skill' is a 'gender-saturated category' (Williams 1992, p. 29); clearly, it is also an ethnicity-saturated one.

Three other elements of Blainey's discourse in these two sections merit brief attention. At the outset, he constructs NESB immigration as damaging democracy: 'To have little knowledge of the key language in a democracy is to be deprived: the democracy also becomes the less a democracy' (1984, p. 56). Second, as a centrepiece of his incremental construction of 'government' throughout the book as secretive, conspiratorial and traitorous, Blainey refers to the 'quiet downgrading of the importance of English', constructing English monolingualism as natural in Australia (1984, p. 58). Third, he describes 'the social cost of the deficiency in English' as greatest for the NESB immigrant due to 'the cost in confusion, loneliness, misunderstanding and prejudice' (1984, p. 58). The curious assumption that people cannot live a perfectly happy life in a country where they do not speak the official language constructs them as responsible for their own inevitable suffering; as Tollefson puts it, this is the neo-liberal narrative that 'people who do not speak English must inevitably suffer in many ways throughout their lives' (Tollefson 1991, p. 178). Blainey uses English language to construct immigrants as responsible for the success of communication with the mainstream, and equally responsible for the 'prejudice' against them, even while professing to be motivated by a concern for their welfare. And last, after the other points he makes about English, he announces 'an elementary truth' that establishes a firm connection in racist discourse between English language and both biological and cultural racism: 'The immigrants who look different, whose culture is different, require far more than others that passport to the new land – a knowledge of its language' (1984, p. 59).

The purpose of this examination of aspects of Blainey's work is not to argue that they were highly directly influential on such outcomes as election results, but that they represent useful instantiations of discourses that are present – and indeed increasingly widespread - in Australia and that serve to 'naturalise' certain policy positions and material practices in relation to NESB immigrants, work and English language. In the next two sections, we will first investigate the way in which some of these narratives formed a continuity with the narratives of White Australia, and then consider the extent to which the advent of the policy of multiculturalism can be seen as a major discursive shift away from these narratives.

'White Australia' – then and now

Racist discourse has a long history in Australia, and has long focused on employment. Trade union hostility to non-European immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries combined economic and racist motives (Castles et al. 1988, p. 8; Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988, p. 35; Scates 1997, p. 160). An economic argument alone was insufficient justification for the exclusion of non-British workers. Colonial discourses constructed them as both morally inferior and threatening (Scates 1997 p. 161).

The infamous 1901 *Immigration Restriction Act*, the 'White Australia Policy', was a foundation text of the Australian nation. The purpose of the Act was to limit immigration as far as possible to Europeans, preferably the British. The White Australia Policy remained in force, although interpreted ever more loosely, until the 1970s. Few non-British Europeans migrated to Australia between 1901 and 1947, and those who did were received with hostility, particularly from potential fellow-workers (Castles et al. 1988 p. 8).

After the Second World War, there was rapid growth in Australian economy. A similar growth in the workforce was needed (Bertone 2000b p. 124). Immigration was justified by the argument that it was necessary to strengthen

Australia economically and militarily in order to keep at bay the 'yellow peril' with which this outpost of empire was surrounded, and to which Australia had been so clearly vulnerable during the war. The unions were placated by the promise of continuing racial homogeneity through largely British immigration (Collins 1988). However, when adequate numbers of British could not be obtained, displaced persons from camps in Europe were brought to Australia. These people were not to compete with Australians for scarce jobs and housing. An indenture system restricted them to unskilled work, no matter what their skills, and they were to be withdrawn in the case of industrial dispute (Collins 1988). In this way, these immigrants were intentionally 'tracked' into low skilled, low status work in order to protect the existing 'white' working class. This pattern continued de facto as other groups were added to the list of immigration source countries, setting up a two class system which treated ESB migrants like the Australian-born and ensured the construction of NESB migrants as cheap, unskilled labour – 'factory fodder' - in popular discourse.

The policy discourse of assimilationism was used to 'sell' post-war non-British immigration to a hostile Australian population (Castles et al. 1988, p. 112). Castles et al. argue that assimilation was 'the first "nationalism"', in that it sought to create a homogeneous population within the Australian state' (Castles et al. 1988, p. 111). It used a 'historical-cultural' conception of racial superiority rather than a biological one. 'Others' could learn to be 'civilised', and 'civilisation' was identified with the 'Australian Way of Life', based on consumption and Fordism, 'high standards of living in an advanced industrial, market society ... an animism of consumer durables' (Castles et al. 1988, p. 111). In this discourse, immigrants were poor, and they were deemed lucky to come to a 'civilised' country such as Australia (Markus 2001, p. 15). The price, however, was 'work that Australians would not undertake' (Jupp 1998, p. 155) and ridicule, invisibility and silencing (Jupp 1998, p. 134).

Although the British character of Australia was still central, assimilation discourse focused on cultural practices rather than biological race (Stratton & Ang 1994, p. 146). Thus this discourse represented a move in policy discourse to

'racism without race', involving the construction of a cultural 'other' which was expected to assimilate. The discourse of assimilation involved many of the narratives of racist discourse that were still in evidence in Blainey's *All for Australia* thirty years later.

The discourse of multiculturalism

The dominant policy discourse about race and ethnicity from the 1970s to 1996 was multiculturalism. The initial Fraser government version of multiculturalism was based on a conservative culturalist approach that emphasised the promotion of, and respect for, ethnic group difference. Difference was conceptualised in terms that were fundamentally static and essentialist; and ethnicity was an attribute only of non-Anglo-Australian 'migrants'. However, the emphasis on cultural maintenance shifted in the late 1980s to make way for a focus on access, equity and 'social justice' (Castles & Vasta 1996; Markus 2001, p. 29).

The discourse of multiculturalism has been interpreted in different ways. Stratton and Ang outline a reading of multiculturalism as a discursive shift that has 'made a real difference' in the sense that it 'has constituted a zone for dealing with identity and difference which is neither separatist nor assimilationist' (Stratton & Ang 1994, p. 152). However, critiques of the policy discourse hinge on the charge that multiculturalism has failed to address racism.

The discourse of multiculturalism assumes a responsibility of the state to overcome barriers to equal participation in economic, social and political life that arise from race, ethnicity, gender, religion and culture (Castles & Vasta 1996, p. 2; Stratton & Ang 1994, p. 128). However, there is ample evidence that racist discourses, including both textual and material forms such as racist attacks, have co-existed with policies based on the discourse of multiculturalism (Castles & Vasta 1996 p. 3).

The cultural maintenance aspect of multiculturalism has been critiqued for its tendency to reify identity, hierarchies and power structures in ethnic and religious

communities (see for example Markus 1994, p. 196; Ram 1996; Stratton & Ang 1994, p. 153; Yuval-Davis 1992). Australian multicultural discourse also constructs 'Australian society' and 'ethnic communities' as mutually exclusive. Thus it enables the power differentials between the Anglo-Australian centre and the permanently marginalised 'ethnic' to be naturalized (Docker 1994). In this way, 'official multiculturalism suppresses the continued hegemony of Anglo-Celtic Australian culture by making it invisible' (Stratton & Ang 1994, p. 154).

This power differential is symbolised by the centrality of the term 'tolerance' in multicultural discourse. Tolerance 'presupposes that its object is morally repugnant, that it really needs to be reformed, that is, altered' (Goldberg 1993, p. 7), and thus implies 'a belief in the superiority of the dominant one' (Castles 1996, p. 29). The process of becoming tolerant does not remove the power to revert to intolerance; in fact, 'those addressed ... by the discourse of tolerance see in the very address a confirmation of their power to be intolerant' (Hage 1998, p. 87). Tolerance has 'limits', which are set by the centre. The Commonwealth Government defines the principle of cultural identity as the 'right of all Australians, *within carefully defined limits*, to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion' (Office of Multicultural Affairs & Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 1989, p. vii) (my italics). Thus the discourse of multicultural tolerance 'legitimizes the power of the dominant group to proclaim and manage hierarchies of acceptable and unacceptable difference' (Castles 1996, p. 29).

There is a danger in the critique of multiculturalism as 'racist' of 'throwing out the baby with the bath water' (Vasta 1996, p. 60). However, the policies of multiculturalism, while resulting in practical improvements in a number of areas such as funding for learning English, particularly after the shift from a predominant cultural maintenance focus to a 'equity and social justice' approach, did not directly address discourses of colonialism and racism. Multiculturalism's continued construction of certain groups of immigrants as 'other' provided fertile ground for the Blainey's and then the Howards and Hansons.

The 'new conservatism'

As racist discourse strengthened after the Blainey years, the role of John Howard was to position the Liberal Party within this discourse and to legitimise the discourse through both his own use of language and his actions. After the election of the Coalition government in 1996, government discourses increasingly drew on racist discourse to discredit and undermine the discourses of pluralism and multiculturalism, notably in regard to Howard's 'surreptitious show of sympathy' (Manne 2001, p. 4) for the racism of Pauline Hanson's One Nation. Thus the 'potential for racial politics' was maximised and racial discourse entered into 'the highest levels of government' (Markus 2001, p. 220).

After the election of the Howard government in 1996, the two major federal agencies funded through multicultural funding, the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, were abolished, and the Prime Minister 'studiously avoided' mention of multiculturalism (Markus 2001, p. 40). However, in a move that sent a strong message to an electorate fed on Hansonite rhetoric, the new government extended to two years the period that immigrants had to wait for key social security benefits, including the benefit of last resort available to the destitute (Markus 2001, p. 41).

Luke (1997) suggests that the post-1996 'anti-Asian and anti-Aboriginal backlash is connected very closely with the public construction of a golden economic age of full employment in a protected, pre-multinational, pre-globalised economy' (Luke 1997, p. 8). He argues that a major achievement of the state in Australia in the decade from the mid to late 1980s has been the recognition of the heterogeneity of the community. However, the practical implications of this in terms of education were still 'unfinished business' in 1996 (Luke 1997, p. 9), and the continuation of this project imperilled by the new conservative agenda of 'yet another return to the "basics"' (Luke 1997, p. 10). The new post-Fordist basics, however, include 'flexible generic competences, computing and on-line skills' (Luke 1997, p. 10). These are accompanied by a reassertion of a 'medical,

epidemiological model that tend[s] to frame educational problems and issues in terms of individual, family and community “lack” and pathology rather [than] in terms of institutional access and structural economic equity’ (Luke 1997, p. 10). In other words, the new discourse constituted a shift from ‘sociological explanation’ and an investigation of practical ways of building on cultural and linguistic difference to a construction of diversity as an individual problem to be ameliorated or mainstreamed, often in an educational context (Luke 1997, p. 10).

Coalition complicity with the views of Hanson was followed by the mobilisation of xenophobia underlying the Australian response to the arrival of asylum-seekers by boat. Coalition spokespeople were deeply implicated in racist discourse. The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Phillip Ruddock, referred to the arrival of the refugees as an ‘assault’ on Australia, and drew on narratives of immigrants as arrogant and demanding with reports that they had asked for satellite TV and ‘two-in-one-shampoo’ (Manne 2001, p. 79). Asylum-seekers were constructed as potential terrorists by politicians including the then Coalition Defence Minister Peter Reith and talkback radio hosts like Alan Jones. Jones’ declaration that the September 11 terror attacks had been carried out by ‘sleepers’ – ‘terrorists who had been living quietly in the United States for years’ (Mares 2002) - made explicit the discursive link with immigrants already living in Australia. Asylum-seekers were constructed as potential carriers of infectious diseases, as dangerous (they are kept isolated behind razor wire) and as invaders through constant reference to ‘border security’ (Mares 2002). The conflation of the terms ‘asylum-seekers’, ‘refugees’ and ‘illegal immigrants’, and the common use of binary oppositions like ‘bogus’ or ‘genuine’; ‘legal’ or ‘illegal’; ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’; ‘citizen’ and ‘non-citizen’ (Mares 2002), both drew on and perpetuated discourses about ‘foreigners’ in general and certain ethnic groups in particular.

Material practices associated with NESB immigrants and employment in Australia

In the section entitled 'Policy as discourse' in Chapter 2, I stressed that material practices are not separate from discourses but form an integral part of them. I espoused 'a conceptualisation of policy as including ... the policy text itself and its associated processes and outcomes', rather than merely 'policy as text'. The following two sections will briefly examine patterns of material outcomes associated with NESB workers in Australia in order to explore the way in which the discursive construction of their 'NESBness' naturalises their position in the workforce.

Much has been written about the association in Australia of NESB immigrant workers with the jobs with the lowest pay, the worst working conditions, the least security and the lowest status - the 'dirty worker syndrome' (Collins 1988, p. 6). NESB immigrants have come to bear a disproportionate share of unemployment, in particular certain groups from the Middle East, North Africa and Vietnam (see for example Office of Multicultural Affairs & Workplace Studies Centre 1994 p.19; Bertone 2000a p. 70).

The late 1980s and the 1990s saw a sharp decline in the labour market outcomes for NESB migrant workers, with lower rates of employment, higher rates of unemployment and lower average weekly earnings than their Australian-born counterparts (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1992; Castles et al. 1988; Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991). The early 1990s saw NESB employment decimated by the combined effects of recession and restructuring (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993b, p.110; Textile Clothing and Footwear Industry Training Board 1991, p. 11).

However, in contrast to the experience of ESB workers, the labour market position of NESB workers continued to worsen during the 'recovery' phase, with labour force participation rates and overall employment for both males and females from non-MES countries continuing to fall (Brooks & Williams 1995, pp. xiv-xv) and workers from these countries losing employment share to other

workers across industries and occupations (Brooks & Williams 1995, pp. 40-46). Unemployment rates were consistently higher for those born in non-MES countries (Brooks & Williams 1995 p. xvi; Department of Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business 1999, p. 2).

Employment to population ratios for the overseas-born worsened significantly between 1972 and 2000, compared with a very slight trend upwards for the Australian-born (Gregory & Meng 2001, p. 62). Young NESB people, in particular, tended to remain in education, due to difficulty in finding jobs in a labour market that has become very harsh for them (Gregory & Meng 2001, p. 67-71).

A recent study compared the unemployment rates of a visibly different group that the authors call 'Asian' migrants, defined as migrants from South Asia (Indian subcontinent), East and Southeast Asia (China, Korea, Vietnam etc.), and the Middle East or North Africa (Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Iraq etc), with those of other NESB immigrants (Junankar, Paul & Yasmeen 2002, p. 7). The study found unemployment rates among 'Asian migrants' up to 50 per cent greater than among their non-Asian counterparts.

Duration of unemployment was essentially the same for NESB and ESB workers in the late 1970s, at just under 25 weeks. By 1995 the ESB figure had doubled, but the NESB figure had tripled. Average duration for NESB males was 82 weeks (O'Loughlin & Watson 1997 p. 116). The figures for the incidence of LTU show a similar pattern. In the late 1970s, 13.5 per cent of the ESB unemployed and 16.2 per cent of the NESB unemployed were LTU, a difference of approximately 3 percentage points; in 1995, the difference was 16 percentage points (O'Loughlin & Watson 1997 p. 116-7). Mature aged, male blue collar workers who left school early are particularly likely to be LTU. However, there is also a high rate of LTU among NESB workers with tertiary qualifications (O'Loughlin & Watson 1997 p. 119-20).

A further indicator of NESB disadvantage relates to what Gonas and Westin (1993) called 'permanent temporariness', defined as repeated rotation between temporary labour market situations including employment, self-employment,

unemployment, retraining and withdrawal, probably the most common pattern for those retrenched from permanent employment (Gonas & Westin 1993; Harris & Redundancy and Unemployment Research Group 1987 pp. 192-194, pp. 202-208; Webber & Weller 2001 p. 243). NESB jobseekers found significantly fewer days of work than the Australian-born, and derived less advantage from having tertiary qualifications (Watson 2000 p. 87). One of the explanations for this is suggested by Watson et al. (2003), with their observation that a particular barrier affecting access to casual, part-time jobs is 'who you know' (Watson et al. 2003, p. 37).

Retrenchment data also indicate significant labour market disadvantage. For example, ABS data on retrenchments during the 3 years up to 1997 indicate that retrenchment rates were higher for the NESB overseas-born than for those born in MES countries. While those born in MES countries constituted 56 per cent of all overseas-born employees, they constituted only 47 per cent of overseas-born retrenched workers (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997, p.8). Over the period of the 1990s and after, periodic bouts of retrenchments have continued to occur. Retrenchment due to the closure of Ansett, continuing closures of companies in traditional areas such as food processing and TCF (such as the Bradmill retrenchments in 2001-2002) have been the subject of much media reporting. Many of those involved in such episodes were older workers with long histories of employment in those organisations, or those lucky enough to have been re-employed in full-time, permanent jobs in those organisations after losing jobs in the recession of the early 1990s. But 'permanent temporariness' may disguise the real effect on other workers; as Watson et al. (2003) put it:

Much retrenchment affects young workers who have relatively short periods of tenure in their jobs and are employed on a casual or fixed-term basis. This means that the exit of such workers from the job is somewhat blurred: have they been retrenched, have they completed their casual contract, or have they just left voluntarily? In other words, retrenchment may start to fade into normal patterns of high turnover in short-term jobs (Watson et al. 2003, p. 37).

With the overall decrease in the proportion of workers employed in full-time, permanent jobs in the first place, high profile episodes of job loss are likely to become less common, and the evidence of involuntary job loss of previously employable people less visible. Instead, such job loss will be increasingly small-scale and commonplace, and the need to compete for new jobs more frequent. At the same time, access to the few full-time permanent jobs is increasingly restricted to those with 'elaborate credentials, long work experience, or high scores in personality tests' - those 'changing from comparable jobs, or perhaps a small group coming in through direct entry after education or training' (Watson et al. 2003, p. 37). In these circumstances, it is likely that the issues around job loss and re-employment will also become increasingly blurred.

NESB workers in the 'labour market'

In accounts of labour market structure other than those of neo-liberal meta-discourse, the general labour market is segmented into smaller labour markets, engaged in by different groups defined according to 'social class, gender, race, ethnicity, citizenship and age' (Castles, Morrissey & Pinkstone 1988 p. 23). The characteristics ascribed to these categories are 'social and historical constructs, based on past struggles, and forming the basis of contemporary struggles on the value of labour and control over it' (Castles, Morrissey & Pinkstone 1988). Barriers of various kinds impede movement between these specific labour markets. Within this segmentation certain jobs are designated as 'migrant jobs' (Alcorso 1989, p. 67). There is evidence that discourses about particular groups of workers are central in the shifting patterns of segmentation, which is evidently far more complex than the dual labour market proposed by Doeringer & Piore 1975 (see also Piore 1980; Piore & Sabel 1984) and critiqued extensively by Garnsey, Rubery et al. (1985; see also Cockburn 1988; Walby 1988).

More recent work on migrants and the labour market in Australia has been based on a more 'refined' version of labour market segmentation theory (Webber,

Campbell & Fincher 1992; Collins 1988). This fine-grained analysis is important in studying changes in the labour market over time, including the extent to which certain groups are affected disproportionately by restructuring. However, the reasons for these patterns, and the mechanisms through which they occur, are complex and poorly understood. Webber, Campbell & Fincher (1992, p. 37) point out that while theorisations of gender segregation are relatively sophisticated, theories of ethnic segregation are far less so.

Lever-Tracy and Quinlan argue that the presence of NESB immigrants in certain jobs is due not to 'exclusionary barriers (particularly ones motivated by prejudice)', but rather to 'different levels of suction resulting from different degrees of vacuum created by [Australian-born] desertion or avoidance' (Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988, p. 103). According to this argument, during the long boom the burgeoning jobs outside traditional 'production' areas were taken up by the Australian-born, while jobs in production increasingly became 'jobs that no one wants to do' (Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988, p. 100). These were characterised not so importantly by insecurity, poverty or lack of skill, but by 'the rate of exploitation and the level of domination' (Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988, p. 102). Educational credentialling functioned to locate educational failures in production jobs. Lever-Tracy and Quinlan's 'suction' theory is an important one, but does not necessarily preclude the existence of exclusionary barriers; in fact, such barriers would seem to be necessary to explain how the jobs outside production came to be taken up by the Australian-born rather than by the many qualified NESB immigrants arriving in Australia over this time. The authors themselves acknowledge that migrant workers' access to non-production jobs was blocked by 'realistic or exaggerated requirements for linguistic competence' along with non-recognition of foreign credentials and 'the claimed irrelevance of foreign schooling' (p. 101).

It has been argued that 'exclusionary discrimination' – the kind that may lead to segmentation - does not lead to 'economic discrimination' or lower pay than others of equal productivity (Evans & Kelley 1986, 1988). Evans and Kelley conclude that economic discrimination does not exist in Australia because

‘equally good opportunities are not necessarily the same opportunities’ (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 6). While this may have been true to an extent in the 1980s, when many NESB immigrants were ‘tracked’ into regulated and unionised workplaces, the loss of thousands of such jobs in the early 1990s makes it far less applicable today, when many of those so tracked are unemployed, underemployed or re-employed in jobs with lower wages and poorer working conditions.

The segmentation patterns of the workforce are constantly changing. However, segmentation itself appears not to diminish significantly. Much has been written about the way in which gender segmentation persists despite changes in its nature in changing workplaces (see for example Cockburn 1988). The concept of a dominant racist discourse, involving as it does both linguistic and material practices associated with a collection of specific narratives, and a capacity to shift and change in response to historical circumstance; provides a more useful way of understanding the position of NESB workers in the ‘labour market’ than neo-liberal meta-discourse.

In her 1992 study of the clothing industry, Yeatman refers to a ‘naturalising’ of the association between certain groups of workers and certain occupations and industries (p. 48). One of the ways in which this naturalising occurs, she suggests, is through discourses relating to ethnicity. Citing a 1980s prediction of a growing demand for cleaners in the ‘clever country’, she suggests that the off-shoring of much lower status work to ‘third world’ societies and the movement of ‘persons identified as belonging to these third world societies’ into residual low status work in Australia are part of the same discourses (Yeatman 1992, p. 50). Such discourses lead to a ‘co-determination of ethnic/racial and class disadvantage’ (Yeatman 1992, p. 50) that links individual countries into global patterns of labour hierarchies. Within these discourses, she uses the term ‘tracking’ to refer to the material practices that locate people within the positions where they are naturalised as belonging.

Tracking

‘Tracking’ is the process whereby members of certain immigrant groups continue to gain employment in specific, low-paid segments of the labour market regardless of their pre-immigration jobs and education levels and of the current contraction of these labour market segments. Tracking mechanisms often reflect characteristics ascribed to people by members of more powerful social groups. They relate to both demand and supply side behaviour, and include the behaviour of jobseekers, employers, educational institutions, regulators and accreditation bodies and employment placement agencies.

Research on gender segregation draws attention to ‘the active engagement of male employees’ (Cockburn 1988 p. 32) in organising to prevent women from accessing certain occupations (Cockburn 1988). In a similar vein, many writers argue that the restrictions on entry to professional and para-professional occupations in Australia emanate from professional bodies and function to enable systematic discrimination to take place against those with overseas qualifications and skills (Iredale 1989; Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 5, p. 92; Iredale 1992, p. 30; Jamrozik, Boland & Urquhart 1995; O’Loughlin & Watson 1997). For Jamrozik, the New Middle Class – in this case, the ‘helping’ professions – lead in this process by demanding that immigrants not only demonstrate knowledge and skill but also ‘demonstrate a willingness to accept the values and attitudes of the profession’ which ‘is expected to extend into the immigrant’s lifestyle’ (Jamrozik, Boland & Urquhart 1995 p. 138-9). Thus exclusionary mechanisms include particular professional or occupational discourses, defined as

... socially accepted association[s] among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artifacts’, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role’ (Gee 1996), p. 131]

Such Discourses are acquired by lengthy apprenticeship, and are particularly impenetrable to those from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Yeatman also suggests that publicly funded agencies including TAFE, Migrant Resource Centres and public employment services contribute to 'tracking' through failing to provide advice and programs that offer alternatives to the naturalised patterns associating ethnic and gender groups with certain types of work (Yeatman 1992, pp. 47-49). For example, these organisations 'work with and reproduce the 'naturalness' of the association of newly arrived NESB women, who lack fluency in English oral and written skills, with certain jobs' – a 'naturalness' that does not apply to women from western or northern Europe, however (Yeatman 1992, p. 48-9). Employment-assistance services in particular may contribute to tracking by overestimating the importance of English language proficiency for particular jobs, referring NESB jobseekers only to labouring occupations, regardless of their previous work experience, or simply not referring them to employers at all (Chauvel 1985 p. 13). Government services in this area, including labour market programs, have been relatively inaccessible or unhelpful to workers of NESB (see for example Alcorso 1989; Campbell, Fincher, & Webber 1989).

Employer recruitment and workforce planning and management behaviour is a major aspect of the tracking process (Williams 1992 p. 51-2). The narrative of immigrants as factory fodder means that employees who start in the wages division (for example when newly arrived in Australia) often remain there, no matter what their previous education or experience (Collins et al. 1995; Watson 1996, p. 92). The narrative of immigrants as last in the job queue naturalised the 'tracking' of NESB workers into dead-end jobs and as a consequence into the ranks of the LTU following the downsizing and restructuring in both government and private organisations in the early 1990s (O'Loughlin & Watson 1997 p. 107).

Narratives within racist discourse referring to specific 'attributes' of particular NESB groups may underpin retrenchment and re-employment patterns during periods of industry restructuring. Webber and Weller (2001) describe changes in the ethnic composition of the Australian clothing industry during the late 1980s

and early 1990s. Women from Southern European backgrounds were no longer required for reasons largely connected with discourses about age and ethnicity. Younger and more newly arrived Asian background workers were believed to be more hardworking (Webber & Weller 2001 p. 196). Thus the ethnic characteristics of the workforce segment were transformed due to management narratives about ethnic traits.

A number of studies conclude that different labour market experiences including levels of unemployment can be explained by 'human capital' factors, in particular differences in English language proficiency and period of residence (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 6). However, the statistical study referred to above (Junankar, Paul & Yasmeen 2002) found significant differences between unemployment rates of Asian and non-Asian migrants that were not subject to explanation by the usual explanatory variables - human capital, English language ability, demographic variables, and so on. They attribute these differences to discrimination against Asian migrants.

Qualitative studies (see for example Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991, p. 94-108; Fotiadis 1989) afford evidence of the ways in which the construction of NESB workers as 'other' underlies recruitment and management behaviour. Conscious discrimination has been found in some studies (Iredale 1992, p. 16). For example, in one study a striking 30 per cent of interviewees favoured direct discrimination (Evans & Kelley 1986, p. 30). However, much of the discrimination manifested in recruitment and hiring as well as workforce management is mediated through discourses of which employers themselves are not aware.

Narratives of cultural racism underpin the use of the term 'personality' as code for finding clones of existing managers (Watson 1996, p. 45) and of 'cultural fit' as a criterion (Iredale 1992, p. 37; Niland & Champion 1990, p. 10; Watson 1996, p. ix). Hage's 'national belonging' underlies the comment of one of Watson's informants about the importance of being 'seen to be Australian' (Watson 1996, p. 45). The narrative of immigrants as last in the job queue informs Iredale's

comment that employers are often 'reluctant to choose overseas applicants when there [is] a suitable Australian available' (Iredale 1992, p. 34).

Discrimination through English language requirements is the subject of a significant amount of literature. Accent is a common issue (Iredale 1992; Niland & Champion 1990 p. x). Niland and Champion (1990) recommended that research be conducted into the effect of accents and ways in which their 'adverse effects can be mitigated' (1990, p. xiv). Iredale found it strange that many organisations she studied anticipated lower levels of 'communication skills' in overseas trained staff from India, considering that almost all tertiary education in India takes place in English. Accent and idiom were the most common difficulties. She notes that 'Scottish, Geordie and other British Isles accents' were mentioned jokingly while 'difficulty with accented English from other countries was seen as a job performance problem' (Iredale 1992, p. 31).

Language testing is cited by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) as an example of indirect racial discrimination if the standard of English in the test is 'not necessary for the work and is unreasonable in the circumstances'. (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1996, p. 6) The Race Discrimination Commissioner observes that instances of indirect discrimination are widespread in employment, education and training. However, the legislation has rarely been used to challenge indirect discrimination due, she suggests, to the difficulty of gathering the information required, tightening definitions of 'reasonableness' and limited access to legal representation (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1996, p. 6).

A study that did much to 'unpack' the way in which judgments of 'English language skills' provide a cover for racist discourse was Hawthorne's study of immigrant engineers arriving in Australia in 1991. Hawthorne found that within a statistical analysis of factors affecting overseas qualified engineers' ability to find employment, 'the sole significant predictor of employability proved to be racial origin' (Hawthorne 1994, p. xviii). However attitudes were justified in terms of the need for very sophisticated English language levels, local knowledge, 'cross-cultural skills' (meaning cultural capital or 'fit') and 'technological fit'

(Hawthorne 1994, p. 67). Recruitment agents were particularly implicated in ethnic stereotyping, with negative assessment of 'cross-cultural skills' underpinned by stereotypes of engineers from Middle Eastern countries as 'evil', 'arrogant', 'underhand, cunning and devious' (Hawthorne 1994, p. 69). Accent, immigrant engineers' interaction with Australian workplace staff and their overall readiness for employment were rated very differently according to ethnic group. Thus regardless of the fact that no significant problem was found with the work skills or English language of Middle Eastern, South American and Asian engineers, employer representatives' perceptions of English language skills was 'significantly affected by engineers' ethnic region of origin' with a 'decided preference' operating in favour of European engineers, with whom Australian engineers seemed to experience 'a greater degree of communicative "comfort"' (Hawthorne 1994, pp. 78-80).

Much of the literature regarding language-based discrimination relates to 'skilled', professional and managerial occupations. However, it is relevant here in a number of ways. First, many qualified and experienced NESB workers are in 'unskilled' occupations precisely due to such discrimination. Second, with a discursive shift towards textualisation in employment at these levels, the jobs of NESB wage workers may come to resemble more closely those of 'skilled' workers, professional and managers. For example, Watson notes that the limited English language literacy of many such workers 'left them highly vulnerable to new personnel procedures such as "performance appraisal", which required filling in questionnaires in order to keep their jobs' (Watson 1996, p. 67). Third, it is likely that as 'good' jobs in manufacturing are perceived as more desirable by Australian-born workers, some of the discriminatory mechanisms described above may come into play. Lever-Tracy and Quinlan (1988, p. 106) suggest that employment of NESB workers even in production jobs depends on the existence of a motive to accept non-Anglophones in the form of insufficient Australian-born applicants (Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988, p. 107).

A central plank of the campaign against discrimination has been the introduction of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) practices. Niland and

Champion (1990) studied the application of EEO for immigrants in both public and private sector organisations. They found poor progress in the public sector (1990, p. 4), and almost none in the private sector (Niland & Champion 1990). However, there is evidence that EEO is not an unmixed blessing for immigrant workers. Watson (1996, pp. 47-8) comments on the hidden 'cultural assumptions' that form part of the definition of merit in EEO.

The use of a discourse approach to the 'labour market' assists us to understand the ways in which NESB workers may actively reproduce the structures that restrict them. Workers may accept labour market segmentation, and collude with tracking, due to their acceptance of the allocation of value to educational and other 'human capital' attributes such as English language level, formal qualifications, 'relevant' work experience or disability. They may accept discourses about what is appropriate work for their social group due to cultural factors, particularly studied in the case of gender segmentation. They may be limited in their jobsearch behaviour or in the jobs they target by their imperfect knowledge of the labour market. For example, widespread reliance on personal contacts to find work is a major tracking mechanism (Alcorso 1989; Campbell, Fincher & Webber 1989), particularly as secure, full-time jobs dry up and employers increasingly use more formal recruitment methods. However, the terrain within which workers are 'tracked' is shaped by the power relations between gender and ethnic groups.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have further analysed some of the dominant discourses constructing the participants in this study as NESB workers. In particular, I have examined racist discourse, which intersects with, and is legitimated by, the discourses of neo-liberalism examined in the previous chapter. I have delineated a series of racist narratives relating to work and language. These are summarised in Table 3

Table 3 Narratives about ELL, race, and ethnicity

- *justice as 'equal' treatment*
- *NESB immigrants (especially the visibly/culturally different) as:*
 - a social cost/burden
 - frauds (ignorant of language and even their own culture)
 - unskilled
 - ungrateful
 - lazy and unmotivated
 - criminal
 - dependent
 - arrogant and demanding
 - job snobs
 - job snatchers – rightly located last in the job queue
 - factory fodder (Collins 1996b, p. 83)
 - responsible for:
 - their own inevitable suffering
 - prejudice against them
 - the success of communication with the 'mainstream'
- *English as a unitary 'basic skill'*
- *English as a necessity for employability*
- *English as a global language (EGL)*
- *'language and literacy as a basic or foundation skill onto which higher order communication skills are grafted'*
- *the literacy 'crisis'*
- *trainability - to be 'trainable', workers need to be able to deal with training conceived of as the internalisation of a given body of knowledge presented in English in complex oral or textual forms*
- *'Asian Tiger' narrative*
- *language and cultural practice as a 'symbol of Otherness'*
- *government as:*
 - over-supporting immigrants – wasting money
 - supporting immigrants secretly – conspiratorial
 - supporting immigrants at the expense of 'ordinary Australians' – traitorous
- *immigration as damaging:*
 - democracy
 - the immigrants

The chapter has also examined the material practices associated with racist narratives about English language and literacy, race and ethnicity.

The narratives comprising the discourses of both neo-liberalism and racism will be explored in subsequent chapters. In the next chapter, I will examine the way in which the narratives delineated in Chapters 3 and 4 are instantiated in the policy framework from the late 1980s until 2002.

Chapter 5

Policy discourses at work

Introduction

In Chapters 3 and 4 I outlined the dominant policy and public discourses in Australia since the mid 1980s as they related to work; education and training; English language and literacy, race and ethnicity; and the state. These discourses were primarily those of neo-liberalism, including neo-classical economics, human capital theory, globalisation and social contractualism. These discourses entered a terrain of existing inequalities structured by racist discourse. In this chapter I will first use these discourse ensembles to analyse a number of fundamental texts of the Hawke and Keating governments pertaining to employment, labour market programs, education and training, English language and literacy, race and ethnicity. Among these are both policy documents and a commissioned report, which document dominant and contending discourses at the time of the first study, *Surviving Retrenchment* (Pearce, Bertone & Stephens 1995). I will then follow the same path with selected policy statements of the Coalition government in relation to the same areas.

The focus of analysis is upon the interplay between elements of the dominant and contending discourses that are present in these texts. The texts are examined in chronological order. The Labor government documents are the National Policy on Languages (1987); the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (1989); the report *The Cost of Low Levels of English Proficiency amongst Immigrants in the Workforce* (1991); the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (1991) *Working Nation* (1994); and *Towards a Skilled Australia* (1994). The Coalition

government documents are Reforming Employment Assistance – Helping Australians Into Real Jobs and a number of statements relating to Mutual Obligation, in particular a media release entitled ‘Brought to Target “Cruising” Dole Recipients’.

Policy discourses under Labor 1987-1996

The Hawke government was elected in 1983 on an interventionist policy, including the pledge to protect the ‘losers’ in the process of macro- and micro-economic reform (Bertone 2000b, p. 124; Quiggin 1998, pp. 80-81; Webber & Weller 2001, p. 23-28). However, migrant groups were excluded from consultation, and the implications of structural adjustment for particular groups, including migrants and women, were not addressed (Bertone 2000b p. 127-8). For the first few years, the promise was implemented. Measures included the Labour Adjustment Packages (LAPs) designed to assist the workers in restructuring industries including Textiles, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) and Passenger Motor Vehicles (PMV); increased government attention to labour market assistance (Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs 1985; Webster 1997, p. 7) and the designation of migrants as a disadvantaged group with prioritised access (Pearce, Bertone & Stephens 1995, pp. 11-12); the establishment of the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR). There was a new emphasis on ELL through the Early Intervention Program (EIP), SkillShare, on-arrival English as a second language (ESL) and the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program. Unfortunately, the CES was unable to generate figures for migrant participation in labour market programs until the early 1990s (Jones, Roger & McAllister 1991 p. xvi).

However, the mid-1980s saw the Hawke government turn to radical neo-liberalism (Quiggin 1998, pp 80-81). Over 1987-88, wage rises became linked to productivity through review of awards and work classifications and more flexible work practices. In the early 1990s Enterprise Bargaining reduced awards to a

‘safety net’ and further increased wage differentiation between industries, enterprises and workers (Bertone 2000a). Webber and Weller’s case study of the TCF area (Webber & Weller 2001) traces the transformation of the TCF Award with job reclassification for functional flexibility, strategies for a more flexible deployment of labour, new forms of training, including multi-skilling, and workplace reorganisation.

Trade unions acceded to such changes, with ‘strategic unionism’ (ACTU 1987, pp. 169-94) accepting the ‘labourist’ versions of post-Fordism – the argument that flexibility and new forms of work organisation would make Australian manufacturing internationally competitive and, in the process, liberate workers from Taylorist process work (Mathews 1989; Schmidt 2000; Webber & Weller 2001, 72). However, in the context of the threat to the trade union movement emanating from the economic liberals’ push for deregulation, others went along with the only alternative voice and ‘set declining living standards against long-term survival’ (Probert 1995, p. 25). The fall in manufacturing employment, which had begun in the early 1970s with the winding back of tariff protection, experienced a temporary respite in the mid to late 1980s. However, the fall accelerated, with further tariff cuts and the recession of the early 1990s (Bertone 2000b p. 125). After the severe tightening of monetary policy in 1989 (Bertone 2000b p. 131), the economy again went into crisis. The dominant arguments about solutions were now firmly based on economic rationalism, including further deregulation and the decentralisation of wage fixing. The ACTU did not challenge these arguments but promoted economic restructuring in line with these arguments while seeking protection for the low paid (Bertone 2000b p. 131). Thus, the period of the first round of interviews for this study, the early 1990s, was characterised by Enterprise Bargaining, Award Restructuring and recent recession.

After its accession to power in 1996, the new Liberal Government brought in the Workplace Relations Act, which enshrined individual contracts and non-union collective agreements. This significantly reduced the union role in enterprise negotiations and facilitated further divergence between wages and conditions for

different groups of workers. In the August 1996 budget the Coalition introduced a radically privatised system for the delivery of employment assistance. The registration, referral and assessment functions of the CES were also merged with the payments network of the DSS to form Centrelink, (Commonwealth of Australia 1996). Spending on labour market programs was reduced by \$1.7 billion, leading to a reduction of 230,000 places, a step described as ‘breathtaking’ by an OECD official (Birrell & Hawthorne 1997, p. 82). English language programs were slashed. These changes, together with the abolition of Social Security support for new immigrants for the first two years after arrival and the introduction of a user-pays principle into the provision of ESL, were forecast to have serious effects on NESB immigrants’ ability to secure professional employment (Birrell & Hawthorne 1997, p. 82-3).

The National Policy on Languages (1987)

The early 1980s saw a strengthening of racist discourse in Australia (see Chapter 4) that was reflected in debates on language. An inquiry into language issues in 1982–84 by the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts. (Ozolins 1993, p. 217) received considerable negative public reaction, underpinned by a strong English First lobby and significant hostility to language rights, even from the most senior government sources (Ozolins 1993, pp. 219-20). The Standing Committee report drew extensively on ‘a neo-classical view of language learning and language change’ (Tollefson 1991, p.176). It accepted a number of ‘common-sense’ assumptions:

... everyone should learn English because it is necessary for jobs; it is not feasible to provide translation and interpretation services for all of the languages in Australia; dominance by English is more practical than other systems for organizing language in Australian society; and people who do not speak English must inevitably suffer in many ways throughout their lives (Tollefson 1991, p. 178).

Moreover, the report stressed the determining role of individual decisions and individual practice and values, rather than language policy, in the maintenance of community languages, and attributed responsibility for illiteracy to the cultures and experiences of illiterate people – disrupted schooling, emotional problems, cultural deprivation and illiterate parents (Tollefson 1991, p. 176-7).

In the absence of progress in the development of a national policy, Education Minister Susan Ryan appointed Joseph Lo Bianco as a consultant and the National Policy on Languages (NPL) was produced. Looked at from the perspective of the 21st century, the NPL was striking in its thoroughgoing pluralism and humanism. Overall, the policy rejected instrumentalism and economism and declined to oversimplify cultural and linguistic factors. It began with a carefully written preamble (Lo Bianco 1987, pp. 1-2), which emphasised from the outset the significance of language in itself to all people. It declined to privilege any one language over others. The preamble constructed language as central to individual, national, ethnic, racial, cultural and human identity, and the policy featured throughout a dynamic rather than an essentialist construction of both language (e.g. 1987, p. 6) and culture (e.g. 1987, p. 1). The policy stressed the equal value of all languages to their speakers and the widespread daily use of Australian community languages for a broad range of purposes (1987, pp. 6-7). Language policy, rather than individual responsibility, was central. Thus, any attempt to reduce English to a mere ‘work skill’ was decisively rejected, as was the narrative of immigrants as responsible for the success of communication with the mainstream.

The NPL emphasised the positive part immigrants have played in Australia’s development, stating that recent immigrants had transformed Australia’s ‘economic and occupational structures’ and that community languages were contributing to a ‘deeper cultural transformation’ (1987, p. 76). It supported ‘language pluralism’ (1987, p. 6) and multiculturalism but without ‘othering’ immigrants, constructing them within the general term ‘Australians’ throughout. It constructed English monolingualism in negative terms, explicitly countering the

narrative of English as a global language as a rationale for monolingualism (1987, pp. 64-6). It linked linguistic and cultural diversity and second language learning to cultural and intellectual enrichment, equity and social justice, along with economic and diplomatic factors on an equal basis. While acknowledging language needs for economic purposes such as trade, the NPL carefully balanced the imperatives of 'community' and 'foreign' languages, of English and other languages, of ethnic communities and external economic considerations.

The policy criticised the 'stigmatisation' of the use of LOTEs (1987, p. 56). It rejected the idea that 'people who do not speak English must inevitably suffer in many ways throughout their lives' (Tollefson 1991, p. 178), acknowledging and legitimising the existence of people who did not need to learn English, since 'their needs [were] adequately met' in communities using LOTEs (1987, p. 90). Personal bilingualism was promoted as enhancing cultural understanding and providing cognitive benefits (1987, p. 46). It included a recognition, at least in relation to children, that learning could proceed in LOTEs while English was being learned, so that learners would not fall behind their monolingual peers (1987, p. 91). This principle could have been extended to adult learners in certain circumstances. Under the rubric of 'a language other than English for all', the report recommended funding for programs to provide services and information in community languages, for language maintenance and to teach school content subjects in students' first languages. Thus the NPL constructed the learning and use of languages other than English as a positive value, and communication between monolingual English speakers and others as a shared responsibility. It strongly countered the narrative of English as a mere work skill.

The policy accepted the principle that English should remain the dominant language in Australia but emphasised its social benefits and access to it under the rubric of 'English for all' (1987, p. 146). It constructed access to English as a question of power (1987, p. 1). It referred to measures to 'enhance the competence of Australians in English' (1987, p. 6) in the context of English both as a first and second language, thus avoiding deficit constructions of NESB immigrants' English language competence. Lo Bianco argued that English is a

'cohesive and unifying element in Australian society' (1987, p. 71) while acknowledging that it has enormous practical significance in employment advancement. He recommended inter alia a major adult literacy campaign; a major in-service project for the training of all teachers in the teaching of English, including as a second language (1987, p. 101), the careful planning of ESL initiatives and the implementation of the earlier Campbell report on ESL, which included a broadening of ESL pedagogy to include bilingual approaches (Ozolins 1993 p. 179). Educational approaches included the promotion of the 'need to integrate adult ESL learning with the range of pre-vocational, vocational and recreational course offerings of the TAFE sector and ... other adult education providers' (1987, p. 91-3, 103). It acknowledged the existence of specific discourses or genres within English (e.g. 1987, p. 82). Thus in its educational approaches the policy firmly rejected the narratives of English as a unitary 'basic skill' and 'competence in language and literacy [as] a basic or foundation skill onto which higher order communication skills are grafted' (Wickert & Baynham 1994 p. 180).

The Commonwealth endorsed the NPL in 1987, allocating around \$4 million over the next two years for the Adult Literacy Action Campaign (ALAC). Australia now had a language policy that was the object of international attention and compared favourably with other immigrant-receiving countries, including the US, the UK and Canada (Kipp, Clyne & Pauwels 1995 p. 1). This campaign resulted inter alia in the report *No Single Measure* (Wickert & Kevin 1995), which provided the first reliable statistics on adult literacy. Over 1989-90, \$5 million was committed for International Literacy Year projects (Sanguinetti 1999 p. 35). However, in the months following the report's completion, there was a significant shift in the way it was presented by the Labor government. In April 1987 Prime Minister Hawke enthusiastically embraced the report, reflecting in his comments Lo Bianco's careful balance between the different rationales. However, within a few months, the rhetoric had changed. Lo Bianco wrote in 1989:

... by the time of the 1987 budget (August), the way of talking about the policy and its programs had changed. These shifts, both subtle and not so subtle, merit deeper analysis, but, essentially, represented (1) a changed target audience (business, 'hard-nosed' economic rationalists and those primarily dealing with the labour market and 'national interest' macro-economic policy, rather than an electoral constituency); (2) a changed rhetoric (less emphasis on the 'value of diversity', our 'rich society', 'unity in diversity', being a 'good neighbour', 'many cultures co-existing', and much more stress on 'facilitating trade with Asia', 'knowing and dealing with our markets'); and (3) a different logic (rather than ensuring social cohesion, better acquisition of English and improved intergroup social relations, language policy would primarily address the language-derived obstacles to economic restructuring through attacking adult illiteracy rates ...) (Lo Bianco 1989, p. 189; see also Sanguinetti 1999 p. 46)

This shift was reflected in the discourses of the next policy to be examined, the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (NAMA).

The National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia ... Sharing Our Future (1989)

The NAMA was produced by the Office of Multicultural Affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and appeared with a Foreword by Prime Minister Hawke. Gone are the discourses of humanism and the careful balanced examination of a complex multicultural reality. The terms of the Foreword frame the document within economist and performative discourses, and also, incredibly, resonate with the narratives of Blainey rather than those of Lo Bianco. Pre- and even early post-war Australia is constructed as a British place without first generation immigrants and without Aboriginal people. In the recent past, we are told, Australians saw themselves as a nation '*descended from* British and Irish migrants' (my italics); now, there are both Aboriginal people (with an ambivalent 'special' status), and immigrants and refugees, who were 'attracted by our British

heritage and institutions'. In the first paragraph we are told that Australia is now 'enmeshed' in the Asia-Pacific region due to transformed strategic, trade and investment considerations. This description highlights the deep ambivalence of what Rizvi calls the new 'Asia literacy' (Rizvi 1996, p. 183-6). One reading is that Australia is now caught in a snare in the Asia-Pacific region, in which the bait relates to our economic and strategic needs.

Hawke proceeds to describe the increasing number of people in Australia who speak a language other than English, and to designate the 'task' of government as responding to the 'challenge of this diversity'. The solution lies in economic gain, through 'harnessing' the 'wealth of human talent available to us'. Thus the 'we' of the old Australia are constructed in contrast to a 'them'; and relating to 'them' represents both a difficult task and a potential for exploitation if we are clever enough to tap it. Thus, in the first four paragraphs of his Foreword, Hawke has framed the policy in an anxious instrumental economism, an 'us' and 'them' hierarchy in which British values are superior, and in a construction of diversity as a problem. Although the second half of the Foreword draws on contending discourses to some extent, with mention of 'social justice' and 'equity', these discourses are clearly subordinated.

The contending discourses are stronger in the text of the policy itself. The NAMA acknowledges three 'dimensions' of multiculturalism: cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency (Office of Multicultural Affairs & Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 1989, p. 7). The sections entitled Participation and Basic Rights draw on discourses of entitlement and social justice (1989, pp. 6-7). 'Basic rights' are constructed in terms of freedom from discrimination and prejudice, including 'that unwitting systemic discrimination which occurs when cultural assumptions become embodied in society's established institutions and processes' (1989, p. 15). Discrimination based on a biological construction of race is explicitly cited as one of the structural barriers affecting participation (e.g. 1989, pp. 9, 20). Measures involving equality of outcomes, such as levels of participation and representation, are used as indicators of inequality, in contrast to racist narratives of 'equal' treatment. The section

entitled Social Justice draws extensively on a discourse of equity with terms including 'fair distribution', 'equal access', 'equal rights', 'equal opportunity for participation' and 'equal life chances' (1989, p. 19), and with a stated long-term objective of 'similar group outcomes'. It attempts to construct NESB immigration as a benefit to both society and the economy, while avoiding too much self-congratulation and insisting on a more 'complex and varied' picture that encompasses structural difficulties (1989, p. 20). Even affirmative action is raised in a positive context (1989, p. 15).

However, in the following section entitled Human Resources (1989, p. 26), education and training are constructed firmly within economist and Human capital discourses. Despite some attempt to counter this with an early token mention of 'the individual's right to self-expression and economic security' (1989, p. 26), multiculturalism is clearly constructed in terms of economic benefit, with the statement that 'multicultural policies seek to maximise the contribution ... of all Australians to the economic life of the community' (1989, p. 26). The hybrid discourse of productive diversity is drawn on to justify language learning and language maintenance (1989, p. 27). There is some use of discourses of equity regarding reforms needed to ensure immigrant participation in vocational training, and the policy draws attention to the 'dangers' of industry and award restructuring for many immigrant workers, calling particularly for measures to address workers' English language abilities (1989, pp. 28-30). However, this warning is relatively weak in the context of a long list of government achievements, which lists labour market reform and the main aspects of the NTRA, including the move in labour market programs away from work experience and job creation to formal structured training (1989, pp. 32-3). These measures are constructed as benefiting 'all Australians' (1989, p. 34); in contrast, 'even more targeted measures' are required to ensure that 'all members of the community regardless of background are able to make their maximum contribution to Australia's development' (1989, p. 34). In contrast to the previous carefully written sections, the discourse here returns to 'majority/minority' narratives that construct certain workers as inevitably, although regrettably, left behind and unable to contribute

(constructed in economic terms) due to their English language and education levels. Thus society is constructed as an economic phenomenon within which NESB immigrants are constructed as a burden.

The contending discourses are again very evident at the beginning of the section entitled Language and Communication. It draws on the discourse of pluralism to construct language learning as a positive value for cultural understanding and draws on the narrative of mutual responsibility for communication in a way that specifically targets monoculturalism and monolingualism as a problem:

There is an obligation on both sides to try to understand the other – an obligation on those born into and on those who choose to live in such a mixed society. There is a need for opportunities to develop cross-cultural understanding particularly among people who have always lived within a single cultural framework (1989, p. 37).

At first, this section is careful to place ‘difficulty in speaking English, inability to understand languages other than English and failure to communicate across cultural barriers’ at the same level of importance and to construct them as the responsibility of ‘both sides’ (1989, p. 38). All three are argued to ‘impoverish the individual, cause friction and injustice in society, and contribute to economic inefficiency and waste’ (1989, p. 38). Thus the section draws on narratives of individual well-being, constructed in terms that are at least partly non-economic, and of social cohesion and justice. There are many echoes of the NPL, including an affirmation of its major principles.

However, then there is a striking transformation. Suddenly we are given a catastrophising description of the ‘practical implications’ of the inability of many people to speak English adequately, cast in economist and human capital terms. Such people are described as inevitably remaining ‘functionally unskilled no matter how impressive the qualifications that they possess’ (1989, p. 38). This lack of English means ‘lower productivity, poorer morale, less flexible use of labour, industrial malfunctions, increased health and safety hazards, obstacles to

retraining and multi-skilling, and less effective use of overseas acquired skills' (1989, p. 38). The racist and economist narrative of NESB immigrants as a social cost is strongly drawn upon here as we are told that the extra time needed for communication in the workplace could be costing Australia \$3.2 billion per year (1989, p. 39). The section uses rhetoric that naturalises individual deficiency in English as the cause of social inequality, unemployment, and an 'inability to retrain' when retrenched (1989, p. 39). It constructs immigrants as responsible for prejudice against them, with the statement that 'in the classroom, [lack of English] is a barrier to acceptance' (1989, p. 39). It states that 'English is a problem for many Australians', but 'as a nation we are also disadvantaged by our general lack of facility in other languages' and '*Australia is fortunate* to have a vast but largely under-utilised natural reservoir of language skills' (1989, p. 39; my italics). In this way, English is constructed as an individual problem for the immigrant, while 'we/the nation' – thereby constructed as not the immigrants – lack facility in other languages, a problem that can be solved by using the skills that 'they' possess, which are constructed as 'ours' by right. The rhetoric used to describe the individual consequences of lack of English is hyperbolic; the young immigrant's education is 'irreparably disrupted', the aged retiree is 'now lonely and isolated'. There is no place in such a discourse for the educational benefits of properly supported bilingualism or the capacity of groups with a shared language and culture to ensure a perfectly happy life for their older members. This is a return to the narrative of NESB immigrants as responsible for their own inevitable suffering – the notion that 'people who do not speak English must inevitably suffer in many ways throughout their lives' (Tollefson 1991, p. 178).

The conclusion of the NAMA, a section entitled 'A Better Australia,' clearly manifests the tensions between the discourse of pluralism and the racist discourse of the 1980s, in particular the narrative of immigration as damaging democracy and NESB immigrants as a social cost. In several major ways it gives ground to that discourse, albeit with strenuous counter argument. For example, the conclusion to the document concedes the British origin of many Australian institutions and even of the 'freedom' that Australian society allows for individual

citizens, which, like PM Hawke, it constructs as the country's major attraction to immigrants (Office of Multicultural Affairs & Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 1989, p. 50). However, it insists that these institutions have been and continue to be transformed and modified, like those of Britain itself, to reflect new realities (Office of Multicultural Affairs & Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 1989, p. 50), of which 'the changing face of the Australian population' is simply one of many (Office of Multicultural Affairs & Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 1989, p. 52). But the notion of the limits to multiculturalism – 'an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia' – is offered as reassurance in this context (Office of Multicultural Affairs & Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 1989, p. 52) (see Chapter 4). More significantly, however, the NAMA uses neo-liberal performativity discourse – the argument that 'governments and the community are seeking better value for their resources' to construct a long-term model for 'respond[ing] to cultural diversity without the need for on-going external or additional support' (Office of Multicultural Affairs & Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 1989, p. 51). Although muted by the discourse of equity and justice through the argument that this 'mainstreaming' cannot happen immediately and that specific initiatives are required in the meantime, the long-term model is nevertheless cast in terms of narratives of 'equal' treatment and NESB immigrants as a social cost.

Although the discourses of equity and social justice are still significantly represented in the NAMA, in the two years since the NPL, many elements of the discourse of pluralism and humanism have been rendered invisible in an overwhelming economism and performativity that provides the context for systematic othering, denigration and inferiorisation by Blainey, Hanson and the New Right.

The Cost of Low Levels of English Proficiency amongst Immigrants in the Workforce (1991)

As the rhetoric of the 'literacy crisis' took hold in 1990-91, the links between literacy and English language were strengthened in the public mind with the release in February 1991 by the Bureau of Immigration Research of Thorsten Stromback and Alison Preston's report *The Cost of Low Levels of English Proficiency amongst Immigrants in the Workforce* (Stromback & Preston 1991), originally commissioned by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Although not strictly speaking a policy document, this study is included here because its foregrounding by these government agencies underlined the new narratives of the policy arena. The study purported to calculate the costs to the Australian economy of the 'lower productivity' resulting from poor English language in the workplace. It was based on neo-classical economic modeling of the most naïve kind, and on very weak human capital assumptions. The basis of the calculation involved the classic assumption that 'the lower productivity of those with poor English is best measured by their relative earnings' (Stromback & Preston 1991, p. 8). The authors concede that:

The validity of this measurement depends on actual wages being approximately what they would be in a perfectly competitive market. This is a maintained assumption that cannot be verified. There is, however, a vast body of economic analysis based on this assumption and our approach follows standard practice (Stromback & Preston 1991, p. 8).

Thus, there is no room in the model for the possibility that the reasons for lower earnings may be anything other than lower 'productivity', such as discrimination. Nor is there room for the idea that either low earnings or 'productivity' could be related to factors other than English language proficiency, such as work organisation, investment patterns or language practices as a whole in the industries where immigrants are concentrated. Other acknowledged problems in the methodology, such as whether an improvement in 'communication'

between workers would also improve the productivity of workers who are native English speakers, are also solved by simple recourse to 'competitive theory', which denies such a possibility (Stromback & Preston 1991, p. 9).

The report is muddled as to what exactly it is measuring. As well as 'poor English', it refers to the 'problem' as 'illiteracy' (1991, p. 8) and 'difficulties in communication' (1991, p. 9). Its major method of ascertaining English language levels is the use of responses to the census question that asked respondents who speak a language other than English whether they speak English very well, well, not well or not at all (1991, p. 12). Although it is widely used, this is unlikely to be an accurate measurement (Pearce, Bertone & Stephens 1995, p. 63).

The report's finding of an annual 'cost' of \$763m, representing the amount that would be gained 'if all immigrants became as fluent ... as those who speak English only' (Stromback & Preston 1991, p. 23) is ludicrous. As we have seen, it is practically impossible for those who arrived in Australia as adults to become indistinguishable from native speakers of English. By basing an academic study on the perpetuation of this myth of linguistic assimilation, the authors and funders have strengthened the narratives in racist discourse that construct NESB immigrants as responsible for the success of communication with the 'mainstream' and therefore lazy and unmotivated if they do not assimilate in this way. They have also obscured any differences between genres or contexts of ELL, and thus perpetuated the construction of English as a unitary 'basic skill' that people either possess or do not possess, thus using the narrative of language practice as a 'symbol of Otherness'. They have constructed English monolingualism as a positive value linked to employment; naturalised the 'commonsense' racist idea that NESB immigrants should cease to speak their own languages in order to improve their English and thereby their 'employability'; and obscured any other values regarding the use of other languages in the workplace or elsewhere. Further, the finding assumes that were this mythical linguistic assimilation to happen, sufficient jobs would be available for the entire population of the kind and with the wages currently enjoyed by those who speak English only. It is far more likely that, were all those with 'poor' English to suddenly

improve their English, they would remain in the same jobs earning the wages they currently earn, as those jobs must be done by someone (Berg 1971). The report seems to be an example of the type of a priori neo-classical economic approaches that 'lead the reader from sets of more or less plausible but entirely arbitrary assumptions to precisely stated but irrelevant theoretical conclusions' (Leontieff 1972; cited in Toohey 1994, p. 18).

The Stromback and Preston report was presumably commissioned with the best intentions; its stated 'secondary concern' is to recommend funding for the teaching of English as a second language. Nonetheless, discursively, the finding supports the position that the country would be far better off if it had no NESB immigrants, and that the presence of these immigrants in the workforce is holding back Australia's development and represents a cost rather than a benefit. The victim of the phenomenon was 'the Australian economy' (Stromback & Preston 1991, p. viii). Although the report concedes that individuals also bear the cost (Stromback & Preston 1991, p. viii), again, migrants are overwhelmingly constructed as outsiders, who have no part in the Australian economy except to hold it back. This tone was taken up in press reports. 'Migrants with poor English skills cost the Australian economy \$763 million a year,' announced the *Daily Telegraph Mirror* in Sydney (Thew 1991). A plethora of surveys and experts were cited in the press in 1990–91, constructing NESB immigrants as a social cost to Australia, the economy, or industry, with headlines that announced 'Poor Literacy Costs Industry Millions' (Nance 1991) and 'Lack of English Costs Dearly' (Australian 5 February 1991).

The Cost of Low Levels of English Proficiency amongst Immigrants in the Workforce did a great deal to strengthen racist and economist discourses, particularly the narrative of NESB immigrants as a social cost. Through the implication that it was actually possible for their English language practices to become indistinguishable from that of native speakers, the report also constructed the blame for their unemployment or location in the economy within the narratives of NESB immigrants as lazy and unmotivated. Simply by 'measuring' the single factor that it did, the study made invisible other languages and creative

methods of communication in the workplace, the productiveness and contribution to the economy of NESB immigrants, and naturalised the narrative of NESB immigrants as last in the job queue.

The National Training Reform Agenda

The National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) was foreshadowed in the report *Australia Reconstructed* (Australian Council of Trade Unions 1987), which called for the Australian economy to become more internationally competitive and began the movement towards the introduction of award restructuring, multi-skilling, the removal of restrictive work practices and CBT. The NTRA itself comprised a number of policies, including the ALLP (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991), the *Working Nation* White Paper (Commonwealth of Australia 1994), and *Towards a Skilled Australia: a National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training* (Australian National Training Authority 1994), published by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), newly established under the NTRA to oversee the system. These documents will be examined below.

The NTRA created a national training system, including a series of ‘powerful interdependent regulatory and funding bureaucracies’ (Sanguinetti 1999 p. 52), including ANTA. The features of the national system were to apply to all training, both on and off the job. These features included the use of CBT, including assessment, across all training programs, based on national competency standards linked through the Australian Standards Framework (ASF); nationally recognised and portable qualifications through the National Qualifications Framework (NQF); new national arrangements for standardised curricula, the accreditation of courses, registration of providers, articulation and credit transfer, and recognition of prior learning and current competence (RPL/RCC); flexible pathways and delivery; and the introduction of a competitive training market. A compulsory training levy on companies was introduced in 1990 ‘to provide the capital base for the development of a private training market’ (Marginson 1993 p.

27). Companies with payrolls exceeding \$200,000 paid a 1.5 per cent levy¹⁸ unless they invested an equivalent amount in training their own employees (Commonwealth of Australia 1994; Yeatman 1992 p. 61).

The NTRA aimed at increasing participation in training by groups that had missed out in the past (Mawer & Field 1995). CBT was intended to 'democratise training, ending a system based on gaining 'time-serving' qualifications that entrenched privilege and discriminated against skilled but unqualified workers' (Sanguinetti 1999 p. 45). From this point of view, a number of writers commented that CBT was potentially of great benefit to disadvantaged workers (Mawer & Field 1995 p. 1; Niland & Champion 1990, p. 11; Pearce, Bertone & Stephens 1995 p. 28; Yeatman 1992 p. 57). Unions were optimistic about the capacity of competency based assessment to be objective and to deliver skills recognition and improved career paths and working conditions; it was 'hoped' that it would not disadvantage workers with lower levels of English language skills (Webber & Weller 2001 p. 143).

Working Nation and Towards a Skilled Australia represent two of the more representative later documents of the NTRA and were produced at the time of the first round of interviews for *Surviving Retrenchment*. They illustrate the way in which by 1994 the policy discourses about work, education and training had moved decisively away from pluralism and humanism and 'human capital with a heart' towards discourses that constructed 'deficit subjects' (Luke 1997) through 'reciprocal obligation' and coercive lifelong learning discourse. In these discourses, despite residual traces of equity and social justice narratives, unemployed NESB people are constructed as doubly 'other' and as responsible for their own difficulties.

Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (1991)

¹⁸ The levy was later suspended under Working Nation in 1994.

Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP), consisting of a White Paper (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991a) and a Companion Volume (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991b) was the response of government to its commitment to 'maintain and develop' the NPL (1991b, p. iii). It did so in the sense that it allocated significant new funding for programs in the areas of English language literacy, LOTEs, and services in LOTEs. However, it was in a discursive sense a step backward from the NPL. This was signalled from the outset by the fact that rather than echo the NPL's emphasis on 'languages', its title reassured the anti-multiculturalists and the 'English First' lobby by using the singular 'Australia's Language'.

The policy reflects the interplay between the dominant and contending discourses with which we are already familiar. The early sections of the companion volume refer to the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (NAMA) and the Government's Social Justice Strategy (SJS). The SJS centres on 'access and equity' through fairness in distribution of and access to social, personal and economic resources, 'equal rights in civil, legal and industrial affairs' and 'the opportunity for participation by everyone in personal development, community life and decision making' (1991b, p. 13).

However, these references, in Chapter 2 of the Companion Volume, are framed by a Chapter introduction (1991b, p. 12) that firmly situates them within an economic discourse, with references to competing in the 'global economy' and the foregrounding of references to people as 'human resources'. 'Australians' are castigated for having been 'insular and introspective'; however, the reason advanced for ceasing to be so is solely couched in terms of global competitiveness. This contextualising introduction again constructs a dichotomy between Australia, which is identified with insularity and introspection, and 'its human resources' – belonging to it but not a part of it – which are 'multicultural and pluralistic'. In other words, 'Australians' are being exhorted to take more notice of the 'others' who belong to them, in order to use multicultural 'them' as resources.

The chapter states that the NAMA 'recognises the limits to Australia's multiculturalism'; Australians (clearly to be read as Australians of culturally 'different' origins) must 'accept a commitment to Australia and the basic structures and principles of Australian society' (1991b, p. 13). On one hand, as we have seen (see Chapter 4), this formulation rests on colonialist discourse and constructs NESB immigrants as damaging democracy. On the other, in the chapter introduction, an economic version of these 'principles' has been succinctly stated: the 'goal' of Australia is simply 'to become a truly 'clever' country'. Thus the role of immigrants is to accept their subordinate position in the structure of society and to accept whatever use needs to be made of them as 'human resources' in order to achieve 'global competitiveness'. A later sub-section of the section on 'human resources' is devoted to the 'language contribution and needs of immigrants'. Only two implications of immigration are specified in the ALLP. The first of these is 'the potential contribution of language resources within the Australian community, which may be harnessed for national development'; this is stated to be a 'benefit to government, business and industry', but the ways in which this could be achieved (surely necessarily involving a policy of widespread and valued bilingualism) are not explained, with the languages represented in this 'pool of language and cultural resources' merely listed (1991b, pp. 16-17). The rest of the sub-section is devoted to the second implication: a description of the cost of immigration in terms of the need for ESL provision, again constructing NESB immigrants as a social cost. This sub-section finishes with the statement that without 'adequate English' the settlement of these people, and probably also their children, will be 'unsuccessful' (1991b, p. 19); again we are asked to assume that 'people who do not speak English must inevitably suffer in many ways throughout their lives' (Tollefson 1991, p. 178).

At its outset the ALLP states: 'Proficiency in our national language, Australian English, is obviously necessary for an individual to participate as fully as possible in Australian society' (1991a, p. iii). In this way the policy constructs and naturalises 'appropriate' English language and literacy as a necessary precondition for participation in 'education and training, the workforce and the

community' (1991b, p. 33). Freebody (1997) notes that this kind of statement constructs the speaking and writing of other community languages as 'commonsensically ... obvious obstacles to the shaping of one nation-state, as well as ... the productive public employability of its members (Freebody 1997, p. 14). Beazley points out that the linking of literacy to 'participation' (see also Department of Employment Education and Training 1991b, pp. 33, 35, 42) sets up an image of

... the socially responsible, highly achieving, economically productive 'literate' citizen counterpoised with the ineffective, dysfunctional, possibly even the delinquent 'other' who is breaching the social pact of a democratic (and therefore participant-based), literate society (Beazley 1997, p. 54).

In this way, the notion of English proficiency as a precondition for 'participation', commonly used in policy over the period, constructs NESB immigrants as damaging democracy.

In a welcome construction of English as situated and contextual, the policy refers to preparing children for 'the variety of literacies our society requires' (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991b, p. 42). However, this kind of phrasing gives the impression that if the children do not acquire these literacies and thus do not fulfil the 'requirements' of 'our society', they will be lesser members of it. In other words, it exists independent of them, and they must demonstrate themselves worthy of inclusion. This 'othering' is compounded by association of literacy with other forms of difference. For example, a section entitled 'needs', intended to identify sub-categories of people who are particularly in need of assistance with literacy, after focusing on the 'socio-economically disadvantaged', lists a series of 'others' without explanation: 'people with disabilities, isolated people, welfare recipients and prisoners' (1991b, p. 43). In contrast, a DEET-funded study carried out in the previous year 'made false the claim that many prisoners are illiterate or that their literacy abilities are to any great degree different from those found in the general adult community' (Black,

Rouse & Wickert 1990, p. 11). References such as this perpetuate the idea of a group of 'others' with multiple 'othernesses'.

The policy draws heavily on human capital discourse. In its emphasis on lifelong learning for all Australians, the policy sometimes constructs literacy as an issue for all, in the context of demand-side factors, as a result of '[r]apidly changing demands' (1991b, p. 36). However, in much of the policy, the literacy skills of individuals are constructed as deficient – 'poor' (1991b, p. 14), 'inadequate' (1991b, pp. 14, 39) and less than 'sufficient', (1991b, p. 22) in a way that divorces literacy capacities from any idea of varied uses and purposes. In this, the policy still reflects the idea that language and literacy are contentless, merely involving encoding and decoding, conducted in a vacuum (Gee 1996). Literacy itself is constructed as a unitary 'basic skill' that is possessed or not possessed to a measurable extent – 'low levels' or 'high levels'. From here, it is not far to the construction of a category of people who 'fail', and in fact the policy refers to the 'failure' rate' in the Wickert study (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991b, p. 38).

Echoing previous policies, including the NPL, the ALLP stresses the need to 'lessen the stigma against adults of English-speaking society who have reading and writing difficulties' (1991, p. 14). However, by its reference to the Australian Institute of Family Studies finding that 'poor literacy has a negative effect on individuals and society in areas such as citizenship, families, health, consumer rights, crime and social welfare and the labour force' (1991b, p. 21), the policy does to some extent construct individuals as the cause as well as the victims of society's problems in these areas (Beazley 1997, p. 56). Further, the policy refers to the Stromback and Preston study and others, which purport to demonstrate the cost to Australia of 'inadequate English language and literacy' (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991b, p. 21) – an invitation to blame, if not an explicit attribution of guilt.

In another counter to discourses of blame, the policy associates the origin of the 'deficiency' in adult literacy with missed opportunities for education in childhood (1991b, p. 39). At some points there is an attempt to replace the idea of

deficiency with the idea of 'potential' (1991b, p. 41), and the idea of the deficient individual with the idea of the individual who has 'not yet developed effective literacy' (1991b, p. 46). However, in line with neo-liberal individualist discourse, missed opportunities are presented as a failure of individuals and their families. The policy glosses quickly over the idea that any of the responsibility for the missed opportunities may be attributable to the education system. After observing that '[w]e can do more to improve literacy teaching in schools', (1991b, p. 38) the policy spends a whole page describing other causes of literacy difficulties, including speaking English poorly, negative attitudes towards school, 'socio-economic problems, poverty, health problems and the language and literacy deficiencies of parents' (Beazley 1997, p. 58). Indeed, the policy's contention that '[t]he lives of some children are so disrupted that the best schooling system and the best teachers cannot ensure their literacy progress' (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991b, p. 39) gives the impression that migrant children in previous times, for example, have had access to 'the best schooling system and the best teachers' for their needs, which is far from being the case.

In dealing with the position of people who speak and are literate in other languages, again the policy is equivocal. On some occasions the policy acknowledges that other languages and literacies may be of benefit to Australian society (see e.g. 1991b, p. 36). However, the policy firmly rejects the idea of systematic use of other languages in the workplace, even for the purposes of health and safety; in this context, it states that '[w]here possible, English should be used in the workplace' (1991b, p. 15). The term 'illiterate' is used very rarely in the document, and indeed it draws attention to the common misuse of the term. However, one use of this rejected term in the document is reserved for speakers of other languages, some of whom are described as literate in their first language and 'illiterate in English', others as 'illiterate' in both (1991b, p. 58). Other literacies are not described in the document, except for Aboriginal English and Australian Sign Language. As Beazley observes, this silence 'serves to push the already

literate known subject to the periphery of the document' (Beazley 1997, p. 61) and represents a decisive rejection of the discourse of linguistic pluralism.

In a new policy development, drawing on the neo-liberal narrative of competition as improving quality, the ALLP foreshadowed an increasing role for the private sector in ESL, adult literacy and LOTE teaching. In general, the report stated the view that competitive tendering in adult literacy and ESL 'has particular value for new, innovative or pilot initiatives and, potentially, as a means of improving the reach of the programs' (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991b p. 29). To some extent, the ALLP countered the 'common sense' narrative of 'competence in language and literacy is a basic or foundation skill onto which higher order communication skills are grafted' (Wickert & Baynham 1994 p. 180). The policy endorsed the concept of 'integrated' programs:

There is a danger that, without adequate provision for adult literacy and ESL, award restructuring may exclude workers who do not have sufficient oral or written English to undertake the training required by the new awards. It is critical that English language and literacy training be integrated into vocational training courses ... (1991b, p. 22)

However, it takes for granted that education and training cannot be provided systematically in languages other than English, downgrading bilingual approaches as 'imaginative' and 'short-term' and reinforcing the monolingualism of 'real' training.

In the short term, however, imaginative approaches to the use of a worker's primary language and other cross-cultural techniques, in conjunction with English as the medium of job skills training, would more quickly gain access to, maintain and enhance the skills of workers of non-English-speaking background (1991b, p. 22).

Restoring Full Employment and Working Nation (1993–94)

Prior to the White Paper of 1994, there was a great deal of discussion of ways of tackling unemployment, including direct job creation (Petersen 1999 p. 17). Proposals from economists and business leaders advocated radical deregulation of the labour market to create demand for labour. Despite its wish to be seen to be opening up the economy, the Labor government was neither convinced of the benefit of such deregulation nor willing to risk its relationship with the union movement. It opted instead to embark on a restructure of welfare and employment assistance (Considine 2001, p. 118), with case management and training as major strategies (Considine 2001, p. 127).

By the time of the introduction of Working Nation in 1994, many of the measures it announced were already in place. In February 1990 the Labor Government announced its Active Employment Strategy, which was to commence in July 1991. The terminology, embedded in the ‘principle of reciprocal obligation’, reflected the OECD’s concept of ‘active society’ (OECD 1990). The Newstart job and training subsidy scheme, introduced in 1989 for the LTU, was extended to all the unemployed in 1991. Activity Agreements and some case management were introduced (Webster 1997 p. 7). The Jobstart wage subsidy program was introduced soon after, reflecting the OECD emphasis on wage subsidy programs. Between 1991–92 and 1992–93 places in labour market programs were increased to 500,000, with a doubling of labour market assistance to job seekers (Petersen 1999; Webster 1997). From 1991, intensive individual interviews were conducted with unemployed people and sanctions for non-compliance increased (Eardley & Matheson 2000, p. 182). Benefit recipients were permitted to undertake voluntary and casual work and to study, but only on a part-time basis. Rules were ‘complex and ambiguous’ and decisions by case managers often highly subjective (Finn 1997 p. 56).

Working Nation was announced in May 1994. Its stated aim was to reduce LTU to 5 per cent by the year 2000 (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 2). The Job Compact guaranteed that job seekers who had been receiving benefits for 18

months or more would be given access to either jobs or training or both. Working Nation was to rely heavily on direct employment subsidies for the LTU, with some employment creation in the form of New Work Opportunities.

The 1993 Green Paper Restoring Full Employment (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993) and the 1994 White Paper Working Nation (Commonwealth of Australia 1994) dealt with macro- and micro-economic 'reform', industry development, training, labour market assistance and income support together. Both were structured around the reduction of unemployment, and both linked the solution emphatically to economic growth (Probert 1994b). Within the frame of international competitiveness, the Introduction to the White Paper drew strongly on the narrative of economic nationalism, with 'every Australian' exhorted to make a 'great national effort', to 'develop the strength to compete in the world', to 'resolve as one nation to make employment and growth our universal ambition' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 1).

An initial section in the Green Paper called 'In letters to the Committee' contains short quotations from unemployed people about the devastating personal effects of joblessness. On the first page there is a reference to full employment 'allow[ing] all Australians to exercise their right to a job, enjoy a decent income and to feel part of society' (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993, p. 1). Thus, discourses of rights/entitlement and social inclusion are drawn upon, but with the assumption that inclusion is mediated by employment the unemployed are discursively 'othered'. The Green Paper proceeded immediately to the statement that: 'Creating enough jobs is crucially dependent on achieving a high and sustained rate of economic growth' (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993, p. 1).

In this way, individual well-being, social inclusion, wealth distribution and the 'right' to employment are explicitly subordinated from the outset to the condition of national wealth creation. Working Nation announces that the social is economic; it describes 'policies for economic and social strength', and states that '[t]he two go hand in hand, and with them go more opportunity, more fairness, more confidence and faith in our country and ourselves, more cooperation and

more cohesion in communities and across the nation' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 1). In a strong statement of neo-liberal economism, a 'dynamic social democracy' is equated with 'a country which has realised its economic potential and the potential of its people' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 1). The reasons for tackling unemployment are constructed both in terms of economic efficiency, preventing inflationary pressures and reducing government outlays, and in terms of equity: 'Unemployment, particularly long term unemployment, is inherently unfair' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 2). However, with a strong focus on Lifelong Learning, the training market and the introduction of the Job Compact within the discourse of Reciprocal Obligation (RO), the White Paper constructs the skill and motivation deficiencies of individuals as responsible for inadequate economic, and therefore social, outcomes, including unemployment.

The last two quotations of 'In letters to the Committee' (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993, p xvi) relate to discrimination on the grounds of age and ethnicity, but these issues are taken no further in the report. Thus, by implication, the Green Paper itself constructs certain groups, among the NESB immigrants and older people, as last in the job queue, the discrimination against them to be tackled only when there is full employment – when demand reaches the end of the queue.

After the two initial chapters on macro- and micro-economic 'reform' and industry development, Chapter 3 of the Green Paper, A Skilled Workforce, sets the tone for the remainder of the policy, in which the skills and motivation of workers are placed squarely at the centre of the strategy for the achievement of full employment.

Both the Green and White Papers draw heavily on the narrative of vocationalism, stressing the need for education and training to be 'more responsive to the requirements' of the current and anticipated labour markets (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 89). The clients of the new competitive training market are 'both individuals and industry' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 98). The discourse of Lifelong Learning is introduced in the Green Paper. Under the heading 'Lifetime Training' (my emphasis), the Green Paper

places education and training for adults squarely in the context of economic needs, drawing on arguments about the ageing population, structural change in the economy, emerging skill shortages, new technology and award restructuring. (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993, p. 83). The White Paper make the normative aspects of Lifelong Learning quite clear with the statement that 'all workers *must* upgrade their skills and learn new ones throughout their working lives' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 89) (my italics).

However, other than through general references to the discourse of Lifelong Learning, Working Nation gave relatively little attention to the education and training of older adults. The Green Paper raised the issue of difficulties with formal education and training and made specific suggestions for overcoming these, including an expansion of the role of Adult and Continuing Education in reaching those who had little or negative previous experience of formal, classroom learning (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993, p. 87). Another area canvassed by the Green paper was training for part-time and casual workers, including women with childcare needs, to enable them to access Award Restructuring career paths (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993, p. 91). However, these were not taken up in Working Nation.

The White Paper chapter A Skilled Workforce includes one general reference to providing opportunities for 'disadvantaged groups' to access training (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 99). The major initiative announced, however, apart from 'remedial' courses for ELL (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 111) was continued funding for the WELL program, which was framed within a construction of NESB workers as inherently backward, inflexible and lacking in motivation and purpose: 'Workers with language and literacy difficulties often experience problems coping with change and, in particular, retraining. Many drift into long term unemployment' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 104).

Drawing for a moment on the discourse of the multilingual community of practice, Working Nation raises as a problem the failure of previous training to recognise the existing knowledge and previous experience of trainees

(Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 98). This was presumably a reference to the potential for RPL/RCC to enable such recognition of tacit knowledge and experience to occur. However, discursively, the policy uses the trainability narrative to counter such a possibility. In a manner typical of the discourse of the time, 'coping with change' is equated with credentialed formal training. Read in the context of colonialist binaries of civilisation vs primitiveness, modernity/progress vs stagnation/backwardness and culture vs nature, such narratives had a significant capacity to strengthen the construction of NESB workers as 'other', as essentially backward and as untrainable. Such a reading will result in the naturalisation of immigrant workers being 'left behind' by change, counteracting the force of the actual measures the policy proposes. Problems with retraining are constructed as due to the natural deficiencies of the workers themselves rather than to the monolingual and textual assumptions of retraining programs and their often inappropriate linguistic demands. English monolingualism and credentialism are naturalised, as is the exclusion of productive workers from the workplace.

Chapter 5, Reform of labour market assistance, introduces the discourse of 'reciprocal obligation' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 116). The discourse defines the 'problem' as one of individual and social well-being and equity on the one hand, and labour market efficiency and moral and motivational inadequacy on the other. Thus residual equity narratives are combined with a construction of the unemployed worker as lacking in motivation – a 'dole bludger' – and as too selective – a 'job snob'. The Job Compact combines these two discourses: it introduces an undertaking by the government to offer an employment place to the LTU, and of a provision for a form of sanction or 'breaching' – withdrawal of income support for a period – if that place is not accepted (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 116).

Working Nation proposed a number of changes in employment assistance, including extensive individualised case management. Primarily, the case manager negotiates the Job Compact with the worker. In addition to negotiating the Job Compact, case managers could provide assistance with impediments to

employment, such as health problems, as part of the individually negotiated package for each client (Considine 2001, p. 120). Contracted Case Management (CCM) was introduced by the Labor government against the backdrop of a fundamental tension between 'the conflicting goals of providing a service to employers and helping disadvantaged job seekers'. DEET's own, recently expressed, preference highlighted the employer as client, while external reviewers (and indeed the Green Paper itself) stressed the worker as client (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993, p. 138-42). The proposed solution to this perceived equity/efficiency conflict was 'a much more deliberate approach ... to linking programs with job matching' (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993, p. 139). Thus the focus shifted from unemployment benefit as entitlement to unemployment benefit as conditional on negotiating an agreement with a case manager.

The Job Compact and associated measures are claimed to address poverty, inequality and 'long term dependence on Government income support' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 142). However, the introduction gives several paragraphs to the labour market efficiency arguments about LTU (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p.107). Although the chapter avoids explicit rhetoric of blame, it justifies a new regime of coercion as a response to:

strong community concern that some unemployed people are making insufficient effort to find employment, whether through reduced motivation resulting from long term unemployment, reduced opportunities during the recession, or a perception that they would be better off on unemployment allowances (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 125).

The document suggests that income support for the unemployed is threatened with loss of public support if measures are not taken to ensure that the unemployed fulfil their 'obligations' by accepting low paid full-time, or part-time work (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 158). However, this is couched in rhetoric about fairness and benefit to the recipient; its aim is to 'enable unemployed people to get their fair share of available jobs' (Commonwealth of

Australia 1994, p. 158). The features of the Reciprocal Obligation/Mutual Obligation (RO/MO) narrative drawn on here are thus insufficient effort by individuals, public concern and the threat of withdrawal of taxation funding for welfare, and the justification of coercion and punishment in terms of fairness and benefit to unemployed people, in a co-option of the discourses of fairness and individual well-being. Although the rhetoric is more muted, these features very much resemble those of the later Coalition Mutual Obligation narrative.

Marketisation, competition and choice

There was no explicit proposal to introduce competition into the delivery of employment services at the Green Paper stage; non-government agencies were seen as complementing the CES (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993, p. 139). However, by the time of the White Paper a year later, the calls of the Hilmer Report (1993) for the introduction of competition into public service delivery had been taken up in the form of a competition model for extending case management (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000), justified by the narrative of competition as improving quality (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 127). It was argued that the opening up of the service to private and community contractors would facilitate innovation and the move away from the 'one size fits all' standardised and centralised service (Robinson 1995 cited in Considine (2001) p. 119). However, Considine cites evidence for the view that the prime movers for the introduction of competition into the system were senior bureaucrats, and the primary motivation was to put pressure on public servants in the employment assistance area; thus the transformation of the system was 'less to do with the cure for unemployment than with the restructure of the public service in accord with the new enterprise deal' (Considine 2001 pp. 128).

However, at this initial stage the competition was limited, based on quality rather than price, and the CES case management section (Employment Assistance Australia, EAA) still in the public sector (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 4). All LTU job seekers were to be case-managed. Case management would be

shared between EAA, contracted community sector and private agencies, all paid on a fee-for-success basis, and the resulting 'quasi-market' would be regulated by the Employment Services Regulatory Authority (ESRA). The CES would classify each client according to their 'degree of difficulty' after 12 months unemployment. Job seekers would choose from among the available agencies and negotiate a service contract. Thus job seekers were constructed as clients and client choice between competing agencies as a major factor in quality.

The payment to the contracted case manager would depend on the client's classification, and be composed of an up-front payment and two further payments at the commencement of work or training and after 13 weeks of either. The inclusion of training as a payable outcome was highly significant, because it signalled a high priority for training while at the same time providing a financial incentive for job seekers to be placed in training programs without adequate consideration of their relevance and likely outcomes, as they had been in the years leading up to Working Nation (Pearce 1995; Finn 1997, p. 3; Commonwealth of Australia 1996).

Towards a Skilled Australia (1994)

Published in the same year as Working Nation, ANTA's 'National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training' (Australian National Training Authority 1994) documents the agreed approach to VET between the Commonwealth, States and Territories that came into force in 1994. It sets the scene for the development of the competitive training market and illustrates the major features of narratives about the 'new workplace', lifelong learning and NESB workers.

The document is framed in an ambivalent construction of globalisation and of Asia, familiar from the NAMA five years earlier. In a brief introductory section (Australian National Training Authority 1994, p. 2), the position of VET is placed within a context of rapid change, constructed as globalisation. In two sentences, through the narrative of international competitiveness, 'the world' is reduced to a

place of threatening economic competition. Globalisation is constructed as a threat; our 'high standard of living' will be damaged if we do not 'perform'. Economism and international competitiveness are the discourses framing the document.

In an early contextualising section, we are told that our future is 'inextricably linked' to Asia, which is also our main source of competition (Australian National Training Authority 1994, p. 2). Thus Asia is constructed as the source of potential damage to our standard of living; its economies are 'dynamic' and expanding, and its education and training initiatives are constructed as responsible for this. This construction of Asia is disturbing, with the new essentialist image of the rich, clever Asian economy serving as a focus for the mobilisation of Australian anxiety (Rizvi 1996, p. 183-6) (see Chapter 4). This section draws on the Asian Tiger narrative of the new Australian racism in a way that reinforces the coercive message of the policy: Australians must up-skill on pain of being impoverished by Asia, which is constructed as a threat.

The economic nationalism of Working Nation is again the context of the strategy. Workers are constructed as belonging to the 'nation' (Australian National Training Authority 1994, p. 2), whose main purpose and rationale is economic competition with other nations, in the context of international competitiveness. 'Australia' as a nation is constructed as closely connected with 'Australian enterprises'; these are being 'challenged' to improve their quality, performance and responsiveness, all of which the document constructs as largely residing in the skills of workers. The policy constructs workforce formally acquired 'skill' as central to international competitiveness. The enhancement of workforce skills, we are informed, improves productivity and quality, increases flexibility and enables workers to adapt to change (Australian National Training Authority 1994, p. 2). Thus inadequate skills are constructed as responsible for deficiencies in productivity and quality. Skill is associated with flexibility and adaptability. Given the construction of skill as credential later in the document, those workers who do not have proof of skill in the form of a credential are thus constructed as unable to adapt to change – the narrative of trainability. Thus the

document constructs education and training in a coercive context, in which workers who do not retrain in order to compete are constructed as also potentially damaging the Australian standard of living. However, the coercion is also constructed as impersonal, with agency obscured by such phrases as 'the demands imposed by change' (1994, p. 2); 'change' is inevitable and uncontrollable. This is the classic narrative of globalisation.

As with *Working Nation*, the strategy's explicit provisions are undermined by the narratives that it naturalises. On one hand, training at operative level for those with low or no qualifications is given significant attention in the section entitled *Improved Accessibility*. VET providers are exhorted to place a high priority on such training. The authors expect that measures to 'free up' VET, in particular, flexible delivery, will encourage this (Australian National Training Authority 1994, p. 16). Given the textual nature of flexible delivery materials, this is probably optimistic. There is explicit support for the incorporation of 'integrated language, literacy and numeracy competencies' within VET programs (see also p. 23), and for programs catering for 'cultural and gender diversity'.

On the other hand, the strategy draws on the narrative of 'competence in language and literacy [as] a basic or foundation skill onto which higher order communication skills are grafted' (Wickert & Baynham 1994 p. 180) with the recommendation of 'discrete English language, literacy and numeracy training' is recommended for 'those with limited competencies' (Australian National Training Authority 1994, p. 19). As in *Working Nation*, the narratives of vocationalism and lifelong learning acquire normative force as we are told that workers 'must' engage in training in 'generic skills or in skills which will be required in industries which have predicted employment growth' (1994, p. 17). The document informs us that 'technical skills are no longer sufficient'; instead, generic skills such as communication and a 'broader knowledge base' will be needed (1994, p. 2). Thus the document draws on the narrative of textualisation, in which knowledge is disembodied and resides in text, and linguistic practices are privileged over experience and the ability to carry out a practical task. It implies that English (defined in the least useful way as 'communication') will be necessary for

employability. Through its emphasis on change and training, the document constructs the experience, skills and knowledge of existing workers as irrelevant. RPL is only mentioned for women (1994, p. 21); it is not mentioned in the section on operative level training.

Culturally different NESB people are constructed as an even greater liability due to the additional 'cultural' barriers they experience to successful participation in VET programs. No further exploration is provided of these 'cultural barriers', which will be addressed, it is announced, through 'training providers to client diversity'. As in all these documents, NESB immigrants are constructed as a burden, as unable to contribute without extensive and expensive 'extra' assistance, and their enormous contribution to industry in this country is made invisible. There is no mention in the document of languages other than English as a positive value, or of other forms of cultural capital.

Through its construction of the post-Fordist 'new workplace' as the norm (1994, p. 2), it constructs qualities other than the usual generic skills of teamwork, quality assurance, problem-solving and IT, including 'reliability, stoicism and loyalty' (Hamilton 2003, p. 162) as obsolete. The 'new workplace' is associated with benefits for workers, but it is not presented in terms of employment security and decent remuneration, only in terms of 'better career path opportunities and more satisfying work', which are generally associated with middle-class employment. However, the writers of this document seem unconvinced even of this, saying only that workers will 'look for' these compensations (Australian National Training Authority 1994, p. 2).

The document briefly acknowledges and then dismisses informal and tacit learning in the workplace, even though qualifications are only 'one significant measure' of skills (1994, p. 16). Drawing on the narrative of credentialism, it goes on to construct formal qualifications as the only indicator of competitiveness for workers, even while acknowledging that this will advantage younger workers entering the labour market (1994, p. 16). The strategy draws on the HC narrative of lifelong learning: in particular, the necessary skills include those required 'to

learn and keep learning, to adapt constantly, and to apply learning to new situations' (1994, p. 2).

The introductory section finishes with a naturalisation of unequal competition between older and younger workers and the displacement of established older workers by 'better-qualified young starters' (1994, p. 2). The report acknowledges that 'young people have been the main beneficiaries of training reform in the 1990s' (1994, p. 17). The photographs included in the liftout leaflet all represent students under 40 years old.

The models of training 'reform' lauded in the document are the fundamental ones of the NTRA: CBT, portable, national qualifications, and providers who 'co-operate and compete' within a training market (1994, p. 3). More authority will be devolved to industry in developing competency standards (1994, p. 9). The document later refers to 'a new spirit of cooperation'; however, this is between providers and 'clients', who are as yet undefined (1994, p. 7). Again we have the narrative of competition as improving quality; competition is claimed to be 'universally recognised as the most effective way to improve services, contain or reduce costs and focus an organisation's efforts away from its own preoccupations towards those of its customers' (1994, p. 7).

Who are the 'clients' of VET, according to the document? Although it refers throughout to 'consumers' and 'clients', the document constructs workers and potential workers as having little legitimate agency or power as consumers; rather, industry and the state are constructed as agents and de facto clients. In the section Greater Responsiveness, choice in the new training market is explicitly constructed as exercised by enterprises, with the parenthetic proviso 'in consultation with employees' (1994, p. 7).

Thus the discourse of neo-classical economics in terms of choice and consumer demand as a driver is used to mobilise support for the strategy (see e.g. 1994, p. 7), while constructing the consumer not as the individual person but as the state and industry, whose interests are constructed as virtually identical. In the training market, beyond basic consumer protection, 'the market' is to be allowed to 'sort out the players' with regard to quality (Selby Smith 1995, p. 14). Thus the

‘market’ is controlled by industry and the state, the employer as client, and the individual worker or potential worker is constructed more as a product than a consumer. In the same section, the heading ‘choice and diversity’ constructs ‘diversity’ as provided by this ‘choice’ between public and private providers. I would argue that this is an example of the co-option of discourses of personal and individual choice and accountability by neo-liberal discourses.

This section has examined policy documents and reports relating to employment, education and training, English language and literacy, race and ethnicity and the state, over the decade beginning in the mid 1980s. It documents the way in which discourses of equity, social justice and personal empowerment, although still present in policy, were overpowered and co-opted by the neo-liberal discourses of performativity and economism. In turn, these neo-liberal discourses created the space for the strengthening of certain discourses of racism, which were present in Australian society throughout its development but were particularly strong in the early 1980s and enjoying a resurgence in the mid-1990s with the growth of One Nation. The argument that tariff reduction, enterprise bargaining and award restructuring could act as pressures against labour market discrimination, in the sense that they would incentivise the rewarding of skill, merit and productivity regardless of demographic and other characteristics (Niland & Champion 1990, p. 9) was a spectacular failure. While the protective measures of the initial agreement failed, the aspects of the Accord which promoted workplace reform – multi-skilling, team work, career paths and particularly training – and which seemed to offer a great deal to lower-paid workers, ‘hastened the trend towards replacing migrant labour with Australian born labour’ (Bertone 2000b p. 126; see also Castles et al. 1988). Ironically, a national curriculum based on work came to dominate ELL teaching, in circumstances where many of its students were likely to spend large parts of their adult lives in unemployment (Wickert & Baynham 1994 p. 163).

Policy discourses under the Liberal-National Coalition 1996–2002

In her Budget Statement of August 1996, *Reforming Employment Assistance – Helping Australians Into Real Jobs* (Commonwealth of Australia 1996), the newly elected Liberal Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Amanda Vanstone, reiterated the goal of full employment. As had been done in *Working Nation*, she constructed it firmly within a context of economic growth.

From the outset, however, economic growth was associated with radical labour market ‘reform’, which would help small business to create jobs. The statement drew heavily on the discourse of performativity, dismissing the Labor government’s labour market programs as ‘costly, ineffective and complex’ and service delivery arrangements as ‘cumbersome and inefficient’. However, the discursive continuities with Labor’s program are evident, with the exception of the now largely absent appeal to equity.

Reforming Employment Assistance – Helping Australians Into Real Jobs (1996)

As was done in *Working Nation*, policy to assist the LTU was justified in the new policy in terms of economic efficiency. It will ‘lead to increased competition in the labour market, reduce wage pressures and enable the economy to grow faster at a lower inflation rate’. It is also constructed in terms of an extremely weak version of fairness/equity discourse, with several references to reducing the ‘disproportionate burden of unemployment on [the LTU]’. Equity is rarely referred to after the introduction to the statement, with the word ‘fair’ used more in the context of competition, notably in relation to making sure that the public sector does not have an unfair advantage in the new competitive employment assistance market. There is also a hint at a narrative of social well-being, with a reference to ‘social cohesion’, but this is soon placed in the context of neo-

conservative discourse about society: the new arrangements are ‘responsible – socially as well as fiscally’.

In a counter to equity discourse regarding groups of people in society, the statement draws on a neo-liberal discourse of individualism, constructing the ‘individual’ as central, with statements like ‘Under Working Nation there was no such thing as an individual, just targets’. In the justification for the changes, the statement again stresses individual well-being: ‘effective labour market assistance contributes directly to the well-being and quality of life of individual Australians’.

The statement relies on a binary construction of programs and jobs as ‘false’ and ‘real’ in a way that continues to imply that the ‘real’ jobs are ‘out there’. The use of words like ‘genuine’ and ‘real’ also, ironically, emphasises the continuity of Coalition discourse with that of Working Nation, with the implication that it is only the methods that will be more effective. ‘The primary objective of the Government’s reforms is to ensure that labour market assistance has a clear focus on real job outcomes and genuinely makes a difference to those assisted.’

The individual is constructed as a client/consumer in the context of competition and choice, flexibility and performativity. ‘Job seekers will have greater choice as to who will help them; providers will have maximum flexibility as to how they organise and deliver their assistance; and taxpayers will have an assurance that public funds are being spent to best possible effect.’ Coalition arrangements will be ‘client-driven, not programme-driven’. To this end, a ‘fully competitive market for employment placement services’ will be introduced, with an emphasis on flexibility and eliminating bureaucracy. ‘Direct job creation programmes’ including JobSkills, the Landcare and Environment Action Program and the New Work Opportunities program are chosen for particular criticism and abolished.

Documents such as Reforming Employment Assistance seem to be designed to present a small target for analysis, with very limited rationales presented with them, particularly in relation to the supposed ‘fairness’ of the concept of MO (Moss 2001, p. 2). Much of the construction of the Coalition government strategy of MO has been effected in the media.

Mutual obligation (MO)

The Coalition discourse of mutual obligation includes the same elements as the Labor Reciprocal Obligation discourse. There appears to be a difference of degree in the sense that blame is more explicitly attributed to the unemployed in the way Coalition spokespeople draw on this discourse, particularly in more populist contexts. The explicit focus on the unemployed as ‘bludgers’, ‘job snobs’, and ‘double dippers’ in the justification of withdrawal of benefits characterises Coalition versions of this discourse. Jocelyn Newman, Minister for Social Security, set the scene in 1996 with her comment that ‘Australians [are] sick and tired of being taken for mugs by dole bludgers’ (*Herald-Sun*, 9th March 1996; cited in Bessant 2000, p. 20).

The young unemployed, the initial targets of Coalition MO policies requiring people to ‘work for the dole’, are routinely constructed as choosing not to be members of the community through the justification of MO as designed to ‘encourage their involvement with the community which supports them’ (Kemp 1998a). The ‘community’ – ‘Australians’ in Jocelyn Newman’s terms – is constructed as distrustful of young people and supportive of the requirement that they prioritise competing in the labour market over all other concerns: ‘The community, in return for their financial support, deserves the reassurance that young people are not only looking for work but are seeking actively to improve their job prospects and competitiveness in the labour market’ (Kemp 1998b). In Peter Freebody’s words, statements like this ‘reflect and re-enact the moral organisation of a society’, setting up a fundamental ‘outsiding’ (ie othering) distinction between ‘the community’ and ‘young unemployed people’ (Freebody 1997, p. 11).

Despite its compulsory nature, entailing the assumption that the unemployed do not want to work, MO is paternalistically constructed (Bessant 2000) as benefiting those compelled: ‘Participation in mutual obligation activities will help many young people to escape the cycle of unemployment by participating in an

activity which will increase their long-term job prospects and employability' (Kemp 1998b).

In a media release of 20 May 2002 entitled 'Brough to Target "Cruising" Dole Recipients' (Brough 2002), Employment Services Minister Mal Brough claimed that 'as many as one in six 'job seekers' were not really seeking jobs at all'. He wrote:

The Howard Government is set to disrupt the lifestyle of 'cruising' dole recipients, who enjoy being unemployed and have no intention of seeking work ... 'These people ... feel that work would have a negative impact on their quality of life and free time ... They give genuine job seekers a bad name and deserve to be labelled dole bludgers' [Mr Brough said].

Brough described such people as 'really upset[ting] the Australian people' and implied that research that did not confirm the existence of many such people – 'a substantial body of non-performers' – was not 'genuine'.

Of the two examples attached to the release, one was 'Jarrod', a tertiary educated 34-year-old writer and musician who, strangely, did apply for jobs and attend interviews. His main fault appeared to be that he did so 'selectively' – in other words, he is a 'job snob' – and that he resisted construction as a failure due to his unemployment. According to Brough, 'Jarrod' 'does not mind if he does not get a job. He is confident and self-assured, and does not feel that he needs a job for self-esteem, or that employment equates with happiness'. The young man is quoted as feeling that he 'contribute[s] in lots of other positive ways'. Brough includes material indicating that 'Jarrod' is also quite critical of the Job Network, comparing its relatively depersonalised services with the pro-active services of professional recruitment agencies. Thus 'Jarrod' is constructed as drawing on post-industrial discourses but discredited as elitist for this and for his criticism of the Coalition government services. A major purpose of this portrayal appears to be a discursive onslaught on post-industrial discourse as instantiated in the attitudes of people who do not 'need a job for self-esteem' and feel they can 'contribute' in ways other than paid work.

The second example in the media release is clearly constructed as a 'double dipper', 'supplement[ing] his dole payments with under-the-table casual work'. This is a young man who 'had a difficult childhood' and has 'issues with drugs and authority'; thus he is constructed as non-compliant and also as 'other' through discourses about drug use and references to skateboarding and appearance. Both instances are cited as examples of a category called Cruisers, who are defined as not wanting to work in a full-time or permanent job and as 'not looking for work'. However, in fact, both do look for work. The account of the findings of the DEWR research project cited in this media release is contradictory and illogical; its primary purpose appears to be a discursive one, to construct as 'other' a 'substantial' group of welfare recipients in order to justify the withdrawal of benefits.

The construction of the 'other' also constructs the group that are not 'other' – the 'normal' adult citizen. These two examples suggest that this group consists of those who work and those who are permanently anxious about not working. In line with other Coalition 'battler' discourses, they are also those for whom being a writer is 'other', a form of elitist self-indulgence. David Kemp observed in the House of Representatives debate in October 1997 that: 'A lot of people in this community are working very hard to provide support for unemployed people to assist them in gaining worthwhile work experience. Families are giving up money to do that ...' (cited in Macintyre 1999, p. 106)

The term 'families' in the discourse of the Coalition refers to good, deserving mainstream people who work hard and are doing it tough. Thus this narrative is tapping into and perpetuating the purported resentment felt by 'ordinary Australians' at the 'burden' constituted by the unemployed, another instance of discursive continuity with Working Nation. The unemployed are constructed by this narrative as not 'families' – in other words, they are the young unemployed who are constructed as not deserving, as passive, lazy, lacking skills and work ethic, as well as self-discipline (Bessant 2000, p. 26).

The focus on the young unemployed has been a feature of MO discourse and the 'othering' of this age group has underpinned it. Much of the popular support

for MO and WfD has rested on the youth focus of the Coalition policies (Eardley, Saunders & Evans 2000). This necessitates a good deal of discursive work to provide a rationale for extending MO to older age groups. It is more difficult to construct older people, many of whom have extensive experience of employment, in the same terms as unemployed youth. At least some of the recent interest in narratives about an ageing workforce and the need for retaining older people's skills in the workforce (Doughney 2003; Kinnear 2002; Virgona et al. 2003; Wooden et al. 2001) may create the discursive conditions for such a move. However, the danger is that the normative force of this new narrative about valuing older people will merely obscure the continuing discrimination against them, and by creating the impression that attitudes have changed, enable their unemployment to be constructed as their own fault, furthering the MO discourse.

Another aspect of the discursive work required to bring mature-aged workers into the ambit of MO is a focus on language and literacy. The discursive link between 'skill', defined as 'basic literacy and numeracy', and deprivation of community support is strengthened in the late 1990s in Coalition government justifications of compulsory training for young unemployed people:

Unemployed young people who do not have basic literacy and numeracy skills will be required to undertake testing and appropriate training to remedy their skill deficiencies. This will be a condition of these young people continuing to receive their full unemployment benefits (Kemp 1999).

Such statements continue the discursive work of constructing lack of literacy 'skills' in itself as 'wilful'. In his Federation speech of January 1999, the Prime Minister announced that young people would lose their right to full unemployment payments if they 'refused' to learn how to read and write.

The verb 'refusing' implies that young people don't want to learn, that it is their obstinacy that keeps them from improving. If, however, their refusal is tied to an economic imperative – if the government cuts their dole – then presumably they can be forced to learn and this, in turn, will solve the problem of unemployment (Kamler 1999, p. 66). Lack of skill is thus punishable by the

withdrawal of benefits (Kemp). These measures and statements are an extreme version of the HC narrative of skills and attributes as ‘within the individual’s control or readily acquired’ (Bertone 2000a p. 55). In this narrative, these factors are available to any individual who decides to acquire them. More than ever, this punitive rhetoric also assumes a certain ‘static notion of literacy’. Literacy is, in Stuckey’s words,

... stuff, a body of information ... acquired via command and demand. It works in channels, input-output ... The transfer is essentially passive ... therefore, asking for and receiving knowledge are different sides of the same coin: a person who wants knowledge – who wants to work – is a person who gets it (Stuckey 1991, p. 16-17)

Justification for compulsory involvement in literacy activities typically draws on HC discourse, particularly the narratives of the literacy crisis and of the ‘new workplace’, and fails to engage with the issue of the effects of compulsion on learning. For example, a 1999 speech by Trish Worth, Parliamentary Secretary to the minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, cited the OECD to argue that the benefits of literacy include higher work productivity, higher average incomes and government revenues, better quality of life and reduced poverty, lower unemployment, lower crime, lower levels of public assistance and improved health and child rearing. She cited a ‘twenty per cent increase in productivity’ by a company that began workplace training under the WELL program and drew directly on the narrative of English as a global language in a very debatable claim as to cause and effect: ‘... in countries that have a high mean level of literacy there are small differences in performance between social groups. This means that improving numeracy and literacy acts as a restraint on the gap between the rich and poor’ (Worth 1999). Language and literacy are thus reduced to a mere question of compliance.

Fundamental to an understanding of the discourses of the Liberal-National Coalition has been the divergence between policy documents and public and media statements. In the former, discourses are muted and the discourse of MO

coopts narratives of community health and social well-being. In public and media statements the punitive and coercive narratives of MO and the construction of the insider/outsider divide are clearly seen. By the time of the McClure Report the two forms of the discourse had diverged radically.

Australians Working Together (AWT)

At the time of the second round of interviews, the new programs under AWT were about to come into force (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2003). After an initial period when MO was limited to younger people, it was gradually extended to higher age groups until, in 2003, AWT brought those over 50 into the MO system through the discontinuation of the Mature Age Allowance (MAA) and Parenting Payment (PP) systems (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2003). Under the MAA, unemployed people over the age of 60 did not have to look for work (Raper 1999, p. 378). Under AWT, they must provide evidence of two contacts per fortnight (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2003).

Thus, the coercive material practices of the discourse of Social Contractualism are gradually increasing their reach. The substitution of MAA and PP with Newstart in 2003 was justified in terms of making the system 'simpler' (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2003). The construction of MO in relation to older workers also unremittingly reiterates the benefits for those compelled, highlighting the notion of 'contribution' in a way calculated to find an echo in the sense of many older unemployed that their contribution has been rejected. The AWT website profits from an interdiscursivity with community health narratives that conveniently use the term 'active', albeit with a different meaning: 'The changes help mature age people to *maintain an active lifestyle* and enable them to contribute more to the workplace and the community' (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2003; my italics).

However, the Easy English version of AWT puts things more starkly, explicitly constructing the ‘problem’ addressed by AWT as dependence on welfare: ‘Why has [AWT] been introduced? Too many working-age Australians rely on government payments ... 60 per cent of these people do not have to look for a job or work for their communities in any way’ (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2003).

Conclusion

The policy context since the late 1980s has reflected a significant discursive shift. Over this period, the narratives of neo-liberal meta-discourse have become more dominant in policy as text. Many of the threads discussed in chapters 3 and 4 have been identified in this chapter in the policies articulated by successive governments. The next chapter will focus on the enactment of these policy discourses in policy implementation in practice.

Chapter 6

Policy discourses in implementation

Introduction

In Chapter 5 I traced the ways in which dominant and contending discourses were instantiated in selected policy texts from 1987 to the time of the second round of interviews for this study in 1992, and in policy documents and public statements after 1996. As I have stressed in Chapter 2, conceptualising policy as discourse involves consideration of policy implementation processes and outcomes not as separate from policy itself but as an integral part of it. For this reason, this chapter will examine policy processes and outcomes related to the policy texts that were analysed in the previous chapter.

Chapter 6 will be in two parts. The first is a brief overview of policy implementation processes and outcomes of Working Nation and the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) as they relate to NESB workers. The second is an examination of the discourses instantiated in the post-1996 employment assistance arrangements. This examination consists of a brief overview of practice followed by an analysis of interview data from employment assistance and English language and literacy (ELL) providers interviewed in 2002. The way in which the ‘policy actors’ with whom NESB jobseekers come into contact engage with dominant and contending discourses forms a part of policy as discourse. These patterns of engagement are explored in the interviews. Further, this engagement informs the ‘material practices’ that also form part of policy discourses. When read together with the policy documents, the interviews with

providers provide important additional insight into the actual material practices associated with dominant and contending discourses.

Further illustrative material from these interviews is provided in Appendix 2, and additional information regarding the post-1996 employment assistance system is in the Glossary.

Material practices under Labor 1987-1996: Working Nation and the NTRA

Working Nation

Working Nation introduced sanctions against jobseekers in the name of the detection and coercion of ‘bludgers’, ‘job snobs’ and ‘double dippers’ within RO/MO discourse. However, those ‘breached’ were those with language and literacy difficulties and least systems knowledge, and a high proportion was of NESB people (Finn 1997, p. 42). The system also placed pressure on the unemployed to take up whatever placements were offered, regardless of suitability (Finn 1997 p. 4), legitimated by the ‘job snobs’ narrative. Performativity pressures increased incentives for the removal of hard-to place jobseekers from case management (Considine 2001 p. 130), and led to thousands of short-term training programs, often not articulated with the vocational certification process, that would count as outcomes for contractors and therefore attract a payment (Commonwealth of Australia 1996; Considine 2001 p. 122; Finn 1997 p. 2-3). Rather than generating innovation as intended, competition, marketisation and performativity intensified the pressures against quality assistance for NESB people.

The employment subsidies offered under Working Nation for the very LTU proved insufficient to overcome employers’ negative attitudes to this group (Finn 1997, p.4). The CES continued to suffer from under-resourcing and service was often poor (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993; Finn 1997 p. 35). In

1995, the government announced alterations that addressed some of the major problems (Finn 1997 p. 3-4). However, Labor lost office in 1996. Evaluations of the effectiveness of Working Nation programs at the time were 'equivocal' (Considine 2001 p. 135). The Coalition government argued that the Working Nation structure was an expensive failure, but later evidence indicates that despite some difficulties, these programs may have been more effective than originally claimed (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000, p. 5). LTU fell by 20 per cent in the first 18 months of Working Nation (Finn 1997, p. 1).

From the early 1990s to 1996, the Special Intervention Program (SIP) was the main vehicle for the provision of English language/literacy training for unemployed people, through the CES. It was generously funded, reaching \$122.3 million in 1993-4 (Birrell & Hawthorne 1997, p. 82), but inadequate in certain respects. Though the CES used English language professionals to assess barriers to employment faced by individual jobseekers with low English language/literacy proficiency to determine eligibility for SIP programs, these assessments were at the discretion of a CES officer with no specific linguistic expertise (Pearce, Bertone & Stephens 1995 p. 100). ELL courses were often generalist rather than embedded within a vocational context (Rich, Murphy & O'Brien 1996, p. 25) and thus a form of 'sidetracking' (Bertone 1995, p. 71). Full-time assistance was limited to 52 weeks in each two-year period of unemployment (Department of Employment Education and Training 1994, p. 8), inadequate for many learners. Although a proportion of jobseekers were referred to 'integrated' programs or vocational programs when they had received sufficient language/literacy training, there were acknowledged gaps due to 'insufficient provision' (Rich, Murphy & O'Brien 1996 p. 33). CES staff appeared to construct language learning in terms of performativity, as a kind of production process where lack of progress by students indicated poor quality control procedures or lack of effort on the part of the production team – the teaching staff (Rich, Murphy & O'Brien 1996 p. 33).

The NTRA

The egalitarian aspects of the NTRA's vision of training reform were not accepted by employers, nor by the conservative political parties (Marginson 1993 p. 166). Transformation of training outstripped workplace reform from the beginning (Marginson 1993, p. 166) and only the very large companies moved to new work arrangements which reflected post-Fordist theory (Stephens & Bertone 1995, p. 18). Instead, the performativity of neo-liberal discourse legitimated widespread cost-cutting measures, including work intensification and increased use of outworkers, which threatened migrant workers' jobs and working conditions (Bertone 2000b p. 126).

The introduction of the competitive training market under the NTRA was a major impediment to access and equity (Mawer & Field 1995). Private providers were not bound by the access and equity policies of the public sector (Georgopoulos 1994 p. 65). In the workplace, the training levy, while successful in inducing employers to provide training (Hall, Buchanan & Considine 2002, p. 4), also encouraged a form of 'creaming' whereby the most needy workers were often not selected for training. Competition and privatisation impeded the development of partnerships between industry and training providers, and between different types of training providers, impeding the development of 'integrated programs' (Mawer & Field 1995 p. 4), and undermined the longstanding collaboration between providers, who now competed for resources and student numbers (Sanguinetti 1999 p. 53). In the non-workplace training arena, funds were shifted around at short intervals between an increasing number of tenderers (Sanguinetti 1999 p. 54). As a result, information became quickly outdated and student confusion increased. For teachers they led to work intensification and continued downgrading of conditions of employment due to downward cost pressures and funding shifts, resulting in the deprofessionalisation and marginalisation of teaching (Sanguinetti 1999 p. 53).

The monolingualism of the NTRA was ensured from the outset by explicit government commitments. John Dawkins, then Minister for Education,

Employment and Training in the Hawke government, stated in 1990: 'The Australian workforce may be multicultural but it is monolingual ... one point needs to be made with crystal clarity: those new training opportunities will be available only in English' (cited in Courtenay 1994, p. 40). Monolingualism meant that English language skill became a prerequisite for even basic level workplace training. Bilingual and bicultural skills were rarely formally included in competency standards (Mawer & Field 1995 p. 22). Competency-based standards, training and testing frequently involved inflated English language requirements (Mawer & Field 1995, pp. 5, 32). Testing was often inappropriately designed, by people who knew little about language, and in some cases led to the dismissal of workers (Adult Migrant Education Services 1994, p. 14; Georgopoulos 1994, pp. 64-5; Mawer & Field 1995, p. 25). Because of the emphasis on testing through written and spoken communication, linguistic performance is privileged over actual capabilities and thus NESB people appear not to be competent (Collins 1996b, p. 92). In addition, CBT sometimes involved culturally specific items and 'ethnic bias' (Georgopoulos 1994, p. 65).

Many employers continued to see the costly business of English language and literacy training as 'someone else's responsibility' (Mawer & Field 1995, p. 1). Despite a widespread recognition of the need for such training, there was no agreement on the extent of the need or on responsibility for the costs, and funding was not adequate to cover demand (Mawer & Field 1995, p. 25). English language skills of trainees were wrongly blamed for poor teaching or the power relationships in the company (Mawer & Field 1995, p. 33).

One of the elements of the NTRA that offered most to those with informally or overseas acquired skills was Recognition of Prior Learning and Recognition of Current Competence (RPL/RCC) (Bertone 1995, p. 69; Mawer & Field 1995, p. 53). However, even by 1995, little progress had been made in the developing of processes for RPL/RCC, or where processes existed, in implementation at workplace level (Bertone 1995, p. 21). Similarly, even though progress was being made with the introduction of 'integrated programs' whereby English and vocational training are provided together to avoid NESB workers being

‘sidetracked’ into marginal or pre-vocational courses (Wickert 1995 p. 37), such programs were far from the norm even by 1994 (Bertone 1995, p. 71; Courtenay 1994, p. 42). Thus through the determined monolingualism of the Agenda, and the failure to prioritise integrated programs, racist and neo-liberal narratives about English prevailed. High level English was constructed as a prerequisite for training, and those who did not have it were constructed as ‘untrainable’.

The ‘affirmative action’ required to ensure that those disadvantaged in respect of the opportunities offered by the new arrangements (Yeatman 1992 p. 49) did not eventuate. In spite of the many counter-discursive voices attempting to draw attention to the pitfalls, including such organizations as the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA), issues relating to language and literacy were constructed as peripheral and as a costly extra. Trade unions were complicit with politicians and industry in such constructions (Mawer & Field 1995, pp. 22-3): ‘We haven’t got it right for the ESBs yet, let alone the NESBs. We’ll get the system up and running first, then fiddle at the edges later.’ (union representative cited in Mawer & Field 1995, p. 23).

As a result of the NTRA, credentialism and textualisation were strengthened (Marginson 1993, p. 167). Those in need of most support and assistance were constructed as perpetually in need of training. The ‘language and literacy crisis’ had enabled NESB workers to be blamed for the ills of the economy; the discourses of performativity and economism underlying the training agenda legitimised their exclusion from the workplace in large numbers. As Marginson had predicted, the new system fed credentialism, to the detriment of NESB workers.

Material practices under the Coalition: Centrelink and the Job Network

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Job Network represents the marketised system of employment assistance introduced in 1998 by the Coalition government.

Contracted Job Network Providers (JNPs) offer Job Matching (JM) and Intensive Assistance (IA) including case management to unemployed people, who are referred to them after registration and assessment by the public sector agency Centrelink. English language and literacy (ELL) training are provided through contracted programs under the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP). Contracts are awarded on a competitive basis and payment is by 'outcomes' in the form of placements in employment and to a limited extent, training programs.

This part of the chapter will examine the place of the dominant and contending discourses in interviews conducted with a group of non-profit JNPs, community representatives and LLNP Providers interviewed for this study in 2002. Analysis will focus on the way in which these professionals engage with dominant discourses in interviews and in accounts of practice. However, first I will briefly outline the way in which neo-liberal discourses are enacted in the new employment-assistance system.

The pressures for performativity and the coercive nature of the new system lead to 'cursory' initial assessment of NESB jobseekers and underestimation of their difficulties (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000, pp. 30-31). Staff turnover, a particularly acute problem for the most vulnerable jobseekers (Pearce, Disney & Ridout 2002, p. 26), and 'lack of officer expertise' hinder relationships between Centrelink offices and other agencies, impeding the resolution of problems and the running of training courses (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000, pp. 33-37).

The rationale for the new system is the narrative of competition as improving quality. However, the reverse appears to be the case with regard to negotiation between agencies (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 56). The contestable market approach is contrary to the interests of NESB clients (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 6). Competition and commercial-in-confidence protocols prevent discussion of effective methods (Considine 2001 p. 126), although this may be improving (Productivity Commission 2002, pp. 327ff). Competitive pressures lead to 'creaming' (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 40) and 'parking' of those perceived as hard to place (Considine 2001, p. 135; Department

of Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business 2000). Pearce et al. (2002, p. 32) suggest that agencies may attempt to have 'hard-to-place' jobseekers removed from their books through multiple breaches. A focus on the employer as client may lead to tolerance of discrimination (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 58-9).

The rationale for the privatisation and marketisation of employment assistance was the provision of consumer choice to clients (Commonwealth of Australia 1996). However, such choice does not appear to be facilitated or widely exercised (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 32). Little information is provided about provider characteristics (Considine 2001 p. 126) and there is no independent evaluative information about particular providers (Pearce, Disney & Ridout 2002, p. 31). The current star ratings system is not generally appropriate for use by jobseekers selecting a provider (Pearce, Disney & Ridout 2002, p. 32). If the provider of choice has no places the choice is invalidated (Pearce, Disney & Ridout 2002, p. 29). There was little evidence of NESB workers exercising useful choice in the present study, with the exception of large specialist providers such as AMES. Pearce et al. recommend a move away from choice for vulnerable jobseekers (Pearce, Disney & Ridout 2002, p. 32).

Spending on training has declined since Working Nation (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 44). Longer and more intensive education and training are precluded by structural mechanisms (Productivity Commission 2002, p. 337). As with Working Nation, training options are strongly influenced by 'bottom line' considerations. Some agencies refer clients only to 'free' or 'user pays' vocational training courses or those run by other JN providers (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 50) and training costs are dealt with inconsistently (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 44).

Centrelink and JN written communications are often complex and only in English, which is likely to lead to administrative breaching for those with limited English language and/or literacy (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000; Pearce, Disney & Ridout 2002, p. 25). Support for people with disabilities; interpreting

assistance and culturally and linguistically appropriate services for NESB people are particularly difficult to access (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000, p. 41).

The new arrangements have involved the 'co-option' of a number of community organisations which previously held an advocacy role on behalf of disadvantaged groups (Considine 2001 p. 139-40). There has been a shift towards self-motivated jobsearch, and a discursive move away from intervention (Considine 2001, p. 125, see also pp. 135-7), in line with performativity pressures and neo-liberal discourses of individual responsibility. Concern with the 'bottom line' appears to have permeated through the system (Considine 2001, p. 140).

Provider discourses under the Liberal-National Coalition 1996-2002

In the section entitled 'Policy as discourse' in Chapter 2, I espouse 'a conceptualisation of policy as including ... the policy text itself and its associated processes and outcomes', rather than merely 'policy as text'. This conceptualisation shows that the impact or take-up of policy as text may be very different from what was intended (Ball 1994, p. 17). Ball (1994, p. 23) also points out that '... "subjugated knowledges" cannot be totally excluded from arenas of policy implementation'. I have argued in Chapter 2 that policy implementation involves capillary exercise of power and further 'contests of discourses', perhaps including the 'subjugated knowledges' present at implementation sites. Policy actors located in different sites of text production compete for control of the representation of policy. Thus the way in which the 'policy actors' with whom NESB jobseekers come into contact engage with dominant and contending discourses in the interviews forms an integral part of policy. It influences the 'material practices' that also form part of policy discourses.

When read together with the policy documents, the interviews with providers also provide important additional insight into the actual material practices associated with dominant and contending discourses. An example is the way in which the advocacy narrative associated with equity discourse may be in (often

unsuccessful) contestation with neo-liberal pressures on Job Network providers for performativity, resulting in an absence of material support for a NESB jobseeker.

Narratives relating to work

Job Network Providers (JNPs) and Language Literacy and Numeracy Program Providers (LLNP) were asked about their perceptions of the labour market in 2002 compared with the previous 10 years. The major features agreed to characterise the new labour market were as presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Characterisations of the new labour market by providers

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the continued disappearance of jobs from the labour market in general and the western region in particular• the continued arrival in the ‘labour market’ of people newly retrenched in large numbers• significantly increased competition for the unskilled or lower skilled jobs remaining in the formal sector• increased visibility of the informal sector and small, ‘shonky’ firms with below-award wages and poor working conditions• a large increase in ‘flexible’ forms of employment including casual and contract work, both as a substitute for and as a route to permanent employment• the outsourcing of recruitment and other functions to employment agencies and labour hire companies• credentialism including a rise in ELL demands• the textualisation of the jobsearch process including the use of new technology and greater demands for ELL• discrimination by age, ethnicity, workcare record, and other factors

In neo-liberal discourses, the ‘labour market’ allocates labour in an efficient and rational manner, and workers with knowledge and foresight ‘invest’ in the acquisition of skills, which are then rewarded systematically in the ‘market’. In the interviews with providers, these discourses were countered with narratives of a

workworld characterised by large-scale and rapid change, in which the value of skills depended on the age and ethnicity of those who possessed them.

Stories abounded that illustrated large-scale and rapid change in employment, making irrelevant previous knowledge and planning by NESB workers, many of whom had been in the same jobs for years. The disappearance of vacancies for labourers and machine operators in manufacturing and construction is well-documented. However, a recent development was a contraction in more highly skilled jobs in industries such as computing, finance and insurance. JNPs reported a 60 per cent drop in computer-related jobs. Although highly skilled jobs such as programming were so far unaffected, a JNP reported that TAFE-based computer courses were now virtually worthless. This change illustrates the dark side of the narrative of lifelong learning, the speedy obsolescence of qualifications gained in fairly lengthy courses that until recently were considered to assure future 'employability'. This obsolescence is hastened and confirmed by unemployment, with resulting costs for the individual, who must choose between undertaking retraining at considerable personal cost or seeking employment in a less skilled area.

JNPs and other providers countered neo-liberal economic narrative of the labour market as efficient by stories of widespread discrimination relating to both age and ethnicity. JNP saw themselves as 'educating' employers about discrimination but acknowledged their ultimate powerlessness in this regard. Agencies are bound to follow the law in respect of discrimination, but JNPs highlighted the way in which the competition central to the marketisation of employment assistance militates against this:

We had a large Job Matching contract ... the employers that we dealt with were often the lowest paying employers, the cheapest running exercise – you know, ... we're a free service, so you know, they were not always paying award wages or stuff like that ... and some of the calls that we used to take, like 'I don't want ... this old, I don't want this sort of -' and you just go 'Well I can't advertise that', but you know if I send anyone who was say a non-English speaking, say if I send a Vietnamese person down there, I'd be just wasting that client's time, and the

employer's time ... they were discriminating, yeah ... We'd take the stand that we would culturally try and teach that employer, we would send whoever we thought had the skills for the job ... But then it's also very competitive to keep those employers, you know, so if you're sending down jobseekers that you know are not going to be a winner, and [another agency] are sending down jobseekers that are ... They get the cash, we don't. It's a really cut-throat industry.

Some JNPs and other providers constructed the material practices associated with advocacy as effective in influencing employer behaviour with regard to age discrimination. These practices included both direct mediation and forms of resistance such as obscuring information about clients' age. However, one JNP with many years experience in placing NESB workers reported increasing difficulty in placing older jobseekers with limited English language over that time. This suggests that the growing presence of counter-narratives about age in the media and in academic and management circles may be challenging the dominance of the traditional narratives, but that narratives regarding English language may be more deep-seated.

A major narrative relating to the need for 'international competitiveness' is the need for flexibility in employment. JNPs acknowledged the dominance of this narrative and of 'booming' casualisation, which was constructed as a major social problem. JNPs constructed casualisation as a consolidation of employer power, as a breach of the mutual commitment of employer and worker and as inimical to learning in the sense that it absolves employers from responsibility for training. JNPs also drew on discourses of equity and fairness to critique narratives of flexibility: 'When I negotiate with labour hire companies ... I'm not interested in the one day on call - it's not fair on the person ...' (JNP)

All JNPs interviewed gave accounts of mediation practices with employers that involved countering narratives of credentialism to 'market' older workers on the basis of motivation, reliability and tacit industrial skills and knowledge. This was a kind of discursive translation between employer narratives of textualisation and credentialism and workers' construction of knowledge as embodied and embedded in practice. Unfortunately this kind of mediation tended to occur at the

expense of younger people, with JNPs reflecting MO policy discourses that construct youth as unemployable: 'Today's generation of young workers are hopeless' (JNP).

Narratives relating to education and ELL

Marketisation of language and literacy programs, in particular competitive tendering for the LLNP, was critiqued on the basis of inefficiency and bureaucratization. Competition was constructed as damaging quality of provision through the resulting fragmentation and asynchronicity and through the loss of forms of provision that were previously possible due to economies of scale. As an example of bureaucratization, a LLNP provider recounted the following anomaly. Two different competitor agencies recently won tenders for LLNP provision in different areas of the western region. Eligible jobseekers must be referred by Centrelink staff to the appropriate competitor for the area in which they live.

However, in certain defined circumstances, jobseekers may be referred across those catchment boundaries. The catchment boundaries newly defined by this LLNP tender agreement are not the same as those between Centrelink offices, nor as the previous catchment boundaries. As a result, Centrelink staff must be aware both of the new LLNP catchment boundaries and of the special circumstances which justify referral across catchment boundaries; if they are not, they refer jobseekers to the wrong competitor. Jobseekers then have to be sent back to Centrelink for re-referral or referred directly on to the competitor by staff at the incorrectly selected LLNP provider. Complexities such as this compound the difficulty of the task of Centrelink officers, who may already be confused as to the eligibility criteria for those they refer. In addition, they absorb a great deal of provider time, generate an unnecessary climate of suspicion between providers with accusations of 'poaching' clients, and further confuse jobseekers who may be sent from office to office for reasons that they do not understand.

Fragmentation was also reported to lead to the loss of economies of scale for non-LLNP training. Larger JNPs contract public or private training providers to set up courses at any time for groups of their clients. Smaller JNPs may never have such a critical mass, and generally the competitive nature of the system precludes co-operation with other JNPs in this area. Therefore smaller JNPs rely on referring clients individually to existing classes. Normally, accredited courses at TAFEs or other providers only begin once or twice per year. Placing a client in one of these may therefore involve a wait of up to six months. Unemployed people may be discouraged by such a wait. Their time in IA may be limited, and for the client to complete the course and then go through all the mechanisms for placement in a position may take longer than allowed for IA. A similar situation may occur even in larger JNPs if the type of training required is not shared by enough other clients. Some English language providers drew on equity discourses in expressing concern that for some of those most in need of assistance, no assistance will be available. The loss of provision related particularly to courses for those who had not learned to read and write in any language, of whom there were a significant number among the new immigrant groups such as those from the Horn of Africa, due to long periods in refugee camps, lack of universal education in some areas and the recency of the introduction of written forms of some of the area's languages. JNPs reported that there was now little alternative than to simply attempt to place a jobseeker in this category into a very basic labouring job.

At the time of the 2002 interviews, JNPs expressed concern about a change in the system with the removal of training as a payable outcome. There was considerable confusion among IA providers and others as to whether training and education outcomes are the same thing, and what kind of outcomes would no longer be paid, as well as regarding the purported retrospectivity of the decision. No definite information was available, and the discussion appeared to be shrouded in secrecy. When DEWR was contacted, the researcher was informed that the matter concerned a letter of clarification regarding the existing tender document and that unlike that tender document the letter was not on the public record. Thus

a fairly significant decision regarding the status of training in the Job Network system was not open to public scrutiny.

Responses to this issue illustrated the way ‘bottom line’ considerations underlie almost all thinking in the area due to the marketisation of the system. First, those reporting a retrospective change were most concerned at the ‘bottom line’ implications, because those jobseekers currently in training courses would not constitute a payable outcome for the agency, as expected, and the decision would therefore result in a loss for the agency. Second, the reasons for the change were attributed to pressure from those agencies that did not have a training arm and believed that the current rules accorded a competitive advantage to those agencies that did. Third, others drawing on the advocacy narrative expressed concern on behalf of clients that the measure would remove any financial incentive for agencies to refer clients for training or to conduct accredited training courses themselves, and that such training would therefore be unavailable.

A similar pattern applied to responses to the decision under AWT to enable JN assessors to refer jobseekers to the LLNP prior to starting IA. One JNP believed that if an IA provider referred a jobseeker to the LLNP the IA provider would be required to monitor the attendance of the jobseeker and the jobseeker would remain officially on the IA provider’s caseload, but should the jobseeker find a job during the period on the LLNP the IA provider would not be credited with that outcome and would not therefore receive a payment. This was predicted to lead to a reluctance by IA providers to refer clients to the LLNP.

Narratives relating to English language and literacy, race and ethnicity

In their comments and in their practice, JNPs and others in similar gatekeeper roles drew on the new discourses that construct English as fundamental to employment, even while they countered and critiqued them. Providers acknowledged a profound shift from a workworld organised by the discourse of the multilingual community of practice to one organised around monolingual

work and training practices. The shift was attributed primarily to the disappearance of large manufacturing companies in which large amounts of productive work were carried out through the use of languages other than English by an informal use of bilingual workers and supervisors. Other more recent policy moves away from bilingual practices had also contributed to the shift. For example, it was reported that personal care workers working for ethnic organisations who had previously been able to write case notes in the language of the organisation are now required to write them in English as a condition of government funding to the organisation. This change has significantly extended the length of training required for an individual, and previously qualified workers are suddenly no longer qualified.

Although JNPs spoke approvingly of the multilingual manufacturing workplaces of the past, they also constructed such practices within narratives of racism and monolingualism, strengthened by the discourse of performativity. Learning in the worker's first language was constructed as necessarily slow and unsatisfactory, and the employment of workers with little English as a risk: '[The other workers] used to show them around and eventually they would learn that ... that sign means Fire Hazard. ... but all those jobs are gone ... and the employers won't *take a chance*' (JNP; my italics).

Current employers were referred to as not having the 'skill base' in their workforce to 'cope' with the workers being retrenched from manufacturing who operated in languages other than English. Such accounts naturalise monolingualism and construct multilingualism as an extra requirement, discursively preparing the ground for the discourse of performativity to naturalise it as unaffordable. That next step in fact does occur in comments like the one below, where NESB immigrant workers are constructed as a burden, needing to be 'carried', and as culpable, needing to be 'covered'. Being bilingual is constructed in deficit terms, multilingualism is constructed as a social cost, and the other contributions of workers are made invisible.

I think in the last twelve years, profit margins have decreased so much that they ... can't have staffing levels where they can *carry* people. So previously ... you

might have had two personal care attendants and one of them could have written the notes in English for the other person, or you could have been able to *cover* that sort of ... well, not any more ... They need their staff to be multiskilled in every area and don't actually have the space or the coverage to *cover* that person if he [sic] might have poor literacy. (JNP; my italics)

An ethnic community spokesperson constructed such shifts as a 'major problem' for NESB employment. She drew on the narrative of English as situated and contextual by emphasising the specific genre of written English required in such cases, the acquisition of which requires 'extensive studies' by the worker, and the added difficulty of working under pressure in a second language. In the new monolingual discourse of employment acknowledged by all JNPs and other providers, some degree of English was constructed as a necessity for employability. On one hand, this narrative was highly instrumental, with reference to understanding 'instructions' and 'directions', and on the other there was a use of terms like 'communication' that may represent a requirement for any level of English including a native-speaker-like accent. The issue of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) was something of a touchstone in the construction of the 'commonsense' narrative of English as a necessity for employability. It was reported to be central for employers in what was characterised as the current climate of risk of litigation. The function of OHS in the naturalisation of English as the *sine qua non* of recruitment was both drawn on and contested by JNPs in a group interview:

JNP A: It poses a problem to me that if there's a safety issue and someone shouting in English and the person doesn't understand what they're saying and they can't get out if there's a fire or whatever, you know there's still those issues there.

JNP B: But that's not why they're doing it ... the reality is that these entry level positions are so competitive that they can choose people with good English. ... A five-hour written exam by Drake to get into Toyota has got nothing to do with their occupational health and safety ... it's just to basically cull out a certain number of

people so that they can get down to the next level. So ... if you've got a disability or ... a language problem, you just get [rejected immediately].

The practice of using English as a method of 'culling' was widely reported as a counter to the narrative of English as a necessity for employability. Many of these stories also countered the HC narrative of English as a 'skill' that is rewarded incrementally in the labour market. They attributed employers' behaviour to the racist narrative of language practice as a 'symbol of Otherness', and highlighted the way in which this kind of structural discrimination tends to mean that no amount of English language learning by an individual will result in employment in the new labour market:

Our perception of English language needs is probably ... a bit different from some of the employers' ... we can go for the [English language learning] outcomes, and we can get them, but it ... often doesn't make a great deal of difference in the eyes of an Aussie employer who has lots of people ringing for jobs anyway and just can't be bothered with dealing with someone with a foreign accent ... they've got automatic filtering systems and that's probably number one. (LLNP provider)

These practices acknowledged by JNPs in fact construct NESB immigrants as last in the job queue, and immigrants' skills as inferior; thus they are always on trial, under challenge to demonstrate other skills and knowledges:

... what ... immigrants ... will have to show is sort of other things, you know, they are keen, they are willing, and attitude etcetera, to actually overcome that accent language barrier that some people are not open to ... (Ethnic Community spokesperson)

It is within this narrative of NESB immigrants as last in the job queue that the advocacy role of JNPs and community groups is constructed. However, as we have seen in the context of discrimination, this role is constrained by the need to maintain relationships of trust with employers. Even the most well-meaning

agencies participated in the process of filtering out certain workers from the (official) jobsearch process on the basis of language practices. Unemployed people without some spoken English were not referred to employment at all by the JNPs interviewed, and for some this extended to those who did not write in English.

For some JNPs, the fact that an unemployed person has little English constructed them as 'other' and naturalized their employment in the 'cash society'. The neo-liberal performativity discourse of 'outcomes' is available to JNPs and other providers to justify practices that function to ethnicise the informal sector and to 'track' those most in need of training opportunities into exploitative employment:

... even [people with English language difficulties] can get work. Because there are people in their own sort of nationality out there that employ people like that anyway. ... We've done pretty well at getting outcomes ... even in spite of the fact that we've got a large number of clients that ... have language barriers, a lot of them are working in the ... cash society, so it's a matter of sort of weeding that out ... (JNP)

The number of people I have from an Asian background who will say to me 'I don't want to work for a Vietnamese boss, or an Asian boss' – and it's all because of the way they're paid and treated, the expectation for a low wage, and ... those who've been around Australia for a bit ... but they still don't speak very good English because it's always been – spoken in their native language ... they're starting now to realise that 'I can do better for myself, but I don't want to work for my own kind'. And I was shocked the first time I heard that because I thought 'Oh, you've got cultural background there, ... you've got no problems with communication' and they started to realise they're being ripped off by their own people. (JNP)

References such as 'people like that', 'my own kind' and 'ripped off by their own people' and the metaphor of 'weeds' situate such accounts firmly within racist discourse, reinforcing the 'naturalness' of exploitation and dishonesty

within ‘other’ ethnic groups. Ironically, a third JNP drew on the narrative of entrepreneurialism to construct Vietnamese jobseekers in a positive light as risk-takers – ‘more entrepreneurial’.

JNPs acknowledged the centrality of the narrative of textualisation in the specific discourses of recruitment. The new discourse constructs English as central, but the narrative of textualisation adds to this a construction of knowledge and ability as inhering in both written and spoken ‘text’. In the multilingual community of practice, recruitment was carried out in the physical presence of the worker and involved testing of the ability to perform or learn physical tasks. In the new discourse, ‘shape shifting portfolio people’ (Gee 2002, p. 75) send their ‘portfolios’ ahead of them to compete against those of other people, and participate in interviews on the telephone, or in rooms far from the shop floor. Knowledge and competence are constructed as part of these texts, and the quality of the text constitutes the basis of the competition. For JNPs and other providers as tertiary-educated professionals, the narrative of textualisation is familiar and commonsense, and some comments naturalised it for all workers. However, in a form of critique, several JNPs constructed textualised job seeking as a ‘game’, pointing out that in most labouring and operative level jobs it is a very recent phenomenon, and the rules of the ‘game’ are not known to these workers. Part of providers’ advocacy role was constructed as a kind of discursive translation role, crucial for these workers immediately upon retrenchment:

They don’t have the ability to communicate and give examples of what they’re capable of ... When we do resumes for them they say ‘I’ve just been operating a machine for the last twenty years,’ and till we actually go into the details ‘Did you do this, did you do that?’ ... [then] we can tell them ‘these are the skills you actually have’ ... they can’t actually see it themselves, they don’t know how to translate that ... Lots of people ... who have been machine operators ... they were actually programming the machines to do x amount of work and they didn’t realise what kind of a skill that was, to program the machines and make calculations ... they don’t recognise it as a skill. (JNP)

Within this description of retrenched workers is a counter to the narrative of trainability and a construction of learning as participation, as many workers are credited with having learned computing skills and the associated language in the workplace without ever naming it as more than doing their jobs.

The HC narrative of lifelong learning was countered, and the narrative of learning as participation drawn on, through accounts of practice that recognised the inappropriateness of formal classroom teaching for some workers. The workers in a much-praised outplacement program explained their move from formal group classes to individual drop-in models in response to retrenched workers' preference for a narrative that constructs knowledge as embodied and embedded in practice:

... there was no point of us having group sessions because they didn't like it ... they much preferred one-to-one ... If you've got white collared or educated students ... you're dealing with a different type of person ... [These workers] have got to learn by doing, like you've got to ... kind of guide them, I think, rather than tell them ... it's just not in their mind frame ... When we're building up the resume we talk to them and make them aware ... [of the skills they have] we don't sort of say 'Now this is what you do' because we find that when you do that, they tend to ... blank out. It's like school.

Another aspect of the new textualised discourse of recruitment was the multiplicity of gatekeepers between those making hiring decisions and the potential employee. The first gatekeeper is the JNP with which the worker is registered, which may or may not specialise in working with NESB people. However, if a suitable vacancy is listed through another JNP, the worker must apply through that other JNP. This can cause problems for NESB workers who may be 'blocked' by a less than favourable recommendation from a JNP who is not accustomed or committed to advocating for NESB clients.

In addition to JNPs having to deal with competing JNPs to access certain vacancies, JNPs often did not deal directly with employing organisations but with employment agencies and labour hire companies. Each layer of gatekeepers

wants to be perceived as referring 'good' people to the next layer, rather than 'taking a risk' by referring people who could be rejected even for spurious reasons. Thus the multiplication of separate agencies exacerbates the exclusionary tendencies of this new discourse, and results instead in an intensification of risk for NESB immigrant workers. Recruitment agencies' attitudes to NESB workers vary considerably, depending on their employer clients: 'A lot of the agencies that we've spoken to ... they say 'We want ... operators who speak read and write English' – they don't want non-English-speaking people, basically, the clientele they've got ...' (Placement Worker)

A further complication to the textualisation of jobsearch is that the majority of all vacancies and all Job Network jobs are listed through electronic methods. Many older jobseekers (30 per cent in one provider's estimation) have no experience with computers, yet no formal computer training is provided to newly unemployed jobseekers.

There was a tension in the JNPs' description of their practice between direct mediation with employers and 'entrepreneurialising' people by alerting them to the 'game' of jobsearch and training them to play it. One provider explicitly defended both practices in the context of advocacy narrative, the first because in the current labour market clients would soon need to find a job again due to casualisation and the second because many clients did not have the 'skills or cultural understanding' to find jobs without assistance, or because of discrimination against which no amount of self-marketing would work.

Providers from a background in ethnic groups drew on the discourse of pluralism to critique particular monolingual practices including program implementation and correspondence. It was suggested that programs such as JST would be effective for many NESB workers if they involved discussion with jobseekers in their first language to identify skills and explore cultural issues. Monolingual practices were constructed as enforced through the discourse of performativity; it was reported that the current fee structure does not permit adequate use of interpreters, and bilingual staff are limited. This was critiqued by ethnic group providers, but merely acknowledged by others, who drew on both

performative discourse and racist narratives to naturalise the unavailability of services and the inappropriateness of training for people with limited English. In line with classic racist narratives, lack of understanding was attributed to lack of motivation:

... you might send them out a letter in English and they don't understand what it is, or they don't want to understand what it is, and they don't come in. You can't ring them up because they don't understand you on the phone, you don't want to spend any money on hiring interpreter rig up, so what do you do? You send out another letter in a few weeks' time saying please come in. Next thing you know, three months have gone by! (JNP)

A JNP described an in-house training program covering very complex material that was provided to largely Vietnamese-speakers solely in English; when Vietnamese staff were available there had been 'experiments' with providing teaching in Vietnamese using the extensive English text untranslated, but although there were acknowledged to be significant 'problems' with this approach, it was constructed as merely unfortunate. Centrelink letters were acknowledged even by some Centrelink staff interviewed for this study to be 'shocking' (Centrelink staff member) and a JNP from an ethnic community group commented jokingly: 'No-one reads Centrelink letters!' A broad understanding of the JN system was reported to be necessary to make sense of Centrelink communications, and many without such an understanding are unable to interpret their real significance. LLNP providers countered the narrative of vocationalism drawing on narratives of formal study as personally fulfilling and formal study as socially beneficial:

I think a lot of the real outcomes are not quantifiable and not payable. I think in terms of the social contact and ... just helping the students gain access to the mainstream culture ... they really do achieve some [good outcomes] ... providing students with access to health services and ... cultural things, ... they're learning about how the government works ... there are a whole lot of broader cultural learning points that [they're able to learn]. (LLNP Provider)

It was suggested that the source of support for RO/MO discourse may lie precisely in these narratives rather than support for neo-liberal discourses about education and work:

I was fairly appalled by the whole notion of mutual obligation, but I have to say that the students say pretty positive things ... having had it suggested to them that they go back to school, a lot of them now are quite positive ... ‘Well it’s an awful lot better than sitting at home’ ... it’s motivating, sort of thing ... and really I think the social part of it is as important as anything ... (LLNP Provider)

This suggestion echoes the observation that neo-liberal discourses are powerful precisely through their ‘articulation with liberal humanist ideas’ (Edwards & Usher 1994); in other words, support for coercion and compulsion is rooted in a narrative of work and learning as positive in themselves.

It was reported that workplace ELL and vocational training is declining in importance for many companies: ‘English in the workplace – I can’t see any companies at the moment ...’ (JNP) One large textile company, a major employer which recently retrenched many long term workers whose English language levels were by no means perfect, was reported to have ceased its previously fairly extensive educational programs including English language and literacy in 1995.

Narratives relating to the state

RO/MO policy discourse is based on the construction of the unemployed as potential ‘bludgers’, ‘job snobs’ and ‘double dippers’, and thus to blame for their own unemployment. Its associated practices are on one hand the coercion involved in the close monitoring of unemployed people’s job search ‘activity’ and in compulsory participation in activities such as WfD, and on the other detection and withdrawal of benefit or ‘breaching’. It is thus primarily a coercive and punitive discourse. The JN and its associated systems are founded on discourses

of performativity and competition. Contracts are awarded competitively and payment is by 'outcomes' or placements. However, RO/MO discourse coopts a discourse of equity and fairness in justifying its practices and an 'advocacy' narrative that constructs JNPs as offering assistance to the unemployed. The co-option of the 'advocacy' narrative is assisted by the fact that this assistance is offered through competitive contracts that are often granted to ethnic or other community groups who also have a traditional advocacy role. The interviews with JNPs reflected the discursive contradictions and tensions both between the advocacy and the detection/coercion elements within RO/MO discourse, and between the advocacy elements of RO/MO and neo-liberal discourses of performativity and competition linked to the marketisation of their role.

Many non-profit JNPs clearly experienced as a constraint on the advocacy role the neo-liberal discourses within which their role was constructed. They attempted to balance and combine these discourses, constructing a kind of hybrid discourse that could be read as a 'professional non-profit JNP discourse' (see Sanguinetti 1999). This hybrid discourse involved both use and critique of certain aspects of neo-liberal discourse; discursive and material practices that resisted it, which they justified by the presence of the co-opted discourses of fairness and advocacy; a focus on the practices that might be shared between advocacy and their role within performative and competitive discourse, particularly placing as many unemployed people in jobs as possible; and an acknowledgement of the discourses of performativity and competition that ultimately limited their freedom due to their constitution as businesses.

Ultimately, the advocacy narrative is based on discourses of equity and entitlement. In constructing the hybrid discourse, some non-profit JNPs drew on these discourses to construct their identities in contrast to the for-profit providers. Providing training, mediation with employers and the 'entrepreneurialisation' of unemployed people (Considine 2001) were the elements constructed as primary to the advocacy role and therefore at the heart of this distinction.

... the greedy bloodsuckers ... just get them in ... they're there five minutes and they throw them the paper and say 'Find a bloody job'! ... One of our ex-

candidates we didn't manage to find a job who came in the other day looking for money, I mean he's broke, living in the pub, got a few other issues and he's got another [Job Network] organisation. I said 'Are they helping you look for work?' He said 'No, they don't do anything', he said 'what they do is they give you a train ticket if I found my own job'. A train ticket! (JNP)

This distinction also involved the construction of the client. A narrative of employer as client was ascribed to the for-profit JNPs while the unemployed person was constructed as client within the advocacy narrative. Also ascribed to for-profit JNPs was a reluctance to accept jobseekers who they believe will be difficult to place, and policies of 'parking' and 'creaming'.

The non-profit agencies described themselves as accepting any jobseekers allocated to them, training them to a basic level if necessary and then advocating for them, which was sometimes termed 'marketing' them. This relies on careful analysis of employer requirements to identify which employers are likely to employ this type of jobseeker, and as a consequence, on developing close relationships with particular employers. These relationships are based on employer trust in the agency's assessment of the jobseeker's motivation, reliability and so on, and on the training provided to the jobseeker by the agency.

However, the commitment to maximising the placement opportunities for clients may involve a blurring of the distinction between the unemployed person as client and the employer as client, and indeed of the distinction between the interests of the employer and those of the JNP. With some JNPs providing recruitment, training and initial supervision and personnel services for particular employers at no cost, in return for arrangements whereby a regular stream of placements occurs, JNPs may become very involved indeed with particular companies. Thus the unemployed person may be constructed as the product, rather than the client of the program.

This feature is particularly evident in the use of marketing and corporate language in relation to advocacy. For example as well as describing their role as 'convincing' employers to 'give someone a go', the terms 'sell' and 'market' were often used to construct unemployed people as a product in the same way as policy

discourse (see Chapter 5). ‘Corporate-speak’ comments such as ‘our candidates have a willingness to actually stay and grow with the company’ provided an insight into the kind of discursive accommodation that was a strong feature of this hybrid discourse. Even those JNPs most critical of the marketised system and most insistent on the advocacy narrative were clearly beginning to conceptualise their role in neo-liberal terms.

Practices of resistance to neo-liberal discourse were reported to include subversion through collusion between Centrelink staff, for-profit and non-profit JNPs. Although Centrelink staff are not officially permitted to recommend any particular JN agency, they were reported to do so unofficially on the basis of the extent of material and moral support offered by particular agencies and the perceived needs of the client. This practice is likely to assist NESB jobseekers as long as the staff making the recommendation have the relevant skills, and it is recommended by Pearce et al. to replace auto-referral in cases where vulnerable jobseekers do not make a choice (Pearce, Disney & Ridout 2002, p. 32). Some jobseekers perceived as hard-to-place were reported to be commonly rejected by for-profit JN members and sent back to Centrelink with instructions to request referral to a non-profit agency. Although highly undesirable in competition terms, the resulting concentration of hard-to-place clients with the non-profit agencies was reported with equanimity by JNPs due to their identity as advocates and their conviction that hard-to-place clients would be better off with them.

JNPs described the tension between advocacy and the pressures for performativity built into the Job Network system itself. Another feature of the hybrid discourse is a struggle over the meaning of terms such as ‘quality’. Hope was expressed that the JN system would evolve in the direction of advocacy and assistance due to the nature of the clients’ needs, and that this would be included in the conception of quality rather than simply considering ‘quality’ in terms of number of placements or ‘outcomes’. In the meantime, JNPs resisted by using what little time they could find to respond to the needs of clients who were not likely to deliver a payable outcome. However, this was limited by the performative discourse within which the viability of the organisation was

constructed. Moreover, time spent with unemployed people was jeopardised by compliance demands built into the system, the 'administration and paperwork' that was required to prove that providers were 'not cheating the system', which was reported to compromise the amount of time that case managers spent with clients.

Finally, some JN providers drew on the narrative of advocacy in critiquing the inhumanity of performative discourse which reduced their decisions about real people and their needs to financial considerations for their 'bottom line': 'If I send this jobseeker I may get \$300, but if I send this jobseeker I may get \$6000!' (JNP) However, within the advocacy narrative, JNPs also constructed their role in terms of persuading retrenched workers to accept a deterioration in their pay and working conditions, on the basis that there is no alternative in the current circumstances:

... the issue that those people have, and have to get over, is that they were probably on reasonably good wages, they were on a permanent full-time salary, and they now enter a workforce back at the start, at a more mature age and their wages will drop quite considerably and they'll probably only get ... casual work. (JNP)

The discourse of RO/MO was critiqued by several JNPs in terms of an inherent contradiction between its advocacy and detection/coercion/punishment elements. In order to be assessed as 'at risk' and thus obtain appropriate and early assistance such as job search and/or English language training, case management or other support, an unemployed person must disclose, at the point of initial assessment through the JSCI, all the reasons why they will have more difficulty than others in finding work. However, JNPs reported that the coercive and punitive aspects of the RO/MO discourse and the fact that Centrelink and JNPs are perceived as gatekeepers in the process of job search mean that many highly motivated unemployed people do not identify disclosure as appropriate in their dealings with these organisations. Rather, they choose to demonstrate their confidence, merit, and flexibility to staff and minimise any barriers they face. Appropriate behaviour for the committed job seeker involves the projection of employability,

and the minimisation of the significance of any problems. In the absence of extensive system knowledge, mediated by excellent English language comprehension, distinguishing between the different functions of Centrelink and JNPs in such a way as to obtain effective assistance is very difficult.

A JNP described meeting ‘blank stares’ when he attempted to explain the system whereby clients’ support needs are assessed, particularly from NESB clients. Many, including those at risk of becoming long term unemployed, believe that the disclosure of any barriers to employment will lead in the short or long term to the withdrawal of benefit. This contradiction within RO/MO discourse was critiqued from the point of view of the advocacy narrative because it prevented assistance from being provided to many retrenched workers who need the advocacy and mediation of IA immediately to prevent them from becoming LTU. It was also critiqued from within the discourse of performativity because it resulted in misplaced activity by the JNP.

There was considerable criticism by JN and LLNP providers of the effects of the discourse of performativity on the effectiveness of related services provided through Centrelink. Although there was some sympathy for individual Centrelink staff, the situation created considerable frustration. The quality of the Centrelink service, particularly the JSCI, was perceived by many JN members and community workers to depend on the individual Centrelink staff member. One training provider referred to Centrelink as ‘a black hole’, describing examples of significant delays in decisions and incorrect referrals which did not reflect recent rule changes. As a result of misclassification by Centrelink, fairly high levels of inappropriate referral were reported by both IA and LLNP providers, most often underestimating the difficulties of retrenched NESB workers. These problems were raised as a performativity-based critique of the internal logic of the marketised service; they had resulted in financial losses to those tendering for programs, in unnecessarily acrimonious exchanges between competitors and in extra work for these agencies in dealing with mistakes and continually ‘educating’ Centrelink staff due to constant turnover.

The rationale for the contracting out of the employment assistance service to private bodies was provided by neo-liberal tenets of competition and consumer choice. The force of consumer choice and the pursuit of market share were argued to incentivise innovative and creative approaches to assisting unemployed people. However, the narrative of competition as improving quality was countered by most JNPs, particularly in the context of NESB unemployed people, on the basis that jobseekers do not really understand the idea of choice in the selection of a JNP. Centrelink was reported to have insufficient time and resources to explain the system adequately in this regard. Many jobseekers were reported to arrive at IA information sessions with virtually no knowledge of the process by which they arrived there. Such jobseekers are unlikely to exercise consumer choice at all. Those who do exercise choice frequently do so on the basis of factors other than the quality of service that they believe will be provided. Many simply choose the agency nearest to the Centrelink office or to their home.

RO/MO discourse constructs the unemployed as potential 'bludgers', 'job snobs' and 'double dippers', and thus to blame for their own unemployment. Most of the comments by JNPs about this aspect of unemployment occurred in relation to 'parking' and 'breaching'. Most JNPs said that 'parking' in the sense of keeping a client on their books and deliberately not contacting them was not worth the risk when the organisation was audited by DEWR. However, there were cases where de facto 'parking' was acknowledged to occur. JNPs described people who 'want[ed] to be parked' because they had given up hope of finding work and were within a few months of pension or MAA eligibility, had serious and obvious disabilities, knew that individually they could not earn as much as their family were receiving on benefit, were working and not disclosing or simply did not want to work and would sabotage an interview. There was general agreement that as a result of IA,

... only about 30 per cent of people find work ... and so you're probably looking at another 30 per cent who might not find work and were trying, and probably 40 per cent who were either doing something a little bit funny or avoiding ... don't want to work. (JNP)

The pressures of performativity may provide an incentive for JNPs to classify the more difficult or discouraged clients as ‘not wanting to work’:

I’m not going to waste my time trying to place people that I know ... have got disabilities and don’t want to work. And there may be other people that just – you know they’re just not interested in working. And I’m not going to refer people to employers that I know are deliberately going to mess up at the interview or mess up on the job. So they’d be the sort of reasons why you may, over a period of time, ‘park’ some people. ... By and large once they’re referred to Intensive Assistance you can’t get rid of them. (JNP)

In a sense these descriptions were drawing on RO/MO discourse. However, in another sense they were not. These stories were not part of a narrative of blame for the unemployed. JNPs and LLNP providers were in close contact with the employment environment and sanguine about their clients’ prospects. There were no associated comments about the need to ‘breach’ such people, nor stories about having done so. Most of the stories related to attempts to keep in touch, to map out a plan of action, to persuade people to declare if they were ‘double-dipping’, to send people to short-courses where ‘They’re learning something they probably didn’t know before, and you’re investing something in them.’ These were really stories that recognised the complexities of peoples’ situations and the likelihood that many had correctly gauged their chance of employment. In a sense, parking was constructed as a tolerant treatment carried out in preference to breaching. Breaching was defended only in terms of a concern about the effects of a client’s behaviour on other clients: ‘... you ... refer them to jobs, they let you down, and you know you could have given this job to somebody else, what do you do with them?’ (JNP)

RO/MO constructions of the unemployed were explicitly countered by LLNP Providers in terms of the numbers of people who did not ‘want to work’ and the ‘job snobs’ narrative:

For our students, they're just desperate to work, you know ... we have a few people who are ... playing the system, but they are not the majority by any stretch of the imagination. And they do almost sit and weep in front of you, they say 'I'll do anything ... it doesn't matter, teacher, I'll do anything'. (LLNP Provider)

Conclusion

The discourses of policy in implementation reflect those of policy as text. The monolingual NTRA and the narratives of credentialism, textualisation, the 'new workplace' and trainability constructed NESB workers as unemployable. Performativity pressures and the narrative of the language and literacy 'crisis' legitimated their exclusion from work. The focus on training programs and the residual narratives of multiculturalism permitted the development of significant pockets of expertise and potentially progressive policy, such as 'integrated' programs and RPL/RCC. However, the impetus behind these approaches was lost along with the abandonment of the NTRA and of multiculturalism in 1996.

The marketisation of the Job Network system by the Coalition government continued the transformation of the Australian employment assistance arrangements in 'the most important OECD initiative in social policy in the post-war period' (Considine 2001 p. 117). RO had signalled a move away from income support for the unemployed as a right, toward the idea of income support, training and labour market assistance as conditional upon certain behaviour by the unemployed. Under the Coalition, MO discourse brought with it the stripping away of most training and labour market programs, and the fragmentation and competition of a delegated, marketised system. The professionals interviewed in this study critiqued major contradictions between performativity and competition on one hand and advocacy on the other. However, they themselves were also engaged in the enactment of neo-liberal and racist discourses.

This thesis uses a concept of discourse as instantiated both in language and in material practices (see Chapter 2). Discourses are defined as 'sets of meanings encoded in linguistic or material practices'. Thus the conceptualisation of

discourse is not one that is purely linguistic. While much of the data analysed in the thesis is linguistic data, the sets of meanings encoded in the linguistic data will also be encoded in the material practices associated with the discourse. It is not my intention in this thesis to focus directly on material practices in workplaces. However, many of these are referred to in the stories of the JNPs in this chapter, and in those of retrenched workers in the following two chapters. The next chapter will examine the ways in which the NESB participants in this study engaged with dominant discourses encoded in both language and material practices.

Chapter 7

Worker discourses engaging neo-liberalism

Introduction

This chapter examines the way in which the retrenched workers interviewed in 1994 and 2002 engaged with the dominant discourses (see Chapters 3 and 4) and the manifestation of these discourses in policy text and implementation (see Chapters 5 and 6). In analysing these interviews for this study I looked for workers' narratives - *terms, descriptions, figures of speech (including metaphors), vivid images and stories*. I asked the questions 'What 'cultural stories' or narratives are being drawn on in this material?' and 'In what way do these 'cultural stories' or narratives relate to those that form part of neo-liberal discourses?' Among these narratives, I looked for those that explicitly referred to the dominant discourses about work; education and training; English language and literacy, race and ethnicity; and the state. That is, I looked for narratives that drew on, acknowledged or explicitly critiqued neo-liberal discourses. I also looked for accounts of forms of material resistance by workers to their construction as subjects within these discourses. In the process, I found narratives that formed part of the contending policy discourses analysed in Chapter 5, and a third group of material that I characterise as 'countering' dominant narratives. This chapter will outline the results of this analysis.

Further illustrative material from these interviews is provided in Appendix 2.

Narratives relating to work

Most interviewees countered the neo-classical economics narrative of the ‘labour market’ as efficient and rational. They constructed work within profoundly social discourses, the context of work as an unequal power struggle between workers and employers, and trade unions as potentially or actually protective. Knowledge and information about the labour market were difficult to acquire and political, and planning was almost impossible due to rapid changes in patterns of demand and to the difficulty of predicting the value of credentials in a workworld structured by discrimination. Individuals worked in an attempt to maintain their own and their families’ security and well-being and work was allocated by profoundly social mechanisms.

The construction of work

The discourse of neo-classical economics constructs individuals as only working in order to maximise their individual ‘utility’, generally conceived in economic terms. The workers in this study drew on a variety of narratives in constructing the part played by work in their lives, including work as the sale of their labour for money, which was an important part of the picture for most people. However, this narrative was combined with others that had to do with social and psychological well-being and social responsibility. Even in the few cases where the motivation to work was solely constructed as economic, the narratives associated with earning were complex and ultimately social.

Raffaele had lost his job subsequent to a car accident from which it had taken him several years to recover; during that time his marriage had broken down. His comment below illustrates several narratives about work that were present throughout the interviews:

Everything has changed. Before I had a wife and family and a job, I was happy, I had my pride because when you work, you bring home money, you can buy things

because you work for it. ... I used to work seven days a week, I was never never on the dole. Now I'm just nothing.

The major narrative used by interviewees to construct their reasons for working was the narrative of work as fair exchange with society. In this narrative, working, and 'working hard', are constructed as part of a dual bargain. The bargain was with the employer and was a fair exchange for income. For many, a degree of mutual loyalty and commitment was also part of the bargain with the employer: 'I was upset because they let me down. I never looked for another job, I'm not the sort to go looking around when I already had a job.'

However, for very many workers, not 'going on compo' or accepting unemployment benefit was also associated with 'working hard'. In this way, 'working hard' was constructed not solely as part of a bargain with an employer but also with society as represented by the state, mediated through taxation, welfare and consumption. The other side of this bargain was employment security and several people commented that it was not their retrenchment that was the problem (that had happened to them before) but 'employment apprehension' – the new structure of the labour market whereby they could no longer be sure of finding another job. The unavailability of opportunities for re-employment was constructed as a breach of this aspect of the bargain, this time by society as a whole. Workers 'worked hard' and paid taxes; in return, they had an entitlement to a job with a fair wage, which would enable them to provide a decent life for those who depended on them. They were also entitled to a decent old age and other benefits. Thus it was the state that had breached the bargain by not ensuring that their relationship with society could continue to be mediated by work.

However, this bargain also had a profoundly ethical dimension, in which the bargain with society was not mediated by money. Petro was not receiving unemployment benefit because he had earned enough by working double shifts all year round and year after year to pay off a second house. Nonetheless, he constructed work as a continuing obligation to 'society', and the reward as a sense of social 'usefulness'. He felt that being seen as 'useless', as unable to make a

social contribution, constructed him as a ‘burden’, rather than (as in the discourse of social contractualism) the receipt of benefits:

I feel as if I am a burden on the society. Although ... I don’t have to rely on benefits to live on ... I feel hurt because ... when they used to need us, they used to take us and ... squeeze the juice out of us, and now that they don’t need us they discard us as useless.

Many people reported a feeling of being ‘useful’ as one of the benefits provided by work. Fulfilling one’s side of the bargain involved individual ‘pride’ and ‘self-respect’, the sense of being valued by society. Within the narrative of work as fair exchange with society were a number of other narratives that were widely drawn upon by participants to construct their identities as workers. The first was the notion of payment as recognition of the value of this contribution, the narrative of payment for work as a symbolic indicator of worth. ‘When you lose job, you lose the money ... And this makes you down too. Like you’ve been rejected.’

As we have seen in Raffaele’s comment, consumption formed part of the narrative of work as fair exchange with society. Consumption was legitimated by the earning of income, and by the workers’ needs as immigrants. Consumption was constructed as security and in a sense as assimilation. Underlying this narrative was the comparison between ‘Australians’, who were assumed to possess security already, and the migrants’ project of ‘hav[ing] something behind them’ and enabling their children’s lives to approximate more closely to those of ‘Australians’ in this respect.

The participants own ‘consumption choices’ rested largely on home ownership, which was in turn largely constructed in terms of security. Young people were constructed as driven by current consumption choices different from those of their parents. However, there was a real concern among these first generation immigrants about their children’s capacity to make the transition to home ownership, given the changes in work.

Another narrative was earner as provider. For Raffaele, the earner 'bring[s] home money'. Thus providing for a wife and family are closely connected with having a job, and Raffaele had lost both. This narrative was used widely by both men and women in relation to men, sometimes mediated by discourses of ethnicity through the construction of the 'ethnic male breadwinner'. However, it was also drawn upon by women in relation to their own identities. The earning capacity of many low-paid workers for a forty-hour week was little more than a family would receive in benefits. In these low-waged families, the capacity of the wife to earn was what made it possible to buy a house, to bring a relative to Australia or to have more than the barest level of survival. For this reason, a strong narrative of the husband as the 'breadwinner' often co-existed with the use of the narrative of earner as provider in relation to the wife.

Several of the women drew on a narrative of income as personal autonomy. In this narrative, having an income enables a woman to avoid dependence on relatives and the loss of power that this entails. Women constructed their position when unemployed as humiliating, forcing them to ask their husbands for money for personal necessities in a situation where there was not enough to go round. Women's paid work created a space for them to both benefit the family and have something for themselves.

Married women without young children were very aware of paid work as an alternative to the isolation and drudgery of staying at home. This was as true for women who had lost demeaning and dangerous jobs in the clothing industry as for those few whose work had offered challenge and variety. These women drew on a narrative of paid work as social connection. Men referred to having friends at work, but rarely drew on this narrative as a major benefit of working, perhaps because dominant discourses of masculinity permitted – even encouraged – them to leave the house for social connection when they were unemployed.

Very many workers constructed paid work as social identity or status (Haworth 1997). Social identity here appeared to be related to simply being employed. Most of those who had experienced unemployment constructed unemployment in itself, rather than the status of the actual job they had lost, as a significant loss of

both social status and social identity. Raffaele had lost his social identity through losing his ability to work and to earn, as well as losing his family: 'Now I'm just nothing'. However, many others whose families were intact reported the same loss of identity. Several people referred to work as 'strength', in a way that had no relation to physical strength; this metaphor appears to refer to a kind of secure social identity.

Minh had been an artist/craftsman and owned a small lacquer-ware factory in Vietnam. He had lost his job on the assembly line at Ford and studied English for two and a half years under the PMV LAP. Two weeks prior to the interview, he had started an unskilled job at a tannery, spraying hides with chemicals. He said he had no time now to look for a better job. His family was worse off financially as a result, and he was very aware of the health risks of the job. He showed me the residues under his fingernails from where the chemicals came through his gloves. Nevertheless he said he felt 'stronger' because he was working. Another worker commented on how she felt when she was working: 'Feel more strong, say 'Look, I work, same as you''.

The narrative of paid work as social identity or status was drawn on by both men and women. However, many workers, both male and female, distinguished the compulsive force of this narrative for men from its lesser force for women, particularly women with male partners and children. However, aside from times when they had very young children and after the age of about fifty-five, most women also acknowledged a norm of paid employment. Some older men constructed the effect of job loss in terms of social identity. However, approaching pension age clearly released most men from this set of concerns. Social identity was constructed in terms of an employment/unemployment dichotomy only within a certain age range.

Within the dual bargain, individuals constructed work as fulfilling certain more personal or psychological needs. The most common personal narrative was that of work as productive occupation necessary for health. In this narrative, productive work was constructed as a psychological need, separate from the money earned. Many people spoke of being bored without paid work, of 'staying

at home doing nothing', of sleeping all day, of being 'fed up', of 'thinking, thinking' or 'going crazy' without a job. This also had implications for their physical health. This narrative was deeply bound up with discourses about gender. Both men and women considered the impact of unemployment as more serious for men. Appropriate occupations for men were constructed as typically outside the home, while women with children did not need paid work to 'find something to do'. However, the narrative of work as productive occupation necessary for health was drawn on both by men and by women without dependent children.

The narrative of work as personal fulfilment is central to the human capital narrative of the 'new workplace'. This narrative was used only by a few who had been white-collar employees – one in personal service work and one qualified tradesperson. They used terms like 'challenges' 'fulfilment' and 'sense of achievement' to describe the importance of work. A retrenched tube-moulder who had been a teacher in Poland made a fleeting reference to the notion that personal 'interest' may also be connected with employment: 'must go [to that kind of work] people which have interesting about that'.

This group of narratives was widely used as counter-narratives to the neo-classical economics narrative assuming universal individual preference for leisure. Many of these workers constructed others (especially 'Australians') as preferring leisure, in contrast to themselves; thus this narrative is linked with discourses about ethnicity. The construction of work as pain and individuals as only working to maximise their individual utility is also fundamental to the discourse of 'mutual obligation' whereby people have to be forced to work; thus these narratives could also be read as a counter to that discourse.

The narrative of 'working hard'

Most people told stories about 'working hard' in 'hard jobs', typically heavy, dirty, hot, noisy and physically demanding jobs, especially involving piecework and night shift. Part of the 'bargain with society' for many was a recognition that

this was their place in the Australian economy, that these were the jobs that were designated for them in the narrative of NESB immigrants as factory fodder or last in the job queue. Several referred to migrants being prepared to work in 'hard' jobs that 'Australians' would not accept. A Latin American accountant retrenched from a large vehicle manufacturer and now LTU commented: 'The good jobs are taken. I must take those left over'.

'Working hard' was also constructed as working long hours for many years without rest. There were many stories about working 12, 14 or 16 hours per day, usually by accepting overtime, and about taking a casual job during annual leave, for twenty or more years. Another construction of 'working hard' was stoicism, persevering with work while ill or in pain. Lastly, 'working hard' was constructed as acquiescence. Asked about her retrenchment, one woman commented: 'I never said no to anything. Some people were slack and they are still there'. Here, 'working hard' is constructed as not refusing a request from management, and the opposite is constructed as 'slack'. Constructing 'working hard' as acquiescence also opens up the way for exploitation. This construction was typically used by women and very young male workers.

The narrative of hard work was deeply embedded in discourses about age and ethnicity. The young were sometimes specifically referred to in these stories, characterised as not wanting to 'work hard' as older people had, or still did, and parasitic on their parents in housing and living costs. As we have seen in Chapter 4, Australian racist discourse constructs NESB immigrants as lazy and unmotivated. There was a clear acknowledgment in the interviews of popular Australian racist narratives about immigrants' disinclination to work and contribute to the economy. One worker reported 'Australian' acquaintances asking about her intentions when she became unemployed: '[They] were more friendly when I was working. ... they have heard some story about migrants not work[ing] and they think my family is like that'. A kind of reverse racist construction was attributed to some employers who were reported to prefer migrants in general, specific ethnic groups or 'workers from the refugee camp'

because they were more hardworking. However, workers pointed out that this did not mean being treated with respect or equity.

Working hard' was often constructed as acquiescence in relation to ethnicity. In the process, resistance to authority was constructed as 'not working hard' and attributed by 'Asians' to 'Europeans' and 'Australians'.

Many workers countered the narrative of immigrants as lazy and unmotivated by constructing immigrants as hard workers by necessity. Sometimes this narrative was used about all migrants, sometimes about 'Asian' migrants, by 'Asian' migrants. In this narrative, the settlement needs of people who arrive in Australia with nothing, in search of security and improvement, mean that they are prepared to 'work hard'. For many, this narrative functions as a warrant for claims that migrants work 'harder' than 'Australians'. 'Australians they got farms, houses, don't want to work any more. They leave, the migrants stay because they still want to work'. On one hand, this availability of NESB immigrants for particular kinds of jobs and very long hours was constructed as voluntary, associated with establishing a financially secure position. On the other, it was clearly linked with unfamiliarity with industrial norms and a weak labour market position.

The 'labour market' and the allocation of resources

The narrative of neo-classical economics that constructs the 'labour market' as efficient and rational was overwhelmingly countered by these workers through stories of employer behaviour that led to inefficient and irrational outcomes. These stories involved the devaluing of the 'human capital' of certain categories of workers, through the enactment of discourses that construct it as inferior. In some cases these discourses operated systematically at an official, national level, for example in the case of the treatment of qualifications and experience obtained overseas (Pearce, Bertone & Stephens 1995). In other cases, discourses about

ethnicity and age were constructed as operating locally through particular employers.

Narratives about ethnicity¹⁹ and the labour market

Workers constructed direct discrimination by employers on the basis of ethnicity as fundamental to the structure of their working world. Ethnic patterning constructed the whole experience of employment and unemployment. Ethnicity-based discrimination was attributed to both employers and more junior managers, such as supervisors and leading hands, who influenced both retrenchment and recruitment. Although most of these were ESB, NESB employers, supervisors and leading hands were also the subject of a significant number of these stories. Stories portrayed workplaces (such as particular clothing manufacturers) and industries (such as car detailing) as increasingly dominated by certain ethnicities. Ethnic structuring determined patterns of authority within an individual workplace.

Direct discrimination was not constructed as universal and was particularly associated with small to medium companies. In large companies, discrimination tended to be indirect and based on English language requirements and the textualisation of the recruitment process. However, in a context where employment in large companies was increasingly rare, it was ever-present as a potential explanation for lack of success in gaining re-employment, one of the tools available to workers to enable them to make sense of their experiences.

¹⁹ This study was founded on the identification of people as 'NESB immigrants'. Many of the questions that were asked related to this categorisation, within which the alternative group was referred to as 'people born in Australia'. Workers commonly abbreviated this to 'Australians', and identified this group as including the children of NESB immigrants, who were sometimes used as a comparison to make a point about attitudes or behaviour. Within the NESB immigrant group, many people constructed two groups: 'Asian' or 'European'. Italians, Greeks, Maltese, Eastern Europeans, people from the former Yugoslavia, generally identified and were identified by others as 'European'. Vietnamese and Chinese generally identified and were identified by others as 'Asian'. Another group including Filipinos and people from the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East generally did not draw on these groupings and were not usually included in them by others.

In telling these stories of ethnic discrimination, workers were actually acknowledging, countering and critiquing colonialist and racist narratives that constructed NESB immigrant workers. These included colonialist narratives relating to English language, to education, skill and competence, and to trustworthiness. For example, William acknowledged racist narratives constructing immigrants as unskilled, as frauds and simply as culturally ‘other’:

Some companies say ... ‘What’s your family name?’ I say ‘It’s [Chang]’ ... Maybe they think ‘This is Chinese or something’, they don’t believe we can do the electrician, something like that. [They assume we can’t] speak English ... Some Australian companies, they use Chinese [workers] ... but a lot of companies didn’t use them, they think ‘Oh, they’re Asian people so has not quite good skills, they’re only liar’ ... And [Australians think] the people is different, maybe make noisy or talking different [from] Australian, not very gentle.

William also countered these discourses from within HC discourse by stressing his own skills and experience as a tertiary educated electrician with twelve years as a manager in manufacturing in China. Other workers critiqued employer behaviour from within those very colonialist narratives that attributed technological ‘backwardness’ to workers from certain countries (Hawthorne 1994; Pennycook 1998, p. 64):

Compan[ies] didn’t think Vietnamese had much skill before – that was wrong because now it’s 80 years since the French occupation, we got more skills, then US occupation, more skills again.

Other cases demonstrated the way in which such colonial narratives were available to the workers constructed as ‘other’ within the particular dichotomies of these narratives. The dirt/cleanliness dichotomy (Pennycook 1998, p. 64) was available to Van (see Chapter 8) to ‘read’ his experience:

[When I was interviewed for a job as] sandwich hand ... they said 'No, no Vietnamese, no black hair ... no yellow skin'! And then when I come back, I really angry, and I said 'Why?' I don't know, somehow dirty or something? You know, when you do sandwich hand, [you must be] clean or something like that. I'm not ... dirty, something like that!

Van's response, rather than a critique of the narrative as such, involves the construction of an identity for himself that excepts him from such a classification. Others acknowledging such narratives recounted attempts to evade them by abandoning obvious forms of cultural difference:

From my people ... some they are not working, they never work[ed], because they have scarf. Some company you can't [get] a job if you have scarf ... because I have one friend ... and she say to me ... she use scarf ... she do interview, everything, after that they ring up her, they say to her 'Sorry' ... I say to her 'Better leave, take it off'.

However, many acknowledged the impossibility of evading the dominant racist discourse of ethnic discrimination. Physical size was a factor for Vietnamese-born workers. Workers applying for manual jobs were told that they were 'too short to load stuff on trucks', and to 'go home, drink a lot of milk, come back!' A Vietnamese-born worker simply stated 'I can't change my – the colour of skin!'

Most references to direct discrimination related to recruitment and selection. A significant minority of workers constructed direct discrimination as a significant factor in retrenchment. For them, the factors of cultural 'fit' and language that favour the Australian-born in the workplace also made the NESB workers more vulnerable to retrenchment. The nexus between ethnic discrimination and language will be explored below.

Membership of an ethnic network was constructed as a major factor in the allocation of employment, within both the old, large multilingual workplaces and in the newly dominant smaller companies. On one hand, this was constructed as enabling. Typically, workers of the same ethnicity – family and friends, and in

one 1995 case, acquaintances entering into a commercial arrangement whereby a week's pay changed hands – 'introduced' each other to jobs, and in many cases fulfilled an informal training function. Employers, supervisors and leading hands recruited people of their own ethnic group through the network, and 'training them was easy because they were family and they could talk to each other'. The ethnic group was constructed as offering practical support, such as shared transport and moral support, or 'back-up' in the workplace. A young Polish-born woman recounted a story about her husband's workplace. He was working with a group of other Polish workers, one of whom was assaulted by the supervisor. The supervisor was sacked but reinstated within a week. All the Polish workers, including her husband, resigned in protest.

On the other hand, this kind of ethnic patterning had clearly 'tracked' certain groups of workers into the worst jobs and shifts and was an impediment to advancement for those not of the same ethnic group as those with workplace power. For those who had previously found jobs through such networks, the loss of contacts still in employment who could assist them to find a new job magnified the effect of the mass unemployment of NESB workers. By contrast, 'Australians' were more likely to know people in white-collar jobs that had been less hard hit by recession and restructuring and would therefore be in a position to bring their relatives into better paid and more secure jobs, for which NESB workers might otherwise have been eligible. These stories acknowledged a narrative that constructed NESB workers as last in the job queue. In some cases 'looking after one's own' was constructed as natural behaviour in a context of a multi-ethnic workforce, particularly in the context of small family enterprises.

Narratives about age and the labour market

The narrative of the labour market as efficient was also widely countered through stories of widespread, systematic and explicit discrimination on the grounds of age. As in the case of ethnicity, the neo-classical narrative about efficient allocation of the best person to the job is counteracted by other dominant

discourses. With regard to ethnicity, discrimination was attributed to intersecting discourses that were clearly established and rooted in racist and colonialist ethnic hierarchies. With regard to age discrimination, workers' accounts suggested that dominant discourse constructs older people as less productive, on the basis of extremely crude numerical assumptions about working life and productivity. It is possible that age discrimination may also be based on claims about the inability of older people to adapt to change (Wooden et al. 2001), a central requirement in the 'new workplace' narrative. However, there was no mention of this in the interviews. There were also some accounts of discrimination against workers younger than 25.

Workers countered such constructions by stressing their experience and knowledge, and their willingness to 'work hard'. A 56-year-old Italian-born man who had previously worked for many years as a grinder and then leading hand for a large car manufacturer recounted beginning a new job as a grinder after a practical test and informal interview. After three days of satisfactory work he was asked to fill in a form, including his age, and was dismissed with the statement that it was against company policy to employ anyone over fifty. Workers recounted various ways of attempting to avoid such discrimination, from withholding or understating their age to dyeing their hair.

There was general agreement in 1994-95 that age requirements permeated the CES and CES officers were criticised for their inflexibility on the requirements, their failure to 'twist it a bit' by trying to persuade the employer to vary the stated age requirements. As a result, some of those over 40 expressed hesitation about even stepping into the CES because of the age requirements – they 'kn[e]w the answer already'. Some Job Network Intensive Assistance providers were more pro-active in trying to persuade employers to accept older workers, but workers interviewed in 2002 did not comment on the effectiveness of this strategy.

Workers did not see a shift in the dominant narrative about age in the 2002 interviews, with one exception. One worker had been re-employed at the age of 49 by a company that told him he 'was not old', that they had been looking for workers of his age, because young workers were 'irresponsible' and likely to

leave. However, the worker described this as a 'lucky' chance given the continuing discrimination that he saw around him.

Other forms of discrimination were also constructed as structuring the allocation of work. A WorkCare record involving an injury more serious than a cut finger was universally reported as a guarantee that one would not find another job. These accounts of the allocation of employment were grounded in an acknowledgement of dominant narratives other than the HC narrative of 'merit'. Workers constructed employment opportunities as socially allocated, according to narratives about ethnicity, age and other characteristics that attribute skill and other desirable qualities to particular social groups.

Power in the 'labour market'

Narratives of employer power

In the discourse of neo-classical economics the labour market is distorted by regulation and by trade unions. Without these a state of equilibrium could be reached in which no actor in the labour market would be strong enough to influence the price of labour more than any other actor, and wages would find some kind of 'natural' level (Toohey 1994). In Australia, trade unions were characterised in neo-liberal discourse as 'vested interests' that damaged the economy with excessive pay claims, challenged the restructuring of the economy and impeded attempts to improve the competitiveness of Australian industry (Pusey 1991).

Participants in this study overwhelmingly countered the narrative of equal power through stories and statements stressing the power of employers in the labour market and their own relative weakness. In these stories and statements, employers have the power to determine the price of labour, particularly in situations of widespread unemployment. Workers were clearly anxious to demonstrate that they were not 'pricing themselves out of the market', as alleged in neo-liberal discourse, while at the same time drawing on discourses of equity

and well-being to place limits on the extent to which pay levels should be allowed to be driven down.

Employers were constructed as both powerful and exploitative, precisely because they offered the only avenue workers had to contribute to society and to maintain an identity as useful members of it within the narrative of work as fair exchange with society (see below). The discourse of employer power was most often drawn on by interviewees in the context of talking about trade unions. Narratives concerning trade unions will therefore be examined in some detail.

Narratives about trade unions

Those interviewed drew on both neo-liberal and alternative narratives in relation to trade unions. However, these narratives were configured differently in the local and in the global context. By far the most common narrative was the local narrative of trade unions as a protective counter-balance to employer power. Language used to refer to the situation without trade unions included ‘power’, ‘dictatorship’, ‘do whatever they like’, ‘take advantage’. Terms referring to the role of the union were ‘protect’, ‘safety’ ‘behind of you’, ‘fight for you’, ‘rights’, ‘clout’ and ‘balance power’.

Protection was constructed in terms of support in obtaining one’s workplace rights and entitlements, of negotiating improved retrenchment conditions and of information and advice about legal and contractual, educational and even social security and WorkCare entitlements. Support in the case of unfair dismissal was also central, and was constructed as increasingly important in a changing working environment where labour shedding was common and the chances of finding another job once a permanent job was lost were slim. Several workers recounted stories of dismissal following industrial accidents or upon diagnosis of occupational illnesses or injuries, attributing to trade union support their reinstatement through unfair dismissal cases or their ability to obtain WorkCare payments. Several workers lamented the fact that they had worked in non-

existent compensation for retrenchment to this factor. 'Good' unions were synonymous with 'strong' unions in this narrative.

Most did not refer to unions as maintaining wages, much less constructing them as responsible for excessive wage demands. Wage setting was constructed as a function of the state through the award system. Those who mentioned trade unions in this regard constructed their effect on wages and entitlements as reasonable and more a case of protecting workers from excessively low wages or poor treatment. The only worker to mention wage demands at a macro level constructed them in terms of profit sharing.

Many people who had been union members told stories of workplaces where the union was largely absent. This absence was usually couched in terms of sparse or non-existent visible external union representation rather than the local absence of shop stewards. Many users of the narrative of trade unions as a protective counter-balance to employer power acknowledged union weakness or absence. But they accounted for it in sympathetic ways, in terms of variations between different unions, shop stewards, workplaces and employment conditions, and limitations on union power that were constructed as inevitable due to the power of employers, particularly in times of recession, restructuring and insecure employment.

There was some criticism of unions themselves, largely on the grounds of being complicit with employers and the government. Attempts by employers to manufacture a spurious solidarity with workers against the union were criticised. Employer strategies aimed at neutralising shop stewards by dismissing them or offering them the first retrenchment packages also featured in this narrative. A shop steward and OHS officer retrenched from a clothing factory related the story of being sacked by the receivers because the previous owner had agreed to buy back the company on condition that this worker, a particularly effective shop steward, should be sacked.

The narrative of trade unions as a protective counter-balance to employer power was largely one that was presented as justifying union membership. However, there was also a darker side to the narrative. This involved an

acceptance of the desirability of union strength and dedication to workers' interests, but constructed trade unions as too weak to be of assistance to workers, and in some cases actively dangerous because of this. Stories often involved a contrast with stories of employer power exercised against participation in union activity. They referred to constant negative comments by management as well as to explicit prohibition of joining trade unions and victimisation of those who were seen as pro-union. Such stories were used in this version of the narrative as a justification for dismissing unions as powerless and concluding that joining or contacting them was too dangerous. Stories related to both small and large companies where proposed or actual contact with external union representatives was constructed as fraught with danger. Significantly, times of labour shedding were constructed as the opportunity for companies to divest themselves of such people.

This version of the narrative was reflected in a particular set of descriptions and stories based around explanations for union weakness, including corruption and co-option of shop stewards through offering overtime or promotion. In these stories, workers had wanted and failed to obtain from unions more visibility, information and advice in general and more consultation and resistance on retrenchments and closures. Some dismissed their union as 'on the side of the employer' because it had accepted less satisfactory retrenchment conditions than the employees wanted. Others had wanted unions to fight to prevent closures, outsourcing or work intensification, and were disappointed that the fight had been limited to maximising retrenchment packages.

Only one interviewee used the pronoun 'we' in reference his trade union. Even some who had been shop stewards and those who used trade union terminology such as 'rank and file' normally used the pronoun 'they'. I would suggest that the use of 'they' is quite significant, in that it reflects a narrative that constructs trade unions as a counter-institution that is external to, and essentially separate from, workers. This narrative underlies the 'wait and watch' approach of many interviewees to joining unions. Another element of the narrative of trade unions as a counter-institution was descriptions that highlighted the high cost of

compulsory unionism. Many of those who dismissed the union as powerless to help them did so in the context of the deductions made from their pay for union membership, in some cases likening these to paying tax. However, rather than objecting in principle to joining unions or paying union dues, their dissatisfaction was associated with a complaint that they received little assistance in return and their dues were therefore ‘money for nothing’.

This version of the narrative is not in itself a union-hostile one, in that it does not characterise unions as intrinsically undesirable. Rather, it could be described as a narrative of ‘union failure’. However, in the sense that this version of the narrative tends to construct union membership as useless, expensive and risky, it could be read as an emerging local narrative of neo-liberal anti-union discourse, the perpetuation of which does ‘discursive work’ to prepare the ground for a flight from union membership. This reading is supported by the way in which this ‘union failure’ narrative at the local level is combined by some workers with classic neo-liberal narratives at the national/global level.

In relation to trade unions, the major narratives of neo-liberal meta-discourse are national/global in scope. Two of these were present in the interviews. The first was associated with the discourse of globalisation, specifically ‘economic nationalism’. It constructed unions as causing industrial unrest and thus harming national competitiveness. The second was the narrative from neo-classical economics that constructs trade unions as artificially maintaining wages and thereby preventing the clearing of the labour market. Both attribute to trade unions the power to intimidate employers, against the national interest.

In relation to trade unions, only three workers drew on such narratives. The first was Dat, a Vietnamese-born worker retrenched from a large vehicle manufacturer, who called on the government to ‘control the union power’ to prevent strikes because ‘the people for the investment they look at this country and they don’t trust this country much’. This statement reflects and promotes the notion of mobile international investment as a disciplining force in local labour markets (Pusey 1991).

The second worker to draw on neo-liberal discourse was Sam, a 56-year old Maltese-born interviewee who had expressed a great deal of bitterness about his sudden retrenchment by a large Japanese vehicle manufacturer. Sam drew on neo-liberal discourses of blame for unemployment (he said Australian workers had 'priced themselves out of' markets in comparison with 'the cheap Asian labour') and used economic terms – 'overseas markets', 'labour' – in a way that constructed the speaker as positioned within a public discourse of globalising neo-classical economics. This positioning was reinforced by a second blame statement: 'The killer of Australia has always been the strikes ... specially the wharves ... the wharfies'. In classical neo-liberal rhetoric, this focuses on the most radical union activity, presenting it as a phenomenon in itself, without context, the nature of the trade union beast; and immediately narrowing this down to the *bête noire* of neo-liberal globalisation and anti-union discourse in Australia, the wharfies.

It appears to be predominantly in the national or global context that neo-liberal narratives concerning unions have been adopted by some workers. When it comes to the local, these two workers combined their use of global, neo-liberal narratives with the narrative of union failure at the local level to form a hybrid discourse quite distinct from the full neo-liberal rejection of unions at all levels. In relation to the processes that led to his retrenchment, Dat stressed union weakness and absence, commenting: 'They work nothing! When we need them, we can't see them!' Sam's comment about the wharfies is followed immediately by a protest against growing social and income inequality in the context of new entrepreneurialised employment practices, and an implied critique of the union for not doing enough to protect people from these practices. In this context, this statement must be seen together with a previous one regarding the part played by the union in his retrenchment, in which he accused the union of agreeing to redundancies instead of reductions in the working week for all workers. He comments: 'The union never considered the workers ... They just done the deal and when the deal was done they told us. I don't think I will join the union next time if I had a choice'.

The neo-liberal discourse of both Dat's and Sam's first statements can thus be read as a component of a hybrid with a narrative of union failure. This hybrid constructs unions as unhelpful to ordinary people both in the sense that their high-wage policies create unemployment and that they are complicit with managements in acquiescing to solutions that increase the gap between haves and have-nots. Even so, the reading of such a narrative is complex and contradictory. On the one hand, it could be read as a variant of the neo-classical idea that if unions did not exist, and salaries could find their level, equity in the distribution of work would ensue. On the other, it contains an implicit claim for more active union involvement in the workplace rather than less, an accusation of abandonment of the workers by unions, and a passionate appeal for distributive justice. These are hardly typical of neo-liberal discourses. This form of the hybrid is still not opposed to the principle of union strength at the local level, much less to the activities of unions in maintaining wages. The hostile narrative of 'union failure' was present in the interviews of many workers. However, only these two workers used it as a hybrid with neo-liberal global level discourse.

The only use of unequivocal neo-classical trade union narratives in relation to both global and local contexts was by Alf, who had been a HR manager both prior to and after migration. Alf's use of contending narratives will be examined in Chapter 8.

Also present in the interviews, although used by only a handful of workers, was a more definitively anti-union narrative involving the construction of an identity as a hard and good worker. A handful of workers constructed unions as inimical to working hard and fast. A few said that unions sometimes protected workers who were 'bludgers' or who had done 'something wrong'.

In one case only, a pro-union narrative was used in the context of a national or global level. This was the narrative of unions as a force for national well-being narrative, in a counter to neo-liberal globalisation discourse, and explicitly countered the 'excessive wage claims' narrative:

I would like the unions to be stronger for people to take power for themselves, to win something, to stop companies from sending money out of Australia – use it

inside Australia to help people here. Keep wages steady but increase the skills of our workers and keep production here instead of overseas.

One Vietnamese worker stated that Vietnamese refugees did not like unions because they ‘made trouble’ with the employer and were identified with communism in Vietnam. This narrative may be related to neo-liberal discourse. However, it was by no means shared by all Vietnamese-born workers, many of whom constructed trade unions as a protective counter-balance to employer power, specifically in terms of the immigrant identity. Those in large companies and men were more inclined to draw on this narrative. However, several Vietnamese women who were aware of unions drew on the narrative of union failure in regard to their own workplaces, criticising unions for failing to help them adequately because they were immigrants (see Chapter 8).

Many of the workers in this study, particularly those who understood English less well, simply knew nothing about unions or the union in their workplaces. Of those who did, the vast majority wanted unions to help them individually, to tell them about, and help them obtain, their entitlements and to resist employer decisions about relocations and closures. In other words, they saw them as a counterbalance to the fundamental power of employers. Overwhelmingly, the narratives used by workers provided a clear counter to the neo-classical economics narrative of power equality between workers and employers – the notion of the trade union as preventing a notional ‘equilibrium’ based on equal power between all in the ‘labour market’.

Individual knowledge and foresight

The neo-classical narrative of the ‘labour market’ involves the assumption that people behave rationally in maximising their own lifetime utility. As Brian Toohey points out, the idea that rational choices may be made between various means to achieve an end implies the existence of perfect knowledge and foresight (Toohey 1994, p. 43).

Workers constructed knowledge about the workworld as power. With knowledge, they could defend their interests and plan for their future. However, both knowledge and foresight about employment were constructed as very problematic by most of the workers interviewed. Knowledge itself was hard to obtain and for many it was deeply dependent on having networks of trusted informants from whom they could obtain real and relevant information. The problem of foresight was intensified by the recession, policy changes and discursive shifts of the early 1990s, which had disrupted many of the 'demand side' patterns upon which people had based previous decisions.

First, access to knowledge within the workplace was constructed as political. One set of stories about retrenchment involved the manipulation of information about company plans by employers to encourage workers to leave. Another set of stories referred to an employer agenda to replace experienced workers with inexperienced ones who knew less and were therefore easier to manipulate. Other stories constructed the central role of English language and literacy and cultural capital in gaining information about the labour market:

New Australians are always dependent on others for advice, and if they give you the right information you are OK but if they don't you are lost. You can't go to an [advice] agency, you don't know it exists till you have heard something from someone outside.

Those who had little English or could not access written information were completely reliant on their networks of trust for information. Knowledge about the new narratives in recruitment of entrepreneurialisation and textualisation, involving resumes and interview 'skills', and about the likelihood of a particular course of action really leading to a job, was dependent on contact with the right people.

Second, workers overwhelmingly constructed their knowledge as outmoded by change. In this narrative, workers constructed the world of work of the early 1990s as having been radically transformed over a very short space of time. Knowledge that had been built up over years was no longer valid, superseded by

change of various types. The recession of 1991 and the relentless series of closures and downsizings of large manufacturing companies in the Western region had drastically reduced the available jobs and increased competition for those that remained. The small companies that were left were constructed as unreliable due to their position in the supply chain for very large companies, which were able to displace fluctuations in demand onto them. They also offered poor pay and conditions: 'Small companies and small pay!' commented a Macedonian woman drily. The change in the employment situation had introduced a sense of 'job apprehension' (Sennett 1998) in those who were still employed, and a sense of what could be called 'employment apprehension' that permeated the accounts of virtually all of those interviewed.

Despite their stories of exploitation, Taylorism and rigid hierarchy in the workplace, 'before' was universally constructed as a 'good' time, when employment could at least be relied upon. Even in 1985, people as old as 55 with no English had quickly found jobs. However, the speed and decisiveness of the recent changes had made irrelevant life-plans based on long-term employment. A construction labourer retrenched when a long-term project finished said: 'You planning work ten years, get some superannuation whatever. But the company finish the contract, even permanent, what can you do?'

Several people commented that for migrants in the West, the 'recession' was not really over, even in 1995. The majority of those interviewed in 2002 saw the employment situation for NESB workers as about the same or worse than it had been in 1994–95. The recession was constructed as having provided an incentive and a cover – 'a very good excuse', in the words of one worker – for other changes that disadvantaged many NESB workers. These included the introduction of new technology, 'multiskilling' and inflated demands for English language, qualifications (including Year 12 for jobs on the factory floor) and extremely precise experience that would enable a newly recruited worker to 'hit the ground running'. These stories acknowledged the discourse of performativity that now dominated work, with cost reduction the primary concern and NESB workers

perceived as a risk. As one worker put it, 'It's always the same: "We have to reduce the costs"'.

Workers were now confronted with new demands for formal qualifications, computing skills, English language and literacy requirements, for the same jobs they had done for many years. Some of these were job-related, some simply raised entry levels. Most workers simply acknowledged these new requirements: 'Now they ask for experience and English for cleaning – not before'. The process of recruitment itself had become textualised. Some workers interviewed in 1994-95 did not know what a resume was, even though the use of resumes was portrayed as essential by employment assistance workers. Several people described recruitment practices for jobs as machine operator or other manual work that did not involve a practical demonstration of ability but only a written application and interview. They found such practices absurd and discriminatory. A Filipino woman who had been a machine operator on a vast range of different machines for many years now found that without experience on the exact machine involved in the job, agencies would not even send her to a company. She drew on a discourse of equity to critique such methods: 'They should give people a chance! ... Why don't they try me out?'

A discourse of equity was also drawn on to comment on the increasing distance workers had to travel out of the region to find work. A retrenched TCF machinist found that house-keeping jobs were all located in better-off suburbs more than an hour's drive away: 'It's too far ... It's not fair, is it? We should have jobs around this side too, why not?'

In 1994 workers told stories of a labour market transformed by the sheer scale of the retrenchments. Apart from the jobs lost in the public sector, the private company closures and downsizings, a series of local council amalgamations was planned, resulting in the projected retrenchment of hundreds of workers. Those re-interviewed in 2002 constructed the employment situation as little if any better than in 1994. The major reason for this was casualisation, now a major cause of 'employment apprehension'. A long-term casual worker commented on the constant uncertainty: 'You never know if you finish or you go permanent or what

... so there is more pressure, you know? ... Now there is no security for nobody'. A worker re-employed in an engineering company in 1994 told of a contraction by 2002 from 600 to under 200 workers. He attributed this partly to work being moved to New Zealand but mostly to 'efficiency measures' and automation. Workers used terms like 'disaster' to describe the employment situation in the region, and terms like 'nothing' and 'a dime a dozen' to describe their value as workers.

In 1994 those working in the IT area were assumed to be the safest. Paul, who came to Australia from Germany as a child, had accepted a good redundancy package from a systems design job in the insurance industry during restructuring and had been offered another job before he finished the first. When contacted in 2002, however, it transpired that he had lost that job after eighteen months and had been unemployed for three years. He felt that this was due to his age (he was 50 years old) and to automation and off-shoring in the finance industry. He had finally found a job through a family member as a laboratory assistant in a flour-mill, a job totally unrelated to his previous qualifications and experience. He described a workworld characterised by intense competition and performativity in which skill formation and the retention and protection of valuable staff were simply irrelevant:

Companies aren't interested in developing you. They want you to come in, do the job and go home. The millers and so on that I see, they are concerned that if they hurt themselves and are off work for a month, their career stops entirely – pressure is applied to leave. It's 'out there' that they won't get anything else ... Experience doesn't have the importance it used to have.

The early 1990s was generally constructed as a watershed, and 1994-2002 as a period in which the changes that began early in the 1990s were consolidated. The larger engineering and textile companies still in existence continued to reduce staff due to automation and 'efficiency measures'. TCF factories continued to close down and outwork to increase. Displaced clothing machinists in their forties, who were physically still able to work, had retrained and were re-

employed as kitchen hands or room attendants for a few years, but most reported new or aggravated back, shoulder, arm and hand problems that had resulted in them currently being on WorkCare or disability pensions. The effects of many changes in the way work was allocated had introduced an era of 'employment apprehension' for workers and resulted in many previously employed workers being forced out of employment on a long-term basis.

Overall, knowledge and foresight were constructed as both essential and problematic. In contrast with a past in which long-term plans could be made and hard work and sacrifice would bring security and improvement, workers now used terms relating to confusion, change, worry and uncertainty to refer to the future.

Engaging with the 'new workplace'

The HC narrative of the 'new workplace' constructed new technology as a fearsome hurdle, which could only be overcome through extensive formal retraining requiring advanced levels of English language. Some workers countered this with stories of simply learning to use new machines in the way they had always done during long careers of moving from machine to machine or job to job. Many employed in less computerised jobs had not been offered training in new technology inside their workplaces and had not had access to information that would have enabled them to foresee the loss of such jobs.

A Vietnamese woman retrenched from a clothing factory told of being excluded from access to new technology as only new workers employed on the new 'training wage' were trained to use the 'new and special machines'. A highly intelligent Oromo man with very good English had completed an adult apprenticeship as a fitter and turner just before his retrenchment. Despite having been recommended to do this apprenticeship by his employer, he had not been informed about computerisation in his field until after the second year of his course. After retrenchment, he realised he had 'done that course almost for three and a half years for nothing'. Possibly because of his Middle Eastern name and

appearance, he was unemployed for several years until he set up a small cleaning business.

The workers shed in company closures were not necessarily those who were incapable of using computerised machines, as we have seen in Chapter 6. Workers described a pattern where automation simply meant a reduction in the number of workers required, and workers lost jobs on the basis of hierarchies unrelated to their skills or potential to learn. The trend to computerisation was constructed as tending to reinforce the divide between people because, even if a worker is computer literate, to keep up it is necessary to have access to the latest software and to use one's skills regularly. This is unlikely to be possible in unemployment, so once the worker loses employment, it becomes increasingly difficult to regain it. Thus, new technology was associated in these stories not with the benefits of the 'new workplace' but with a decline in employment opportunities and with a growing divide between those remaining in workplaces and the unemployed.

Dat countered the narrative of the 'new workplace' with a critique of the gulf between the rhetoric and the reality:

[There was an] Employee Involvement ... class and they ask us to join it and learn to be a group leader ... [AP: What was the training like?] It's good for nothing ... company give it but the factory they don't need it ... Because we don't have the power to change anything when we know that's wrong. When we tell the foreman ... [he says] 'OK, already done the job' [and nothing happens!] And we keep trying but ... They don't work together, the [overseas] Head Office and in here, in [this] country they work different.

Dat portrayed a clash between the 'new workplace' narrative in which trusted, valued and consulted employees take responsibility for quality and the production process and the Taylorist narrative of hierarchical management. He described the obstruction by supervisors of workers' attempts to suggest changes to the production process, leading to worker cynicism and withdrawal from involvement. The narrative of the 'new workplace' implies the sharing with

workers of knowledge about the company. However, in Dat's account, management used knowledge as power, to the detriment of workers. Information about planned shift closures was manipulated by his employer to induce experienced workers like himself to leave so that they could be replaced by inexperienced ones who were easier to control. In other less direct references to the 'new workplace' narrative, the recruitment testing used by a vehicle manufacturer was portrayed as excessive vis-à-vis the job itself, and several workers described losing their jobs through being constructed by management as inappropriate workers for a reorganised or 'greenfields' workplace.

A worker with an unfinished architecture degree from Argentina, retrenched from a labouring job in construction, recounted the story of his re-employment with a large motor vehicle manufacturer. This involved a four-hour pen and paper test, followed weeks later by a practical 'training' session with a wheel on a board and, later still, a medical and an interview. He commented: 'If you take in relation what sort of test we got to take this job which ... I got ... it's stupid! [They] spend four hours and a half testing us. And we sanding car!'

In some cases people had been targeted for dismissal from multilingual workplaces in connection with the narrative of the 'new workplace' after assessment of their English levels:

[The company] chose best English speaking to stay ... Maybe because they need to read more. They said you have to work by yourself, look after whole job from start to finish, different kind of job completely from before.

Narratives of flexibility as 'mobility'

The neo-classical narrative also assumes perfect factor mobility. In the normative neo-liberal narrative, workers are blamed for 'unwillingness' to move house for a job, and a limit on unemployment benefits is proposed as a solution (Saunders 2003). Workers of all ages generally constructed the social networks that represented their major sources of financial as well as emotional and social

support as far more secure than the possibility of a job elsewhere, particularly in circumstances of 'employment apprehension'. In other words, they constructed social networks as primary.

In addition, the vast majority of people over 25 constructed home ownership as a primary life project, a form of insurance and security. Workers spoke of doing nothing but work and sleep for years, of never taking holidays, until they had achieved home ownership. Many people constructed having paid off their house as a protection against having to do 'very hard' jobs forever, and against the effects of employment insecurity. Some had accepted redundancy packages to pay off their mortgages, because the security of owning a house was constructed as greater than having a job in the current labour market in which even 'permanent' jobs in shrinking areas like manufacturing or the public sector are insecure.

The fear of losing a house for a job and then losing the job was mentioned by many people. Several had come very close to losing their houses when they lost their jobs. Ivona had previously had to sell a house when she was unable to keep up the payments. Like several other interviewees, she was a virtual prisoner in her new house, with every spare cent used to pay the mortgage. Nevertheless she spoke with passion and desperation about keeping this house; remaining there was her resistance against being constructed as 'mobile labour': 'Nothing is worth losing this house – I just bought it. What about if I lose that job? What I do? Move again where I get a job? ... If I lose another house I kill myself.'

The security of home ownership was also commonly constructed as one of the promises of migration. Only one worker critiqued this narrative, and even his critique shows some ambivalence:

The Australian dream is a nightmare, because you are buying a house, then you lose your job. It's not right for everyone [to be] buying houses. If you are buying a house, you stick with the house – it stops people moving. You lose your job then you lose your house then you lose your nerve because you were working so hard for so many years to buy it.

Several people constructed mortgage debt as 'unfinished business'; freedom to move was conditional upon the house being paid off. A mortgage debt was constructed as a tie to be dissolved only by complete payment, rather than a transferable and inevitable background to one's financial situation, as it may be for many employed people in a more buoyant housing market. At the time of the first round of interviews the real estate market in the area was depressed; almost any other area of Melbourne would have been an 'expensive area' in comparison. Interviewees were very aware of this. To sell a house and buy another was to many people a slide backwards in their life ambitions that could scarcely be contemplated.

Several older workers had managed to pay off a second house over many years of hard work. These second houses were constructed as security also, as careful and wise saving to provide for their old age. Most workers interviewed had little superannuation; some did not know what superannuation was, others had not been offered employer-based superannuation at all, or not until very recently. They were angry that their second house income was treated with disadvantage in assessing their social security entitlements, constructing this as 'punishing' them for their foresight.

Home owners also constructed their home as an anchor: 'A job you can have anywhere, but your home' The area of attachment to place was one of the few where expressions such as 'like' or 'love' were used. In general, such expressions were used in relation to particular jobs, but many interviewees used them in relation to their streets and suburbs. These attachments constituted a resistance to the economist and disembodied discourses of neo-liberalism. Buying a house was constructed as a form of commitment to a place. The words 'settle', 'take root' and 'established' were typically used in the narrative of house as anchor. Such a commitment was sometimes contrasted with a previous time of movement, particularly migration. Many had no knowledge of country areas, having never had time to travel.

The house was also constructed as an anchor because of its place in the supportive networks of people who gave workers' lives meaning. It was a locus

of relationships with friends, neighbours and family. Responsibilities for ageing parents and dependence on adult children were constructed as geographic imperatives. Spouses' employment and children's schools had to be taken into account. For a move to be worthwhile in a low-paid occupation, employment for both husband and wife had to be available.

Narratives of flexibility as 'casualisation'

As we have seen, work was constructed by these workers as part of a bargain between the worker and both the employer and society. The relationship between employer and employee was constructed as ongoing and entailing some mutual obligations. For employers this included, wherever possible, the provision of permanent, long-term employment. Some constructed retrenchment as a breach of this bargain by the employer.

The growth of employment 'flexibility' was overwhelmingly constructed as a further assault on the forms of personal well-being and social relationships provided by work. Employment conditions based on short-term contracts, casual and, to a lesser extent, part-time work were constructed as degrading people's relations with work over the long term, shaping it in such a way that the employment apprehension of the early 1990s was not ameliorated for this group of workers by the time of the second round of interviews in 2002.

Casual work was constructed as a breach of the mutual commitment of employer and worker, as a diminishment of the worker's contribution. One worker said she 'felt like I was nothing to that factory. When they don't need you they kick you out'.

Some workers constructed casualisation as a consolidation of employer power. In this narrative permanent employment was constructed as a matter of fairness or of employee 'rights' (see case study 1, Chapter 8). The 'flexibility' of casualisation was constructed as benefiting the employer by 'sav[ing] money on benefits'. In this narrative, casual employees were particularly vulnerable to employer reprisals if they challenged employer power.

Another narrative constructed casual work as disabling because regular casual work prevented workers from doing a number of things that might improve their prospects of finding permanent work, or improving their lives in other ways. This included studying effectively on English or vocational courses and searching for a better (permanent) job. On-call work intensified the problems. Being available at very short notice prohibited travelling far from home or undertaking any commitment that would be difficult to leave. Casual work was also constructed as disabling in personal and income terms. Many people described a constant sense of unease and insecurity, 'feeling funny'. However, there were also implications for the worker's status as a provider and home-owner, or simply the sense of control: '... when you are permanent at least you have a plan ... Mortgage is possible, holiday is possible if you are permanent'.

Casual work was also constructed as risk, partly because the worker 'could miss a permanent job somewhere else', and partly through stories of difficulties with income support payments when workers moved in and out of casual work. Many stories were told of losing money in the complexities of income support when they were employed temporarily, and there was a real fear of being 'caught in a mistake and then the government sends the hounds on you'. Some opted for the safer course of action – staying home. It was ironic, given the narrative of flexibility, that the fear of breaching made some workers less inclined to accept casual work.

Casualisation was also constructed as inimical to learning in the workplace. A Maltese-born retrenched cleaner commented: 'The young ones don't know anything – they all work casual'. In context, this comment constructed casual work itself as preventing workers from amassing the situated embodied working knowledge their parents had accumulated through participation in the workplace community of practice over a long career. A retrenched bank clerk described having to train '[casual] outsiders that don't know anything' in the bank. His use of the word 'outsiders' also constructs these people as lacking the knowledge that derives from participation – preferably permanent and full-time – in the community of practice (see 'Narratives relating to education and training', this

chapter). The use of casual workers was also reported to involve a requirement for experience on the exact machine the worker was to use. The implications for skill formation are significant.

Casual work was constructed as not 'real' work. Casual (or short-term) jobs were constructed as fallback, in the absence of a 'real' job. No participant in the study welcomed casual employment, although many of them were currently or had previously been employed as casuals. Stories that constructed casual jobs as fallback involved accepting jobs that were lower paid but permanent, and workplaces where worker attrition was high because their working conditions resembled casual work, without allowances, holidays or sickpay. Those in casual employment told of their ongoing search for permanent jobs.

A few workers recounted forms of material resistance to discourses of flexibility. Some of those whose partners were employed, and who were therefore not under pressure to accept any available employment, chose not to work at all rather than to work in casual employment even as a 'stepping stone' to permanent employment. Some refused to use recruitment agencies²⁰ that only dealt with short-term work. Other workers simply acknowledged that their working lives were now constructed within the discourse of flexibility and its implications for their job security. In this context, permanent employment itself was constructed as no longer permanent: 'There's no job guaranteed permanent ... these days'. Several workers commented that their retrenchment had been as easy as if they had been casual – but they had not been paid as casuals, on a higher hourly rate than permanent workers. The simple fact was that 'You can't expect to work for the rest of your life now'.

Narratives of flexibility as 'multiskilling'

²⁰ Some workers constructed employment 'agencies' as responsible for casualisation. The term 'agencies' was used to refer to labour hire companies, personnel agencies such as Ecco and in some cases Job Network providers; few interviewees were aware of the differences between types of 'agencies' or of whether employees incurred costs through their use.

According to the narrative of flexibility, workers must become functionally flexible through multiskilling. Multiskilling was constructed in several contradictory ways. In the narrative of multiskilling as natural, workers' employment histories demonstrated their ability to adapt to new machines and even completely new types of work – that was simply what they did. Some workers spoke of being prepared to do any job they were asked to do in the workplace and of welcoming the opportunity to learn new skills as they went.

Others, particularly women retrenched from the clothing industry, constructed multiskilling as work intensification. In this narrative it was a policy, sometimes constructed as selectively applied and discriminatory, to reduce worker numbers and save money, often at the expense of quality, safety or client service.

However, for most, multiskilling was constructed as credentialism; it formed part of a HC discourse of flexibility that assumed that skills were gained only by means of formalised training and certification, thereby excluding those who had less English and education. Thus multiskilling itself was constructed as contributing to the tightening of the employment situation for these workers, as they lost jobs based on particular skills acquired informally or overseas and found that they needed a greater range of certificates and licences to be considered for re-employment. Atef, an Egyptian army engineer and teacher retrenched from a panelbeating job and now LTU commented in 1995:

[By the time] I finish the [English] course there was the recession, they all ask for panel beater and spray painter and colour matching and supervisor job and quote for the job, all these together. I don't have that experience.

The neo-liberal narrative of entrepreneurialism

Starting a small business is a common NESB immigrant pattern (Collins et al. 1995), and privileged in the neo-liberal narrative of entrepreneurialism. There were three main narratives concerning small business. The first narrative was small business as risk. Terms used in this narrative included: 'guts',

‘scared/afraid’, ‘gamble’, ‘fail’, ‘bankrupt’, ‘lose everything/ lot / my house / the shirt off your back’. Several people cited statistics about the number of small businesses that fail and others told stories of their own failed or marginal businesses. A retrenched public transport worker who had lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in a supermarket business critiqued the neo-liberal narrative: ‘I thought I was a millionaire because I had a business!’ A young Vietnamese-born man had left a permanent job where he had been very successful, in order to start a small garment-making business – a ‘gamble’. The business went well but when the company to which they subcontracted ostensibly went bankrupt, he and his wife ‘lost almost everything’. They were still paying off business debts from their unemployment benefit, several years later.

Capital and knowledge about the law (‘the law change!’) and the business environment (‘the jungle’) were constructed as major problems. Some constructed entrepreneurialism as ‘how you were brought up’, a personality trait, a ‘vocation’, which they did not have, or as morally indefensible: ‘Business people are liars, tricky people’. Some had been impelled into such a risky situation without any intention on their part. Basia and her husband lost their jobs at almost the same time. Her husband worked for a large food company as a permanent full-time driver. Suddenly he was ‘sacked’ along with the other drivers; they were told that to keep their relationship with the company they must become self-employed contractors. Basia was ‘scared’ because they had a mortgage; but they remortgaged the house and bought the truck, and she became the bookkeeper for the ‘family firm’. It was ‘a bit stressful’, she said – her husband’s job was ‘the same only more headaches, because responsible for it now’. Eight years later they no longer lived at the same address.

Another narrative was small business as last resort. Several workers constructed the choice of small business as a resistance to racist and HC discourse that constructed them as unskilled factory fodder and increasingly consigned them to insecure employment. An older Polish tube-moulder wanted to become a self-employed courier; this way, he commented, he ‘couldn’t get sacked again!’ Another man, William, recounted his unsuccessful efforts to find a permanent job

with some prospects, instead of the round of casual labouring work in which he had spent several years due to employers scepticism about his tertiary qualifications and ten years' manufacturing management experience in China. 'If [I could speak English] like you I get very very very good job here. So best thing is to start my own business', he said. For Kent, a Vietnamese-born tube-moulder in a tyre factory, small business was his resistance to ethnic discrimination in promotion, followed by exclusion from a company move to a greenfields site because of an English language test. Despite a significant improvement in his English, a resume and new interview skills acquired through the PMV LAP, he was unemployed for several years. With his wife, also retrenched, and brother, he opened a 'Two Dollar Shop' and was still running it successfully in 2002.

The third narrative was small business as positive value. This was the neo-liberal narrative of entrepreneurialism, and was drawn on by a significant minority. A number of people constructed a move into some kind of small, usually family-based, business as virtually a norm. Some constructed this as an ethnic pattern: a Vietnamese worker stated: 'All Vietnamese want to do business'. However, for most there were current difficulties that made this very much a long-term aspiration or indeed a fantasy. Many people constructed the financial side of starting a business as totally impracticable, including some who had been saving before retrenchment to follow this course. Others commented that their level of English language, business skills, cultural knowledge or support networks were inadequate for such a task in the short term.

Narratives relating to education and training

HC discourse locates the blame for unemployment in the poor quality of available labour, and the responsibility for education and training with the individual – the narrative of 'employability' (Virgona et al. 2003, p. 56). It constructs human capital as formed independently of, and usually prior to, a period of employment (O'Loughlin & Watson 1997 p. 141). This discourse privileges formal,

credentialed education over situated learning within the workplace. Thus in the current HC narrative of lifelong learning, a willingness and a capacity to return frequently to the formal classroom is morally good and necessary to earn 'employability'. The acquisition of credentialed skills is constructed as systematically rewarded in the 'market'. Within this discourse, the narrative of textualisation constructs knowledge as located in certificates and written sources, and the narrative of vocationalism constructs education as only valuable when undertaken for the purposes of employment.

Learning and knowledge were commonly constructed as tacit and informal. The privileging of formal education and training institutions as sites of learning in HC discourse was commonly critiqued and countered, predominantly through the narrative of learning as participation. This narrative constructed valuable learning as occurring through participation in the workplace. Learning involved close connection with other workers and therefore with the embodied realities of the job. Workers' stories involved the naturalisation of learning as part of a workplace task through accounts of sometimes very long careers of changing from job to job, machine to machine, company to company. Terms like 'hands-on' were used in this narrative. Typically, perhaps due to their tacit nature, the skills or attributes learned through participation were not often spelled out, or were referred to only in physical terms; an exception to this was 'confidence'.

A related narrative constructed knowledge as 'embodied and embedded in practice' (Farrell 2001, p. 68). A young Vietnamese woman complained that the management 'didn't teach [me] anything on the new machine' when she was moved to the summer shoe section; '... they want me to leave! No instructions, only a paper on that machine with instructions!' In her account, she learned by herself in 3 weeks, so well that she was highly productive – 'up to 600 pairs' – and could 'fix' the machine as well. This account is interesting for two reasons. First, the account constructs this worker as being very well able to cope with textualised work without an awareness that this is what she is doing. This suggests the possibility of successful incorporation of text into a discourse of

practice but, by the same token, the improbability of this worker being able to deal with recruitment practices that require her to articulate such skills.

Second, this worker's account constructs textually mediated instructions as 'no instructions', and an absence of 'teaching' almost in hostile terms. In this narrative, teaching and learning occurs between people – it is embodied. Embodied knowledge transfer is benign. Text is not teaching; knowledge transfer through text is constructed as an absence and as even malign. Thus knowledge is not inherent in text, but a function of participation in a community and culture of practice (Billett 1998).

The same narrative is involved in another worker's account of his English course. In this account, fifty students at the beginning of the year were now five, because the course had 'too much theory'. 'Teacher very lazy! ... Just give you a paper and you go to library and answer questions!' In this narrative, textualised methods of learning are rejected in favour of embodied ones.

The same narrative of learning as participation was also used in relation to English language and literacy. Workers countered the narrative of 'skills' as formed independently of the workplace with stories that confirmed Rosie Wickert's view that workplace practice was central to forming linguistic practice:

Now I speak very slow and pronounce very bad. [When I was working] I used to speak, [when] you ... speak you keep learning, learning, and you speak better ... now you want to use, you forget. ... Writing slowly too, before I write all the time, I take a pen like you, I can write everything. But now I take a pen, I want to write a word, I forgot how to [spell].

Overwhelmingly, workers countered the narrative of employability by amassing the evidence of their previous employability and productiveness. However, they acknowledged narratives of credentialism that constructed as non-existent their previously recognised knowledges about work. In these narratives, these workers were constructed as deficient, in terms of the 'qualifications', 'certificates', 'papers' that they did not possess, the courses that they had not

undertaken. The requirements of employers had shifted dramatically since many of them had previously sought employment.

Within the narratives of learning as participation and knowledge as ‘embodied and embedded in practice’, formal study was sometimes constructed as unnecessary, due to the ‘obviousness’ of the requirements of a particular job such as cleaning or shelf stacking. Other reasons were previous mastery of similar or more demanding knowledge without the need for formal training; or pre-existing skills and knowledge. A retrenched cleaner asked: ‘Why you need school to clean? ... They send me to school for a job I already do!’

The normative discourse of lifelong learning was virtually absent, with only one worker – currently re-employed in the employment assistance area herself – articulating this discourse: ‘Now people need to constantly study’. However, most constructed formal study as hope and accepted opportunities when they were accessible to them.

The most common narrative used to counter the normative discourse of lifelong learning was the narrative of formal study as risk. The element of risk relates to the possibility that participation in formal training will not lead to a job, compared with the costs, in terms of fees, travel and associated costs, foregone income, time away from looking for work, and, for some people, extreme discomfort in the formal classroom.

Formal study was constructed as a risk in several ways. First, a worker may undertake a course with the wrong credential (sometimes under pressure from employment-assistance agencies) or at the wrong institution, such as a ‘not very famous’ university. Second, success in the course was not guaranteed, because of the English language and literacy or other demands of the course. Some workers with ample ability lacked familiarity with the formal classroom and therefore had little confidence that they would succeed. Others who were highly educated in their own languages received inadequate support in courses that they would have found easy in their own language but were only available taught in English.

Such stories countered the human capital narrative of ‘skills’ as ‘within the individual’s control or easily acquired’, but also the narrative of ‘competence in

language and literacy is a basic or foundation skill onto which higher order communication skills are grafted' (Wickert & Baynham 1994 p. 180). A wide variety of those interviewed reported English language factors that hindered or prevented their progress in formal courses that were not 'integrated programs' (Bertone 1995, p. 71; Courtenay 1994). Some recounted being sent on vocational courses prior to English courses for administrative convenience. Careful integration of English language with other course content would have assisted many people, from cleaning courses to postgraduate degrees.

Third, formal study was constructed as a risk because the completion of the course might not be sufficient. Employers commonly required experience as well as the qualification: 'They say when you open the telephone: 'You got experience or not?' What for you go to school for that?' These workers' stories commonly acknowledged the dominant narrative of NESB immigrant as at the end of the job queue by anticipating the various forms of segmentation and discrimination relating to the new area, particularly at times when young, healthy, qualified, 'Australian' workers were unemployed: 'My granddaughter is Australian, she got a [HE Associate Diploma in Computing], still can't find a job!' Such stories were a powerful disincentive to retraining.

Employment-assistance agencies were constructed as unhelpful in assessing the probable employment outcomes of a course, due in some cases to over-optimism and in others to institutionalised scepticism. Undertaking formal study in a period of unemployment was also constructed as a risk in the sense that its long-term usefulness depended on gaining related employment within a short period. Skills are ephemeral, and in a situation where they cannot be used and practised in employment, the effect of a course can be minimal. This was particularly true of computer and English language courses.

Drawing on discourses of equity, certain types of formal study were also constructed as exploitation. These involved 'work placements' involving the same tasks as paid workers, in occupations in which the unpaid worker was already experienced, and with no real prospect of employment. One worker described this as 'Putting money in people's pockets!' The discourse of lifelong

learning was also countered in the case of unemployed people through the narrative of unemployment as impeding effective learning due to the stress and anxiety it causes.

Another counter to the HC narrative of skills and attributes as 'within the individual's control or readily acquired' (Bertone 2000a p. 55) was a narrative of access to skills as socially allocated. Workers recounted stories about the constraints on their participation in formal education and training both within and outside the workplace. One common element of this narrative was the allocation by superiors in the workplace of a right to attend classes. Typically supervisors were constructed as prioritising production over class attendance. Allocation of training opportunities was also constructed as subject to discourses about ethnicity and other social factors within the workplace. A Vietnamese machinist described an English program as offered to 'Italian and Greek people but not to me'.

The construction of NESB workers as deficient within dominant racist discourses about English language underpinned many accounts of opportunities for training, in which the existing skills and knowledges of workers were nullified by their categorisation as NESB. A highly qualified and experienced professional builder from Latin America recently re-employed at operative level in a large vehicle manufacturing company told a story illustrating the way in which he had already been 'tracked' into a training group that differentiated him from his ESB workmates. He ridiculed being required to 'learn' what a no-smoking sign meant and to repeat material in areas where he already held certificates. Several workers referred to employer perceptions of trainability based on English language assumptions: 'People think that because we don't speak the language we're stupid'.

Restrictions on the length of training that employment-assistance agencies were prepared to support were also constructed as differentiating NESB employees from others, in a situation where English language as well as vocational study, and therefore extra time, was needed. These related to limits of one year or, in the case of the LAP programs, two years, when certificated vocational courses such as hairdressing required two years of vocational training

alone. The social allocation of employment itself was constructed as a determinant of opportunities for training in stories in which certain qualifications required for employment could only be obtained through a workplace sponsor or a work experience component.

Dominant discourses about education and training construct these more and more as a commodity, distributed through a market. In workers' stories, the resulting costs imposed upon individuals in relation to TAFE, HECS, and private providers in niche areas were constructed as significantly increasing the risk involved in formal study, in many cases leading to the decision not to undertake, or to abandon, such study. The risk was constructed as particularly high when the course was full-time and/or privately funded and a job was not 'guaranteed'.

Government support for such study through employment assistance, the LAPs of the early 1990s and Austudy was constructed as positive and enabling. However, it was also limited both through permitting only the less costly courses – which meant that the more qualified workers were unable to retrain effectively – and through means-testing of related benefits, which limited its possibilities for those who had been earners, or who became re-employed. Charges of over a hundred dollars for tests and certificates, sometimes newly required for employment in the same job as the worker had recently lost, were also constructed as significant impediments given the risks of failing to find employment as a result.

The narrative of vocationalism, constructing formal retraining as leading to employment in different industries or occupations, was very powerful, with formal retraining offering for many their only source of hope. Critiques of this narrative were from within HC discourse, with the claim that such formal retraining did not have the intended employment outcome. However, a very few – all older women – countered the narrative of vocationalism with a narrative of formal study as personally fulfilling. English or other classes were described as 'for myself', 'for my own interest', or simply enabling workers to leave the house and gain some of the benefits previously provided by paid work. For these women, undertaking such courses was partly a resistance to the vocationalism of

lifelong learning discourse, and partly a response to their release from the norm of paid work.

Narratives relating to English language and literacy

Although by no means all of those interviewed identified their English language proficiency as a reason for their difficulty in finding employment, English language-related issues surrounded those who had arrived in Australia as adults, and structured their perception of the labour market. Most simply acknowledged the discourses that constructed them as ‘unemployable’ or last in the job queue. People spoke of English language factors combined with financial pressures as limiting them to factory work, hard and dirty work, no matter what their qualifications. Lack of opportunity and support for learning English at the same time as supporting their families had prevented people from applying for the recognition of their overseas qualifications and from gaining employment or even returning to study at a level that was commensurate with their previous qualifications and experience. Most of all, people reported new demands for English language proficiency associated with jobs which in the past had involved no such demands.

In attempting to understand the way in which those interviewed engaged with dominant discourses about English language and literacy, it will be useful to examine quite closely two interview excerpts that illustrate the contending narratives about ethnicity and ELL underpinning the interviews. The first is an account of a conflict between discourses about language and work, recounted by Charlie, a Maltese-born man who had risen to the status of junior manager in a ceramic factory before his own retrenchment. His supervisors instructed him:

‘Don’t employ anyone over 42, and they must be able to read and write. They must be people who understand us’. I argued with them. ‘These people here, we employ them to lug that clay around. You just go around, have a look at their muscles, they are strong, they want to work, you just give them the job!’ No, we

want them to read and write now. Because we cannot talk with them. I said 'How about you learn their language or they learn your language?' That didn't go too well either. They said 'It's alright for you, you can speak their language'. I said, 'Alright, you do like I do!' I could converse with Yugoslav, Polish, Italian, I speak Italian fluently. I can converse Portuguese, Spanish ... If you try you do it. Alright, you don't understand every single word ... but you get through!

This account represents a series of discursive 'moves' in which Charlie presents elements of the discourses being used by management, and then counters them. First, the discourse of the management is presented as one which constructs older workers and workers with poor English language and literacy as unemployable. Also unemployable are those who do not 'understand' management, and the meaning of this word is not immediately clarified. On the one hand, it could be interpreted to mean simple comprehension of supervisors' spoken words; on the other, some far broader kind of shared values or cultural similarity. The blurred boundaries between a requirement for English language and literacy and for 'the workplace rapport provided by cultural capital' (O'Loughlin & Watson 1997, p. 16) recurred throughout the interviews; another example is provided by the speaker's use of 'share some feelings' in the following:

... maybe there is a gap between the Australian and me. My boss prefers someone who can talk to him, share some feelings with him. We work very hard but ... when they think of sacking they choose people who can't communicate ... You have to both speak English and work well.

Clearly the speaker had previously been employed and employable; basic communication must have existed sufficient for actually carrying out the job (in this case, process work and packing). The phrase 'share some feelings' refers to a type of spoken communication beyond this, in a domain of 'preference' and 'feelings', which is likely to contain a significant degree of cultural bonding. In the case of Charlie, the latter interpretation is supported by the juxtaposition of the

demand for ‘understanding’ with the demand for English language literacy, which as many workers pointed out is certainly not relevant to oral communication.

The problem of the supervisors is clearly one of oral communication. However, their requirement for its solution is literacy. It is clear that Charlie is concerned to counter the construction of literacy as a proxy for fluency in spoken English. By ridiculing this reasoning, he is resisting the racist narrative of language practice as a ‘symbol of Otherness’. The use of literacy as a de facto method of excluding NESB applicants was a common theme. As Ivona put it, ‘‘Have to write, read and speak English’ means not [migrants] because not many [migrants] can write well’.

Charlie also counters the narrative of English as a necessity for employability by drawing on what might broadly be called a discourse of the multilingual community of practice. Many people described workplaces where they were able to speak their own languages for much of the time. These included clothing factories, meatworks, food, rubber and metals factories. In some workplaces ‘they’ sent some to learn English as interpreters for the rest’. These workplaces were able to function quite adequately without all employees speaking good English: ‘Speak not a problem if you understand the job’. Many interviewees expressed complete scepticism as well as dismay about the new requirements for English, based on their previous – and in some cases very recent – experience in such workplaces.

The first element of the discourse of the multilingual community of practice used by Charlie is the narrative of what he later terms ‘horses for courses’ – the claim that applicants’ English language and literacy should only be taken into account insofar as they are actually needed to carry out a particular job. This is a direct critique of the narrative of racist discourse that constructs English as a necessity for employability. The type of job involved here is purely physical. Therefore, Charlie insists, the insistence on ELL is misplaced. Second, Charlie claims, like many other interviewees, that this insistence on ELL represents a shift in policy, a new definition of employability. And lest the listener should assume that a change in work practices justifies a new literacy requirement, the definition of the problem in terms of spoken communication is immediately reaffirmed:

‘Because we cannot talk with them’. Thus the shift is constructed as capricious and unjustified, particularly as he has already made it clear that the job is a manual one; thus he constructs the new requirement for English language and literacy as a form of ‘informal credentials inflation’ (O’Loughlin & Watson 1997, p.23).

Another narrative of the multilingual community of practice that workers used to counter the narrative of English as a necessity for employability was a narrative that constructed texts as jointly produced. Ivona described an ongoing disagreement with the employer in her electronics assembly job over her practice of working with her workmates on text-based tasks such as report writing, particularly spelling. Her boss, she said, ‘didn’t want other people to write for me, he said it was my job’. This disagreement represents a clash between the discourse of the multilingual community of practice, where texts are informal and their production shared between workers who learn from each other, and the individualism and textualisation of the new discourses constructing work.

The discourse of the multilingual community of practice is also evident in Charlie’s use of another of its narratives: the narrative of communication as a shared responsibility. A part of this narrative is the claim put forward by Charlie that the solution may involve language learning by management as well as by workers. Thus he is countering perhaps the most dominant of narratives regarding English language and literacy, which constructs NESB immigrants as responsible for the success of communication with the ‘mainstream’. This narrative combines the individual responsibility of HC discourse and the supply side labour market focus of neo-classical economics with racist discourse (see Chapter 4).

In Charlie’s account, the next move in the supervisors’ rhetoric is ‘It’s alright for you, you can speak their language’. The use of the phrase ‘It’s alright for you ...’ captures a subtle discursive move by his superiors that both attributes an advantage to Charlie (the ability to speak other languages easily because English is not his first language, thereby diminishing the value of learning any language except English) and simultaneously constructs him as ‘other’, one of ‘them’ and thus inferior, thereby negating that ‘advantage’. This move is a feature of racist

discourse which involves counterposing 'monolingual English speakers' and 'others', with a playing-down of differences between non-English languages and a claim that belonging to the category of 'other' involves a kind of permeability of language barriers that is denied to monolingual English speakers. Thus learning other languages is constructed as too hard and of little value for English speakers, and easy but of little value for 'others'. At the same time, language background is constructed as a social marker, in an instantiation of the narrative of language practice as a 'symbol of Otherness'.

We have seen in Chapter 4 how neo-liberal discourse empties out the link between language and identity, thereby constructing English reductively as a mere 'work skill', the lack of which can be used to justify the construction of 'unemployability', and consigning other languages to irrelevance. Most workers simply acknowledged the dominance of this construction of English. However, one way of countering this narrative was an insistence on English as a language, representing more than just a work skill. A retrenched clothing machinist countered this narrative by distinguishing between English for job search and English as a language. 'All we learn was about ... not so much English but interview, how to get a job ... just that, not much English. ... It was good, but we were there to learn English!' By enumerating the languages of the workers in the factory, Charlie also counters this narrative and constructs language as identity. He foregrounds those workers' identities as people with linguistic and cultural resources of their own rather than simply deficient in English language competence. Simultaneously, he insists on a construction of his ability to communicate in several distinct languages as an achievement, rather than something that comes naturally to him due to his Maltese origin – his 'otherness'.

Thus he constructs the learning and use of languages other than English as a positive value, rather than a complicated waste of time given the economic and cultural superiority of English. This is reinforced by his suggestion that 'You do like I do', and 'if you try you do it!' He insists that this solution to the communication 'problem' is as available to the supervisors as it is to him, and far from constructing him as 'other' and inferior, his linguistic achievement in

communicating with speakers of other languages is worthy of emulation by his superiors.

Finally, Charlie draws on another narrative of the discourse of the multilingual community of practice, the narrative of negotiated meaning, with the claim that it is 'get[ting] through' rather than perfect, instant communication, that is required. In other words, meaning is negotiated between people. This narrative was also drawn on by many others, as a counter to the narrative of NESB immigrants as responsible for the success of communication with the 'mainstream': 'English speaking people don't like us if we don't speak English fluently. Some people give instructions very fast. They don't like it when you ask for clarification. They want you to speak like them.'

A different insight into the narratives about English with which workers engage may be gained from the account given by Nick, a Spanish labourer:

Doesn't matter how you try to speak, people maybe no understand you properly. That's one problem. Second, you can't bullshit to the boss like an Australian ... because you don't know how to bullshit to him, but some people do it ... can't make excuses enough [if] you no speak English properly. So you ... you disadvantaged! ... Depends on the foreman, if they treat you equally, or the management ... [my company] doesn't worry about [it] because the boss at [my company] was wogs, Italians ... so if they know you're a good worker you don't have any problems. Other companies, you don't speak English properly, they don't want to listen. [But] if you speak English properly, doesn't mean you qualified, [maybe] you don't understand nothing, or you don't do the work. You might have a lot [in] your mind, but doesn't know how to explain ... When you born on this country, your father, or your uncle or your grandpa teach you the ways ... (Nick)

Throughout this account, Nick refers to speaking English 'properly', and initially it is unclear what he means by this. However, as he pursues his comparison with the 'Australian' worker, it becomes clear that he does not mean speaking English well as an adult learner but speaking it in the way native speakers do. The

‘Australian’ worker means a person born in Australia and therefore accentless, with a father, or an uncle or a grandpa to provide them with ‘cultural capital’. This use of the word ‘properly’ is a critique of the claim of neo-classical narrative of ‘skills’ as rewarded incrementally in the ‘market’ – in other words, the more English, the more reward. In order to be treated equally with ‘Australians’ and trusted by all employers, Nick insists, complete linguistic assimilation is required.

In this context, Nick’s first sentence can be read as a statement of the impossibility of such an achievement. Nick is concerned to counter the idea that NESB workers like himself can ever speak English well enough to be accepted as equals. Implicitly being countered here is the myth perpetuated by Stromback and Preston’s study examined in Chapter 5 that if NESB immigrants try hard enough they will speak (and read and write) English properly and then they will be equally employable with monolingual English speakers – that native-speaker-like English is ‘within the individual’s control or readily acquired’ (Bertone 2000a p. 55). His comment is a critique of a narrative that constructs English as a unitary basic skill, something that can be acquired at will to an infinite degree by all people. Nick insists that the possibility of linguistic assimilation is limited, that what is being asked is unreasonable. He is acknowledging the racist narrative of language practice as a ‘symbol of Otherness’, which will always characterise a certain group of people, leading to disadvantage in the labour market if employers refuse to ‘listen’ to them.

Nick’s comment is also a statement about the location of responsibility for successful communication. As we have seen, racist discourse constructs the NESB immigrant as responsible for the success of communication with the ‘mainstream’. Like Charlie, Nick sets up a two-sided picture of communication, using a narrative of communication as a shared responsibility. This narrative locates the solution involved here both in the NESB person ‘trying’ and in ‘people’ who ‘listen’ and ‘understand’ – by implication, ‘Australian’ people, bosses and co-workers. ‘Not understanding’ was constructed as power play: ‘When it’s not convenient to understand, they don’t! They say, “Strong accent”!’

Another dominant narrative being countered here by Nick is a narrative of textualisation of employment in which linguistic practices are privileged over experience and ability to do the job. Nick points out 'if you speak English properly, doesn't mean you qualified, [maybe] you don't understand nothing, or you don't do the work'. In this narrative, the employers 'don't want to listen' to workers whose linguistic practices are not considered adequate but who may 'have a lot [in their] mind'. Nick is commenting on practices within the workplace. However, this narrative was also drawn on extensively by interviewees in the context of recruitment: 'With English more easy to find another job. Maybe you know less than me but because you speak a little bit better ...' The narrative of textualisation, where the ability to talk or write about work counts for more than the ability to do it, underlies the language and text-based training and recruitment practices that came to dominate in the 1990s workworld.

Nick constructs the power relations within which linguistic practices occur as central to the success of those practices on the part of the worker. He constructs English as necessary for self-defence, another common narrative: 'Australians aren't afraid of anything, because they can say what they feel ... People with English can answer back and negotiate – say 'Why?' – about sacking and retrenchment, other people can't!'. Nick appears to use the word 'bullshit' and the derogatory term 'excuses' to refer to discursive work, such as explaining when things go wrong, as opposed to physical tasks. This draws on a narrative that constructs linguistic activities as less real and less respectable than practical, physical ones. Nick's use of 'bullshit' and 'excuses' to refer to linguistic practice is drawing on the narrative of knowledge as 'embodied and embedded in practice' (Farrell 2001, p. 68). The companies he describes as trusting 'good workers' are companies where traditional craft discourse is shared to some extent by managers; in other words, where the work record, or tacit knowledge, of embodied workers is equally or more highly regarded than their ability to talk and write in an acceptable manner. However, his description of the way in which inability to use

English may 'disadvantage' a worker indicates his ambivalence about that narrative in the context of recent changes in discourses about work.

Much of the way in which workers critiqued racist narratives about English involved them drawing on human capital narratives to effect the critique. They were critiquing a racist narrative in which English language considerations negate other forms of human capital. Another group of workers with overseas qualifications and experience also widely acknowledged narratives and practices that constructed these as inferior (see for example Chapter 8). Such narratives and practices were naturalised through narratives about English language and practices including lack of sufficient support for newly arrived immigrants in acquiring sufficient English language and local knowledge to use their existing 'human capital'. Workers differed in the degree to which they discursively resisted such narratives. A Chilean-born mathematics teacher had decided it was not 'ethical' to teach because his English was not perfect. Others insisted that their pre-existing 'human capital' was also relevant. Atef, an ex-teacher, asked: 'Why they don't use [my qualifications]? ... Maybe my English ... [but] they have to teach me good English! ... I'm really very sad because they didn't use my qualifications'.

These narratives were very much within the context of vocationalism. Some workers countered this narrative by constructing learning English as personal empowerment. These workers described the difference learning to speak and/or write English had made to their lives. Although they typically hoped that this might have an employment outcome, this was not central.

In summary, many of those interviewed were countering discourses that constructed them as deficient in human capital (ELL) and responsible for this individually. They were drawing on discourses that said that lack of English was not the reason that they were unemployed, and that therefore acquiring the HC was likely to be futile.

Narratives relating to the state

Privatisation and outsourcing

The early 1990s saw the election of the Kennett government²¹ in Victoria and a rash of privatisations and outsourcing in the state public sector, justified by neo-liberal narratives of marketisation and performativity. Outsourcing was constructed by workers overwhelmingly as waste and as downward pressure on wages, safety and equitable employment patterns, partly due to the intrinsic competitive nature of contracting out. Part of the rhetoric of contracting out had been the image of small, friendly family companies or even worker cooperatives winning the contracts and taking the place of huge, faceless government bureaucracies. This was countered with stories of large private firms that dominated the tender process. Several workers told stories of the work intensification resulting from competitive tendering: 'If we are to continue, we must do it for less. Now we are seven people; we must do it with six ... This is the second time they do that ... we work harder than [before]'. Many told stories of failing to be re-employed by the new private contractor, or of being employed and then dismissed on a pretext. The new firms were reported to 'take young people', to downgrade workers 'from mechanic ... to pick and shovel', or from 'stable in one site' to moving all over Melbourne.

Privatisation and outsourcing was also constructed as unwise public policy, on the grounds of the rigidities they imposed on the job itself, the loss of commitment to training and skill formation, and the social impact of the reduction in wages to 'desperate' levels that was likely to result from both privatisation and the loss of protection through the Award system, also introduced by the new state government. Workers also engaged with neo-liberal narratives about the efficiency of privatisation and outsourcing by dismissing them as 'propaganda'. The performativity and work intensification of the new public sector arrangements were critiqued in terms of their implications for service:

²¹ For a brief account of the impact of the Kennett government, see Salvaris (1995, pp. 145-58).

There are many queues, if a patient maybe is in a hurry, an emergency, they had to wait, doesn't matter how sick they are ... There is not enough cleaners. Maybe there is blood on the floor, or water ... and you can slip, maybe cleaner is doing another urgent thing and they call 'Sorry, I'm doing this!' You have to go three or four place at the same time ...

It was also pointed out that when public sector staff become unemployed, they are still being paid by the government, in the form of UB: 'The policy was to save money, but money doesn't go to another planet, it stays in Australia!'

One retrenched employee of the public sector, an engineer from the privatised water board currently living on his investments in the stockmarket, drew on the dominant narrative of performativity to justify the changes, despite his own inability to find another job. His retrenchment, he said, was necessary 'for society ... We were doing a good job but we were too expensive'.

The construction of unemployment

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, work was generally constructed as fair exchange with society, within which workers gained a number of benefits and their work provided benefit to society. There were two major ways of constructing unemployment within this narrative. In one narrative unemployment was constructed as loss of self-respect and shame. Loss of self-respect and 'shame' were to some extent constructed as arising from a personal and individual relationship to the social bargain. A second and more common narrative constructed unemployment as a disruption of the social bargain, a phenomenon that prevents the bargain from being manifest and thus prevents both social contribution and individual ethical behaviour. In this narrative, unemployment was constructed as a senseless waste. There was a fine line between the 'shame' arising from being constructed as a 'bludger' in the neo-liberal narrative and the

effects of the loss of the social identity and status provided by paid work. Many workers drew on both narratives at different times.

There were also two major narratives regarding receipt of unemployment benefit (UB). In the first, used by some but not all of those who associated unemployment with loss of self-respect and shame, being in receipt of UB was constructed as taking 'something for nothing'. Those few who used this narrative constructed receipt of benefits as demeaning. This was the neo-liberal narrative.

In the second, receipt of UB was constructed as entitlement on the basis of past payment of taxes: 'People ... don't realise it's our money!' Use of the second narrative did not, however, mean acceptance of unemployment. Most of those who drew on it also asserted their discomfort in receiving benefits or recounted stories that demonstrated their reluctance to accept benefits, and their preference for employment: 'You don't want to wait for government to help you out with money – you want to earn the money'. Work was still a social norm, stronger than the financial gain: 'Maybe I think money better [if I don't work]. But I don't like to ... every fortnight come to CES to give the form ... I feel no good. Because some friends they go to work, and why me at home?'

Narratives of the unemployed as social parasites

Neo-liberal meta-discourse involves blaming the unemployed for their own unemployment through the claims that the unemployed do not really want to work, and are therefore damaging the national economy by 'withheld effort' (Pusey 1991, p. 40). This is the narrative of the unemployed as social parasites. Three associated narratives claim that unemployed people are lazy ('bludgers'); they are too selective ('job snobs'), or they are deliberately defrauding the system by claiming UB while working in the informal sector ('double-dipping'). In each case, they are receiving welfare benefits while failing to 'contribute to the economy'.

The narrative of the unemployed as social parasites involves a universal 'suspicion' of social parasitism in relation to all unemployed people. The very

numbers of the 'social parasites' carry a significant part of the discursive force of the narrative, with the claim that they constitute such a large proportion of the unemployed as to significantly diminish the need for concern about the availability of jobs. The narrative is used to justify calls for withdrawal of UB from the social parasites, and extensive measures for the surveillance of unemployed people are structured around their detection.

One of the strongest statements of this narrative was from Mick, who had come to Australia from Greece as a child and lost a job as a public sector financial advisor. For Mick, new immigrants 'add to the burden' by 'not contributing at all to the economy'. Workers become 'unemployable after a year or so'. Accountants are not prepared to become labourers, as Mick said he was – although he did not do so, in several years of unemployment. The solution, according to him, was a twelve-month UB limit.

Some workers distanced themselves discursively from those 'social parasites' that the narrative refers to. When asked whether they would be interested in joining groups for unemployed people, several replied that they did not want to join any group that might require them to 'sit with' such people; others said they were scared of the word 'unemployed'. There was a fear of both classification and contagion in such reactions. On one hand, people seemed to fear being seen by others to be in the same group as 'social parasites' and thereby classified as 'social parasites' themselves. On the other hand there seemed to be a fear that the resignation about unemployment that they associated with those people might engulf them also.

The neo-liberal narrative of the unemployed as bludgers was widely drawn on by interviewees, whether or not they were currently employed. It was commonly stated that the majority of the unemployed did not want to work or were not 'really looking' for work. Statements such as 'eighty per cent of the unemployed don't want to work' were relatively common. There was little attempt by any interviewees to critique this narrative, for example by constructing as negligible the numbers of people who did not want to work, or by asserting that it was not necessary for everyone to work all the time.

Many people described the demeaning experience of being constructed by these narratives themselves, both by ‘activity testing’ for benefits and by the attitudes of others. Even those who used the narrative themselves were caught between accepting and resenting its consequences: ‘I understand [the CES] have to [check on you all the time] but you feel rejected, feel like you are nothing’. People spoke of being ‘treated like a criminal’, described as ‘worse than an insect’, called lazy, a bludger, and an abuser of the system, paid for by other people’s taxes. Several people recounted stories about avoiding social contact or concealing the fact of their unemployment for fear of having their willingness to work called into question. However, some workers reported that the strength of the ‘bludger’ narrative was diminishing with the increasing prevalence of unemployment.

The most widespread discursive response to this narrative was to rely on the construction of an identity for oneself, one’s family and friends, as above suspicion. The narrative of the unemployed as bludgers was countered by asserting the desire and/or the inability to work, due usually to work injury. Most people asserted their own desire to work by recounting stories of their unsuccessful attempts to find work, and of their previous work record. Even while using a strong form of the social parasitism narrative about other people, Mick carefully explained why it was a mistake to include him in the category of people who did not want to work. It was the desire to work, and to work as much as one’s physical capability, that was important here. When asked if he was looking for full-time work, Nick responded: ‘Of course! I’m not a bludger!’

The narrative of the unemployed as job snobs was drawn on by only three people: Mick (see above), Alf (see Chapter 8) and Charlie, all from white collar backgrounds. However, the proposal to force people to accept any available job appeared to be difficult for people to reconcile with discourses of equity and ethics, and draconian proposals were subsequently qualified. Charlie said: ‘It would have to be in your profession or in that range ... Not less money [than before], they have to look up those sort of things too’.

The 'job snobs' narrative was commonly countered by asserting willingness to take any job: 'Now would accept cleaning toilets just to have a job'. It was also critiqued on the basis of employers' retrenchment and recruitment practices: 'The funny thing is, they never ever [offered us the chance] to go down ... to floor level ... It's better to go down than to have no job'. Humour was also used in response to this narrative:

People don't take me because I am too qualified. I have to reduce my resume to basic. What do you expect from a person doing a clerical or management job [going for a labouring job]? Is he going to stay long? If Mr Keating comes here and says, 'Can you take me as a driver or a cleaner?'

Some people countered the narrative by giving reasons for not accepting particular jobs. These were overwhelmingly connected with family responsibilities. Some women without cars had rejected nightshift jobs for safety reasons.

The narrative of the unemployed as 'double dipping' was also widely drawn on. Participants did not allege that 'double dipping' was widespread. However, there was considerable anger about it, with many recounting stories of people they knew who claimed UB and also worked, described as 'cheating on the government' by one worker. The government was urged to prevent it. The anger appeared to be both at the cost to the public purse and at the perceived discrepancy between earning capacity in a legal job and the potential income through double dipping, particularly for workers with families. To earn an equal amount in a legal job would probably have involved many hours of overtime. This narrative is based on a discourse of equity: the notion that there is something wrong if ordinary people are well-off without seeming to have to work for it.

This narrative was also bound up with narratives that constructed 'double dipping' as an ethnic phenomenon. When re-interviewed in 2002, a Greek Cypriot clothing machinist asked: 'How can the Vietnamese buy so much so soon? We been here forty-five years and we couldn't! They must be double dipping!' On one hand her attribution of the apparent wealth of this Vietnamese

family to 'double dipping' involves racist narratives naturalising a link between NESB immigrants – for this clothing machinist Vietnamese immigrants as distinct from Europeans – and both poverty and criminality. On the other, the comparison of this family with her own also appears to involve a discourse of equity, with a sense of appropriate levels of consumption for 'ordinary' people. One consequence of the racialisation of the narrative of double dipping was that some 'Asian' workers interviewed felt that they were under particular scrutiny in this regard, due to their 'bad image'.

Stories of their own encounters with 'black' or illegal work were relatively frequent but usually this work was brief and long ago. Usually in these stories those undertaking such work had no alternative, due to their need to earn to maintain families while speaking no English, possessing no work permit, and receiving no benefits, or while experiencing childcare difficulties or lack of other prospects. Some said they had done illegal work, including outwork, for a short period but had abandoned it due to the low pay.

The major counter-narrative to the neo-liberal narrative blaming 'double-dippers' was 'double dipping' as a consequence of wage deregulation. In this narrative, employers are increasingly able to employ workers illegally, and in these circumstances very low wages are offered on the assumption of double-dipping. Atef told the story of being replaced in a previously legal panel-beating job by a worker employed illegally who was simultaneously claiming benefit. His employer offered to keep him on, but only if he accepted the same level of pay as the new worker. Atef commented in the interview that he would have had to claim benefit as well, in order to live. He declined and went to look for another job, unsuccessfully as it turned out. This man's story may provide an insight into his (and others') strong advocacy of increased powers for employment- assistance agencies to prevent 'double-dipping'. It suggests that in a de-unionised context, the employment of legal workers may be directly threatened by the option for the employer to offer lower wages to those prepared to double-dip. Such stories (see also Chapter 8) constructed the workers involved in refusing to 'double dip' as highly ethical. However, in circumstances where workers are under great pressure

to earn and decently paid legal work is unavailable, the existence of a growing illegal sector must be a significant temptation.

Another way in which the neo-liberal narrative of social parasitism was countered in 1994–95 was through comment on the situation of low-waged couples who maximised their family income by remaining on UB unless both could work. This was the narrative of unemployment as rational choice, which legitimated ‘not wanting to work’ in the name of providing for a family. This legitimisation indicated the privileging of the narrative of earner as provider over the social norm of paid employment. The difference between these circumstances, in which ‘not wanting to work’ was constructed as legitimate, and ‘double dipping’, which was constructed very negatively, seemed to be the extent of the income involved. UB provided only an income commensurate with the couple’s normal earning capacity.

In neo-liberal meta-discourse, unemployment would disappear if wages were allowed to find their natural level. Workers drew on the discourse of equity to counter this. Wages below the level of UB were constructed as exploitative and inequitable. A Chilean architectural draftsman retrenched from a factory job had decided to accept night cleaning work with irregular hours and frequent split shifts because the pay rates for daytime cleaning were less than UB. He commented on this system: ‘Something wrong! ... I want to work, but no like a slave!’ The neo-liberal agenda on wages was critiqued and ridiculed:

I’m not going to go and work for \$8 an hour. But if I’m desperate I have to ... Why not? Make it \$3 an hour! But make sure my house won’t be costing me \$109,000 and the payment won’t be more than \$15 a week! You cannot keep the ... standard of living up and cheap labour. You can’t ... you’ll have a revolt!

The parasite narrative justifying compulsion

The neo-liberal narrative of the unemployed as social parasites is used to justify compulsory job application and acceptance and/or other forms of activity by the

unemployed under RO/MO rules, enforced by the threat of 'breaching'. Overwhelmingly, UB was constructed as a lifeline. Workers responded to threats of its withdrawal with fear and anger: 'I'm frightened that the unemployment benefit might be cut, like in the US'. A man with a work injury who had narrowly avoided being forced to accept a heavy cleaning job that would have 'put me in hospital in two days' critiqued the narrative: 'I can't understand how Centrelink can put pressure on the people when there is no job! ... Is good put the pressure when the people doesn't want to work but ...'

However, a paternalistic form of compulsion was justified by some workers through several different narratives that did not blame the unemployed for their situation. The narrative of unemployment as damaging individual health and well-being explained not looking for work in terms of discouragement, depression and other health problems caused by long-term unemployment. A few people constructed compulsion as necessary to overcome this. Other narratives used to justify compulsion were unemployment as damaging the 'work ethic' and unemployment as damaging social health and well-being. Compulsion would make young people 'better off', enabling them to 'see what is out there to actually do'. It would also prevent robberies and murders.

Lastly, there was a narrative of compulsion as rational use of people's skills. Atef described the recruitment of skilled migrants from Egypt that resulted in doctors and teachers working in pizza shops or receiving UB in Australia. He commented: '... just teach him and use him! Don't tell him, 'Alright, if you like to learn, then ... if you don't like you don't like, get unemployment benefits'. That's not good for the government, not for the people.' However, it was typical that such compulsion was supported in the context of simultaneous measures to significantly increase the availability of training and employment. This will be examined below.

These narratives provide some explanation for popular support for reciprocal and mutual obligation. It is a qualified support however. What was supported is ways of getting people into regular, full-time, properly regulated jobs, or getting them doing something productive and non-exploitative. People constructed

‘cleaning up the environment’ as productive; there was no sign of the Coalition differentiation between ‘real’ jobs and created jobs, quite the contrary. Being employed was connected with narratives that constructed employment as productiveness, as social order, as self-respect, as self-discipline, as independence, and as learning. These are ethical and social narratives.

Narratives about ‘solutions to unemployment’

The solution of time-limited UB was proposed by a handful of people, including Mick. Atef, who had lost his job through being displaced by a ‘double dipper’, proposed the abolition of welfare benefits in order to prevent such practices. However, solutions commonly advocated involved a recognition that jobs were not simply waiting unfilled because workers did not want them. Most people wanted more and better assistance provided to match jobs with workers. Others proposed solutions that spread work more justly, including giving the older and less physically able an ‘easier life’. Some proposed control of overtime: ‘Overtime is used instead of job creation. That is the employers’ policy’. A worker described the workplace that retrenched him, where his relatives now worked twelve hours per day: ‘You can’t refuse, you will be sacked, they will find something wrong with you to kick you out. It would have been better to keep all the workers and all work eight hours’.

By far the most common solutions were based on some form of job creation, particularly within the public sector, alongside and in conjunction with other strategies including compulsory part-time employment paying a higher wage than the dole, supporting small business and returning to the strategy of import replacement.

These proposals drew on discourses of social and individual well-being within an ethical framework. Individual well-being was constructed as involving the narrative of work as fair exchange with society, providing a sense of contribution and usefulness. Social well-being was constructed partly in terms of the narrative of economic nationalism – pre-empting skills shortages in trade areas, maintaining

and extending the skills base and the work ethic – but through social inclusion and in a manner that also addressed other social problems such as transport and the environment. It was also constructed in terms of arresting a perceived decline in service quality in the public sector due to under-staffing: ‘Now there are big troubles in hospital because been reduced the staff in 30 per cent or 40 per cent ... they cannot cope ... there is not a service like before’. Several people pointed out that the payment of UB was socially costly and that the government could have kept workers in the public sector instead, or could use the money to finance job creation schemes that increased the total number of jobs.

In the absence of employment, there was also support for alternatives, particularly for the young. Compulsory alternatives to work that were constructed as worthwhile included military service and programs of the work-for-the-dole type: ‘they’re always talking about cleaning up Australia and things like this – well get them out there, cleaning it up!’

What was striking about most of these proposals was that both job creation and other activities were constructed in terms of learning for those involved. Training was at the centre of the proposals for military service: ‘all forces taking on youth ... as trainees ... learning to be technicians and mechanics and cooks, whatever ...’. Work and learning were constructed as closely linked through the narrative of learning as participation, and work that involved learning was constructed as socially and personally valuable in itself.

There was considerable scepticism about such supposedly employment-generating private- sector projects as the Melbourne Casino, the Grand Prix and sport in general, which were constructed as very poor generators of jobs compared with factories and restaurants and also as socially damaging.

Racist discourse and the state

The construction of belonging and entitlement

Many longer term immigrants constructed themselves as ‘European’ in terms of identity within the workforce but ‘Australian’ in the sense of belonging in this

country: 'We are Australians ourselves, we are Australian citizens'. However, more recent arrivals constructed their sense of belonging and entitlement in much more ambivalent terms, acknowledging the prevalence of racist discourse that constructed them as 'other'. People of both groups referred to 'Australians' as 'the owners of the country' and therefore both more 'secure' in ways other than the financial, and more 'depressed' by unemployment.

Many referred to experience or knowledge of practices in other countries across the world. Apart from their countries of origin, some had experienced other countries en route to Australia and many had relatives in the UK, US and Europe. For some, the comparisons increased their sense of insecurity. Many people said they had found a 'better life' in Australia. However, some people spoke of being constructed as 'other' in ways that countered the racist narrative of immigrants as owing a debt of gratitude.

Racist worker narratives

There was some use of racist narratives by workers, almost exclusively by 'Europeans'. Racist narratives included the narrative of language practice as a 'symbol of Otherness', and the narrative of immigrants as job snatchers. Racist narratives were also available for a displacement of resentment against the inadequacy of public services. An Indian woman who arrived in Australia in 1984 and was interviewed in 1994 said: 'I think now many Chinese and Vietnamese people came here, then all companies full'.

The decline of centralised wage fixing provided a context for resentment against those immigrants who were seen as bidding down wages. Behind such statements was a narrative of immigration as social mobility. This narrative was used primarily by European immigrants who had been in Australia for many years. In this narrative, Australia should be a 'land of opportunity'; immigration should help people by letting in poor people and giving them a decent life. One corollary of this was that the immigration of wealthy people was inappropriate. There was a good deal of resentment against immigrants who appeared wealthy,

as we have seen in the context of ‘double dipping’. In some cases this was racialised, in others not.

However, another corollary used only by some people was that if wages and working conditions are not such as to offer such a decent life, immigration or certain components of it should be curtailed. The racist narrative of immigrants/refugees as frauds was drawn on here. The following quote illustrates the way in which such contradictory and inconsistent narratives were combined in a way characteristic of racist discourse:

... refugees are willing to work for less money. ... We’re not the land of opportunity any more. [There are] a lot of unemployed people and refugees. [We should] decrease the refugee intake, because they come as refugees, get help from the government and then bring all the money from their country. Ex-bosses of prostitution come here as refugees and use government money ...

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which the workers interviewed for this study engaged with the various narratives that I have identified in the dominant discourses (Chapters 3 and 4) and the policies, both text and practice (Chapters 5 and 6). Broadly speaking, workers engaged with dominant discourses in five ways: by simply acknowledging the dominant narratives; by actively drawing on those same narratives to construct their own identities in the interview; by giving accounts of forms of material resistance including evasion, refusal or ‘narrative swapping’; by explicitly critiquing or ridiculing them; or most commonly by countering them, often drawing on narratives from contending discourses. In general, these contending discourses were those of individual and social well-being, which were constructed in terms of equity, rights, security, pluralism and social mutuality. Workers also drew on what I term an ‘industrial discourse’ relating to work, and on a discourse that I have called the discourse of the multilingual community of practice. These will be further discussed in Chapter 9.

However, first, in Chapter 8 I will analyse in greater depth a number of interviews that illustrate the range of ways in which individual participants were drawing on both dominant and contending narratives and discourses. These will be presented in the form of five case studies.

Chapter 8

Case studies

Introduction

This chapter comprises five participant case studies, each of which reflects the significant themes, narratives and ways of engaging with dominant neo-liberal meta-discourse that were present in the interviews. I have chosen interviewees with whom I spoke both in 2002 and, with one exception, also in the earlier (1994-95) phase of the research. The narratives are richer as a result.

The case studies were selected to illustrate a range of contexts within which participants were drawing on both dominant and contending narratives and discourses. They also illustrate a range of ways in which individuals engaged with these discourses, and demonstrate the ‘discursive work’ being done through these narratives in the case of a number of very different individuals in quite different circumstances.

I should note that the selection of participants for the case studies was very difficult due to the wide variety of backgrounds and discursive and interdiscursive positionings of the participants. Unfortunately, many slightly different examples had to be omitted. The selection of material for this chapter may give rise to a question as to the representativeness of the case studies. However, the aim of this thesis is to explore discourses and the way in which participants engage with them. Therefore, although where possible I have tried to provide a broad indication of how widespread were particular ways of engaging with the discourses, representativeness is not what this thesis claims to provide.

Case Study 1

Homayoun: 'Who benefit that?'

Homayoun was an Iranian electronic technician. His university studies and career with the Iranian state communications company had been disrupted by the Iranian revolution in the late 1970s. Subsequently he had set up his own electronic repair business in Iran and later in Pakistan. He arrived in Australia in 1998, when he was in his mid-forties. He was interviewed in 2002.

Work

Homayoun constructed the world of work in Australia as deeply exploitative and characterised by completely unequal power relations between employers and employees, particularly as mediated by casualisation and labour hire companies. He constructed casualisation as a consolidation of employer power and personally disabling, recounting this story to counter the neo-liberal narrative of flexibility.

Homayoun answered a newspaper advertisement for a folding-machine operator in a printing press, an area in which he had overseas experience. The interview turned out to be with a 'contractor', who called him some time later and offered him a 12-hour night shift in a press in Moorabbin, two hours from Homayoun's home. At the end of the shift, at 6.00 am, he found there were no buses and he had to walk for an hour to get to the nearest public transport. He waited several weeks for payment and, a month after his first shift, he was called again. He was subsequently called several times for shifts at various companies, normally 2-3 hours before the shift start time.

On one occasion, however, he was called at 5.30 pm for a 6.00 pm start. He explained that he could not manage it. The 'contractor' commented, 'That's one time'. The same happened on a subsequent occasion, and the 'contractor' said, 'That's the second time'. The last time, he was called at 7.45 am for a 9.00 am

start. He promised to arrive by 10.00 am, earlier if possible, and the 'contractor' accepted this. He decided to take his very old car, and despite car problems managed to arrive at 9.30 am. He worked until 11.00 am, when he was called to a management office and accused of being late. He should have started at 6.00 am. Despite his explanations, he was humiliatingly 'sacked' and sent home. When he told the 'contractor' what had happened, he was told to go back to the same press the next day for a 6.00 pm shift. However, he declined to do so, informing the 'contractor' that he did not wish to work for that employer again. The 'contractor' agreed to this, but Homayoun was never called for another shift.

When recounting his initial experiences in Australia Homayoun was demonstrating that he was 'flexible':

... in my country usually part-time and casual work for people [who] ... were studying, and for a part of the daytime they wanted to ... get some money to help ... their life. But here is – everything is different, you know? ... it is very new for me here ... Even I was happy with that, you know ... [the shift is] twelve hours, it's OK, it's far, it's OK, it doesn't matter.

In the short term, he was prepared to trade flexibility and mobility for experience. Since he lived alone, moving house was possible but the job had to be secure, 'guaranteed' for at least six months.

Describing his growing awareness of the extent of casualisation, however, Homayoun critiqued the deregulated employment system within which only insecure and poorly paid employment is offered by employers despite the existence of regular and predictable demand. This system simply benefits the employer, he maintained. He drew on discourses of equity and justice, a narrative of 'rights' and 'correctness' as opposed to 'exploitation', and linked this to a notion of 'development' that should involve a guarantee of such rights in countries such as Australia ...

In my opinion Australia is not develop country ... They have a lot of unemployment people ... they pay a lot of money to unemployment ... Another

side, they have no job to give to people, correct job, the job that when people working, they give that people right, not just use exploitation, you know? ...

During this period, Homayoun was forced to spend 24 hours per day in a state of readiness to be called for work at short notice in unfamiliar places and at unsocial hours, and to submit to unreasonable treatment and humiliation without any protection or capacity to resist. These factors were completely outside his control. As a result, 'employment apprehension' came to dominate his life, causing ongoing sleep problems.

Like many participants, Homayoun was suspicious of unions that have failed to prevent capital flight, concluding that 'some of the unions they are not at the side of ... labour'.

In the short term, he resisted being constructed within the narrative of flexibility by refusing to work for the company that he considered had treated him appallingly. The price of such resistance, however, was high. Marketisation has created the conditions under which labour hire companies can effectively exclude people from their only connection with the labour market in retaliation for any resistance.

Education and ELL

After a few years of casual work, Homayoun returned to full-time study. In explaining this, he drew on the narrative of formal study as hope. Perhaps by gaining more ELL and computer skills he would be able to gain more control of his work life. However, in another sense, this was a form of material resistance to the discourse of flexibility, a form of evasion that might in itself enable him to have some degree of predictability and sense of progress in his life once more. The second of these strategies is demonstrated by others interviewed in the 2002 round. In my informal conversations with ELL teachers in the course of the 2002 phase of the study, the view was expressed that many students in ELL

classes now seem to be there by default, compared with the hope and intentionality that characterised those of the early 'nineties.

Homayoun also countered the lifelong learning narrative by drawing on the counter-narrative of learning as participation, in which training occurs within the workplace. He described the apprenticeship system he experienced in Iran, where people signed up to work for a company for 5 years, and where extensive and systematic employer training systems were implemented, beginning with observation. Here in Australia, he observed, there is no such commitment to training by companies. Even the 'training' promised to him by the 'contractor' had not eventuated, because the job turned out to be casual.

He also critiqued what he saw as the deskilled and wasteful nature of the Australian system, constructing an identity as a skilled and resourceful person in a counter to the racist narrative of immigrants as unskilled:

... the people [from overseas] they fix this tape-recorder and they can find experience in how is working, the fault should be where, and in that problem what they should change. But here I know that a lot of companies they have CD program. Some companies ... they have model of the different type of the TV, video and the fault. It ... makes very easy. And just the technician look the model and type of the system, equipment, and looks on the CD what is the fault, if goes, fix, OK, otherwise they will not fix that. But we fix that! We fix that. It is different.

His ability to study was completely dependent on the support of Centrelink because part-time study would be quite impossible if he were forced to return to work in the casual system.

The state

Homayoun compared what he saw as the lack of regulation of working conditions in Australia unfavourably with the situation he had known in Iran:

... the company gave ... clothes for job and ... protection shoes, and even they give cabinet to worker [where] they change the clothes, and even they have bathroom, you know, ... But I wonder here, very big companies, they give the worker nothing ...

He constructed the government as responsible for controlling employer behaviour, enforcing the 'rights' of workers and making sure they are informed about their entitlements: '... In my opinion, government should send to company and ask from the worker about their right. They should have their conference and ... talk to worker, "It is your right!"'

However, the current welfare system compounded the insecurity of his employment with income insecurity. It was several weeks before he received payment for a casual shift from the employer, but in the meantime his benefit was cut and he was without income. He countered the 'bludger' narrative: 'I told Centrelink "I can understand why people here not working!"' Homayoun also constructed the receipt of his study allowance as demeaning. The source of his sense of shame was the knowledge that he was capable of earning such a good living so that \$40 would not matter to him. He was incredulous that the government would pay him this allowance but not enable him to earn: 'Monthly they give \$40 ... I told I shamed to come here to take \$40 ... for studying ... I shamed ... because I can earn \$500! ... [but] They didn't do anything [to find a way for me to work like this]!'

Homayoun constructed the government as responsible for individual well-being and, in the context of diversity and multiculturalism, this meant 'supporting' new immigrants, who have special needs: 'I think government should support for at least two three years people when they arrive here. Economically support them and leave free time for them to work.'

Case Study 2

Alf: 'You cannot have your cake and eat it too'

A highly qualified Filipino lawyer, Alf was first interviewed in 1994. At that stage, he had set up a business involving contacts with his native country and was a leader in his ethnic community. By 2002, Alf's business had moved into other areas, which reflected many of the features of the new economy. First, he had formed a company to tender (unsuccessfully) for Job Network funding. He then set up another company and registered it with the Victorian Government as a Registered Training Organisation to tender for Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs, but this too was of limited success. He was currently focusing on his labour hire business, which specialised in providing agricultural labour to growers in Queensland, Gippsland and the Riverina. Workers employed in this business included Anglo-Australians, Filipinos, 'Africans' (probably from the western region Horn of Africa community) and 'Asians'.

Work

Alf constructed the allocation of work as deeply ethnicised. In his first interview, Alf countered the narrative of immigrants as factory fodder by drawing on human capital discourses about skill and credentials, with an account of his arrival in Australia with university law qualifications and excellent English. He commented:

I was thinking that [the Personnel Manager] would offer me a position in Personnel, because I had been a Personnel Manager, I had more experience in Personnel than he had ... and I was reporting directly to the Chief Executive Officer ... of organisations in the Philippines with international relationships ... I was involved in the top secret decision making!

Instead, after several rejections on the grounds that he was 'overqualified', he was offered a job on the factory floor in a textile mill. He resisted this 'tracking', and eventually gained a clerical position in the same company. Only after extensive post-graduate study in Australia was he eventually able to regain a senior public sector Human Resource Management position, from which he was retrenched in 1993. In describing this retrenchment, he drew strongly on the counter-narrative of trade unions as a protective counterbalance to employer power.

In constructing his new identity as small businessman in the 2002 interview, he still drew on discourses that construct work as structured around ethnicity, as well as other structural factors such as immigration policy and English language. Alf's discursive practices in the second interview involved both very clear verbal reference to neo-liberal narratives and accounts of material practices that enacted neo-liberal meta-discourse. However in 2002 he drew predominantly on the narratives of entrepreneurialism and unions as intimidating management.

As an agricultural labour hire company, Alf's current organisation shared with other employment agencies the problem of pressure from employers to discriminate against certain categories of workers. One of the major employer groups told him they wanted 'Asians', because they were small and did not endanger the snow-pea vines. They did not want 'Africans', due partly to their physical size and partly to less clear-cut factors associated with past damage to snow peas by particular African workers: '... the farmers did not like them [because of] that matter, not because of their colour ... the people are no longer the same but from the same place so they associated the colour more with the habits.'

'Africans' applied for the job and were not accepted. Five of them took the growers to the Equal Opportunity Commission and Alf was named with them as their agent. After losing initially, the 'Africans' appealed to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and eventually the growers settled out of court, against Alf's will. Alf chose to pay part of the settlement in order to ensure good business relations with the growers. He commented: '... really there are discrimination issues ... but you cannot have your cake and eat it too, if you want

to do business with them you have to follow their requirements, otherwise they will never take people from you.'

Another phenomenon of the new economy in which Alf was also involved was a labour outsourcing plan whereby a Western suburbs company planned to transfer a group of its permanent employees to employment by Alf's company, which would then supply them back to the original company as a device to achieve numerical 'flexibility', which he constructed as necessary for competitiveness.

Alf constructed unions as intimidating management. He alleged that unions object to certain practices such as labour hire solely because the workers involved in those practices do not join unions. This reflects the anti-union discourse of neo-liberalism, with its claim that unions are motivated simply by increasing their own power and that workers are actually better off accepting what is offered by employers. He represented union 'power' as intimidating employers, preventing them from doing what is best for business, such as outsourcing payroll and personnel functions at the expense of employee security.

... labour outsourcing has become popular, although it is against the union [laughs] uh business, because these people do not join the union ... and [the unions] exert influence on the organisations not to continue with labour outsourcing, and many employers are scared as well because of the union power...

Alf's labour outsourcing plan was initially thwarted by a campaign by workers. Later, however, as he pointed out triumphantly, these workers lost their jobs anyway. In this context, the narrative of union failure clearly forms a part of neo-liberal discourse (see Chapter 7). Alf also gives a clearly neo-liberal account of his practice as a private sector manager regarding trade unions:

I was actually even in the Philippines called a union buster! [I would consult informally but] they know which side of the fence I belong to! ... Many of the unions do not use reason, they just use emotional numbers ... it's thuggery. I don't like it.

It was union power that he objected to, in the form of the numbers of workers that he constructed as intimidating management in an irrational exercise of power for power's sake – 'thuggery'. The use of these narratives, however, contrasts with his first interview when in his description of his public sector work at the hospital, he constructed an identity as an employee using the contending narrative of trade unions as a protective counter-balance to employer power:

I was also involved in ... enterprise bargaining before I left, I was one of the ... representatives ... for the managers ...and I could see very clearly that even for managers there is a need of union membership, because you have no power, you have no clout!

Unlike other interviewees, Alf explicitly referred to the conflicting discourses he drew upon in the two interviews, reconciling them by constructing his trade union membership as protecting him against the excessive power of the state: 'In the public hospital it's a different [situation], so that's why I joined, because it's a public hospital'.

Alf's ideal labour market was one in which workers had no alternative but to accept the price offered for their labour, and to compete with each other. About a group of illegal snow-pea packers who (unbeknownst to him, he said) were traced to his agency, he commented: 'And they were good workers, so naturally [the employers] preferred the illegals to the legitimate workers, because they were very much better workers, they were temporary, they wanted money!'

In other words, those whose relation with the labour market is uncomplicated by the entitlements that legal workers have will therefore be 'better' workers, as their economic needs preclude other considerations. Indeed, Alf's main group of workers consisted of those who were unable to access industrial jobs due to their limited English, among them many who were 'not able to receive the benefit cheque because they are still within the two-year period, for instance'. His business was dependent on the very changes in the labour market and punitive immigration and welfare arrangements that deprive certain immigrant groups of the livelihood they would have previously enjoyed. Alf even resented their

capacity to leave the work, because it left him to pay for rented caravans that were unoccupied. His business would be easier, he said, if the Immigration Department would permit agricultural labourers to be brought directly from the Philippines for the season. This is a narrative of immigration as controllable labour supply. Alf was calling for more mobile and controllable workers from overseas who would come when they were wanted, stay as long as needed, and then quietly go home. Such workers would also presumably cost less and be less likely to get together to demand higher rates, as the locals have the habit of doing.

Education and ELL

As we have seen, although Alf's overseas qualifications were recognised, and despite his excellent English, he was forced to virtually repeat his studies in order to gain access to employment at an equivalent level. He drew on the neo-liberal narrative of credentialism to critique the racist discourses enacted in occupational downgrading of NESB immigrants:

... if you are adequately qualified, but you have no local experience, you cannot get [a management job] ... That's one of my bitter criticisms against the Australian system ... In my observation many [Australian managers] don't have tertiary qualifications, many of them are just high school drop-outs. ... In the Philippines you cannot be manager if you have only one degree, because we put so much emphasis on education ... you can become a supervisor with one degree, but in order to go up ... [you have to take] post-graduate courses ... [in Australia] we are just there because of experience ...

Alf said little about ELL in 2002, except that lower levels of English would continue to exclude people from the industrial labour market. This group was precisely the group that advanced his own economic interests, as was the group that was within the two-year waiting period for the receipt of welfare benefits. Thus he drew on discourses that naturalise lack of choice, seasonal manual work

in conditions that are feared, forced mobility, and subjection to labour hire for workers who speak less English. He constructed them as 'job snobs' if they resisted these discourses:

For industrial workers I think there will still be a problem, because English will still be a basic requirement, but for the packers and pickers in the farms, that would not be a problem. But they do not want to move to the farms ... No accommodation there, their relatives are in the city ... So that's the reason why they continue to be jobless and many of them not able to receive the benefit cheque because they are still within the two-year period, for instance. But if they will just accept any job, there will be no problem.

The state

Alf drew on the neo-liberal 'job snobs' narrative, in which unemployment is blamed on the refusal of job seekers to accept the available work, and the solution is to withdraw or limit UB to force them to do so. However, like the few others that drew on this narrative, Alf did not seem to be able to pursue the logic of this position to the maximum. Ethical considerations seemed to intrude:

[Workers]... they're very choosy! They're very selective! And so they would rather receive the dole. And so that's one of the reasons why our dole queues would never be minimised. ... But if you really would require people 'Alright, ... you do not choose any work', but I don't know whether that is also ... moral [laughs]

Alf drew also on neo-liberal discourses about regulation and government control. He constructed as illegal and immoral government actions that restricted his freedom to operate. He had been fined as a result of evidence against him, which he claimed was obtained from the illegal workers under false pretences (they were told they could go free if they testified against him) and manufactured by the Immigration Department (information was added to blank signed

statements). He constructed the ‘free’ movement of low-paid agricultural workers from the Philippines as desirable for his and his clients’ business purposes, and supported pressure on the government to achieve this. He constructed protective legislation as a business constraint. Anti-discrimination law, and those who facilitate its use by his clients – ‘these Legal Aid people’ – were annoyances, although ongoing ‘business’ with discriminatory employers outweighed the costs of occasional litigation. He regarded standard minimum pay rates for VET teachers as excessive and as a constraint to his business and complained about having to compete against TAFE colleges. This is reminiscent of the argument commonly made at that time that providers accessing government funding constituted unfair competition for private providers in the education and training market.

The story Alf told was not a successful one in society’s terms. He had suffered from a significant decline in status on arrival in Australia and again on retrenchment. He had been constructed within the narrative of immigrant as factory fodder, and thus as ‘loser’ in neo-liberal meta-discourse. He was operating a business on, apparently, the smallest of margins. In addition, he was now, both generally and within the interview itself (conducted by an Anglo-Celtic researcher employed by a university) facing construction as an older unemployed immigrant. One subject position available to him was ‘victim’; but this was not the powerful position he desired.

In the first interview, Alf referred extensively to his own ‘human capital’. His qualifications and experience were fundamental to the identity that he was constructing at that point within HC narratives about skill, particularly the narrative of skill as rewarded incrementally in the ‘market’. His identity at this time was that of public sector manager and community leader. This identity enabled him to draw on contending narratives favourable to trade unions and about the law relating to employee protection, which he constructed as something he could use to his advantage against the hospital management, as a protection rather than an annoyance. In the second interview, he no longer referred to his own ‘human capital’. Alf’s ‘investment’ (both in his own country and Australia)

had not paid off, in that he appeared to have neither wealth nor high status. He had now abandoned the HC narratives about skill. Now Alf was constructing a powerful identity within the narrative of entrepreneurialism as a businessman and an employer. His construction of an identity as a member of the employers' 'side' was a way to avoid being discursively reduced to a bundle of socially ascribed human capital attributes, because he was defining himself as a member of the other side, the side that ascribes.

Case Study 3

Tome and Stoyna: 'I like to work, not to go to school'.

Tome and Stoyna were born in Macedonia and came to Australia in 1969. Before migrating Tome was a farm labourer, a soldier, a switchboard operator and a linesman. He found a job as a machine operator in a western region glass factory, where he worked for 13 years until he was retrenched in 1983. He then found contract work in the inner eastern suburbs, again as a machine operator for five months, and then both he and his wife Stoyna were employed permanently full-time in a large food factory at the edge of the western region. The company assisted him to obtain a forklift licence and he worked as a forklift driver for a number of years. During his annual leave, he worked in an abattoir, as he had every year since he arrived in Australia. He and Stoyna were both retrenched again in 1991 and unemployed for three years. In late 1994 he was contacted by the factory's Burwood plant, an hour and forty-five minutes' drive away, and re-employed as a forklift driver on the afternoon shift as before. His wife was also employed there. They were retrenched again in January 2002. Tome was interviewed alone in 1994 and together with Stoyna in 2002.

Work

Tome and Stoyna both constructed the allocation of work as structured around age discrimination. Even in 1994 they were told they were 'too old'. In 2002 they still found this perpetuated in the Centrelink database and were sceptical about any shift in this situation:

I know [how to use the newspaper], and I know to work over there on the computer, and ... I know which buttons to press and find all the jobs but it's for nothing ... Every telephone number I ring up, 'No, no ... Age I looking for 25 to 30', or 'from 20 to 45' ... I say I'm 56 ... What can I say? 'You crazy? Or stupid? You see the age over there? Not 56, from 20 to 40!' (Tome)

In addition, they saw their opportunity for employment as significantly diminished by the appearance of 'agencies' as intermediaries between employers and workers. Their perception of 'agencies' was formed by their experience at the Burwood factory, where at first they were on three-month contracts, with sick pay and holiday pay, but later were compulsorily transferred to a new employer, which Tome called an 'agency'. Other workers who started at the same time (whom Tome described as 'friends of the boss') were permanent and remained in the direct employ of the company: 'I tell to the boss, I say "Please I no go to the [agency], because I know the rules!" Say "You must go. If you no go with the [agency], you finish ... from here."'

Tome and Stoyna constructed this outsourcing as diminishing their rights as workers and a breach of the mutual relationship with their employer. They had to be constantly vigilant to protect their pay and working conditions. Stoyna constructed the 'agency's' behaviour as an attempt to exploit their lack of English: 'Roster day, sickie different from holiday! Because you working 38 hours, you no working 40! No make stupid people! Alright, no understand English, but I understand this one!' There was always an excuse not to pay. '... very very bad, pinch a lot of money [from] us. Agency took from holiday money, from sick

money, from roster money, everything. Every week, complain with them, every week ...’

When the workers complained to the food company, they were told the problems were not the responsibility of the company but of the agency: ‘... company say “I don’t care, you no with us, you with the [agency]”’. The manager of the agency came to the factory and promised the problems would be resolved, and nothing happened. In January 2002, the Burwood factory also closed down. Tome and Stoyna were retrenched, with a payout of about \$20,000 each. Another man who was a permanent employee but had started at the same time as Tome and was earning the same hourly rate received \$35,000. ‘What’s the difference? ... How [did he] get more money than me? ... Maybe the agency my money get.’

Tome knew that the agency supplied workers to other companies, in Dandenong (further from his home) and elsewhere. He asked whether it could send him to another job. He was told that if he wished the agency to look for another job for him, he would have to pay \$5000 out of his redundancy money, the equivalent of the money the food company had paid. Tome was outraged, and took this as an indication of the perfidy of all agencies. He and Stoyna later put their names down at another ‘agency’ in the western region; they knew virtually nothing about this ‘agency’ either; they were unable to say whether it was ‘government’ or ‘private’ or whether they would have to pay anything or not. Neither he nor Stoyna knew anything whatever about the Job Network. Tome still went cold-calling, but described being stopped by security guards before he reached the office, and told to go to an agency – any agency. But he was loath to do so. Agencies would send him to a factory for one day – a day in Broadmeadows, a day in Burwood, a day in Yarraville. Perhaps because they were reasonably well-off, he would not do this, despite his continuing interest in money. He wanted a full-time job or nothing.

Tome’s resistance to being constructed by narratives about age and ‘human capital’ as expendable, casual labour was his refusal to accept work under these conditions. But Stoyna drew on the narratives of home ownership as primary life

project in her concern for the younger generation, asking how they would obtain a bank loan if so much work was casualised.

Tome reported that no-one came from his trade union headquarters when it was clear that the factory would close in 1991. He commented: 'Must be come the union because I pay for the union'. Thus he drew on the narratives of trade unions as counter-institution and of union failure. Referring to his redundancy entitlements, he had no choice but to be happy with them, he said: 'If you complain where you go? To the union, they just make trouble'. Tome was ambivalent about unions, he wanted their support, which he constructed as both a service that was paid for and was not delivered, and feared their involvement as a potential liability.

Education and ELL

Tome had studied English for six months at evening classes soon after he arrived. None of the companies where he worked had provided English language classes for him. The acquisition of a forklift driver's licence presents considerable difficulty to some workers with low levels of literacy and/or English language, but Tome had acquired one. Presumably his English was adequate for the purpose, and perhaps the company was able to facilitate the process for him. He was sufficiently lacking in confidence at interview to request a bilingual worker, although he was able to make some simple comments in English.

Tome constructed learning as participation and knowledge as embodied and embedded in practice. He was resistant to the idea of undertaking formal study as a path to 'employability': 'I like to work, not to go to school'. He said he had 'no experience' of 'writing, reading, computer'. However, he spoke of gaining a forklift licence as simply part of the job, and he had recently learned to operate the touchscreens at Centrelink. Tome countered the narratives that constructed his unemployment as due to his own deficiency by asserting his employability. He had been retrenched due to company restructuring, not to any deficit on his part,

and later re-employed by his old company, so he was clearly employable until very recently. It was age discrimination that convinced him that formal study would not help him.

The state

Tome and Stoyna resisted the discourse of social contractualism that constructed them as social parasites by resisting going to Centrelink at all. They preferred to forego their limited entitlements rather than submit to the absurd accountability mechanisms of Mutual Obligation. They discursively resisted by recounting their history of hard work and insisting on the non-existence of 'real' jobs:

When you going Centrelink the form you must fill it up, where you looking for job, where you been, all of that ... I no like it. ... Which factory you gonna go? ... All factory finish! Only Glass factory, that's it! If I go one time ... I [can] never go ten times over there! ... I can say only once one factory in this Centrelink form.
(Tome)

Tome and Stoyna were eligible for partial UB. However, their entitlement was limited because they owned a second house. They had no superannuation and constructed their second house as security and careful provision for their old age. They felt punished for their hard work by their ineligibility for full UB:

Centrelink say 'I can't give you money because you ... get the redundancy. You finish this money, you come back'. I no get nothing. ... 'You have house, you have money, you sell, eat, and after you come back!' ... I pay tax every year 10,000 ... 10,000 my wife. Five year, hundred thousand dollar we pay tax for government. Hundred thousand dollar! (Tome)

I working all my life, 20 years I no going holiday see my mum, 80 years old, I never going holiday ... OK, ... we have house, we have some money on side, but

that is because we worked hard ... and why the government now wants to take that money from me? (Stoyna)

Tome argued, 'If they can't find me a job, they have to pay me'. His argument for eligibility was based on the reasoning that Centrelink's inability to find a job for him should constitute proof that there are no jobs, and thus proof that he is not unwilling but unable to work. Therefore he should be eligible for UB.

Case Study 4

Nadia: 'I am born to look after people'

Nadia and her husband came to Australia in 1974 as refugees from Chile. Her university studies had been interrupted by the coup, and she had later trained as the equivalent of a State Enrolled Nurse (SEN). In Australia, she worked as a medical secretary and receptionist, a SEN and an Industrial Nurse in a white goods company before becoming an Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Inspector in the Victorian Department of Labour. After a fall in a factory and a period on WorkCover she was retrained as an Industrial Relations Complaints Officer. In the early 1990s she had a serious car accident and was off work for a year.

When she returned to work the public sector was in the throes of restructuring and 'everybody was out for themselves'. After some bullying by a supervisor, and nagged by a sense that it was unfair to ask for more support even though she was still not well, she was persuaded to accept a redundancy package. She was 48 years old. A few months later her husband was retrenched from his job as a sheet metal worker and welder in a high technology manufacturing company.

Work

Nadia was one of the few participants who drew on the narrative of work as personal fulfilment. She constructed paid work as social connection, commenting that she missed the contact with people that paid work provided. She also retrospectively drew on the narrative of work as productive occupation necessary for health:

I don't have pressures of work but working kept me going better than not working. I obliged myself to comply with my work – I like to do things well, and I ignored being sick. The first two months [without work] I didn't know what to do with myself. Working structured my time.

However, she had been able to move away from that narrative when retrenched due to enrolment in a course that she found absorbing and challenging. In this, she resembled a number of other participants, especially women, and contrasted with others who had not been able to make this change.

While she was studying, she also tried to find another job. She had expected this to be easy, but commented: 'I didn't take my physical restrictions into account, which was a mistake'. She soon found that she was constructed as unemployable by discourses about physical capacity. She resisted by minimising the information she provided, but full concealment was impossible:

When they ask about WorkCare at interviews I don't tell them about my hand [an old RSI problem] because I consider myself recovered. But I have to tell them I need special furniture because of my back injury. Then they don't want to know about you. There are plenty of fit people.

Nadia also drew on the narrative of work as fair exchange with society, commenting that paid work had enabled her to feel 'useful'. After accepting that she would probably not find paid work again, she had also moved away from

constructing only paid work as providing this contribution, and undertaken extensive voluntary work in community centres.

However, she drew on discourses of equity and social well-being to critique the way in which the pressure for cost minimisation even in this context led to a reluctance to provide paid jobs and an exploitation of voluntary labour. She also recounted a form of material resistance to the discourse of performativity as instantiated in the community sector. She had given up her voluntary work as a receptionist for an ethnic welfare organisation that was also a Job Network provider: 'They had a list of a thousand people looking for jobs as receptionists. Why don't they employ someone? ... They use a volunteer receptionist! ... They have quite a bit of money!'

Nadia constructed consumption as security, explaining that she and her husband had arrived in Australia with \$12. She was very attached to the house they had bought, and drew on the narrative of house as anchor.

For Nadia, the employment situation was worse in 2002 than in 1994. Nadia constructed the world of work as transformed permanently by factory closures, particularly in textiles clothing and footwear, and the failure to create new jobs of a similar type. She acknowledged narratives about age that structured the workforce, both for her and for others over 40 years old. She critiqued as irrational and inequitable the results of the narrative of flexibility, promoted by policy decisions by government and furthered by an employer agenda of cost minimisation. Her critique drew strongly on discourses of individual and social well-being that were widespread among participants:

I can't understand retrenchment as a policy measure. They say they want to save money. It may save money for that body, but it increments unemployment and Federal government costs increase because of unemployment benefit. I can't see the point. It is a detriment to people because of the lower standard of living, you get marriage breakdowns, the kids are disadvantaged ...

In particular, she commented, as did many participants, on the problem of employment insecurity for young people, drawing on the narrative of home

ownership as primary life project. Mortgage payments of \$1200 per month were 'OK if you have a job', but many young people were never sure if their jobs would continue.

She was committed to trade union work – the 'united involvement of workers' – having been a shop steward in Chile, and very involved in OHS policy activism in Australia. In 1994 she commented critically, but with some ambivalence, on union directions, drawing on both the narrative of trade unions as a protective counter-balance to employer power and the narrative of union failure. Referring to a problem during her employment at the white goods company, she observed: 'In Australia on one hand the union does not defend workers but on the other it fought for me ... Over the last five years the unions are not doing their job ... They are too complacent with the government and the employers.'

In 2002, she was again ambivalent. On one hand, she critiqued the discourse of neo-classical economics with reference to individual contracts, constructing employers as far more powerful than employees without trade union representation, and individual contracts as a strategy to consolidate employer power:

If you're the father of two children, with a mortgage, will you refuse the employer's terms on an individual contract? Then the employee is separated from the rest, I am breaking my friendship with the rest of the workplace. I shouldn't talk to my colleagues because they may be on lower salaries. I have to fight for myself.

Through individual contracts and through such methods as stopping deduction of union contributions from employees' pay in the public sector, she said, 'they are destroying the union movement ... unless people realise that and return to fight for their rights we will get worse'. However, on the other hand she was questioning union strategy in the light of the discourse of financial globalisation:

It is not only Australia, the economy of the whole world is changing ... big companies are looking for countries to pay workers less ... the union has asked for

too much in recent years, they break the market. I am pro-union, I know it's good to ask for more, but if you ask for more money all the time the factory can't deal with it. The product has to sell to pay what you are making.

Education and ELL

At the time of the first interview, Nadia accepted the lifelong learning narrative that told her that she needed to retrain. After her retrenchment, while she looked for another job, she had enrolled part-time in a mixed TAFE and Higher Education Diploma course, specialising in Community Justice. She hoped eventually to work in a Legal Aid Centre. However, by the time of the second interview when she had finished her course, the Kennett government had closed many of these centres and her qualification was of little use for employment.

Despite this failure of her individual foresight and planning due to factors beyond her control, she continued to value the course, both because it now allowed her to do voluntary work in an important area and because of the 'general experience' it had given her in an area close to her heart. She commented 'I am born to look after people'. However, by 2002 she had reacted to the failure of the vocationalism of the neo-liberal lifelong learning narrative to ensure her employment by moving decisively away from that narrative towards a construction of formal study as personally and socially fulfilling: 'I don't know [what I will study next], but it will be a hobby course for my own interest, not for work, because I have been studying all my life. Now I've been nearly three years without a job.'

Nadia also drew on the narrative of learning as participation to describe the concerns of local people about their children's ability to gain work skills; the women, she said, 'fear for the future of their children ... their development as workers'. In these circumstances, despair about finding a job in which to learn through participation simply fed credentialism, by making young people 'jump from one course to another, from diploma to degree to masters' but then they were called 'overqualified' or 'too young' or 'inexperienced'. Thus she countered the

neo-liberal vocationalism of the discourse of lifelong learning both through comments on her own and others' experience.

Ethnicity, English language and literacy

Nadia had very significant bilingual skills, which she used in her voluntary positions. Her practice thus enacted a discourse of pluralism and multilingualism. However, she was prevented from using her languages in paid employment. After several years living on her disability pension, she was unable to afford to pay the costs of accreditation.

Nadia acknowledged one of the major narratives of racist discourse in Australia: NESB immigrants as owing a debt of gratitude. She implicitly critiqued it through her choice of terms from equity discourse to describe its quid pro quo: 'How much discrimination and humiliation have we received? We took it as payment for being able to live in this society.'

The state

Interviewed in 2002, Nadia countered the narrative of social contractualism that blames the unemployed for their own unemployment by stressing the non-existence of jobs. She used the metaphor of a 'miracle merchandiser' to describe the Job Network provider where she had done voluntary work as a receptionist. The 'merchandiser' says, 'Sure I can find a job for you!' The merchandiser is offering a product as 'very good and reliable, but when you go home it doesn't work', because the jobs are simply not available. But such an offer would be a 'miracle' because they had no jobs for most of those people. She drew on narratives of equity and fairness to critique the increasingly punitive employment assistance system: 'I know people who have to travel to Broadmeadows or Dandenong. They are forced to do it or lose benefit ... it takes one and a half hours on the train!'

Nadia described her shock at the casualness of the agency's punitive measures. The agency offered jobs no matter how far from people's homes, and could 'breach' them if they did not accept. When an unemployed person did not answer the phone, she reported, 'they forget them' – but a note goes on their file to say they did not answer for a possible job.

Nadia was on the disability pension. At the time of the 2002 interview, there had been some discussion in the press about moves to restrict eligibility for this pension to those classified as able to work less than 15 hours per week. She was not personally threatened by this because she had a very high percentage of disability: 'They cut us in pieces and they divide by percentage'. However, in the context of increasing 'pressure' from Centrelink on those injured workers who were not able to evade it by receiving the pension, she commented:

They are inflicting a pain and an instability [by threatening to restrict the pension] ... If they can't find work for people who are able to work, how they expect to find work for people who are disable to work? ... [The government wants] to reduce at all costs the budget. They choose the weak areas, the people who could not defend.

She was not convinced that even if the proposed legislation were defeated, the 'pain and instability' would end. She commented: 'these things go underground'. She was full of praise for the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service, which had counselled and supported her and paid for an ergonomic chair and other aids to enable her to do academic work at home. Centrelink had also been helpful, paying her pension and study supplement without problems.

She acknowledged the power of the neo-liberal 'bludger' narrative in both her 1994 and 2002 interviews. She countered the assertions of some interviewees that its power was diminishing over time as more and more people became unemployed. She described her continuing awareness that others resented paying tax to support her and told of a finished friendship with a woman who voiced her resentment that her own husband had to pay for his medication while Nadia did not.

Case Study 5

Phuong and Tram: 'My name was on the list'

Phuong and Tram were two separate Vietnamese-born participants who had arrived in Australia in their very early 30s with virtually no English and had found jobs as machinists in the clothing industry. Both were retrenched from their first jobs when their clothing factories closed down in the early 1990s. They are considered together because, despite this similarity, their experiences and their ways of engaging with dominant discourses were very different.

Phuong worked as a secondary teacher of history and geography in Vietnam, and her Diploma of Teaching was recognised as equivalent to the first year of a degree in Australia. Nevertheless, she had been 'tracked' into work as a clothing machinist in Australia. In 1994 her husband was studying Engineering after losing his job at the Post Office, and she had three teenage children at school. She had studied English under the TCF LAP and in 1994 was continuing to study on the Associate Diploma of Liberal Arts, funded by Austudy. Concurrently she was teaching Vietnamese language at two language schools. After completing the Associate Diploma she completed an honours degree in Arts at Victoria University of Technology. She had intended to undertake a Masters degree but changed her mind, due primarily to the cost of the course. In 2002 she was still teaching Vietnamese and, in addition, had two casual part-time jobs as a bilingual teacher's aide in local primary schools.

Tram came from a very poor family and left school after completing year 9. In Vietnam she worked as a payroll clerk in an architect's office and then as a sales assistant and book-keeper in a co-operative grocery. From her arrival in Australia in 1987 she had worked as a machinist from 7.30 am to 8.00 pm with one and a half hours of breaks. She travelled more than an hour each way on public transport as she did not drive. With her bonus and overtime over five years and three months, she managed to pay off most of the house where she lived with her

mother and her disabled sister. When she was retrenched in late 1992, she paid her severance pay off the mortgage and studied English, computing and maths for two years under the TCF LAP, hoping to find another job in the industry or as a sales assistant in an Asian grocery. But such a job did not appear. In 2002 she was still unemployed. Tram was interviewed in 1994 and 2002 with the aid of an interpreter.

Both Phuong and Tram largely avoided explicit critique of people or structures. They did not draw on narratives of equity and fairness. At one point where she might have done so, Phuong constructed restrictions as convenient to her. Tram was more forthright, stating that she did not want to live on UB and taking a stand about working in a regulated environment. Nevertheless, when she was asked whether her retrenchment was 'necessary', she commented: 'I can't think either necessary or unnecessary because I believe in my fate, my name was on the list'. It is possible that particular cultural or religious factors common to these women and other participants may constitute another form of 'resistance' to the discourses that construct them, in the sense that they protect them against the more personally corrosive effects of these discourses.

Work (Phuong)

Phuong's story was of an escape, through special temporary policy initiatives, family support and hard work, from construction within the narrative of immigrants as factory fodder. By telling her story she countered this narrative. With regard to her first job, she drew on the narrative of earner as provider to construct the role of work. Like many other participants, she described being 'tracked' into machinist work, unable to take the time to learn English in order to use her qualifications and experience.

This pressure was intensified by an immigration policy that denied a pension for the first two years to her elderly mother, who arrived from Vietnam a few months before Phuong's retrenchment. Only the extension of full support under the LAP to people with employed spouses enabled her to study instead of looking

for another job in the clothing industry, possibly as an outworker, on retrenchment. Without this support, she would have been unable to bring in family income without working. Other women – and men – were not so lucky. In her 2002 interview she described many outworkers in her church community whose livelihood was increasingly under threat from 50 per cent falls in piecework rates, and who were forced into agricultural work far from Melbourne. Phuong also constructed work as social contribution in her account of the voluntary work she did ‘helping Vietnamese people’ through her church, and of her plan to do voluntary work when she finished her course if she could not find paid work.

Phuong acknowledged the narrative of NESB immigrants as factory fodder. She constructed starting a small business as a form of resistance to being ‘tracked’ into work in ‘the factory’ for those who had been professionals or business people in Vietnam. She drew on the narrative of small business as risk, however, with her comment that many of those who had small businesses were forced to seek factory employment again in 2001-2002 due to the economic situation. She also constructed paid work as personal autonomy for Vietnamese women. Many women, she said, were too ‘shy and scared’ to work in a factory. However, many others were prevented from doing so by their husbands, who feared that once their wives earned an income they would no longer ‘obey’ them.

Phuong constructed training opportunities in her first workplace as socially allocated. She described the introduction of ‘new and special machines’ in the clothing factory. Training on these machines was not offered to her, as an existing worker, but only to new, government-subsidised workers, who cost the company less to employ.

Phuong drew on the narrative of trade unions as a protective counter-balance to employer power, stating that she would always join because ‘unions protect my rights’. She had known very little about trade unions in the factory because all union business was conducted in English. Although union representatives occasionally came to the factory and talked to the workers and gave out magazines, she said there was no attempt to explain in a way she or her friends

could understand and no use of Vietnamese by representatives or in printed materials.

In her 2002 interview, Phuong drew on narratives of work as personal fulfilment, talking about her education work in terms of 'liking', 'enjoyment' and a sense of vocation. She explained her success partly in terms of the 'personal attributes and preferences' excluded from the neo-classical model (see Chapter 3) – being able to return to an approximate equivalent of her pre-migration occupation of secondary teacher. Her Honours thesis concerned Vietnamese secondary school students in Australia. In drawing on this narrative she was countering the vocationalism of neo-liberal lifelong learning discourse.

Like many other workers with work injuries, Phuong constructed work as actively impairing physical capacity for work and thus damaging 'human capital'. She had a miscarriage during her time in the factory, which she attributed to the heavy lifting and carrying of baskets of jeans. This caused long-term health problems, which affected her capacity to work.

Work (Tram)

Tram wanted to work primarily because she wanted the income. As a woman without children, the social norm requiring her to work did not appear to affect her, and she did not need to provide for others. Thus, she approximated most closely to the neo-classical narrative that constructs people as working only to maximise financial utility: 'Now if I receive unemployment benefit it's only enough for me to have a not very easy life. I expect that I will have a job in the future, but if I don't I'll have to live on unemployment benefit and I don't want to.'

Tram countered the narrative of English as a necessity for employability by telling the story of her recruitment. She did a formal interview and a medical through an interpreter and was trained by Vietnamese-speakers in the workplace. Although she had no prior experience on the particular machine she was to use, she was accepted on the basis of a one-week practical trial. She drew on the

narratives of learning as participation and knowledge as embodied and embedded in practice to construct work and learning in her workplace, where she learned from other workers how to use different machines as required. Tram thus countered the neo-liberal narrative of employability through drawing on the discourse of the multilingual community of practice. She could not understand why, despite her record of work and learning, she was now constructed as unemployable.

She described the workplace as structured not according to merit but according to ethnic patterns, with the complicity of both employers and unions. She was often moved between different jobs – as a plain machinist, on the overlocker, on the buttonholer. She saw this as exploitation based on a perceived ethnic trait of ‘hard work’; here she appeared to be constructing hard work as acquiescence. In this context she constructed multiskilling as work intensification and attributed racist stereotypes about ‘Asians’ to management. She was ambivalent about these, seeming to concur partly with the construction of ‘Europeans’ as resistant to authority and therefore lazy:

If the boss liked you, you had a stable job. If not, you got moved around. We Asian and they keep changing around like that because they think we work very hard. European if they changing job for two days they don’t want to work very hard so the boss has to put them back in the old job.

Tram constructed the allocation of work as structured according to age. She was told at 38 that she was too old for employment as a sales assistant or a machinist. She later spent several years with two Job Network providers, without success, for the same reason:

[The first, private JN member] cannot help me anything. ... [They] only introduce me to the jobs that they choosing people with young age, instead of mature age like me ... the workplace that [they] try to matching me with, they only asking for younger, that’s why they cannot match me with any job. Sometime I go for an interview face to face, sometime over the phone. Not really interview [over the

phone], but like asking information like ‘How old are you?’ or something like that...

The only jobs she could find were too far away, and she did not drive – as LTU, she has no money for lessons and to buy a car. She had been offered a job in Tullamarine on nightshift but did not accept it because it would have taken her two hours on the train. She did not want to join a group for unemployed people because she was ‘scared of the word unemployed’. Tram drew on the narrative of home ownership as primary life project. She had sacrificed everything else to pay off her mortgage, and the house was her security. The fact that it was paid off made it possible for her to survive. She was not willing to move house for this reason and because she knew almost nothing of other areas of Melbourne.

Tram recounted the story of a short-lived machining job in 1997 that illustrates her resistance against being ‘tracked’ into the ultimately ‘flexible’ labour force of the sweatshop by her level of English language ability, inability to afford her own transport and the prevalence of ethnic small businesses in the clothing industry. In 1997, Centrelink sent her to a job in a small Vietnamese-owned clothing company on a twenty-week subsidy. There was one toilet for more than twenty employees and most of the (Vietnamese-speaking) employees were working from 8.00 am until midnight for \$5 per hour and claiming benefit. She was officially working an eight-hour day but her employers insisted that Centrelink was under-subsidising them and pressured her to stay behind regularly without overtime payments. She was subjected to minor harassment and was paid only \$9 per hour instead of the \$11 she had expected. She was told by Centrelink that this was a training wage, but she received no training, and needed none. Several experienced unsubsidised English-speaking employees started at the company but were quickly harassed out; she herself expected to be offered only continuing work at \$5 per hour when the subsidy finished: ‘I don’t want to [be paid] cash because it’s not officially working. Like I don’t want to have cash in hand. I want to work like officially work and get an award and everything, like a rule, a rule for everything, I don’t want to work like that.’

Finally, as she was beginning to consider asking Centrelink if she could leave, the company told her they were not receiving their full subsidy and she was dismissed because she was 'not suitable'. Centrelink threatened to breach her because she was not willing to explain, so she was forced to report what was going on:

I explain to the interpreter saying that ... I don't want to receive unemployment benefits working for cash long hour, and that's why I get the sack. That's why [Centrelink] laughing, they understand that it's not my fault. [So you think that they were trying to push you to become that kind of cash worker?] Yes ... I don't want to report them because using a lot of cash-in-hand worker ... I kept my mouth shut [to Centrelink at first] ... That's why ... if I report them everyone ... get into trouble. ... Actually I did not say particular anyone, but I said that they got some ... activities there like that.

Despite repeated periods of Intensive Assistance she did not find another job.

Tram constructed the small business sector as central to her chances of finding a job, and in her account, that sector is 'down' since 2000: 'When I approach them they say "I am going bankrupt, how can I offer you a job?"' Thus she countered the narrative of entrepreneurialism.

Education and training (Phuong)

The contending narrative of formal study as personally and socially fulfilling underlies Phuong's account of her introduction to study in Australia, when she studied in the supportive environment of the Women's Learning Centre at the local TAFE: 'When I studied the first course I felt interested because all women in the learning centre, and we very happy, very enjoy because all women'.

Phuong constructed English as situated and contextual. Due to her need to learn particular types of English, studying at such a high level was still difficult for her in 1994; although 'my English quite enough' in general. 'Sometimes I feel

very tired, to do some subject like economics, it's difficult'. Her high level of education in related areas in her own language contributed to her ability to cope with the demands of her courses. Often she knew quite a lot about the content and could concentrate on the language through extra reading and 'lots of homework'. She again drew on the narrative of formal study as personally and socially fulfilling to explain why she managed to survive in this context: 'I think I have opportunity to study, I like learning, I like study, so I try to do ...'

Her education came to a halt, however, after her Honours year. She did not win a scholarship and could not afford to pay the costs of doing the Masters degree herself. In this sense her major form of material resistance, studying for personal fulfilment, was brought to an end through the commodification of education. However, she did not critique this explicitly, as she did not critique her insecure employment conditions, preferring to say that her health and family demands ('I have a free day Tuesday for housework!') meant that both of these suited her.

Ethnicity and ELL (Phuong and Tram)

Both Phuong and Tram said they spoke English 'not well' in 1994. Phuong constructed lack of opportunities to learn English as contributing to the 'tracking' of migrants into factory jobs. She attributed retrenchment partially to the narrative of English as a necessity for employability, and to the location of responsibility for this in the individual worker: 'I think migrants lose their jobs more because of language'. Many 'Asians' had 'problems to understand the boss', so were more likely to be retrenched.

She described the new immigration rules requiring sponsored relatives to be supported for the first two years as a major source of problems for many migrants. She acknowledged the racist discourse enacted in such policies, interpreting them as a message that migrants were 'other' in Australia, that they were not 'in their own country'.

Tram had studied for two years under the TCF LAP but found English quite difficult. She had wanted to do a sales assistant course but had been told that

none was available. From late 2001 she was again studying English under the LLNP. She was enjoying this but making slow progress. She commented with a guilty look, 'older people, harder to catch up!'

The state (Phuong and Tram)

Phuong countered the 'job snobs' narrative by stating her willingness to accept a factory job if necessary in the future, even though it was not her choice. Phuong constructed the state as responsible for individual well-being through a government-sponsored version of the discourse of lifelong learning, proposing a program like the LAP for all retrenched workers:

I think the government should help people who are retrenchment to look for job like some program like training, education ... when I lost my job I received training from CES so I felt not very sad. And I think this program is good for people. [Good for everybody who's retrenched, not just car and clothing industry?] Yes.

She drew on this narrative to critique arrangements for transport, books and equipment costs that disadvantage those on Austudy compared with those receiving Social Security benefits.

Tram also constructs the state as responsible for individual well-being, but her method is job creation:

I expect that the government has to create more jobs because if they do that then they don't have to pay unemployment benefits. We'd be working. The life of people will improve and they'll feel better if they're working. For example set up a centre and teach people how to make artificial flowers, art/craft, and then export. Pay not much but help them to get off benefit in the long run. For art/craft you group people and they improve every day.

Tram also critiqued the marketisation of employment assistance under the Job Network. In the 'old system', she said, they 'knew what they were doing, because only [one organisation] looking after job seekers'. Now, nobody was 'particularly looking after job seekers'.

Tram's story about her encounter with the sweatshop also illustrates her resistance to the 'norm' of 'double dipping'. She draws on the narrative of 'double dipping' as a consequence of deregulation, insisting that she wants a job where there are 'rules' and an 'award'.

Conclusion

These case studies illustrate the variety in the experiences and the narratives drawn on by participants. The narrative of NESB immigrants as factory fodder had 'tracked' Alf and Phuong into manual jobs despite their considerable qualifications and experience. Monolingualism and ageism constructed Tram as unemployable and untrainable. Neo-liberal discourses were available to Alf to construct an alternative identity as businessman and 'winner' in the new economy. However, Hodayoun and Nadia strongly critiqued neo-liberal discourses drawing on a discourse of equity. Resistance took the forms of refusal to register at Centrelink; refusal to do voluntary work in the place of a paid worker; refusal to work for below-award wages on the assumption of 'double-dipping'; and refusal to work for a particular employer.

Some of these case studies also illustrate the similarities and differences in the ways participants engaged with neo-liberal discourse in the two rounds of interviews. Case study 2 illustrates the way in which construction of an identity within the 'new economy' led Alf to draw on different neo-liberal narratives from those of the first interview. In case study 4, Nadia had moved away from the neo-liberal narrative of vocationalism in the light of its failure to deliver its promised benefits in her own life.

The next chapter will consider the major patterns of discursive engagement of the participants as a group and the contending discourses upon which they drew. It will then consider some of the implications of the findings of this study for employment, employment assistance, education and training, and Australian society in general.

Chapter 9

Implications of discursive engagement

Introduction

In Chapters 5 and 6, I examined the way in which neo-liberal discourses were instantiated in a series of Labor and Coalition policy documents since the late 1980s and how they constructed the role of Job Network and other providers, whose voices were also heard in Chapter 6. In Chapters 7 and 8, I then analysed the ways in which the participants in this study engaged with the dominant discourses. In this chapter I will first briefly review the dominant policy discourses, how they interact with each other in the policy context, and how they construct the workers in the study. Second, I will analyse the major patterns in the discursive engagement of the workers with the dominant discourses. Third, I will analyse the contending narratives drawn upon by the workers in terms of the contending discourses of which they form a part. Last, I will consider the implications of this discursive engagement with regard to work and employment assistance, education and training, English language and literacy and Australian society in general.

That is, chapter 9 will allow me to bring together my thinking about the objectives of this thesis in the form of a conclusion. Recall that my objectives were:

1. to investigate the discourses present in the policy context in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s in relation to four focus areas: work; education and training; English language and literacy; and the state; this investigation

focuses on how these discourses constructed the participants in the study, as workers, as learners, as retrenched/unemployed, and as NESB.

2. to analyse the ways in which the participants engaged with the dominant discourses of neo-liberalism in relation to the four focus areas, in particular how they were subjectified by them, how they resisted them discursively or materially, and to what extent they drew on these discourses themselves.
3. to consider what contending discourses, if any, were drawn on by these workers in relation to the focus areas.

Discourses of the policy context

The policy context since the late 1980s has reflected a significant discursive shift. The National Policy on Languages (NPL) of 1987 represents a high point of the policy discourses of humanism and pluralism. Despite the strong social presence in Australia at that time of racist narratives that constructed monolingualism as 'commonsense' and the language practices of NESB people as a 'symbol of Otherness', the NPL declined to 'other' any group, particularly on the basis of language. Similarly, it declined to construct language in the disembodied, reductionist, instrumental way of the neo-liberal meta-discourse that was beginning to overwhelm public life, instead constructing it in terms of human identity, culture, and social well-being. It also acknowledged the centrality of power.

In the late 1980s, however, policy documents began to be framed in neo-liberal discourses of economism and performativity. In the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (NAMA) of 1989, contending discourses of linguistic and cultural pluralism, equity and justice still had a relatively strong presence. However, neo-liberal narratives in the document now constructed the meaning of multicultural policy in terms of its economic contribution, and it categorised people into those 'normal' citizens who can contribute and those 'others' who are left behind. A major criterion for the latter group was English language, which in

turn was naturalised as determining educational participation. While at first constructing monolingualism as a problem, the NAMA and later policies introduced the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA), which was structured around the principle of monolingualism. The neo-liberal discourses of economism and performativity linked to the narrative of economic nationalism enabled the major multicultural policy of the nation fundamentally to 'other' NESB immigrants and permit the entry into the policy terrain of narratives from racist discourses. These narratives were given additional force by framing the construction of the nation's future in terms of ambivalent and orientalist constructions of Asia and of Australia's past in terms of a superior British heritage. Neo-liberalism brought with it racist discourses, and the force of the neo-liberal narratives was itself augmented by the 'common-sense' racist narratives about work and language already embedded in Australian society.

My point here is not that the NAMA and other later policy documents did not contain measures designed to assist NESB people; of course they did contain such measures. Rather, the strengthening meta-discourse of neo-liberalism as instantiated in the NAMA and later policies licensed a new economism and economic nationalism throughout Australia. Thus it legitimated the exclusion of certain types of workers, already constructed as a 'problem' due to existing discourses, from training and employment and thus in a sense from social citizenship (Castles & Davidson 2000, p. 110). Thus the way that NESB workers were constructed within these policy discourses undermined the seemingly ameliorative initiatives that the policies instituted. This is not to say, of course, that all such initiatives were likely to be successful. Nor does it mean that some of those initiatives were not very useful to some people. However, the promotion of specific initiatives to assist people who are 'othered' and defined as a 'problem' does not in itself counter racism (Goldberg 1993, p. 47).

The later policies examined in Chapter 5 instantiate the now clearly dominant discourses of neo-liberalism. The commissioned report *The Cost of Low Levels of English Proficiency Amongst Immigrants in the Workforce* (Stromback & Preston 1991) illustrates the way in which the 'language and literacy crisis' was

constructed in Australia. The Stromback study lent academic support to the discourses of blame that were already developing. The 1989 report *No Single Measure* (Wickert & Kevin 1995), which included a serious attempt to counter neo-liberal discourse on English language and literacy (ELL) (see Chapter 4), was also coopted into the service of the discursive creation of the 'literacy crisis'. These documents helped to lay the discursive foundations for the devastating effects of the NTRA on NESB workers.

The narrative of the 'new workplace' allowed neo-liberal meta-discourse to 'coopt the tenets of progressivism, participation and equity into a rationale for efficiency, effectiveness and competitiveness, to be achieved through the operation of corporate management' (Wickert & Baynham 1994 pp. 159-60).

Through the new narratives about English, training and the 'new workplace' the discursive conditions were created for massive job losses among NESB workers (Courtenay 1994, p. 43). English language issues were 'used as justification for workers' "failures" to demonstrate competence, often after many years of competently performing their jobs and their lives' (O'Connor 1994, p. 88). The NTRA had created the discursive conditions for the 'tracking' of thousands of productive workers out of the workforce. As O'Connor asks,

What do we expect an employer to do if our message is that an 'illiterate' worker is unproductive, is a danger to other workers, produces substandard work, and generally costs the company tens of thousands of dollars through their personal incompetence? (O'Connor 1994, p. 89)

The period leading up to *Working Nation* saw the continued strengthening of the narrative of economic nationalism and the gradual weakening of the contending discourses of humanism, equity, social justice and pluralism as they were supplanted by the new discourse of social contractualism. In this discourse, welfare recipients are deficient and made more so by the receipt of unemployment benefit, which is constructed as demeaning in itself because it represents 'dependence' and therefore moral weakness. Unemployed people were constructed as non-contributors to the 'economic nation', due to laziness,

choosiness or 'de-moralisation' (Allan 1997). Increasing surveillance and compulsion were legitimated by this discourse. Under threat of 'breaching', unemployed people must now demonstrate that they are looking for work even though no work may exist, and they must attend various forms of programs designed to entrepreneurialise them (Considine 2001). In Working Nation, equity discourse provided some kind of counterpoint to that of Reciprocal Obligation/Mutual Obligation (RO/MO). The residual discourse of equity at least provided a subject position that offered a way out through participation in a government-sponsored version of lifelong learning discourse. However, since the advent of the Coalition government, coercion and a discursive onslaught against unemployed people have moved to the centre of the discourse, completing the shift from 'ameliorative to prohibitive agendas' (Luke 1997, p. 15). Coalition RO/MO discourse involves a construction of lack of 'skills', including ELL, as intentional and to be reversed by coercion. Part of its discursive direction seems to be to combat post-industrial discourses that construct social contribution as possible without constant paid employment.

As one of the 'unofficial' constituting discourses of Australian society, racism is fundamental to policy, both textual and in implementation. Racist discourses, based on the construction as 'other' of certain groups of people, underlie policy. Policy itself, by drawing on neo-liberal discourses, further naturalises racist structures based on 'otherness'. The forms that racist discourse takes shift and change along with its contexts. At the same time, racist discourse 'intersects' with other discursive formations (Goldberg 1993, p. 1). Along with visible difference and cultural practices, linguistic practices constitute one of the central ways of constructing 'otherness' within racist discourse in Australia.

How are we to understand the presence of contending discourses such as equity, justice and pluralism in policy texts? On one hand, this presence may be understood as the result of negotiation and powerplay between proponents of various discourses within the writing of policy (Ball 1994, p. 17). But the discursive effects of such interdiscursivities are more complex. Edwards and Usher (1994) argue that the human capital (HC) discourse of competence

‘appropriates’ progressive educational discourses within an overall context of economism and instrumental education (see also Aronowitz & Giroux 1993, p. 61). Edwards and Usher comment:

It is precisely through [their] articulation with liberal humanist ideas that discourses of competence are powerful, not simply within the formal structures of education and training but, more important, over and through learners (Edwards & Usher 1994)

I would argue that this notion of appropriation is useful in conceptualising the relationship between the discourses of performativity and equity. Edwards and Usher’s argument is that the appropriation of liberal humanist ideas operates as a form of seduction into the discourses of economism and instrumental education. By constructing features of progressive discourse, such as ‘student centred learning’ in the case of education, within a context that confines the outcomes within the economist discourse, people are ‘empowered to disempower themselves’ (Edwards & Usher 1994). It seems to me that something of the sort happens when policies founded in neo-liberal economism and performativity, which define the social in purely economic terms, also include the discourse of equity. Equity itself becomes merely economic, the impulse towards equity becomes only a demand to ‘contribute’ economically on an equal basis. This is not to say that those insisting on incorporating equity discourses into the process of policy formation are anything but bona fide, nor is it to deny the importance of economic aspects of equity in a society where inclusion is increasingly mediated by work. However, through such policy interdiscursivities, the impulse to equity is translated into an impulse to the economism and performativity of the discourse as a whole, and its possibilities are thus weakened. Equality is transformed thereby into ‘equality of opportunity’ to perform in ‘the market’.

The construction of the 'other'

The dominant discourses enacted in these policies and their implementation in practice increasingly constructed NESB immigrants as 'other'. This occurred first through the globalisation narrative of economic nationalism, within which people were constructed as 'human resources'. In this construction, people who spoke languages other than English (LOTES) were a kind of desired 'other'. Their HC attributes could be exploited for the benefit of monolingual 'Australians' who would thereby be absolved of the need to disturb their monolingual and monocultural comfort. At the same time, however, the construction of people as human resources implied the undesired or inferiorised 'other', defined as a non-contributor.

The HC narratives of the 'new workplace' and lifelong learning, with their associated narratives of textualisation, credentialism and trainability, naturalised the construction of longstanding and productive NESB workers as non-contributors by reason of their NESB-ness. While there were initiatives intended to benefit NESB people in some cases, the effect of these was mitigated by racist discourse and by the very performativity of policy discourse itself, which legitimated employers' existing reluctance to 'take a chance' by employing people different from themselves (Hawthorne 1994; Niland & Champion 1990, p. 10; Watson 1996, pp. 43-5). Those previously 'tracked' into factory and other manual work, including many educated, skilled and experienced people, were constructed as unproductive, despite their long histories of productive work. This 'othering' was based on racist and human capital narratives regarding skill and ELL. English language and literacy were defined as unitary 'basic skills'. These narratives constructed the 'literacy crisis', English as a mere 'work skill' and ELL as necessary for employability.

These were not the only ways in which NESB workers were 'othered'. At the same time, the neo-liberal narrative of entrepreneurialism, read along with colonial dichotomies of 'inventiveness vs imitativeness' (see Chapter 4), constructed those workers who had previously worked at manual jobs under a

Taylorist regime as dependent ‘others’, without initiative (Hull 1994, p. 50; Sennett 1998, pp. 39-40). Workers who had work-based injuries or illnesses were othered with those ‘whose bodies require special provision - who are constituted as dis-abled in respect of the norm’ (Yeatman 1994, p. 84). In the neo-liberal narrative of ‘prosperity chauvinism’, poverty itself is naturalised and the poor are ‘othered’²². The discourse of social contractualism brought with it its own specific form of ‘othering’.

However, language-based ‘othering’ is one of the most insidious forms. The link between linguistic practices and racist discourse is difficult to establish because linguistic practices change between first and second generations of immigrants. Language does have practical implications as a ‘tool’. The distinction between a practical need for a particular kind of language to accomplish a particular purpose and the narrative of language practice as a ‘symbol of Otherness’ is likely to be disputed. However, discourses of recruitment that exclude workers from jobs that they could well perform through inflated demands for ELL, and discourses of training that naturalise the exclusion of many NESB workers through training practices that are linguistically inaccessible, form part of the narrative of language practice as a ‘symbol of Otherness’. By discursively reducing language to a mere ‘tool’, disembodied and instrumental, HC discourse makes these meanings invisible, along with the discourses of humanism and pluralism that construct language in terms of human identity, culture, and social well-being.

In a few cases, participants in this study drew on dominant discourses that ‘othered’ them and naturalised their lesser entitlement to the benefits of social citizenship. Sometimes, as described below, this was done in order to ‘deflect’ disadvantage onto other members of the ‘othered’ group while maintaining an exemption for oneself. Such cases may also be interpreted in the light of Hage’s concept of ‘practical nationality’ (See Chapter 4). In other cases the explanation

²² Peel (2003) analyses the way that both news stories and some poverty researchers talk about poverty as ‘pitiable’ but ‘inevitable’ (p. 23), and about the poor as rather threatening ‘others’: ‘the moral of the story ... is often what “they” [ie the poor] might do to “us”’ (p. 24).

for this seemingly unlikely pattern of ‘self-othering’ may be found in Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic violence’ (1991, p. 51; see Chapter 3). ‘Symbolic violence’ is a form of actual power that draws an overwhelming legitimacy from shared belief, whereby those subjected to it ‘believe in the legitimacy of power and the legitimacy of those who wield it’ (Thompson 1991 p. 23). One of the most important aspects of the resulting inequality is that it ‘appears to be based on the qualities of the person alone’ (Bourdieu 1991 p. 73). In this study, these cases largely related to matters of nationality and language; the ‘qualities of the person’ involved immigrant status and linguistic practices, in particular national origin and command of English. For example, many drew on constructions of themselves as ‘other’ in contrast to ‘Australians’; some referred to ‘Australians’ as ‘the owners of the country’. Thus the racist discourse that constructed them as less entitled to secure, well-paid employment or to welfare benefits because of their origin and/or their linguistic and cultural practices was accepted by these participants, despite being inimical to their interests.

Discursive engagement by workers

As we saw in Chapter 7, the ways in which workers engaged with the narratives of dominant discourses were complex. In summary, there were five types of engagement. First, workers simply acknowledged the existence of dominant narratives. Second, they drew on those same narratives to construct their own identities in the interviews. Third, they gave accounts of forms of material resistance, including evasion, refusal or ‘narrative swapping’ – choosing a course of action that constructed an identity within a different dominant narrative that provided a more advantageous subject position. Fourth, they explicitly critiqued or ridiculed them. Fifth, and most commonly, however, they countered dominant narratives through stories that demonstrated that these narratives were not true or that they had deleterious effects. In countering dominant narratives, workers

often, although by no means always, drew on narratives from contending discourses. These will be examined in the next section.

In many cases, workers simply acknowledged the narratives that excluded them from employment, including HC narratives about ELL and narratives of textualisation, credentialism, multiskilling and trainability. They simply described themselves as constructed by these narratives in the 'labour market'. However, one of the powerful ways in which some workers engaged with dominant narratives was by acknowledging and attributing practices to narratives that were not those 'official' narratives within dominant neo-liberal meta-discourse but were those of racist discourse. This occurred particularly in the attribution of employer recruitment or selection behaviour to discrimination rather than to 'official' HC narratives about skill or credentials. These workers acknowledged racist and colonialist narratives that constructed them as inferior, as unskilled, as frauds, as dirty, as backward, or simply as 'other' and last in the job queue. In relation to ELL, there was an acknowledgement of the racist narrative of language practice as a 'symbol of Otherness' rather than as a 'skill', rewarded incrementally in the 'market' or really necessary for particular jobs.

Some workers drew on particular neo-liberal narratives to construct their own identities in the interviews. The only person who consistently did this was Alf (see case study 2, Chapter 8). Some neo-liberal narratives were drawn on rarely. The HC narrative of work as personal fulfilment was used by a few people, all skilled or white-collar workers. The neo-liberal narrative that blames trade unions for damaging national competitiveness and for artificially maintaining wages and thus causing unemployment was also drawn on by a handful of workers, including Alf. All except Alf drew on this narrative as part of a hybrid with a local narrative of union failure. The union failure narrative was quite commonly drawn on by a wide range of workers. This narrative was not opposed to unions on principle but could be read as a kind of precursor to a fully-fledged neo-liberal rejection of labour organisation.

The neo-liberal narratives most commonly drawn on were those of entrepreneurialism, lifelong learning and vocationalism. They also included

economic nationalism and some of the narratives of social contractualism – the unemployed as ‘bludgers’ and ‘double dippers’, and a paternalistic form of compulsion. In the case of entrepreneurialism, the pattern of discursive engagement appears to be a form of ‘narrative swapping’. This will be examined below. The construction of formal study as hope appeared to represent a kind of conditional acceptance of the ‘economic determinist’ discourse of lifelong learning, whereby some workers embraced the possibilities of retraining on government sponsored programs. This is not, however, the full neo-liberal normative version of the narrative, which constructs lifelong learning as a duty of the economically contributing citizen, to be carried out within a marketised, user-pays system (Bagnall 2000; Coffield 1999). Participation in such a system would have been an unacceptable risk for most of those interviewed, purely from a financial point of view. Nor was the progressive version of the lifelong learning discourse widely drawn upon. The reason for this was the centrality of the narrative of vocationalism for the majority (see below).

The narrative of economic nationalism, in the sense of an acceptance of a need for international competitiveness, was widely drawn on and underlay constructions of the role of the state in tackling unemployment. However, as we have seen in Chapter 7, economic nationalism was closely linked to social and individual well-being and to a kind of general social productiveness based on social inclusion. Thus there was a sense that competitiveness would result from structures that enabled everyone to learn and to work, overseen by the state to ensure that this productivity was of benefit to Australia and that its benefits were distributed throughout society. Again, this was not the full neo-liberal *laissez-faire* version of the narrative, in which wealth must be created within the nation by the nation’s enterprises and will then simply ‘trickle down’.

The neo-liberal discourse most commonly drawn on was RO/MO, particularly the narratives of the unemployed as ‘bludgers’ and ‘double dippers’ and the construction of compulsion as necessary. In a very few cases the ‘bludger’ narrative was explicitly used to blame the unemployed for their own plight and for damaging the national interest (the narrative of economic nationalism) – one

worker described not wanting to work as 'not fair for Australia'. However, virtually all of those who were using the narrative were transforming it by strenuously constructing a version of it that distinguished between those who did not want to work or to work hard, and those (including but not usually limited to themselves) who wanted to work but could not find a job, or for whom working would actually damage their ability to provide for their families. This transformation significantly narrowed the scope of the 'withheld effort' narrative. However in this way a number of workers drew on, and thus perpetuated, a dominant discourse that in its usual form 'othered' their own group. This practice is testament to the strength of neo-liberal narratives about belonging and contribution. Peel (2003, p. 32) uses the term 'deflect' to describe this phenomenon. In his recent study of poverty in Australia, he points out that the discursive attribution of 'fraud, hopelessness and threat' to unemployed people is particularly difficult for them to counter. Such narratives have to be '... denied and refuted, or deflected onto those who 'really' deserved them. It is not surprising that participants in this study said, in essence, 'I'm not like that, but some of those [other people] are' (Peel 2003, p. 32).

Widespread use of these narratives by the workers interviewed provides some explanation for their support for the compulsion of RO/MO discourse. However, it was a qualified support. What was supported were ways of moving people into regular, full-time, properly regulated jobs, or getting them doing something productive and non-exploitative. People constructed 'cleaning up the environment' as productive. There was no sign of the Coalition differentiation between 'real' jobs and created jobs. Being employed was connected with narratives that constructed employment as productiveness, as social order, as self-respect, as self-discipline, as independence and as learning. These are ethical and social narratives.

Accounts of material resistance were more difficult to determine. Workers spoke with palpable relief about ways of ceasing to be constructed by the discourse of social contractualism through leaving the labour market – accessing disability pensions or Mature Age Allowance, having babies or focusing on

domestic work. These were forms of evasion rather than challenges to the discourses. Similarly, studying appeared to function for some as a way out of the oscillation between the 'just-in-time' labour force and the pressures of employment assistance (see case study 1, Chapter 8). Some lied about their age, dyed their hair or fabricated employment histories that disguised a period of work injury. Homayoun refused to work for a particular company that had treated him appallingly (see case study 1, Chapter 8). Tome and Stoyana simply refused to go to Centrelink, foregoing their partial UB (see case study 3, Chapter 8). Nadia had left her voluntary job as a protest against being substituted for a paid worker (see case study 4, Chapter 8). Tram refused to be 'tracked' into low-paid work and 'double-dipping' (see case study 5, Chapter 8).

Starting a small business appeared to be an attempt at evasion through 'narrative swapping'. People who were constructed within narratives of racist and neo-liberal discourse as unskilled factory fodder drew on an alternative dominant narrative that offered a more advantageous subject position as entrepreneur. Several people gave accounts of material practice that illustrated this form of engagement, constructed through the narratives of small business as positive value or small business as last resort. An extreme example of 'narrative swapping' is Alf (see case study 2, Chapter 8). In moving from employee to businessman, Alf illustrated how neo-liberal meta-discourse can be used in the construction of a powerful identity. His use of neo-liberal discourses was his resistance against being constructed as 'other' within racist and ageist narratives. Other aspects of neo-liberal meta-discourse were available to him for use in the construction of this identity, both providing a rationale for his business practices and enabling him to construct an identity as a 'winner' despite his very limited success in financial and social status terms.

Neo-liberal and racist narratives were commonly critiqued, ridiculed or countered. Neo-classical economics narratives of work as pain (disutility) and economic 'utility' as the only reason to work were almost universally countered, drawing on narratives that constructed work in quite different terms (see below). Trade unions were generally constructed as protective in principle, although for

many they had failed. The narrative of the efficiency and rationality of the 'labour market' and HC narratives about skill were countered through narratives that constructed employment as socially allocated. The narrative of the individual as having perfect knowledge and foresight was countered through stories of the rapid transformation of the labour market and stories constructing knowledge as power. Social networks were constructed as primary, with attachments to place and people impeding mobility, particularly in a context of insecure employment. Particularly strong counters and critiques were applied to narratives of flexibility, with casualisation constructed as a breach of the mutual commitment between employer and worker, and as a consolidation of employer power that was inimical to learning. Multiskilling was constructed as mere credentialism. Racist discourses, ageism and discrimination against workers with WorkCare records in the allocation of employment were constructed as counters to the HC discourses of skills as rewarded in the labour market, on which the discourse of lifelong learning is based. Perhaps most strongly, workers often countered their construction as unproductive, non-contributing members of society with stories of long histories of hard work.

Some narratives simply did not appear, or were engaged with by far fewer people than might have been expected. The narrative of the 'new workplace', for example, was mentioned directly by only one worker who, based on his experiences in a vehicle manufacturing company, critiqued the supposed democratisation of the workplace resulting from the introduction of new management methods.

Although few workers engaged with this narrative in interviews, it was central in the construction of many NESB workers as unemployable. The 'new workplace' narrative justified support for workplace change in terms of a liberation from Taylorism. But the narrative of Taylorist management, drawing on common-sense racism, discursively constructed NESB immigrants as incapable of other forms of work. Without a discursive shift towards a different construction of NESB immigrant workers, a move away from Taylorism to the narrative of the 'new workplace' would bring with it a move away from the

employment of NESB immigrant workers. In the context of the strengthening of racist discourses in Australia in general, and the construction of migrants' needs as peripheral both by neo-liberal meta-discourse instantiated in policy and within the union movement (Bertone 2000b, pp. 127-8), such a shift was highly unlikely. The 'new workplace' narrative combined with HC narratives about language, including the narrative of the 'language and literacy crisis', to create a further racist rationale for the extrusion of NESB immigrant workers with the common-sense justification of ELL deficiency.

Contending discourses drawn on by workers

In general, workers drew on discourses of individual and social well-being, which they constructed in terms of equity, rights, security, pluralism and social mutuality. These require little further discussion. However, there were two discursive ensembles generally drawn on by workers in this study that warrant further consideration. In examining these unanticipated discourses that emerged from the analysis of the interviews, some new perspectives from the literature will also be explored.

In Chapter 7 I concluded that the workers I interviewed constructed work as fair exchange with society. This narrative appears to form part of what might be termed an 'industrial discourse' about work, similar to that described by (see Chapter 3).

Within this industrial discourse for the workers in this study were the narratives of payment for work as a symbolic indicator of worth; earner as provider; paid work as social identity or status; work as productive occupation necessary for health; paid work as social connection; and income as personal autonomy. Workers constructed paid employment as a norm, a practice that was incumbent on all adult people that, with certain exceptions, formed the basis of identity and mediated social life. Without paid work, it was impossible to have 'normal development and experience in the industrial system' (Haworth 1997, p. 28).

‘Industrial reality’ was defined both in terms of the income that would enable them to lead a ‘normal’ life, and simply what they considered to be the ‘normal’ activities and forms of life for people like themselves (Haworth 1997, p. 28).

However, the industrial discourse drawn on by the workers in this study was broader than Jahoda’s in a number of ways. First, it constructed the work of women as well as men, although perhaps less forcefully and more variably in relation to childbearing periods and upper age limits, but sufficiently strongly to mean that paid work was a norm for these NESB women and had been for a very long time. Second, the discourse contained a strong ethical element, relating the benefits of working for the individual to the benefits of the individual’s work to society as a whole. Workers constructed their work as a form of longstanding social contribution and productiveness, of benefit to society as a whole as well as to themselves. Thus they saw society as a cooperative unit rather than a competitive one, in which everyone’s work was ‘useful’. This construction of work reflects Rodney Allan’s description of the moral basis for work: ‘... co-operative practice is the fundamental relationship constitutive of modern societies. Our societies are giant co-operative enterprises from which everyone benefits to some extent, and on which everyone relies’ (Allan 1997, p. 13).

Within industrial discourses, however, there is no possibility for the construction of unemployment as anything other than damaging to the individual. There was little hint of post-industrial discourse in the interviews, such as those drawn on by Jarrod in the Coalition press release (see Chapter 5). Even the younger participants were committed to paid employment, although perhaps a little less anxiously than were their elders when they could not find it. It is ironic that the narrative of social parasitism punishes, in the name of enforcing a failing work ethic, the very people for whom the ethical discourse of work is so central.

It was within this discourse that most workers used a version of the narrative of vocationalism, constructing learning, both formal and informal, as closely associated with paid employment. As they used it, the narrative did not have the normative force of the neo-liberal narrative. However, for their own purposes, education and training were tightly bound up with gaining paid employment.

Their critiques of training courses were based on their effectiveness in leading to employment.

Industrial discourse also appeared to underlie support for the RO/MO narratives of compulsion, at least with regard to the young. Several people spoke of their attempts to socialise their children into factory or other unskilled work, which they portrayed as increasingly difficult. The support for compulsion of the young unemployed had something of the same flavour: the sense that 'industrial reality' offered a 'normal' life and that taking up one's part in the social bargain was inherently worthwhile. Several recent studies comment on the phenomenon of popular support for MO (Eardley & Matheson 2000, p. 199; Eardley, Saunders & Evans 2000, p. 29).

The second major contending discourse informing the workers' construction of their experience was the pluralist discourse of the multilingual community of practice. Within this discourse were the narratives of learning as participation and knowledge as embodied and embedded in practice (Farrell 2001, p. 68). In the narrative of learning as participation, learning occurs through doing, in the context of an actual task. Learning is 'an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world' (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 29). Workers learn how to work with computer-based machines within a job or workplace without necessarily seeing this as different from what they have always done. They learn from, and with, other workers in the workplace. Rather than learning as the internalisation of a given body of knowledge, learning through participation involves the 'whole person' and a mutually constitutive view of the learning agent, the activity and the world, as well as understanding and experience (Lave & Wenger 1991, pp. 51-2). Learning in the community of practice is embodied and situated, connected and relational (Belenky et al. 1986). This narrative also relates to forms of knowing – knowing how, knowing when and why – other than declarative knowledge (Biggs 1999).

In the related narrative of knowledge as embodied and embedded in practice, workers 'map meaning onto activity rather than onto words', and thus to 'know' something means 'to do it rather than to list, describe, and talk about it' (Gowen

1992, p. 82). Gowen describes an employee culture in a large hospital based on what she calls 'praxis: the meaning in the doing' (Gowen 1992, p. 82). For employees, writing things down is just 'not a sensible thing to do' (1992, p. 85). The employees' knowledge is tacit. Thus, in the hospital literacy program,

... employees understand curriculum that focuses on learning to improve current job performance as insulting. This is not to suggest that the workers in the classes do not want to become better readers and writers, but they do not tie this to a deficiency in the ways they perform their work (Gowen 1992, p. 67)

As we saw in Chapter 7, these narratives of learning as participation and knowledge as embodied and embedded in practice form a counter to the HC narratives of textualisation (Farrell 2001) and credentialism. Workers were incredulous that they should be required to undertake formal training in a job they had been doing for years.

Also within the narrative of the multilingual community of practice were the narratives meaning as negotiated between people, texts as jointly constructed and communication as a shared responsibility. The multilingual factory should not be romanticised. Often the community of practice existed as a resistance to the discourse of Taylorist management, which used language difference to prevent communication and divide the workforce (Kalantzis & Cope 1994, p. 77). However, many workers had learned English at and through their work, within a community of practice in which English was a lingua franca. They had learned what one worker called 'factory English' – a variety of Cummins' basic interpersonal communication skills. In the discourse of the multilingual community of practice, what mattered was not linguistic practice conceived as an individual skill in the HC manner, but a social meaning-making in the context of a task. Choosing the wrong word; not knowing how to spell the name of the heater one is assembling and needing to ask the worker at the next table; or having different grammatical patterns and different pronunciations did not matter. What mattered was that the task was successfully performed (Mawer & Field 1995, p. 31).

Implications

The last two decades have been a time of growing social inequality. The way in which neo-liberal discourses have constructed Australian NESB unemployed workers as 'other' has contributed to that inequality. Coffield (1999) points out that constructing people's worth according to their economic contribution creates a new moral economy, which attaches a market value to each individual and permits certain categories of people to be constructed as a poor investment. He cites a query by a UK industrialist as to whether 'public money should be wasted' even on research relating to such groups.

Discourses around the allocation of work contribute significantly to this growing inequality. The ideal workers in the new economy, those that Gee calls 'shape shifting portfolio people' amass a 'portfolio' of skills that enables them to move frequently between consultancy-type relationships with a series of employers. For those with credentials and whose work is situated in areas of growth and employment demand, this may be a satisfying or even fulfilling existence (but see Sennett 1998). However, for those displaced from sectors that are contracting out, the growth of short-term employment and casualisation represents a continual and repeated requirement to compete, to submit an uneasily constructed textual portfolio that is marked with one's 'otherness' to scrutiny by employers for whom the major challenge is the elimination of applicants. Casualisation and short-term employment infinitely compound the difficulties in gaining employment of those workers who have most difficulty in demonstrating their eligibility for employment within dominant discourses about ethnicity, age, English language and literacy. The new textual discursive practices of recruitment are a deeply cultural and linguistic 'game'. Those who lose long-term jobs in industry, and workers who are linguistically and culturally different, are those least able to play that game successfully. Thus the combination of the new discourses of recruitment and increasing casualisation is likely to lead to growing inequality among workers.

Job Network arrangements have resulted in a shift on the part of agencies from the unemployed person to the employer as the primary client (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000, pp. 45-6). In this sense they appear to have moved closer to the role-perception of the private employment agencies, increasing pressures previously confined to higher level recruitment to ensure the 'right fit' between the company culture and the applicant, including screening for linguistic practices (Watson 1996, pp. 43-4). The pressures of both performativity and entrepreneurialisation in recruitment have resulted in a shift towards 'the mobilisation of personality' as a primary resource for jobseekers (Considine 2001, p. 181). Watson comments on the use of the term 'personality' as code for finding clones of existing employees and, as one of his informants puts it, the importance of being 'seen to be Australian' (1996, p. 45). These developments provide a legitimating discourse for a new set of racist exclusions in blue collar employment. Recruitment and selection practices are often ignored in 'best practice' and 'cutting edge' studies of industry, which thus tend to obscure the real consequences of industry change for workers as a whole.

Language issues are political and structural. Reducing them to mere questions of 'skill' within HC discourse obscures these aspects of language and forms part of the narrative of language practice as a 'symbol of Otherness'. It naturalises the 'tracking' of newly arrived immigrants into the worst jobs and/or into long term unemployment. Increasingly these jobs are in the informal economy or in the lowest paid sectors with the most inhuman and ephemeral working arrangements. In this study, the dominant discourses around language were those least explicitly critiqued, but they played a significant part in the structuring of the employment situation of these workers. The difficulty of critique is an indication of the power of the discourse. The iron grip of monolingualism has been much strengthened in Australian public discourse since the late 1980s. This is hardly surprising considering the growth in officially sanctioned racist discourse and the deliberate discrediting of multiculturalism since 1996.

Neo-liberal discourse constructs linguistic homogenisation as merely functional. However, as Tollefson reminds us,

... the policy of requiring a dominant language at work is not seen as a 'policy' at all, but rather a 'natural' practice unrelated to the state ... the workplace is defined as an economic rather than political domain and thus outside politics and policy making ... the ideological use of language at work is a major basis for controlling access to work, and therefore to economic resources and political power ... Excluding the workplace from debates over language rights means that minority groups cannot legitimize the use of their languages at work, except at 'minority businesses' that cater largely to minority populations. As a result, dominant linguistic groups exercise an unquestioned, 'natural' (i.e. ideological) monopoly over the language of work, and therefore over the workplace itself. (Tollefson 1991, p. 208)

Neo-liberal discourses involving 'labour market deregulation', language and credentials also naturalise the racialisation of marginal types of employment. Those workers constructed within neo-liberal and racist policy discourses as last in the job queue sift down to the least regulated areas of employment, which then become racialised through narratives about 'third world' working conditions in which workers are 'ripped off by their own people' (see Chapter 6). Resistance to 'tracking' into such forms of employment becomes more difficult under the coercive regime of RO/MO discourse (see case study 5, Chapter 8). Racist assumptions as to who has the 'right' to regulation and who does not are naturalised through policy narratives associating equity and civil and political rights with 'British' institutions.

As we saw in Chapter 4, the hybrid discourse of policy multiculturalism did not directly address racism. Any shift away from neo-liberal discourse, however, must tackle racism directly. It must recognise the ways in which racist discourse naturalises injustice and inequity and seek to undo them. This means a shift away from deficit constructions of language and culture that construct people as inferior 'others'. It means the provision of adequate support for language learning, bilingualism and biculturalism of all kinds as a right, and as incumbent on all, including the mainstream. If learning is a function of a community of practice,

such a shift is essential. As long ago as 1975, Doeringer and Piore drew attention to the workplace socialisation aspect of training, which ‘really depends on the new employee’s acceptance by the established group of workers’. A key factor, therefore, in obtaining skills is ‘social acceptability’ within the workplace. Thus skills acquisition is ‘sensitive to such factors as race, sex, and shared social beliefs’ (Doeringer & Piore 1975, p. 172-3). It is essential that proposals for the development of ‘learning organisations’ (see e.g. Virgona et al. 2003, p. 54) take into account racist discourse, including discourses about language.

Without a discursive shift away from monolingualism, from discourses of deficiency, blame and coercion, and from ethnic and age discrimination, many NESB people will not choose to or be able to participate in learning and work in a way that significantly changes their situation. Real equity and justice require support from society for the continued development of people’s knowledge and ability. This involves extensive state financial support for learning of many kinds. However, such ameliorative programs will not have the intended effect if their intent is undermined by discourses that construct their actual or potential participants as ‘other’, as non-contributors, as responsible for the economic problems of the nation. There is a need for the development of a pluralist learning discourse that does not ghettoise those constructed as deficient within racist discourses about language. Most of the participants in this study accepted the vocationalism of dominant lifelong learning discourse. However, a narrow conceptualisation of this vocationalism within coercive constructions is dangerous, first because it can only provide a kind of ‘technical literacy’ and not ‘conceptual literacy’ (Aronowitz & Giroux 1993, pp. 62-3), and second because to adopt this model is

... not just to downgrade the importance of other kinds of learning, but also to deny that such learnings might themselves have a significant, but indirect, impact on the economy. This might occur through, for example, developing individual and social well-being, or by enabling learning gained in a non-work setting to be subsequently applied to work. (Tight 1998, p. 483)

Training must be conceptualised in terms of situated learning for a purpose, rather than as isolated from doing and as composed of discrete and measurable 'skills' as in the HC model. The purpose must be one that is seen as worthwhile to potential learners. This provides challenges within dominant training discourses that increasingly separate employment from learning. A recent study of 'generic skills' and displaced workers stresses the need for both increased experiential learning in formal VET contexts and the development of working environments in which a broader form of learning, characterised by 'shared processes of reflection on practice', is embedded (Virgona et al. 2003, p. 6). Such an approach would require a discursive shift away from performativity and HC constructions of learning and a commitment to the recuperation of the body of educational expertise marginalised by the dominance of these discourses. However, in order to benefit NESB workers, it would also necessarily involve the recuperation of discourses of linguistic and cultural pluralism within which these bodies of expertise were situated until the mid 1990s (Luke 1997, p. 7). Bilingual and integrated approaches to learning and, indeed, to work itself are crucial to the inclusiveness of new approaches.

The extent of the discursive shift required is very great. A recent report focusing on Victorian manufacturing industry found little evidence of a strong training culture in Australian workplaces (Hall, Buchanan & Considine 2002). Expenditure on training by employers has declined since the mid-1990s, as have the number of hours spent per employee. The responsibility for supporting and funding training has been shifted from employers and government onto the individual. The report found that the increase in traineeships in new industries and occupational areas has raised concerns regarding the quality of training, as has the growth in New Apprenticeships with a very strong on-the-job component. Spending on training for casual and part-time employees is lower than that for full-time staff, suggesting that casualisation is likely to be associated with employers' reduced commitment to training. Participants in this study confirmed this trend. The current foregrounding of 'generic skills' in the VET sector is in danger of becoming yet another rationale for definitions of 'skill' that simply

represent an employer wish-list of employee attitudes (Virgona et al. 2003, pp. 16-17). The requirement for 'generic skills' may function simply as a substitute for contextualised training within the discourse of performativity. Terms such as 'generic skills' or 'employability skills' tend further to obscure actual language requirements, allowing even more room for linguistic practices to be read as a 'symbol of Otherness'.

The workers in this study had not taken up the strong discourse of neo-liberal globalisation. They had not 'given up on government' (Pusey 2003, p. 155). They constructed the state as responsible for maximising equity and fairness in society, for protecting the weak, for distributional justice, for the provision of quality public services such as education and health and for wage setting. Most immediately, they called on the state to rehabilitate the social bargain based on work, in the name of the productiveness and learning of the nation as a whole, the well-being of society and the personal well-being of individuals. They wanted an active state to ensure that all of those individuals who were able to be productive and learn through paid employment had the opportunity to do so, while older people and those with disabilities had an 'easier life'. This involved the creation of jobs and the reining in of increasingly fragmentary, ephemeral work relations in the form of casualisation. They called on the state to ensure that ordinary people who 'work hard' are entitled to a decent life, home ownership on a reasonable scale for security and measures to invest for a decent old age. These demands requires an active state (Allan 1997, p. 21)

Pusey argues that the unusually equal distribution of income based on a central wage-fixing system, tariff protection, 'immigration restrictions on cheap labour' and full employment is the system of preference for the majority of Australians (2003, pp. 152-3). There is no need in this model for the assumption that immigration brings labour that is necessarily 'cheap'. This is a claim of racist discourse. The interviews in this study demonstrate that immigrants want secure, decently paid employment as much as anyone else does. It is the narrative of NESB immigrants as last in the job queue that 'tracks' them into low-paying work. However, the belief that people who are prepared to 'work hard' should be

entitled to a job and an income that will provide them with a decent life and prevent them from needing unemployment benefits is based on the kind of discourse Pusey describes.

As we have seen above, what I termed ‘industrial discourse’ underpinned the relation between the state, society and the individual. RO/MO discourse had some support because it fundamentally draws on this industrial discourse. However, comments in 2002 suggested that there was growing scepticism about the punitive aspects of RO/MO discourse, due to a perception that the bargain has been broken in a way that is more than an aberration. Mutual Obligation itself was supported by participants in this study but there was an expectation that the jobs existed. There was no sign of post-industrial discourse of the kind that has become the favoured target of the Coalition (see Chapter 5).

Participants in this study strongly endorsed significant job creation by government. This position endorses positions such as those of Pixley, who argues for a ‘political commitment to job creation’ (Pixley 1993, p. 5). However, unless and until a strong program of public sector job creation provides them, it is unlikely that there will be jobs for all who want them. As Bessant argues, the lack of such a job creation program in itself makes the coercion of RO/MO discourse unethical (Bessant 2000, p. 24). In the context of a ‘post-full-time work society’ (Bessant 2000, p. 17), the suggestion by a number of participants that those who have ‘worked hard’ should have the option of stopping work without government harassment translates into a rejection of the application of MO to the older unemployed, as is now occurring. Certainly public policy such as early retirement that focuses on removing people from the list of the unemployed is undesirable (Probert 1994a, p. 70). However, in a context where employment for such people is a far-off fantasy, and the alternative is harassment and denigration through construction as a ‘bludger’, practices such as the Mature Age Allowance that permit a form of early retirement are the lesser of two evils for those concerned.

A combination of industrial discourses about work, unequal distribution of work and discourses about the economy and society based on performativity and social contractualism leads to the destruction of people’s self-esteem and their

capacities (Bessant 2000, p. 29). There is a need for programs less tightly based on vocational and industrial discourses about welfare and education. People need a discourse of education that is positive and nurturing and which is based on a broad variety of social and personal goals and benefits, not just vocationalism. Rather than coercion and harassment, this requires a commitment to continued access to financial support through welfare and to incentives for educational programs like those provided early in the 1990s by the Office of Labour Market Adjustment. Such programs need to be based on a reassessment of the dependence/independence dichotomy, a revaluing of social trust and a reassertion of place and community (Sennett 1998, pp. 136-42).

The future

What is the prospect of a discursive shift away from neo-liberalism? There are two areas in particular where some signs exist of a discursive shift. The first of these relates to older workers. In late 2003 and early 2004 there has been a growing debate in relation to the retention of older workers in the workforce. This may benefit older 'unskilled' workers such as the participants in this study. However, if this debate creates a public perception that there has been a change in employer attitudes to these workers, without such a change in fact occurring, the results could be very negative. Such a public perception would further legitimate the discourses of blame that already construct the unemployed as deficient due to their inability to find work.

The second area of a seeming discursive shift is the discussion over the last several years about 'social capital' (Cox 1995; Putnam 2000). Putnam argues that a decline in 'social capital' such as communal activity and communication since the 1960s is a serious threat to the health of society (Putnam 2000, pp. 283-4). For example, he attributes a decline in workplace social capital to the privileging of competition in the workplace (Putnam 2000, pp. 88-90). The revaluation of 'social capital' may be a positive trend. However, it may have a darker side. The

lesson we should draw from the NTRA is that these new discursive lurches may have significant, targeted effects on 'othered' workers. First, if 'social capital' is seen as increased cohesion within particular social groups, the result may be further exclusionary tendencies, to the detriment of 'others' (Cox 1995, p. 29; Productivity Commission 2003, p. 23). Read within existing discourses about ethnicity and class, it may involve an assumption that the English-speaking middle class needs to 'teach' the 'others' how to have social capital. Second, the concept may simply be appropriated by neo-liberal discourse, by being discursively linked to neo-liberal values like performativity. The recent report by the Productivity Commission refers to the benefits of 'social capital' as including a reduction in the 'costs of conducting day-to-day affairs and of doing business' and in the 'need for employers to monitor their employees' (Productivity Commission 2003, p. xi).

At present there is little sign of an additional discursive shift on language or on multiculturalism. What is needed is a recuperation of a progressive version of multiculturalism, including a truly inclusionary and humanist pluralism. The detailed understandings of language and pluralism that are required cannot be developed in any other discursive conditions.

An essential part of such a development is the notion of a public space in which dominant discourses can be challenged and critiqued. Crucially, this must be a public space in which otherwise silenced, 'othered' voices may be heard. I have attempted in this thesis to contribute to such an emancipatory project by bringing into this space the stories of those I have interviewed. If there is to be a recognition of the failure of dominant neo-liberal discourses, the voices and discourses of those 'othered' by these discourses must be brought into such a space so that they can play their part in the 'contest of discourses'.

Glossary

Centrelink	Centrelink is responsible for all Social Security payments, and for classifying and referring unemployed people to the Job Network (JN) (Raper 1999 p. 4). This includes registration of new claimants as unemployed; the provision of a database for use by the unemployed to search for work via a touch screen computer; and referrals for employment assistance, Labour Market Programs and programs for sole parents, people with disabilities and people with English language difficulties (Raper 1999 p. 8).
Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI)	The JSCI determines whether and how soon a client will have access to IA (immediately for certain categories, much later for most) and the level of the funding package provided to the IA agency. Although the standardised JSCI questions are normally administered through detailed face-to-face interviews, understaffing may mean that assessment occurs in a more cursory fashion (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 31). The classification of NESB jobseekers using the JSCI is of significant concern for those who are in need of English language or literacy training or who are less obviously attractive to employers. The JSCI awards points for the number of years a client has been registered as unemployed. This disadvantages the many people who wait until they are eligible for income support before they register including newly arrived migrants during the 2 year waiting period and those who believe that retrenchment packages make them ineligible (Petersen 1999 p. 58). Eardley et al found that "[T]he JSCI too often provided an inadequate picture of clients' difficulties and did not adequately measure the nature and extent of their disadvantage" (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 30). The self-disclosure on which the JSCI depends is significantly constrained by "the coercive nature of the relationship with Centrelink, a lack of personalised service, and the limited information given about the purpose of assessment in the first instance" (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 31). The introduction under AWT of assessment by IA providers is unlikely to resolve the problem of delayed assistance.
Job Network (JN)	A network of public, private and community agencies which compete for tenders for the delivery of employment assistance services. Services included are Job Matching (JM); Job Search Training (JST); and Intensive Assistance (IA). In the first two years rapid change occurred within the Job Network. Although the new system was working reasonably well in aggregate (Australian National Audit Office 2000; Kelly et al. 1999), serious problems emerged in some areas including the awarding of contracts to unsuitable agencies (Considine 2001 p. 124; Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 10); the JSCI (Australian National Audit Office 2000; Kelly et al. 1999); referral to job search training (Australian National Audit Office 2000); the ineligibility of newly arrived migrants and people with employed partners; the structure of payments (Kelly et al. 1999); grievance and appeals processes (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 36); and the touchscreen database (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000; Kelly et al. 1999). Training providers had difficulty filling courses and sustaining comprehensive programs (Sanguinetti 1999 p. 58). Overall, Eardley et al reported mixed views on the part of their informants as to whether the advent of Centrelink had improved or downgraded service quality (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000, p. 37).

<i>Job Matching (JM)</i>	<p>A service by which the JN agency finds a suitable job for the jobseeker and refers them to the employer. Most jobseekers register at a JM agency immediately. Jobseekers who are able to do so simply access job vacancies on the touchscreens either at Centrelink or at a JN Job Matching agency, and follow the directions of Centrelink or agency staff to lodge their written application with the agency listing the vacancy. Payment is by “outcomes”, defined as the placing of a client into a listed job vacancy providing a minimum of 15 hours’ work per week (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 7). Tendering is on a price competitive basis. The relationship between job matching and job skills training is important for disadvantaged jobseekers, as they can become blocked between the “job seeker focus” of job search training staff and the “employer focus” of job matching staff (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 48).</p>
<i>Job Search Training (JST)</i>	<p>A 3-week training course in job search techniques, available to people selected by Centrelink (Raper 1999 p. 173). Most offers are made when people have been receiving payments for 6 – 12 months (Raper 1999 p. 177). Tendering is on a price competitive basis.</p>
<i>Intensive Assistance (IA)</i>	<p>IA, based on case management, is designed for the LTU and those who are identified as having a high risk of becoming LTU and as having a “capacity to benefit” (Commonwealth of Australia 1996). Within IA there are 3 further levels of assistance; the level available to a particular jobseeker is determined by the JSCI administered by Centrelink. Payment to the agency is based on a fixed schedule, including an upfront service fee, a second payment if the client gains paid employment for 13 weeks, and a final outcome payment if employment continues for another 13 weeks. The trigger for the upfront payment is the jobseeker agreeing to be assigned to the agency; after this point, withdrawal may incur a sanction unless Centrelink accepts that they have been “severely mistreated” (Considine 2001 p. 125). IA is limited to 12 months or in the case of the most disadvantaged 18 months. Programs vary considerably between agencies (Raper 1999 p. 180) and are intended to be individually tailored to the person’s needs (Raper 1999 p. 179). These programs provide the nearest equivalent to the labour market programs previously delivered under Working Nation. However, contractors may use the funds they are allocated in any way they choose: thus they may pay the employer a fee for offering employment to the jobseeker for 6 months, they may provide or purchase training for the jobseeker or they may absorb the whole amount as profit (Considine 2001 p.123). IA contractors are now required to find and fill job vacancies as well as prepare the unemployed for work (Considine 2001 p. 122). In the second tender round, in March 2000, approximately 30 specialised agencies were contracted to provide intensive assistance to particular groups of jobseekers, including NESB and those with disabilities (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 11). In an attempt to improve the standard of IA, agencies tendering in the second round were required to make a “declaration of intent” aimed at increasing accountability, and to lodge individual support plans for jobseekers still unemployed after 13 weeks. This has been interpreted as an attempt to ensure that money was spent on training and employment subsidies or, in other words, to “nudge the system quietly back in the direction of labour market programs” (Gittins 1999 cited in Eardley 2000 p. 12). Under the reforms introduced in July 2002 as Australians Working Together (AWT), Intensive Assistance providers will assess whether job seekers referred to them would benefit from referral to complementary programmes before Intensive Assistance, including Work for the Dole, the LLNP, or the new Personal Support Program as recommended by the Productivity Commission.</p>

<i>Training programs</i>	Training programs are provided through in-house arrangements by some agencies (such as AMES) and/or by referring clients to, and/or purchasing places for clients in programs run in another layer of organisations, training providers. These include TAFEs, community adult education and other private providers (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000). Accredited training is only available to recipients of IA, and the "capacity to benefit" criterion has reduced the numbers of people eligible to receive training (Sanguinetti 1999 p. 57).
<i>Australian Job Search database</i>	The database which jobseekers access through the touchscreens. Serious problems exist with the database (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000; Kelly et al. 1999). These problems include multiple listings of the same job, which cause "considerable frustration" to clients (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 34); this is due to employers trying to use more than one agency to fill the vacancy (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 55).
<i>Grievance and appeals</i>	There is a widespread lack of awareness of Job Network grievance and appeals processes in general, and of Centrelink ones in particular. Few jobseekers had attempted to have negative decisions reviewed. There was "a common perception that the processes were difficult, that Centrelink would be obstructive, and that anyone who complained might be victimised later" (Eardley, Abello & MacDonald 2000 p. 36).
<i>Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP)</i>	The LLNP constitutes one of the optional activities available under the mutual obligation requirements to job seekers unemployed for six months or more. Initially, the literacy-only program was designed for youth, and was an alternative to Work for the Dole (WfD). However, the age range has since been widened. Its initial design reflected a separation of literacy from language, inappropriate for the majority of job seekers in the western region, and in 2002, the program incorporated English language. In 2002 the major LLNP provider for NESB people in the West was AMES. However, due to the perceived high overheads, applications for 2002 have seen significant consolidation, and programs are offered in what many consider too few locations. Training is designed for those assessed as having language and/or literacy and numeracy skills 'below the level considered necessary to secure sustainable employment or pursue further education and training' and the program objective was to assist unemployed people to 'increas[e] their chances of obtaining sustainable employment or undertaking further education and training and improving their daily lives' (Department of Education, 2003). Thus, the program has a broad objective that encompasses both vocational and personal rationales. The LLNP is very limited in its scope for those really committed to learning English. The program is part-time and limited to only two courses in two years; job seekers must look for work at the same time (Department of Education, 2003). If a job seeker has completed two LLNP courses in a single year, it will be another year before he/she will again be eligible. Two LLNP courses is often insufficient, and the absence of an educational outcome payment may mean that those completing the courses will not be referred to continuing study at an appropriate level. Within the LLNP, few, if any, providers offer 'integrated' programs that include both language/literacy and vocational skills. Such programs available in the region outside the LLNP include State government-funded Certificate 3 courses in Children's Services and Aged Care. IA clients may access such programs very cheaply, gaining an educational outcome for the IA provider through cost shifting to the State government. Absence of educational outcome payment would prevent cost-shifting but intensify the separation of ELL from vocational training in the JN and LLNP. The LLNP already constructs 'competence in language and literacy [as] a basic or foundation skill onto which higher order communication skills are grafted' and such a move would be a reinforcement of that narrative.

Appendix 1

The original sample

Table 1.1 Number of respondents in original [and reinterview²³] sample by LGA and gender

<i>LGA</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Persons</i>
<i>Footscray</i>	24 [3]	16 [9]	40 [12]
<i>Sunshine</i>	30 [9]	21 [8]	51 [17]
<i>Werribee</i>	18 [5]	11 [2]	29 [7]
<i>Total</i>	72 [17]	48 [19]	120 [36]

Table 1.2 Number of respondents in original sample by age

<i>Age</i>	<i>Sample number</i>							
	<i>Footscray</i>		<i>Sunshine</i>		<i>Werribee</i>		<i>Total (per cent)</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
< 24	1	2	1	0	0	0	3	4
25-34	5	3	5	6	2	2	17	23
35-44	5	3	12	6	8	3	35	25
45-54	9	7	7	8	3	6	26	44
55-64	4	1	5	1	5	0	19	4
<i>Total</i>	24	16	30	21	18	11	100	100

Table 1.3 Sample countries of birth

<i>Country of Birth</i>	<i>Footscray</i>		<i>Sunshine</i>		<i>Werribee</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
China	1						1	
Germany					1	1	1	1
Greece	1	2	1			1	2	3
India		1	1			2	1	3
Italy	2		1	3	3		6	3
Malta	1		3	1	1		5	1
Netherlands					1	1	1	1
Philippines	1	1	2	1	1	1	4	3
Poland	1		1	1		1	2	2
Vietnam	9	6	7	4	1		17	10
ex Yugoslavia	2	3	6	3	1	1	9	7
Other	7	4	10	9	10	7	27	20

²³ For further information on the reinterview sample see Tables 1.13 – 1.15 below.

Table 1.4 Year of arrival in Australia

<i>Year of arrival in Australia</i>	<i>Number in Sample</i>
1950 - 59	12
1960 - 69	15
1970 - 79	32
1980 - 84	27
1985 - 89	29
1990 - 94	5

Table 1.5 Age on arrival in Australia

<i>Age on arrival</i>	<i>Number in sample</i>
0 - 5	6
6 - 10	6
11 - 15	5
16 - 20	15
21 - 30	49
31 - 40	29
41 - 50	8
51 - 60	2

Table 1.6 Self-assessed English literacy and language level at the time of original interview

	<i>Read now</i>	<i>Write now</i>	<i>Speak now</i>
<i>Very well</i>	22	16	24
<i>Well</i>	64	45	44
<i>Not well</i>	29	52	50
<i>Not at all</i>	5	7	2

Table 1.7 Interviewees' years of formal education by sex and LGA

<i>LGA</i>	<i>Years of School</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Footscray</i>	0 - 6 years	3	2	5
	7 - 10 years	3	7	10
	11 - 12 years	11	4	15
	12 years +	7	3	10
<i>Sunshine</i>	0 - 6 years	1	6	7
	7 - 10 years	6	10	16
	11 - 12 years	14	1	15
	12 years +	9	3	12
<i>Werribee</i>	0 - 6 years	2	2	4
	7 - 10 years	3	5	7
	11 - 12 years	4	3	7
	12 years +	9	2	11
<i>Total</i>	0 - 6 years	6	10	16
	7 - 10 years	12	22	34
	11 - 12 years	29	8	37
	12 + years	25	8	33
<i>Total</i>		72	48	120

Table 1.8 Qualifications by gender

	<i>Females %</i>	<i>Males %</i>	<i>Total</i>
None	65	50	67
Basic vocational	15	14	17
Skilled/paraprofessional	13	22	22
University	8	14	14

Note: These are not Australian equivalents but include overseas qualifications. Some of those with qualifications had obtained them since immigration, and in some cases since retrenchment.

Table 1.9 Industry, occupation, year of retrenchment and length of service at retrenchment

	<i>per cent</i>
<i>Industry</i>	
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	0
Mining	0
Manufacturing	58
Electricity, gas and water	4
Construction	5
Wholesale and retail trade	1
Transport and storage	4
Communication	0
Finance, property, business services	5
Public administration and defence	8
Community services	8
Recreational, personal and other services	7
<i>Occupation</i>	
Managers and administrators	4
Professionals	2
Paraprofessionals	3
Tradespersons	8
Clerks	4
Salespersons and personal service workers	4
Plant and machine operators and drivers	27
Labourers and related workers	49
<i>Year retrenched</i>	
1984	2
1985	1
1986	3
1987	1
1988	3
1989	5
1990	7
1991	21
1992	21
1993	19
1994	19
<i>Length of service in job at retrenchment</i>	
< 3 months	3
3 months - < 1 year	14
1 year - < 3 years	16
3 - < 6 years	28
6 - < 10 years	15
10 + years	24

Table 1.10 Re-employment by age at time of interview and sex

Age	Females		Males	
	Not re-employed %	Re-employed %	Not re-employed %	Re-employed %
< 25		100	50	50
25 - 35	55	45	50	50
35 - 45	58	42	32	68
45 - 55	57	43	47	53
55 - 65	50	50	64	36
Total (n)	(26)	(22)	(33)	(39)

Table 1.11 Re-employment by self-assessed level of English language: speaking, reading and writing

Spoke English:	Very well	Well	Not well	Not at all
Not re-employed %	42	48	56	0
Re-employed %	58	52	44	100
Total (n)	(24)	(44)	(50)	(2)
Read English:				
Not re-employed %	23	55	55	60
Re-employed %	77	45	45	40
Total (n)	(22)	(64)	(29)	(5)
Wrote English:				
Not re-employed %	25	53	50	71
Re-employed %	75	47	50	29
Total (n)	(16)	(45)	(52)	7

Note: Problems with self-definition are illustrated here. Both of the re-employed interviewees who said they did not speak English at all were able to conduct some part of the interview in English. These women may be classified more appropriately as speaking English 'not well'.

Table 1.12: Re-employment by qualifications and age of arrival in Australia.

Qualification level	Not re-employed %	Re-employed %	Total (n)
None	57	43	(67)
Basic vocational	41	59	(17)
Skilled/paraprofessional	50	50	(22)
University	21	79	(14)
Age of arrival (years)			
0 - 5	0	100	(6)
6 - 10	17	83	(6)
11 - 15	80	20	(5)
16 - 20	47	53	(15)
21 - 30	59	41	(49)
31 - 40	38	62	(29)
41 - 50	62	38	(8)
51 - 60	100	0	(2)
Total			(120)

Table 1.13 Number of respondents in reinterview sample by age in 1994

Age	Sample number							
	Footscray		Sunshine		Werribee		Total (number)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
< 24		[1]						
25-34		1		4				5
35-44	[1]	2	4 [1]	1	2	[1]	6	3
45-54	3 [1]	6	5 [1]	3	2	2	10	11
55-64			[5]		1		1	
Total (number)	3 [2]	9 [1]	9 [7]	8	5	2 [1]	17	19

Table 1.14 Number of respondents in new sample by age

Age	Sample number							
	Footscray		Sunshine		Werribee		Total (number)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
< 24		1						1
25-34								
35-44	1		1			1	2	1
45-54	1		1				2	
55-64			5				5	
Total (number)	2	1	7			1	9	2

Table 1.15 Reinterview [and new] sample countries of birth by LGA

Country of Birth	Footscray		Sunshine		Werribee		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
China								
Germany								
Greece		2				1		3
India								
Italy		1			1		1	1
Malta	1		1 [6]				2 [6]	
Netherlands								
Philippines	1				1	1	2	1
Poland				1	1		1	1
Vietnam	[1]	3	3	3			3 [1]	6
ex Yugoslavia	1	3	3				4	3
Other	[1]	[1]	2 [1]	4	2	[1]	4 [2]	4 [2]

Occupational Downgrading

The study provided evidence of the downgrading experienced by many qualified NESB immigrants on arrival in Australia. At the time of immigration to Australia, one third of those interviewed possessed formal qualifications; however only half of those applied to have them recognised. Reasons advanced for this included lack of English language proficiency, experience in the relevant vocational area, time, faith in the outcome and knowledge of recognition processes. Of those who applied, only half were successful. A handful eventually undertook further study to gain 'local experience' in the area of their overseas qualifications. As a result the total number of interviewees obtaining employment commensurate with their original qualifications was five; all were male, and two of them had undertaken significant study in Australia (made possible by their excellent pre-immigration English language) in order to do so (Pearce 1995, p. 65-67).

A similar pattern of downgrading characterised interviewees' occupational status. Thirty three per cent of the sample had been Managers, Professionals, Paraprofessionals or Tradespersons prior to immigration. However, only 9 per cent had been retrenched from skilled occupations in Australia. Typically, immigrants who had been auditors, teachers, bank managers, artists, interpreters, customs officers, police and small business people in their countries of birth were retrenched in Australia from jobs as labourers or machine operators or drivers. Although fewer women than men had worked in skilled occupations prior to immigration, those women who experienced occupational downgrading when they arrived in Australia were retrenched from jobs as machinists and pressers in the clothing industry (Pearce 1995, p. 67).

Retrenchment

In order to participate in the first round of interviews, workers must have been retrenched at some time within the previous ten years. Table 1.9 shows that while some of those interviewed had lost jobs during the 1980s, the majority of the retrenchments initially reported by the interviewees occurred during or after 1991, reflecting the widespread labour shedding associated with the recession. Almost half of those interviewed were retrenched from their first secure and/or full-time job in this country. The others had had a number of jobs prior to their most recent retrenchment, with a number having been retrenched previously. The majority of participants – although by no means all - were labourers and related workers or plant and machine operators and drivers. More than half were retrenched from the manufacturing industry; smaller numbers were retrenched from community services, public administration and defence, recreational, personal and other services, construction, and the electricity, gas and water sector.

Participants were asked whether their retrenchment was compulsory or voluntary, but for the majority the distinction was very unclear. Eighteen people classified their retrenchment as voluntary because they had applied for Voluntary Departure Packages (VDPs), but in all cases this was done reluctantly, and in four cases there was no alternative whatsoever. The others classified theirs as compulsory, and over half of these appear to have been made redundant under a union-negotiated agreement; but in a quarter of these cases alternatives had been available, typically consisting of relocation to areas outside commuting distance.

The majority of those interviewed did not really understand the circumstances of their retrenchment. Knowledge of the structure and strategy of the employing organisation was very limited, and many had little understanding of employment rights or redundancy provisions. In some cases small employers appeared to be operating in a very 'shonky' way: employees were terminated without reason just before becoming eligible for Long

Service Leave; subsidised employees were used to replace more costly ones and family members displaced other employees; conflicts between family and employment were engineered, and misdemeanors fabricated or exaggerated, to encourage departure. In particular, it appears that some employers may use employees' WorkCare/WorkCover records to decide who will be retrenched. When asked why they had been chosen for retrenchment, fifteen people responded 'illness/injury'; almost all of the health problems reported by these participants were work-related. Three men and 8 women had lost their jobs while off work on WorkCare/WorkCover. Unsafe workplaces, refusal to deal with work injury and illness in the early stages, medical personnel who may diagnose in the interests of their employers, and light duties which were not light, typically contributed to job loss for interviewees in this category (Pearce 1995, p. 75).

Re-employment

At the time of interview, 60 per cent of the group were registered unemployed and 12 per cent were not in the labour force. Of those who were employed, 74 per cent were employed full-time. Two types of allowance were available for the unemployed at the time of the first round of interviews, reflecting the unemployed person's status as short or long term unemployed. Jobsearch was the basic assistance provided to registered unemployed people; Newstart was the structured income support system for the long-term unemployed which combined an activity test and systematic contact with clients together with expanded access to labour market programs. Forty-three per cent of interviewees registered as unemployed were receiving Jobsearch allowance and 35 per cent were receiving Newstart allowance. The remaining 22 per cent were not receiving an allowance. Many of the female participants between ages 35 and 55 were involved in full-time study under the TCF LAP at the time of the first round of interviews.

It was by no means usual for participants, once retrenched, to be re-employed permanently. Those who assessed their English language literacy in the highest category had a percentage re-employment rate in the mid-seventies, compared with those who said they read and wrote 'well' or 'not well' whose re-employment rates were all between 45 and 55 per cent (Table 1.11 above). Most of those who arrived in Australia at an early age or were educated in English overseas assessed their English language literacy in the highest category. Very few of those who came to Australia as adults with relatively low levels of English language skills described themselves as reading and writing 'very well'. The table suggests that self-assessed English literacy at levels that had been attained after adults had migrated may be associated with lower re-employment rates than levels that depend on acquisition of English at a young age.

As well as English language literacy, those who came to this country as children could be expected to have more 'cultural capital' and to speak English with an 'Australian' accent. These factors may also be associated with their re-employment (Table 1.12). However, the pattern of higher re-employment rates the earlier the age of arrival does not hold for those who arrived in Australia between the ages of 11 and 15, as can be seen from Table 1.12. The re-employment chances of this group may have been adversely affected by a disrupted secondary education. Table 1.12 also indicates a re-employment rate in the high seventies for university qualified interviewees, compared with those at other qualification levels whose re-employment rates are below 60 per cent. However, this may simply constitute evidence for credential inflation, as the re-employment of this group is by no means all in jobs requiring tertiary qualifications.

Other patterns of interest in these summary data concern the higher rate of re-employment among those in professional and managerial occupations than in lower skilled jobs, and the lower rates among those with a partner who was registered

unemployed, lending support to the 'poverty trap' theory (see Pearce (1995) for a discussion of other aspects of the summary data).

English classes

Two thirds of the English courses undertaken by interviewees were in general English. However, about one in five had undertaken English for Occupational Purposes or another generalist vocational course. A small number of those with a high level of education in their own countries had undertaken English for Further Study. Four people were involved in 'integrated' English courses linked to specific vocational areas; two were specialising in childcare and two in horticulture.

Wage subsidies

The Jobstart program offered a wage subsidy to employers who employed the long-term unemployed. Eleven people had had, or were currently in, Jobstart jobs. All but one were aged under 36, confirming comments by some other interviewees that the scheme primarily benefited younger people. Their experiences tended to support the widely-held belief that these jobs lasted little longer than the wage subsidy; eight of the eleven had been retrenched from these jobs, one after 4 years, the others after an average of 25 weeks. Three had been retrenched before the period of the subsidy was over, one of these by an employer who attempted to continue receiving the subsidy.

Appendix 2

Sample interview data

Illustrative material from interviews from Chapter 6

You wouldn't want to touch anyone that's got IT at the moment ... computer repairs or networking or stuff like that ... I tell them straight out ... 'I'm not going to help you find work in that area ... there is no work'. If they've done a TAFE-based computer course, Information Technology, ... electronic technician sort of work, it's almost impossible. ... Even the ones who were doing that sort of work, as soon as they're unemployed, their skills [fall] behind – so ... once you're out of it it's almost impossible to get back into it. (JNP)

... on the one hand there seems to be [from the employers] this 'No no no we don't [employ people over 45]', but on the other hand it certainly hasn't been a stumbling block for us ... mind you we don't say 'He's in his fifties', we just say 'He's mature'! ... It certainly has stopped some from getting work ... but it hasn't stopped us from getting work [for them] overall. (Placement worker)

A lot of large employers now will employ through a labour hire company on a casual basis, for the first two or three months. Don't like'em, they're out! ... Place someone in exactly the same. And then a lot of them never ever go ... permanently onto the books ... But there's no alliance to the company so therefore there's no alliance to the workers any more to train them ... It's ... completely transient, ... the whole [system]. (JNP)

... the potential consequence if something is not written correctly. ... [Personal care attendants] have to do it on a daily basis and they have to do it for every client. Let's say a home care worker may have three jobs in a day and they have to write ... summarise their time there, what they did and how the client felt ... for every client. (Ethnic community spokesperson)

I've got one guy who worked in the food industry for ... 25 years after he arrived from Vietnam, 25 years in a cheese factory, and had every ... quality qualification and every ... product safety handling and all those sorts of things, he's got quite an impressive looking resume ... and he cannot get a job, he can't get an interview for love nor money! And he was saying to me last week that... as soon as they hear his voice on the phone they say 'Sorry mate no jobs' ... and he's desperate to go back to work. He lives in Footscray and he's looking for jobs in Thomastown and - he'll do anything! (LLNP provider)

If I send you a person that's got no English at all ... are you going to send them to jobs? Let's be realists. We're not gods. We don't walk on water. We don't make miracles or whatever. (JNP)

We do tend to be selective who we would send, I have to say ... What's the point of sending them if you know they're going to be rejected? ... We wouldn't send someone who couldn't read or write, I mean that would just be awful for us to do that. (Placement Worker)

... unless these specialised agencies have actually got those vacancies, it's very hard for them to service [the NESB jobseeker] ... they hit a communication barrier when they go to the other agency [to apply]. ... They could get blocked within that agency or the particular people within that agency are – won't know what work has been done with this particular jobseeker and ... or probably aren't trained to deal with NESB people and trained to assess and realise what kind of skills they may have, therefore their recommendation to the employer probably won't be as favourable as say someone that was a specialist in NESB. (JNP)

We're an employment agency, and we've got a recruitment consultant trying to get clients into jobs. But as a Case Manager myself, I have a reverse view of things. I seem to focus a lot more on assisting people to find their own jobs. Because from my experience in labour market programs and actually teaching jobsearch, the outcomes for people finding their own jobs are much better. ... They tend to stay because it's – (a) it's an employer they want to work for, secondly it's generally the sort of work they want to do. (JNP)

Most ... don't understand what the [Centrelink] letter's about. Or don't understand what Intensive Assistance is or what it means and what their obligations are and what commitment is required. (Community worker)

They've just been really slack on any sort of training ... we've found people that have been at [the company] for 20 or 30 years, white collar and blue collar, the training they've received, they've never received any certificates, ... the training people have done has all been in-house, so we've got admin people, that worked in accounting and other areas like that, and now they're really finding it hard to get a job, because they've got no qualifications ... The trainers they get are not qualified ... they get a person off the floor ... they go down into the office for a couple of days and just sort of do something, it's not a formal qualification or anything like that, it's not an intensive training program that they go through themselves to be a trainer. (Placement Worker)

... now they're looking at the quality under the microscope a bit better, I mean they look at who is offering quality service ... There was a time when the bottom line outcome outcomes outcomes outcomes – but ... there are those people that you mightn't achieve an outcome, but ... they still need the support of a Job Network member in a lot of other ways ... Our policy is, we ... help them as much as we can. (JNP)

... they go into Centrelink and ... almost they feel like they're going for an interview, and they go 'Yeah, no, I can work, I can do anything I want, ... yeah I'll travel, ... I have my own car ... I'm fit ...' [They] might be 40, 45 but they've just been recently redundant so ... they might have a long work history. And [if they present themselves so positively]

they're not going to be eligible for any sort of assistance for three to twelve months! (JNP)

... there's a certain link between us and the Centrelink staff where [unemployed people] feel that they only need to tell you so much, because you might tell ... Centrelink about what they've been doing and you're going to get them into trouble or whatever the case may be, and so they hold back, and it's only after building a good rapport with them and getting them on side that they'll actually say 'Oh by the way I did do so-and-so back in this time', you know ... 'Well why didn't you tell me!' (JNP)

The problem is that by the time they get to [our Intensive Assistance] program, it's been a year, normally, from when they left, and in that year, confidence is shot, they may have started drinking, their family might have been having problems - it's late intervention. (JNP)

The lack of information among ... some Centrelink officers is fairly terrifying. They're obviously snowed under, ... they're obviously totally ... pressured in terms of staffing and so on and the caseloads that they have to deal with, so ... [we try] to actually go in and get our message to them and say ... this is what we can offer to these particular clients and this is how you identify the client ... the sort of information that they have and that they don't have is quite staggering ... [the questions they ask and] the sort of things that we [are told] ... about our students that they've referred is mindboggling ... what they don't know about their own [side] ... [things like] eligibility for the program ... We send [many wrongly assessed students back to Centrelink] with a letter ... to say 'these are the eligibility criteria, this is the client, could you please assess them'. (LLNP Provider)

... people don't understand really how depressing it is sometimes when you're trying to help, you ... refer them to jobs, they let you down, and you know you could have given this job to somebody else, what do you do with them? ... Sometimes people don't understand ... why do we breach people, but if you don't breach, what do you do? Do you say 'OK you can do whatever you like?' That makes your job difficult, then you become very very disenchanted. And if you do breach them, you're - 'Oh god, you low-life, what have you done?' (JNP)

... the greedy bloodsuckers ... just get them in ... they're there five minutes and they throw them the paper and say 'Find a bloody job'! ... One of our ex-candidates we didn't manage to find a job who came in the other day looking for money, I mean he's broke, living in the pub, got a few other issues and he's got another [Job Network] organisation. I said 'Are they helping you look for work?' He said 'No, they don't do anything', he said 'what they do is they give you a train ticket if I found my own job'. A train ticket! (JNP)

Illustrative material from interviews from Chapter 7

Narratives relating to work

The construction of work

I worked all those years, I paid tax all those years ... I mean I've been here how many years? ... They ask so many questions and so many ... I never went on the compo, which ... I did suffer, on my back, on my shoulders, on my arms now they're sore, I go to bed at night I can't sleep [because] they're sore ... I mean we work all these years and now we haven't got no help.

Nobody gave me anything for nothing, I worked for it and I paid my taxes.

I wouldn't accept just anything before. Now, I just need ego and self-respect - to know I worked for what I got.

When you lose job, you lose the money. [You get used to having money and] when you haven't got this, even if your husband gives you, he gives to me, I manage the money, but there is no more than that much. And this makes you down too. Like you've been rejected ... you feel unuseful.

There would tend to be a subsequent high loss of esteem. Whereas the Aussies might think differently ... philosophically ... 'I got retrenched, what do I do, I'll find another job, no problems.' The migrants don't have that 'She'll be right jack' attitude unfortunately. The 'She'll be right jack' attitude's good in a lot of things because it helps you mentally to take and accept what's happened. Migrants always think of the shame of being unemployed. That's part of the culture, shame.

I no like employment benefits, that's making me ... sick people, you understand?

For migrant very difficult. Everything ... buy new one ... They need everything. The Australian people for parents living here, I don't think they came here like that. Migrant everything one by one, you know?

We came here with a suitcase in our hands. We never waste anything, we put it aside for a rainy day because of our past experiences ... Australians open the door and find something. We open the door and find it empty. ... You don't want your kids to be like you were.

I've got a 16 year old daughter that will not walk into Target!

My two older sisters have a sewing business at home. They work harder than before because their kids are growing up, 18 and 17. They want expensive clothes, if you don't give they leave home.

The man is a breadwinner. I [think] that's [a] reason why my wife doesn't want to come back, because she sees that I am still unemployed and I won't be able to provide.

I don't want a woman bring the money back home, to feed me!

In this country if you no have the job you finished completely. Because you no have a way to go. If you working, in the morning you get up, get dressed nice, go out ...

When you unemployed, you no money income, you want people, you go look for job like a beggar ... But now I don't care, I getting old, you don't give me job, I doesn't care ... But now I just hope for the children, after finish the school get a good job, that's it.

I no feel well ... you feel more healthy when you work.

I was all the time busy. Now for me is too long time I stay home. Is no good for me. I like being busy, I like go to work, come back and do something around the house, the day passed for me more quicker and I am interesting about that, but if stay home no ... reading and go for shopping and ... I don't like like that (male).

But we worked! ... the council have permanent workers and we was under Jobskills. As we did the job, they bludging and look us, I said 'We working!' We do weed matting, cut the trees ... all over the place ... You sit there, and me work, you still get \$235 a week, for 6 months... I working because I can't [pass the day] looking at the others, like somebody else do!

Before, [when] I used to work, I was more independent ... if I want to buy something, I buy it, for me, for the children, if I want to go out, but when you have to ask the husband ... there was a stage where I had to ask him for money for stockings, money for some other things ...

Before, you'd come home, the beds are undone, the kitchen's in a mess, now they come home, the food's on the table ... of course it's better! [Do you like it like that too?] Oh yeah, I like it, but I like to get out, I hate doing the same thing all the time ... I miss the work, I miss my money actually, I don't like to ask my husband for money.

The 'labour market' and the allocation of resources

Significance of ethnicity in job loss

Born in Australia, it doesn't matter how they prove in the job, they have more chance to get promotion than overseas born and qualified ... [Australians] talk about dog and horse racing, footy and pay. If you have to get rid of one, you pick one you don't feel comfortable with.

In the workplace the better quality products and therefore more bonus go to the English-speaking background and Europeans. Asians sense a difference but don't speak up.

Migrants work harder than Australian but still have more pressure. Still want more from us. Bosses at work, they talk different to the Australian people ... they treat better, more respect.

... they sack the outsiders and they get the family members ... Any nationality – let's be honest, we'd all do that.

Some people Australian ... they look like stupid, not very smart, they still give another job. I think it was the language and the nationality.

We are migrants and the law is more flexible with Australian citizens. In some cases they have more benefit from the government than people like me. For example when they gave me the sack, there was a woman in the factory who had worked there for a long time. She had the same injury as me and she received everything alright with no comment. She got money and a letter to find another job. They have more opportunity. It's what people do rather than the actual law.

[Retrenchment] depends the boss. If the boss is Filipino and lot of Filipinos working there, probably they will keep them ... the boss is the person who makes decisions about who is retrenched. Probably the direct boss because he says who's good, who's not.

... me and one lady she's Poland, we working together, ... and because she buy house, that's why they put her [on] the carpet sewing machine, because she have problem, because if she finish how she pay the money for the house? She tell her problem. [AP: So they didn't retrench her, they put her on the other machine?] Yeah ... still she working ... I didn't tell them about my problems, they didn't ask me too! And because ... she have the same boss her language, I think that one maybe help her more.

Language is important. Maybe one day I don't know what the boss mean. That may be cost me retrenchment. The customs are different.

Even if the owner employ one Egyptian, the Italian workers will kick him out

... you make money for the company, company of course he need you! Not Australian, Vietnamese, Chinese!

Tracking

My wife, sister and brother in law also lost their jobs at same time [as me]. They are still unemployed. ... There were ten family members altogether working there [when it closed].

Nobody has any jobs now. All my brothers and sisters, all my wife's brothers and sisters have lost their jobs, so no-one can introduce me to a job.

Ethnicity in recruitment

It's not what you know, it's who you know. Young boy or young girl, doesn't know how to trim the trees, doesn't know how to drive the truck, still get the job, because his uncle, his aunt or somebody works at Footscray council, an office worker ... Me, I have a licence for the truck, I know how to make landscape, I know how to trim the trees, I know how to clean the park, I know how to cut the lawns, what more do you want? Perfect! Because I no have nobody inside, no job!

[AP: What do you think are the major things that are stopping you from getting a job?] Most important thing, because I am Asian ... At [one company], they give me a test to drive a van ... around Richmond ... at 4 o'clock ... and I drive half an hour, come back, and ... they told later that I going too fast. But that's impossible! ... in the heavy traffic at that time in Richmond it's impossible to drive fast! When they say like that I just laugh, 'OK, Thank you'. I know what they mean ... [That company] all Italian, ninety per cent ... [Another time] I apply ... as a storeperson and the foreman who interview me they say OK, that they will let me know and they think I can get the job, but later I find another person get that job but he didn't have a forklift licence, and he got [the job] because Australian. Usually a storeman or storeperson they have to drive a forklift too ... [AP: The next question is what might help you solve these problems but ...] No! I can't change my – the colour of skin!

The bosses [of the laundry] were Italian, Yugoslav, or Filipino. I was one of the first Chinese, after me they took in more because they decided we were good workers.

If the supervisor is Italian, he will choose Italians. My supervisor said 'I don't want any Vietnamese in my truck'. The manager fought with him but managers change every five years, the supervisor has been there much longer so usually wins. He won. Greeks are the same, Chinese and Vietnamese are the same! We said 'This truck is the Mafia truck.' The manager said, 'We want whoever will work hard'.

The problem is between different groups in the community, for example Italians give work to Italians ... Many Asians work for white people but not the other way.

I wanted to bring in the union, but the supervisor was Greek and most other workers too (they got the easy jobs for this reason) and they were afraid of not getting any overtime or getting the sack if they complained to the union so they said no.

Ethnic patterning

Always unable got a good job at [the tyre factory] ... all the tube moulder people work there, all is Asian. Because very hot ... But that's very hard job, you know!

... the new people come, is the leading hand friend. They friend with the leading hand, they give good job, change me back to tube moulder ... they come in, they do the inspector. No experience! ... They Asian but Timor, you know? ... because my leading hand is Timor too.

My brother in law was trying to get a job in that laundry, he was the first Asian. It took 6 months to get a job on the nightshift. A Czech supervisor accepted him. They found he was a good worker therefore he was able to recommend others. We were all Chinese on the nightshift, very few Chinese on the dayshift ... My wife, sister and brother in law also

lost their jobs at same time [as me]. They are still unemployed. ... There were ten family members altogether working there [when it closed].

It's not what you know it's who you know. Young boy or young girl, doesn't know how to trim the trees, doesn't know how to drive the truck, still get the job, because his uncle, his aunt or somebody works at Footscray council, an office worker ... Me, I have a licence for the truck, I know how to make landscape, I know how to trim the trees, I know how to clean the park, I know how to cut the lawns, what more do you want? Perfect! Because I no have nobody inside, no job!

There are no equal opportunity and they are a little bit discrimination ... they put their position in the newspaper just to put sometime one face and to be equal for everybody but on their minds and in fact they are already choosing the person ... most of the time is a friend, a family, a relative from the staff. [But] that doesn't guarantee if you[re] a friend or family from the staff you must be better worker[er].

There are so many unemployed people now ... I have learned from my work now that I was very lucky to get this job ... [because of] my age and because I am Asian ... many companies if they are looking for only one or two fitters and the rest of the applications are Asian and they have five [Australian applicants] they will take an Australian ... I think a little bit discrimination.

Little companies, companies that they are owned by family, and they employ family members, it's a different story, in fact that's what they done at the [Pokies venue where I worked], they sack the outsiders and they get the family members ... Any nationality – let's be honest, we'd all do that.

The small companies prefer same nationality. Even if the owner employ one Egyptian, the Italian workers will kick him out.

Charity begins at home, isn't it? So I don't blame no-one. Say for instance there were ten people working in a job and there two Australians and the other eight are ethnics. I don't blame no-one, they [keep] the Australians. That's what I think.

Age

I looked for a job. But of course, once you tell them you are 56 ... they're not interested. I've written a lot of applications ... but either you don't get an answer at all, or the answer you get is negative. Purchasing jobs, office jobs ... engineering jobs, inspectors jobs, but in the end I gave up. I even applied once for a Security Guard job, I had no experience, so I didn't expect it, but anything I could sort of think of, I applied for it. I done that for 6 months and then I got sick.

Sometimes I read the newspaper, local paper, come to CES but a lot of the jobs I think I can cope with, they are looking for 18 years old, not 30.

Wherever I been, always the age, the age. Now I say that from now on, I take ten years off. You think it work?

I still keep try look job, look job. They see me grey hair, no, you see me the other day grey? ... because you got grey hair, you go look get job, first time they ask you 'How old, how old?' I say 56, 'Go home'. So I decide maybe next time tell them I 40, 45.

I went [to the Jobclub] for one week, and second one I find a job [by myself], because I['d] had it, I can't sit over there... sitting all day with the newspapers ... and there was on the papers 20, 18, 16 years ... I said 'not for me, this one!'

When you reach 44 not many open.

[At another large company the person recruiting said] 'Why didn't you tell me you were fifty-five? ... If I employ you, that mean you can work ten years for us. If I employ the young one, can do forty years!' Now imagine the way I was feeling! ... very depressed.

... for the older even if you train them, people say you'll soon retire.

The boss say 'Maybe I get a young one, faster than you'. I say 'You try me first, couple of hour, that's all'. So they try me couple of hour, I do very quick, I do quick as the young one.

Some factories they want some younger so they pay less money, but some people think younger is really stupid ... they think young people these days can't keep up with the jobs, like hard jobs and all that. They found a lot of young people working ... like slack.

WorkCare record

Once I [was] hired, I get the job in Springvale. ... The day I come to work, they stopped me in the front door, and they say 'Sorry' because I didn't tell them that I had a WorkCare before ... If I tell [employers] straight away I had a WorkCare before, they don't ... interview me. If I hide it and they find out, 'Sorry'.

Power in the 'labour market'

Employer power

... what can you do? You can't fight to [the very large construction company I worked for]! They have the power, they can pay the union, kick you out if you talk too much.

If the minimum is \$10 an hour and if they would say yes there is a job and they pay \$8 an hour I would accept that job ... Say that you worked for 7 hours and ... you're getting the same amount with me although I've done 8 hours, I would stay, I would do the job, doesn't matter about the money. But without suffering, I don't want to be underpaid and suffering as well ... because they might exploit the people, say 'this person is in need of a job' and they take advantage of this person.

The pay is worse now – they can offer what they like, if you don't take it someone else will.

... when you are using people you squeeze the lemon till the juice stops flowing, when you don't need it any more, throw it away.

Employers can do what they like in a recession. They change the rules now, try to kill the unions because they have power.

Trade unions

I was a worker, wasn't I? Who else can fight for you? No-one!

... without unions you cannot have any safety ... you get sacked if you ask for it.

... because the union can protect you from unnecessary action which can be taken by the company ... someone is behind of you.

... because with some questions you can go to union ... because you do the hard job or sometime got trouble or sometime [the company could do] illegal [things to] myself ...

... because if you haven't got the union you've got no rights at all, the bosses do whatever they like with you. I was in charge there but I was with the men because I know what it's like.

If you study the [new Public Transport] contract carefully you see that it meant automatic dissolution of the union, because the contract says you won't have a third party interfere between workers and employers. Every one knew that to sign was to put a knot around your neck ... We didn't want dissolution of the union, there would be nothing to balance power. It would be a dictatorship!

Unions argued for a pay rise and the employers' organisation ... always says it's not justified, industry can't afford it. I think not every company making massive profits but surely people that work for those deserve something.

This company's union very weak. Not say nothing. Because after this I working in [two other companies], I find the union very strong ... When they retrenched people [at the company that retrenched me] union never says something ... they never get a meeting for how can we get a good future, better working situation, conditions, [we had meetings] only before the company wants to sack some people ... [The union at my current company] is very very good. Very strong. Doesn't matter, if get anything, for example they straight away transfer the money to my bank, and if only one day is late, we meeting, we say 'If next time still one day late we have to strike one day', or something.

Employers make it impossible for unions to get into the companies to find out if workers are being paid the correct amount. And although the unions may be able to walk into the factory, the workers aren't getting up to talk if they have problems. They don't like to get the union representative - the employer says 'we can organise something between ourselves, there's no need for the union representative'. The unions don't understand these problems, and they don't have a lot of power today to fight.

... you have [to] just work same dog and that's it. If you say something, you first to go ... [Union] big big talking but ... when they no have any work doesn't matter, union can't do nothing about. ... And after, if the big boss like you, you can stay there. If you no like, you forget about. ... Permanent or casual, doesn't matter.

... if you talk about union, you're the first to go ... trouble makers, [people who] lose time, production. [My construction company] cover already the superannuation, the standards, over award a little bit, so you don't have to muck around. If you muck around a little bit, they no say nothing but when [they] have a chance, you're ... the first to go, doesn't matter you're Australian or ...what I should say? – wog.

They said they have union but they advise me no good to join union. They say they don't like you join union. They employ three hundred fifty people, only five join the union.

[The union] should have done more, so many people were working there, why go to Bendigo? So many people here, unemployed. And all that machinery, cost millions and millions of dollars.

We pay money to them and they didn't help at all ... All Chinese, Vietnamese, all say the same thing ... I happy to join different union if they help us ... My husband's union very good, help the people a lot, they didn't care if migrants. The union [at my workplace] didn't help us because all migrants.

There were two shop stewards in the factory. They were first people sacked. Then no one want to be shop steward.

Shop steward they get a good job, ... more overtime, so they don't want to get involved.

The bosses offered promotions to shop stewards on condition that they stopped being shop stewards.

[AP: How was the union involved in all of this, as far as you were ...] Keep their mouth shut! ... They afraid that they lose their job too! At that time union really really quiet. ... They hear rumour that they want to shut down the plant ...

When I working on the machine, then my supervisor said 'Everybody come in the kitchen'. Then the union member come, and managers come, and he said 'You finish'. I don't know before manager said to union, I don't know what talk. ... [Do you think the union representatives ...] No good, no good!

Just one time I see one man, they say that's for the union. Supervisor tell us, 'Come the union now, don't hurry, don't ... (laughs).

Have every department ... some union person ... This lady is very cheeky, she never say she's union, she's never say because she's talk with the union something ... to nobody. When she finish, take Australian lady her job, she say 'I take the [Lydia] job', I said 'Oh, she's union!' She said 'yes'! ... This Australian lady, she's very good lady, she says 'If you have some problem you tell me.' But [Lydia, the previous union representative] never never say to us ... All time I tell [Lydia] 'This job is very hard, I want to change, somebody work one day another lady work one day [on this machine]... or one week, you know, I say, maybe...for me it's better'. She say 'No no, that's your job and your machine, you have to you work there'. That's true, I'm no lie! (F41)

The union is useless when all workers on contract, can't help you.

[The union] did what they could. They came to talk to us, they went in every school, they said ... 'we can't do absolutely nothing, they want to throw you out and that's it'.

I know one person, he was retrenched, voluntary retrenchment, they didn't say he had to go, they said 'We have here for you a quarter of a million dollars', and after he got that money he goes to work sometimes once a week, sometimes twice a week ... on a call-out basis. I wouldn't mind doing that. Or the other way is, give a chance to the people. Some people have actually been retrenched and they've got absolutely nothing, worse than me. I think if there was an organisation like Skillshare ... where these people could go for one day a week, instead of people who already got a lot of money out of it. The jobs must be there, since these people are called back.... It always gives the unemployed person a sense of achieving something. The way it is, these people get their package and then go casual, their sense of achievement is 'I am cheating'. You've got the person who got a quarter of a million dollars and he is getting part-time money ... and the person who got absolutely nothing, he's getting nothing. ... So the gap is always increasing. This is what they mean by some people getting richer some people getting poorer. The buying power of the people who are working is increasing, while the people who are unemployed and on a pension is decreasing ... the union...didn't help me. In this situation they agreed [with management] ... they would chop two people off in our department rather than saying 'Alright, what about some people working four and a half days?' ... That way, people have got a job, maybe not as good as it was, but ... that was never taken into account ... The union never considered the workers ... They just done the deal and when the deal was done they told us. I don't think I will join the union next time if I had a choice.

Now I feel so sorry that I choose that [non-unionised] workplace to work for such a long time. I should work somewhere else! I suppose if I working for [a large food manufacturer] and there is a union there ... People got pay rise and benefit because union. I got some friends there. If retrenched, they get package!

Because we do not understand English we rely on [trade unions] to help us.

We pay money to them and they didn't help at all ... All Chinese, Vietnamese, all say the same thing ... I happy to join different union if they help us ... My husband's union very good, help the people a lot, they didn't care if migrants. The union at my workplace didn't help us because all migrants.

Individual knowledge and foresight

They said after retrench everyone ... have to work harder than this time ... if we don't go. Have to get the same pay ... OK, better go! ... After I left they say 'Oh, very good! Nothing wrong!' If I know that I don't go!

... they put all this ... a lot of Vietnamese after, and a lot of Turkish girls, because they didn't know the language, they didn't know their rights, that's why they wanted to get rid of us, because ... we knew the system, and they didn't, and they just closed their mouth and they didn't talk, they were scared to talk.

[AP: You think they wouldn't give you another job?] Usually they don't want ... They want to hire the new people ... because with the new people, very easy for them to ... put

them out. The people that ... was there [before], we know everything, and we saying to everyone!

Easier for the English speaking people because they know how to get around and how to go about. People without language, even if someone tells them 'Yes, there is this going on', they would say 'Oh how am I going to get there? How am I going to communicate?' so it's not so easy for [them] ... If someone is trying to help you, you don't trust this person, you don't know if this person is telling you the truth. And you're thinking 'What if I go there and it's not going to work out – I am going to become a laughing stock!' So you tend to hold back.

Time past for me I think! I'm 42, so another few years if I'm lucky I'm working ... If they keep me there, I will! Till they close door like the other two – I'm not going nowhere! But I'm not so sure how long they're going to keep me.

You planning work ten years get some superannuation whatever. But the company finish the contract, even permanent what can you do?

I'll stay here till they close the doors like the other ones.

Before it was easy to find machinist, anywhere you go you find a job.

When I came here [in 1984], one day finish job, next day find another job. That was very good.

I find a job when I arrive this country, no problem – and no English!

The employers, they treat people like they are going to have problems, for example explaining things ... Since the recession the employers they are only interested in money, they don't want to spend money or time.

The foreman was pushed to push the people, to cover his own job. [The company] knew that immigrants have necessities to be satisfied and they used and abused immigrants. You need your job and do everything to keep it. We even worked our RDO despite the fact that the union had fought and lost money to get it.

Before ... when you got the friend they can get you in the work, maybe the boss say 'I got vacant, you have got friends, you bring'. But now, different. You must have qualify, maybe not, you can't get in. Very hard.

Labourers today, nothing. ... Doesn't matter how much you know, you still labourer. You must show the certificate, if you no understand [how to] do nothing, as long as you show the certificate they might believe you. But I don't have certificate welder, or anything like that.

They should give people a chance! I've been a machine operator for years, so why don't [employment assistance agencies] send me for jobs on slightly different machines? Why don't they try me out?

It's still not good, they buy new machines, need less people, and now retrench six people ... and [I] finish.

Not enough work for people. Too many private companies closing down.

All factories with packing and machine operator jobs are leaving this area and going to the other side of Melbourne - Frankston, Broadford.

Three thousand seven hundred [school cleaners] we were retrenched that time. ... There is no work! Last time I went to the Sunshine Council, the mayor told me - I know him, he is Maltese too ... he said - because Sunshine council is going to amalgamate either with Keilor or Footscray, and he said: 'You know how many workers are going to be finished? ... Eight hundred fifty'. Clerks, and you know, all. That's how much the council employ.

Not many factories left in the West now. Most of the good companies with more money and less hard work, they shut down.

Job situation worse in last one year ... general and clothing, all a disaster ... clothing is down forever, maybe!

Finance industry workers are a dime a dozen now! ... so much work is done through the computer system, the client does the paper work on the computer and it's checked and lodged overseas.

Difficult to see the future.

[I'm] worrying a lot that no work tomorrow!

Everything is changed, it was good but now no-body knows what's going to happen. Many people are unemployed and it's very confusing.

The 'new workplace'

... everything is changed around ... because of the improvement of the technology. Fitter and turner is a manual job. Now, everything is converted to the computer ... When I finished the second year [of the course the company chose for me] ... I start[ed] to realise that. It's already too late, only one year left for me to finish ... It's embarrassing ... because when you get some skill, you have to use that skill. If you can't use it, you have done that course almost for three and a half years for nothing.

Flexibility as mobility

You get the job in Dandenong, are you secure the job for you in your life? No, just couple of months, maybe one year, you get sacked; you moved house, you're moving back. ... It's very difficult to move house. For the young people it's different. [If they get a good job they'll be there for maybe 10, 20 years.] But me, they'll hire me for

temporary at [most], not for permanent. So I can't decide to sell my house and shift in there.

If you worked all your life you should be entitled for a pension. In Europe you get the pension on the stamps you've paid ... that's an incentive to work ... it shouldn't matter if you've got ten houses, you should still get it!

I'm sick of moving!

I move from Italy to come here, I wouldn't move again.

I come from overseas, was really difficult for me to have friends. I couldn't do it, it would be like migrating again, without the incentive of finding a better life.

When you are settled somewhere, its like a habit to eat something - if you change you get sick ... For Asian people, once you decide to settle somewhere it's for sure. Same as get job.

It's hard to get well-established.

We like Keilor Downs, we have established ourselves. I guess if we were in our ... [twenties] we might be thinking differently.

We just moved here and took root. We've been here three years, I haven't got established yet, the fence isn't up yet, the carport ... If I move again, where will I get the energy?

That's my parents' house and I will never sell it. I like it, I love the street, I know all the neighbours. We support each other in the street. It's close to the schools.

My family's here, my children are here, my mum, my brother's around here, my sisters, my husband's job is round here, so I can't [move].

If I move house, I have to ask my husband and my children!

You can't just sell the house and go. If both husband and wife find a job in the same place, you can think about it.

[My workmates who considered moving with the company] find it hard, to shift the whole family from Melbourne to Bendigo and Benalla, that is taking too much risk, you know. And you have to shift all the kids from the school to another school in the area, and they were not happy, the other ['Australian'] fitter and turners... For me it is totally different thing. I don't even know the Victoria area very well. Since I arrived here I've been working! I've been worrying for the money! I start working straight away. Shifting from this area to another area would be quite difficult problem. I wouldn't take that risk.

It's very hard. If it's expensive area or something like that I can't afford sell this house and buy another house and pay more money or something like that. My daughter she got job in St Albans, close from here, and I like here because close shopping centre, everything. Better for me go far to work and stay, 'cause I like here, it's quiet ... Depends, if I catch good job, for example, good money, must do anything for catch job and make money!

Flexibility as Casualisation

I was surprised about this system [in Australia]. In Czechoslovakia it is different, the job always permanent ... If you work 6 months, automatically get permanent ... We should have rights like this.

I [refused the job, I] said, 'Casual not fair, because last time it finish after 5 months!'

... they called me casual, yeah? Then [we got pay] rise, and I ask the paymaster, I said 'Why this rise ... they say we have backpay, backpay, no-one ever have? They said 'This one just for the others, always there, but ... not for casual' ... Union come one day, we talking about, they say 'Oh they have to give to everybody', they say 'They promise me they give to everybody!' Now after 1 month, this union come again, and ... I was talk with him, and after maybe couple of days, ... maybe the union come again in the office, [the supervisor] come around just before I go, say 'Chiara, we no need you tomorrow'. ... Not many say like that. And I was wait, say 'Maybe they call me again'. [But] I imagine straight away something. I say 'the union make trouble and they say 'why she have to talk'' ... They seen me when I was talking. ... If somebody she talk with somebody, all the company know, all the office know. And after maybe a week and a half, they send me money and they send me the letter. That's it!

I still get a job, but it is casual. [Jobclub] make a time is fixed, next week Monday morning. [So if you took that, you couldn't accept casual work?] Mmmm.

When you get a job you get used to it and then poum! You lost it. Inside you feel funny all the time [when you work casual].

If not permanent you can't do nothing.

Casual means changing machine, job every day so can't make bonus.

The union was negotiating and said 'OK if you want our people to sign the contract [under which workers were on call for as little as 2 hours/day, 7 days/week], we want you to specify numbers of hours and days working'. Very very bad because how can you pay the mortgage? Couldn't get that, under Federal award.

It's a matter of self defence. We're dealing with tricky people. So when you have experience you react in the same way. You ask other people how they do it and they pass on tricks ... When I worked two weeks casual, they stopped my money. I didn't get much benefit from doing that ... My people say better to stay at home ... I've heard about people who lost benefit because they were caught in a mistake and then the government sends the hounds on you.

[There's not much point in getting a ticket as a welder because even] the younger people have trouble getting a job. I know many welders with many tickets and lot of experience – they go from one place to another!

When the job is finished that's finished, today ... You have to understand computer ... be professional welder, something else. Even then there's no job guaranteed permanent ... these days. That's it! Simple as that!

My husband still has permanent job ... still permanent, but I don't know tomorrow! (laughs)

Multiskilling

... you mix up with people ... and ... you know, job's how you put yourself in it ... what I mean is if you say 'ooh, this is not my job, this is not my job' ... I was getting some money for the living, you know ...

Before was better ... same machine every day, because before I know this is my machine, this is my stuff, or I do this work, what time I finish. Then everyone [had to work] faster. If this machine have not work, go another machine. If over there not work finish, go another machine. [They tried to find out] which way work faster, sitting work faster or standing work faster ...if somebody make faster, then compare ... who make half an hour how much ... Then they make this work[er] finish [at] that time ...[we got] a bonus, but not many people make faster, they need very very fast ... Not enough time, very hard. Not even toilet time, not even ... have break, but just eat, come back on machine.

Because you never done that job before, the work wasn't as good. The quality went down a lot.

If the boss liked you, you had a stable job. If not, you [were] changed around. We are Asian and they keep changing around like that because they think we work very hard. European if they changing job for two days they don't want to work very hard so the boss has to put them back in the old job. Different treatment from the boss, but the union didn't say anything.

Entrepreneurialism

[Small business] is just like a gamble ... If fish too big, bad luck, the line broken!

I heard about [NEIS] on TV. Good idea, but they should give money help instead of you go to bank to get money. You [would] have to pay interest still ... Now is not easy to start business, can come up and go down in six months. Many people try to start the business. You can see in Sunshine, a lot of shops start and close ... Need more help.

NEIS need to offer some help with capital, low interest loan or something. They are preparing people very badly and they are pushing them into the jungle at the worst moment.

I was thinking, but you need too much money, I don't have the money ... I had a discussion with the small business development but ... you need the first five years of a

business (if it's going to succeed) to recoup what you spent ... But I don't have any experience. To me, it's risking too much ... I said to them 'Look,' I said, 'I haven't got any money, would I be able to borrow money at a minimum interest rate?' They said 'No, ... you might be able to borrow for an established business, but to start a business yourself you have to find the money yourself'. The reason of course is that if it's a new business that hasn't been going, they aren't going to get their money back.

It is not worth it I think. Because there is plenty around, a lot. Everybody is with business wherever you go. No room, no room. [Wife: No money!] No money, but you can go to bank about that ... We got K-mart over here ... they told me they are going to build bigger one in Sydenham ... bigger than Highpoint West ... What for you [start a business]? [Wife: Everybody go to big shops].

You have to consult somebody knows the law ... because the law change!

You've got to be careful, otherwise you lose your house.

I don't regard myself as a business man. I would only waste my money.

I was never a businessman ... I haven't got the ... vocation. ... I don't gamble either! ... I'm not that sort of person. It's how you were brought up.

I think I'm not suitable to work in business ... because I think a person work in business they have to speak fluently, and ... because I saw some people work in business, they very friendly, they very interesting to speak to people, and I think I'm not. I prefer to work in the community.

Something simple like a milk bar. It's a jail sentence but it's a [job] ... good money in that!

For the future, I had planned to save enough to be self employed. I can't do it now ... So [retrenchment] affects my view of the future.

I do it if I win Tattsлото! ... What's the point – I have no money! I don't think a small business under \$100,000 will work under Jeff Kennett.

Narratives relating to education and training

Maybe when I finish this course I can go to Victoria Market, sell clothes, or food, if people asking me Tasmania cheese, I can read it, or peanut from Queensland.

You learned more at work [than at TAFE] because you got hands-on experience ... it gives you confidence.

I don't need training, I can work anywhere. You learn while you work.

[What about courses?] Yes. They try to give me bullshit, which are not suitable for me, and I decide 'No, I'm sorry'... like go study English - what for? I need a job, no study English. Like cleaner course - what for? ...I don't need a course for that!

... they're all basic jobs, like this fellow gave me a chance, all it was filling a shelf. He had these products that come in, all you had to know [was] where the spot was and fix it up properly and leave it over there, that's all you had to do. I don't know what qualifications we had to have to do that.

They would send me to fix the broken machines because I learned how.

I started helping the stockman, I knew everything about the parts, then the stockman died and they asked me to take that job.

[This new job is better because] this company is bigger, here I move around. I can learn more because I work with different people, therefore I learn bits of different trades.

You learn more when you're with people.

... many [migrants], they can't speak English but they know how to work.

...it's a certificate, but they are not apprenticeships, and traineeships. You haven't got a title or diploma or ... you know. That is the workers they are looking for.

But this university not very famous. So worry about if finish can't find a good job maybe ... If Monash or Melbourne got this [post-graduate] course, I finish this [casual manual] job and go straight away. But this one, I don't know. Still thinking about that!

Semi-trailer or road train ...you have to learn that when you're nineteen, to be the career, not when you're 40 or 45! I do [the course] for do something! I try my best ... I give it my best shot!

I decide the level course is too hard for me, the speed is too hard, and I reckon even with another extra [English language] person ... I can't do that in 6 weeks time, that's when the course was running ... The course was in Melton, I have to go over there and [by] the time I reach there and then I have to come back, and you already haven't got extra time, because we left at four in the afternoon, I arrive here ... the first day I went in by car, but then I can't afford to go by car ... And then I start to go by bus ... I come back here at home, it was around six in the afternoon. And they give me a lot of things to prepare, to study, and that thing. I even had to go to library to check or to find resource or whatever. And doesn't run, you know? ... I said I appreciate what you done, but I [consider] I need 6 months, no less than that ... I got six years in the country... but one thing is learn to speak with the people ... it's not bad, I reckon everyone slowly they can get it, some sort of knowledge. But another thing is write too ... Believe or not, we [are] adults, but we got in English speaking, we got the knowledge I reckon less than the primary, because our vocabulary is so ... reduced, that we can't afford to find so many words to do the same thing. And that's [what] they [require] ... A friend of mine, he did the course too, and already he finish, and he did well, but he told me 'Look [George] ... was very very very hard for me.' He is an immigrant here, but he come from Ireland I reckon ... I said 'But that's your language! How can they expect I do the same?'

Some employers ask for tertiary qualified and 'hands on' supervising experience. How can you have both?

I said I got Crane Driver certificate, and still no job ... They told me [at one interview] I was too short to load stuff on trucks.

When you go to school, then they send you for a job and you don't get it because of the medical. When they see the scar on your stomach they treat you like you're a criminal.

I done [Job Search Training] and it don't make any difference. You can say 'I appreciate ti ti ti yours faithfully ti ti ti' ... when you say how old are you - whoosh!

Pay for me the suit, trousers, and everything because must go for experience [as a waiter] ... what for? How much money spent for that? Plenty money! ... [to be a waiter] must be good English ... it's only course, after that course you don't know nothing, and I can't cope over there catch the job. They wouldn't take me for sure straight away, the young people that's all. I haven't twenty years or twenty five.

I did apply for English course by myself ... then they sent me a form from CES, but the form is saying that 'How you can assure us that after you finish the course, that you will be able to find a job, by doing this course?' There is no way for me to assure them that I can find work after I did that course! ...I can improve my language, that's all I can say. I just chucked that form in the rubbish bin and I stopped myself from doing that course.

[Employment assistance] sent me on a computer course, ... I loved the computer course, one hundred per cent positive, I learned something useful ... but I haven't got a computer and I've already started to forget.

Being unemployed stops you from learning ... You see others learning faster and you feel stupid.

Thinking about worries, you know, everything forgot ... Because my mind always in the worries ... about children future ...

One year English is too short to get a job.

What course can you do in one year to change your professional area?

I can stop work if there is guarantee when I finish I find a job, but there is no guarantee.

This [course I found] is expensive. After I know is not guarantee I find a job.

We got a school for training to get the [Vehicle Industry Certificate (VIC)] ... another [workmate] been two times like me, and they got different things to learn, they already started with the VIC ... and after I show my foreman that I got the First Aid Certificate, I still learning First Aid, stupid thing like what's picture means, or another thing ... other people they already pass over that because it's so obvious, you see a picture, they say don't smoke ... [laughs]. I don't try to understand ... any more ... I think to get some TAFE, if I can, study VIC separate from the factory, if I get permanent there ... The teacher is not teacher, is trainer.

I put my name down [for the TCF LAP], because I thought 'Now I finish, I've got time for myself, to do something else. And I did, I went.... I learned a lot from school ... I can write a little bit now, before I was hopeless. I can understand better the news, talk better. I can write and read ... it's good.

I don't know [what I will study next], but it will be a hobby course for my own interest, not for work because I have been studying all my life and I am tired of learning which doesn't help me from a job perspective at the moment. Now I've been nearly 3 years without a job.

I am better because of the rest, and because I don't worry about anything now. I used to get depressed when I stayed home all day, but now with school I am busy and I don't get depressed now.

The English class was very good [although I didn't attend often enough]. The supervisor often asked me not to go because of some work that needed to be done. I was afraid if I didn't do what the supervisor said I'd lose my job.

Narratives relating to English language and literacy

A lot [of highly qualified Chinese immigrants are working in factory jobs]. Some it's different, some like accounting, like solicitor work in China, here it's different. Need very very good English level. But like engineering, those kinds of job, the skill, experience is very important.

At [my class] we had this ... I think she was psychologist, I didn't like her much ... I don't know how come she was a teacher... All we learn was about ... not so much English but interview, how to get a job ... just that, not much English ... It was good, but we were there to learn English!

Narratives relating to the State

Privatisation and outsourcing

When the contractor take over, he ... ask for less than the other contractors. So he might ask for fifty, a hundred thousand dollars less than the previous contractor. Now that hundred thousand dollar, he cannot lose it, and keep 15 people working. Have to cut three or four. This is why we got lot of redundancies. [Kennett] is talking about safety, and work and things like that ...[but] the safety starts at work. You have to have enough manpower not to be causing any accidents.

Suppose I was working in a school which was not closed up. I can do a tender for the contract cleaning. But ... most of the cleaners, they didn't do it because these big firms, they swallow you.

Because the government has to pay money, the same thing, or if it's more I don't know, to the people who do this work. They can't leave the schools ... you can't imagine what students do in schools ... It's not the first time we fix a window, a glass, at evening; when we go back ... not [only] that glass finished, another three of them ... Because some jobs we ... are doing it ourselves. Now, whoever took the jobs for the cleaning, he is not going to do that, because it is not his job. They have to hire somebody else to do it.

... it is a ridiculous decision ... it is unprofessional decision. The reason being, that company was the only company which can provide a training for a new Australian generation, especially here in Melbourne. ... There is no way that you can find that sort of facility [anywhere else] in Victoria.

We had enough jobs and machines to carry on. But where is the chief, the organisation? They left the machines broken down in the field. They told us the government couldn't afford to spend the money. But I never accepted that ... 'propaganda'.

And then a person got injured and they cut him the WorkCare, why? We're not in South Africa here! ... Like if a person get injured at work, and he goes on WorkCare, they bring the ad, that, you know, the doctor encourage him to go to work ... he's still crook! Why should a person crook on crutches have to go to work?

The unemployed as social parasites

Everyone say 'Why you can't work?

Plus my parents ... they won't understand how it is. We come from a poor country and we came into a rich country ... they think that it's easy to get a job just like that! They keep saying to me 'Oh, you still haven't got a job, maybe you don't want to work'.

Someone they say ... like joking, but not joking: 'Eh, I work so you walk around like that' ... they need to pay for me, they pay the tax ...

Migrants always think of the shame of being unemployed. That's part of the culture, shame.

My wife would say 'Have you looked at the paper today? How did you go?' And I'd say 'There were two jobs.' We don't get into an argument with each other, we have a discussion of 'Hey, how come out of three thousand jobs you could only find two?' It's hard for people to realise that the rest of the jobs are asking for 25 to 35 year old people, qualified people, people who are educated in this, in that, specific positions. There may be three thousand, but there are only one or two that catch your eye, where you can say 'Hey, that's me!' It hasn't changed our relationship, but I think that people ... are thinking 'He doesn't want a job. He doesn't want to work.' And that's not true.

We care more about, we never refuse overtime, we do the job, we don't answer back ... I was scared when I was work, I don't know why, I didn't do nothing wrong. I think the big problem is, we brought up to respect people ... even if I know I'm right, I don't ... because I've got a respect of maybe the boss, or the manager ... [Australians] a lot of the

time they get up to fight, to argue, to tell the people to get stuffed ... if in the factory was problem, they say 'If you don't like, I'm leaving', [and] they leaving! ... I wasn't like that. If we left the job or it's closed, that's terrible!

Australians think 'OK, you don't like me, I get another job easier, very easy.' But migrants [find it] very hard to get the job, so when I get job, I'm happy, I work very very hard!

Asian people think you're no good because you're sacked. Now it is changing because so many people are being retrenched.

I worked in a factory for black money for 2 days, we got \$6 an hour instead of \$9 which was the correct rate. I left. This boss was employing all Asian people on very low wages and said he was training them ... The company doesn't have to account to anyone because it doesn't exist. There was no [workers'] compensation, [no] sick pay, etcetera.

It seem a bit unfair when one person in couple find a job, they stop everything. So if the couple can't find a job together they don't want to work. ... If we stay home ... now, we can get about three hundred and thirty. And if I work I get ... usually ... three thirty dollars, that I have to pay for petrol thirty dollar, and for food in the factory about ten dollar, and I had money more for the clothes, and for the washing, I have to spend money fixing car ... so that's why ... and lose my health care card too! ... But both go to work it's better – [otherwise] it's not enough!

I think that we've still got a lot of people who are still coming here with no jobs, adding to the burden here ... There are so many [immigrants] that have come in over the years that are not contributing at all to the economy ... Unemployment benefits are paid too easily. The system allows for people to become chronically unemployed, and unemployable after a year or so, and people accept it as part of life. I think it should be like other countries, that you can go on unemployment [benefit] for a year, and then you're going to have to find a job and work for at least a year before you can get further assistance if it happens again ... How many people have you [interviewed] that have said 'I'm ready to become a labourer now'? ... out of an accounting situation, say?

I will take anything as long as I can do it ... Doesn't matter gardener, doesn't matter concrete, doesn't matter driving, the most pay ... if I have a choice ... If not I take anything, better than unemployed.

I would like to use my accounting skills ... [But] now a boring job is OK ... a warehouse job or kitchen ... Working in an office will make me think I will climb up the ladder again but that is not true.

Now I would accept cleaning toilets just to have a job.

I'm choosy because it is necessary. My wife works in the evenings cleaning, so I have to be home.

It is very bad what is going on now, because it's not normal for people who do nothing to get so much money. People get \$150 per week and work in a black job for \$250 per week. They laugh at me and say I'm stupid for working for \$550. I can't say I'm happy

about that. The government should look more carefully. [If] I have wife and 3 kids, I get \$500 a week from DSS and \$250 from a black job.

I got one job – I worked in a factory for black money for two days, we got \$6 an hour instead of \$9 which was the correct rate. I left. This boss was employing all Asian people on very low wages and said he was training them. They do work for Country Road - my wife said, 'How can these untrained people do Country Road work, exact to one millimetre?' They get clothes from Country Road, they subcontract for \$4 per hour. The company doesn't have to account to anyone because it doesn't exist. There was no [workers'] compensation, [no] sick pay, etcetera. They just bring things like buttonholes into the factory to do.

It seem a bit unfair when one person in couple find a job, they stop everything. So if the couple can't find a job together they don't want to work. ... If we stay home and both of us [are registered unemployed] ... now, we can get about three hundred and thirty. And if I work I get ... usually ... three thirty dollars, that I have to pay for petrol thirty dollar, and for food in the factory about ten dollar, and I had money more for the clothes, and for the washing, I have to spend money fixing car ... so that's why ... and lose my health care card too! ... But both go to work it's better – [otherwise] it's not enough! (See also F24 for poverty trap) (F08)

There's not as much work as there was years ago ... The young kids are very headstrong, if they don't want to do something they won't do it. They'd be better off getting up, getting out there and actually seeing what is out there to actually do. By the government forcing [them] to actually do something, I think they'd get more ... It'd stop a lot of robberies, a lot of murders too.

Australia is still good ... because the government give something for young people if they study, if they're unemployed.

If I don't have [UB] I don't have this house!

[UB] is not enough! But what can I expect from the government if it's not enough? Lots of the people are out of the work.

I have heard statements like 'We're paying you people who are bludging at home' ... it's not that we don't want to work. And we've paid our taxes.

If you are a parent you have to look after your kids. Most kids will laugh at their parents, but no parents hate their kids. It's the same with government [and the people].

[It's a] vicious circle ... because the people in unemployment they like staying home, they like get money in the pocket and do nothing, you know? Just ... fill the paper and receive the money, and then go drinking, whatever ... if the people working, they create more responsibility in their life, you know, ... because they can suffer what is suffer the people who working, you know?

Why can't we open up factories for unemployed people? A lot of people feel down about getting money for nothing. The government could pay instead of the dole [half what they pay now] and then you'd have to work part of the week for the other half - a few days full time or a few hours each day, about 15 hours per week. The government would export

the things made. This would also stop people cheating on the government, saying they have no job when they have. Many people would feel better this way ... The government would set up more factories and get the goods out of it. It would also provide cheap labour and we could compete overseas. For example, such factories could produce small 2 person cars for congested areas overseas and locally ... We could save heaps of petrol and avoid having a freeway full of cars with one passenger each ... In my own personal opinion, everyone trying to improve this world. If you walk in the street and you see tap that's open, you go and close it ... it's like nature, you're trying to be constructive. You want to build this world, you don't want to see a waste.

[Unemployment] could be fixed overnight, I think ... by for a start, all forces taking on youth ... as trainees ... all relevant training that they do would be learning to be technicians and mechanics and cooks, whatever ... another is to put people into jobs so that no-one is actually getting benefits for nothing, they be doing some paid work for some part of every week, three days, two-three days a week. ... So they would actually be employed, maintaining their skills and in some cases gaining new ones. And keep a work ethic going. Get away from welfare mentality. [They] would be earning a wage, even though it's a lower wage, where you can spend more, ... so that then generates employment in those areas. ... If they were actually at work, ... they would be earning a wage that would be more than the dole. And ... if we were to really look at what we're importing, stop the imports. And for the government to ... make it easier for business to employ people by cutting back on ... on-costs ... small business needs to be able to pay less tax ... the largest companies pay[] the least amount of taxes, the small businesses are harder hit.

There's not as much work as there was years ago. Employers have got so many people to choose from ... like when you go for an interview there might be say a hundred people ... I reckon a lot of these unemployed people should be put out on one of these Jobskills type things where it's [compulsory] ... like they do in other countries. I was talking to a friend of ours, he's Russian, he said they put them in the army, when they come a certain age they all have to go in the army! There's no Noes or Buts ... Get them to do something, get them off the streets ... they're always talking about cleaning up Australia and things like this - well get them out there, cleaning it up! ... Wouldn't it be a good thing to actually put them through a course, like they did with a friend of mine. They said to her, 'Would you like to go to school?' Which she did, and she bettered herself. She's become more independent. I've seen a lot of young people working ... they've got like a Jobskill thing where they're doing gardening ... beautification, that's a good thing ... They still had a caravan, where they went and had their meals and that, so they weren't left out in the open all day [in the cold and wet] ...

I still [think] the unemployment people [should] get only as much for six months, they can receive the benefits, because after six months is like a ... vicious circle ... because the people in unemployment they like staying home, they like get money in the pocket and do nothing, you know? Just go to the CES, fill the paper and receive the money, and then go drinking, whatever. Some people are good with children, you know? And some parents are good but the other parents don't care about their children sometimes. And if the people working, they create more responsibility in their life, you know, ... because they can suffer what is suffer the people who working, you know? They understand um the money is no easy way from the unemployment but they have to work something for they life too, you know?

They gave you the VDP and the hospital didn't pay you any more money. But then start pay you the government! And then the money is from Australia but different!

[I wouldn't go back to Greece]. Been too long here. My country now.

Racist discourse and the state

Belonging and entitlement

I think maybe they want to kick Asians out. Sometimes I think we may not be wanted because we came as refugees. Since we've been here we want to take root and establish well here. I want to be a good Australian because they give us a country to live in. The only way out is to push our kids to have a good education (Laotian teacher retrenched from clothing industry).

Migrants from third-world countries are used to little money, at least less money than Australians, because you are entitled to, while we are granted to. I don't scream at the DSS because I don't want to bite the hand that feeds me (Salvadorean accountant retrenched from vehicle industry).

A person who leaves his country to go to a better one is looking for a better life. It's a dream. It clashes with reality ... A newcomer can't compete with friends. In my country when I went to get a job I was confident and assertive. People don't take it that way. In Australia people don't understand your body language. [They] listen to two people talking in another language and [they] think they're fighting, when really they're enjoying quality time!

When someone come from another country, it's because he want to be better. And believe me, for that country it's very easy take people already educated in another country, because Australia didn't spend one cent to educate those people!

Why they bring [these people] from Egypt? I tell you why ... [nervous laugh] The Australian government collect the money ... from our countries to pay the unemployment benefit for us! They ask for doctors ... And to apply, you have to pay A\$250 with the application. How many people a day? At least one thousand a day. How much? At least a quarter million Australian dollars a day! And after a few ... weeks they say 'You – agree, you not, you yes, no, yes, no ... if I apply and they didn't agree about me, it's alright, what can I do? And look, that happen in all the countries around the world. And when they finish from the doctors, they start with the teachers. Finish from teachers, start with the accountant. And no jobs here!

Worker racism

... my mother-in-law, she [was] in hospital ..., and when we went there she was trying to tell them something, and there was no interpreter there to tell them what she wanted. And there was this Vietnamese I think she was, the nurse, she was really rude while we were

there. And I [asked], 'Whole hospital you haven't got interpreter ... so she can tell you what she wants?' She said 'No!'[careless, defiant voice].

I got nothing against [the Vietnamese staff at the DSS], but they can hardly speak ... bloody English and they got a job down there!

Appendix 3

Unemployment in Australia and the western region

Chart 1 Unemployment and the unemployment rate Australia 1978-2002

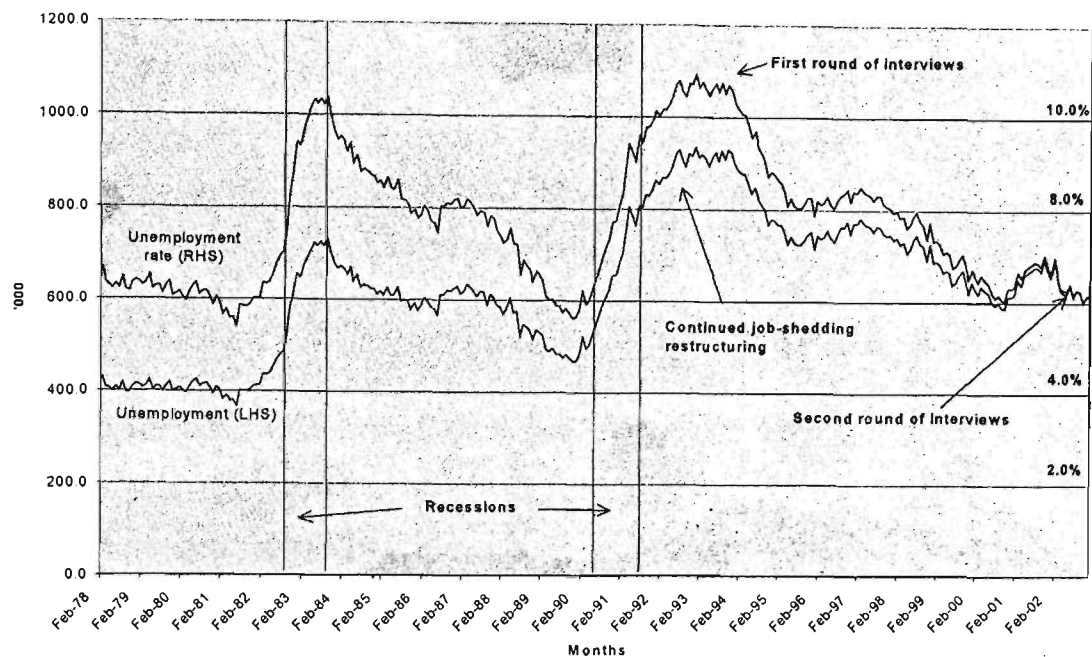
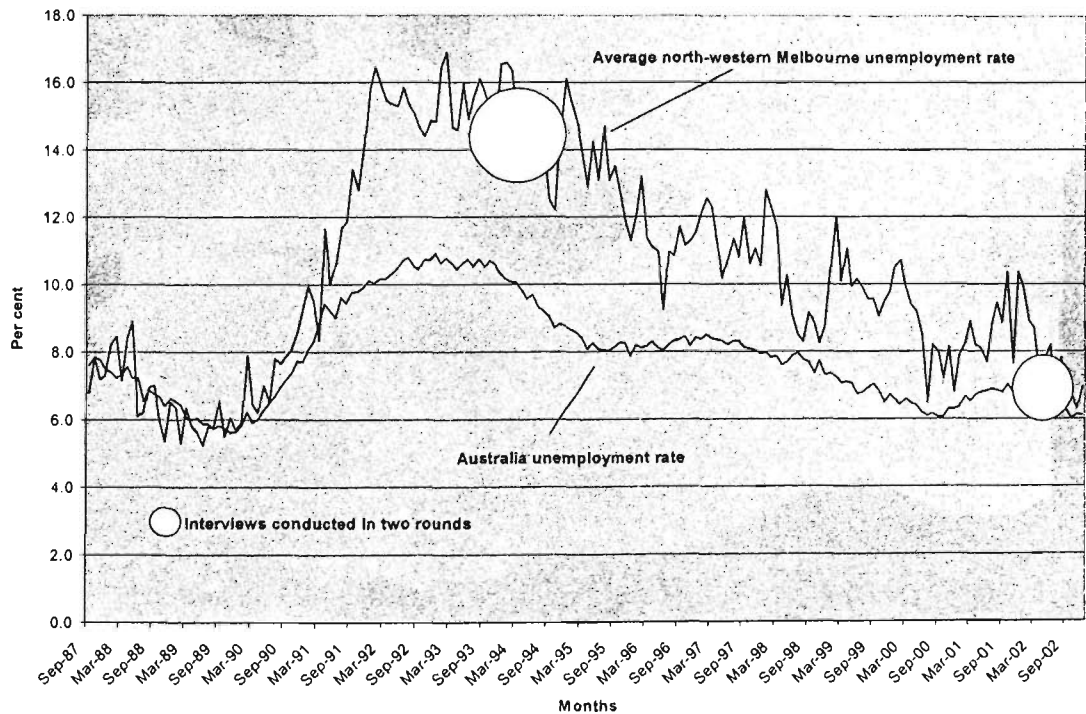


Chart 2 Unemployment rate Australia and western region 1987-2001



Appendix 4: Major areas discussed at interview

1994-5

1. Demographic data including domestic situation, housing, financial dependents
2. Background including details of immigration, first language and English oracy and literacy, English courses, qualifications, employment and education/training history overseas and in Australia pre-retrenchment, union membership, Workcare/WorkCover history
3. Retrenchment story, and financial, health, family and social impacts
4. Employment history post-retrenchment
5. Education/training history post-retrenchment
6. Perceived barriers to employment
7. Preparedness to move house and travel for a job
8. Jobsearch methods
9. Voluntary work
10. Employment assistance experience and perceptions
11. Perceptions of NESB immigrants' employment situation
12. General comments on retrenchment and unemployment

Reinterview 2002

1. Current situation - employment, retirement, study, Newstart, etc
2. Employment history since last interview
3. Perceived barriers to employment now, if any
4. Employment Assistance -If registered unemployed at all since last interview, their experiences and opinions about
 - Centrelink and the JSCI
 - The Centrelink system for applying for jobs
 - Job Search Training
 - Intensive Assistance
 - Work for the Dole
 - breaching
 - private employment agencies/ labour hire companies

- the new system in general
5. Training history and results since last interview
 6. General questions:
 - How optimistic do you feel about your future job prospects? Why?
 - Are you more or less optimistic than 5/10 years ago? Why?
 - How do you think the your job situation has changed since the 1980s?
 - Do you think the work situation of retrenched NESB people has improved, got worse or stayed the same since 1994? Why?
 7. Any specific questions arising from previous interview

Reference list

- Adult Migrant Education Services 1994, 'Industry trainers learn to acknowledge their audience', *Active Voice*, Journal of AMES, Language and Literacy Specialists, vol. 11, no. 2.
- Alcorso, C 1989, *Non-English speaking background women in the workforce*, Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Canberra.
- Allan, R 1997, 'Money for nothing: the ethics of social welfare', *Policy, Organisation and Society*, vol. 14, pp. 1-22.
- Aronowitz, S & Giroux, HA 1993, *Education: still under siege*, 2nd edn, Critical Studies in Education and Culture, Bergin & Garvey, Westport, Connecticut.
- Ashcroft, B, Griffiths, G & Tiffin, H 1998, *Key concepts in post-colonial studies*, Routledge, London.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997, *Retrenchment and redundancy Australia*, ABS, Canberra, Cat. 6266.0.
- Australian Council of Trade Unions 1987, *Australia reconstructed. ACTU/TDC Mission to Western Europe: a report by the mission members to the ACTU and the TDC*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Australian National Training Authority 1994, *Towards a skilled Australia: a national strategy for vocational education and training*, ANTA, Brisbane.
- Bacchi, C 2000, 'Policy as discourse: what does it mean? Where does it get us?' *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 45-58.

- Bagnall, RG 2000, 'Lifelong learning and the limitations of economic determinism', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 20-35.
- Ball, SJ 1990, 'Introducing Monsieur Foucault', in S.J. Ball (ed.), *Foucault and education: disciplines and knowledge*, Routledge, London, pp. 1-8.
- ____ 1994, *Education reform: a critical and post-structural approach*, Oxford University Press, Buckingham, UK.
- Beazley, H 1997, 'Inventing individual identity in the ALLP', *Literacy and numeracy studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 46-62.
- Becker, G 1976, *The economic approach to human behavior*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Beilharz, P 1987, 'Reading politics: social theory and social policy', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 388-406.
- Belenky, MF, Clinchy, BM, Goldberger, NR & Tarule, JM 1986, *Women's ways of knowing: the development of self, voice and mind*, Basic Books, New York.
- Berg, I 1971, *Education and jobs: the great training robbery*, Penguin Education, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, UK.
- Bertone, S 1995, *Training for what? Non-English-speaking background women and the National Training Reform Agenda*, AGPS, Canberra.
- ____ 2000a, 'Doing it tough: migrants and workplace change', in S. Bertone & H. Casey (eds), *Migrants in the new economy: problems, perspectives and policies*, Workplace Studies Centre, Victoria University, Melbourne, pp. 47-78.
- ____ 2000b, 'The half-forgotten proletariat: migrants and the Accord', in K. Wilson, J. Bradford & M. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Australia in Accord: an evaluation of the prices and incomes Accord in the Hawke-Keating years*, Workplace Studies Centre and School of Applied Economics, Victoria University, Melbourne, pp. 123-32.
- Bessant, J 2000, 'Civil conscription or reciprocal obligation: the ethics of 'work-for-the-dole'', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 15-33.

- Biggs, J 1999, *Teaching for quality learning at university*, Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, Buckingham, UK.
- Billett, S 1998, 'Ontogeny and participation in communities of practice: a socio-cognitive view of adult development', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, vol. 30, no. 1.
- Birrell, B & Hawthorne, L-A 1997, *Immigrants and the professions in Australia*, Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, Melbourne.
- Black, S 2002, 'Whose economic wellbeing? A challenge to dominant discourses on the relationship between literacy and numeracy skills and (un)employment', paper presented to ALNARC Online Forum 2002, funded by the ANTA National Literacy Project by the Commonwealth through Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), Victoria University, Melbourne, 15 March-19 April.
- Black, S, Rouse, R & Wickert, R 1990, 'The illiteracy myth: a comparative study of prisoner literacy abilities', Faculty of Adult Education, University of Technology, Sydney; included as an Appendix in Wickert 1995a, Sydney.
- Blaikie, N 1993, *Approaches to social enquiry*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Blainey, G 1984, *All for Australia*, Methuen Haines, North Ryde.
- Bourdieu, P 1991, *Language and symbolic power*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bowe, R, Ball, SJ & Gold, A 1992, *Reforming education and changing schools: case studies in policy sociology*, Routledge, London.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics 1992, *Labour market and employment characteristics of immigrant women in Australia*, ABS Cat. no. 91 1784 8, AGPS, Canberra.
- Brooks, C & Williams, L 1995, *Immigrants and the labour market: the 1990-94 recession and recovery in perspective*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Brough, M 2002, 'Brough to target "cruising" dole recipients', Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, viewed 1 January 2004, <<http://www.dewrsb.gov.au/ministersAndMediaCentre/mediacentre/detail.a>

sp?keywords=&title=&creator=Brough&type=2&month=None&year=2002
&index=None&show=2342>.

- Brumfit, CJ 1984, *Communicative methodology in language teaching: the roles of fluency and accuracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Buchanan, J 1995, 'Managing labour in the 1990s', in S. Rees & G. Rodley (eds), *The human costs of managerialism: advocating the recovery of humanity*, Pluto Press, Leichhardt, pp. 55-67.
- Buchanan, James 1975, *The limits of liberty*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Burr, V 1995, *An introduction to social constructionism*, Routledge, London.
- ____ 2003, *Social constructionism*, 2nd edn, Routledge, London.
- Campbell, I 1990, 'The Australian trade union movement and post-Fordism', *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, vol. 26, pp. 1-26.
- ____ 1993, 'Retrenchment and labour market flows: a review', paper presented to TASA Conference, Macquarie University, December.
- Campbell, I, Fincher, R & Webber, M 1989, *Multicultural dimensions of changes in manufacturing employment in Australian cities: constraints, opportunities and contributions*, vol. 3: 'The experiences of Greeks, Vietnamese and Yugoslavs in the Melbourne manufacturing labour force', 3 vols., Department of Geography, University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- ____ 1989, *Multicultural dimensions of changes in manufacturing employment in Australian cities: constraints, opportunities and contributions*, vol. 1: 'Employment Experience of Migrant Men and Women in Australian Manufacturing Labour Markets 1971-1986', 3 vols., Department of Geography, University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- Canale, M & Swain, M 1980, 'Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing', *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 1, pp. 1-47.
- Candy, P & Crebert, RG 1991, 'Lifelong learning: an enduring mandate for higher education', *Higher Education Research and Development*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 3-18.

- Castells, M 1989, *The informational city: information technology, economic restructuring, and the urban-regional process*, B. Blackwell, Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA.
- Castles, S 1996, 'The racisms of globalisation', in E. Vasta & S. Castles (eds), *The teeth are smiling: the persistence of racism in multicultural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, pp. 17-45.
- Castles, S & Kosack, G 1973, *Immigrant workers and class structure in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Castles, S & Vasta, E 1996, 'Introduction', in *The teeth are smiling: the persistence of racism in multicultural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, pp. 1-16.
- Castles, S & Davidson, A 2000, *Citizenship and migration: globalization and the politics of belonging*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke.
- Castles, S, Morrissey, M & Pinkstone, B 1988, *Migrant employment and training and industry restructuring*, Office of Multicultural Affairs, AGPS, Canberra.
- Castles, S, Kalantzis, M, Cope, B & Morrissey, M 1988, *Mistaken identity: multiculturalism and the demise of nationalism in Australia*, Pluto Press Australia, Leichhardt.
- Cazden, C 1992, *Whole language plus: essays on literacy in the United States and New Zealand*, Teachers College Press, New York.
- Chauvel, R 1985, 'Migrants and the Commonwealth Employment Service', ANZAAS Congress Paper 75.
- Clyne, M 1994, *Inter-cultural communication at work: cultural values in discourse*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Cockburn, C 1988, 'The Gendering of jobs: workplace relations and the reproduction of sex segregation', in S. Walby (ed.), *Gender segregation at work*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, pp. 29-42.
- Coffield, F 1999, 'Breaking the consensus: lifelong learning as social control', *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 25, no. 4.

- Collins, J 1988, *Migrant hands in a distant land: Australia's post-war immigration*, Pluto Press, Sydney and London.
- ____ 1996a, 'The economics of racism or the racism of economics?' in G. Argyrous & F. Stilwell (eds), *Economics as a social science: readings in political economy*, Pluto Press, Annandale, NSW.
- ____ 1996b, 'The changing political economy of Australian racism', in E. Vasta & S. Castles (eds), *The teeth are smiling: the persistence of racism in multicultural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, pp. 73-96.
- Collins, J, Gibson, K, Alcorso, C, Castles, S & Tait, D 1995, *A shop full of dreams: ethnic small business in Australia*, Pluto Press Australia, Leichhardt.
- Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs 1985, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs* (Kirby Report), AGPS, Canberra.
- Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993a, *Restoring full employment: a discussion paper*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993b, *Restoring full employment: background papers*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Commonwealth of Australia 1994, *Working nation: policies and programs*, AGPS, Canberra.
- ____ 1996, *Reforming employment assistance: helping Australians into real jobs*, Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, viewed 26 January 2004,
<http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/publications/budget/budget96/budget_statement/minstindex.htm>.
- Considine, M 2001, *Enterprising states: the public management of welfare-to-work*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Cope, B & Kalantzis, M (eds) 1993, *The powers of literacy: a genre approach to teaching writing*, Falmer Press, London.
- Courtenay, M 1994, 'Language, literacy and numeracy skills development and the Training Reform Agenda', in *National training reform and NESB workers:*

- seminar proceedings*, Workplace Studies Centre, Victoria University/Office of Multicultural Affairs, Melbourne, pp. 38-47.
- Cox, E 1995, *A truly civil society: the 1995 Boyer Lectures*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney.
- Curtis, D & McKenzie, P 2001, *Employability skills for Australian industry: literature review and framework development*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.
- Dant, T 1991, *Knowledge, ideology and discourse*, Routledge, London.
- Darrah, CN 1996, *Learning and work: an exploration in industrial ethnography*, Garland Publishing, New York.
- Davidson, A 1986, 'Archaeology, genealogy, ethics', in D.C. Hoy (ed.), *Foucault: a critical reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 221-34.
- Dendrinos, B 2002, 'The marketisation of English as a global(ising) language: discourses and counter discourses', in M. Kalantzis, G. Varnava-Skoura & B. Cope (eds), *Learning for the future: new worlds, new literacies, new people*, Common Ground Publishing, Melbourne.
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2003, *Australians Working Together*, DEWR, viewed 1 January 2004, <<http://www.together.gov.au/whoIsInvolved/peopleOverFifty/default.asp>>.
- Department of Employment Education and Training 1994, *The special intervention program provider handbook: language and literacy services*, DEET, Canberra.
- Department of Employment Education and Training 1991a, *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, AGPS Canberra.
- Department of Employment Education and Training 1991b, *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy: companion volume*, AGPS Canberra.
- Department of Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business 1999, *Population flows: immigration aspects - Victoria*, DEWRSB, Labour Economics Office, Victoria.

- _____. 2000, *Job network evaluation, stage one: implementation and market development*, EPPB Report 1/2000, DEWRSB, Evaluation and Program Performance Branch, Canberra.
- Dews, P 1987, *Logics of disintegration: post-structuralist thought and the claims of critical theory*, Verso, London.
- Docker, J 1994, 'Postnationalism', *Arena Magazine*, vol. 40, no. 1.
- Doeringer, PB & Piore, MJ 1975, 'Unemployment and the "Dual Labour Market"', *The Public Interest*, vol. Winter, pp. 67-78.
- Doughney, J 2002, *The poker machine state: dilemmas in ethics, economics and governance*, Common Ground Publishing, Melbourne.
- _____. 2003, 'The ageing workforce? Separating fact from hype', paper presented to Australian Social Policy Conference 2003, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, 9-11 July.
- Dugdale, A 1990, 'Beyond relativism: moving on - feminist struggles with scientific/medical knowledge', *Australia Feminist Studies*, vol. 12, pp. 51-63.
- Durie, J 1991, 'Literacy in the textile clothing and footwear Industries', in P. O'Connor (ed.), *Pitfalls and possibilities: women and workplace basic education*, Workplace Basic Education Resource Project/New South Wales Adult Literacy Council Inc, Redfern, NSW.
- Eardley, T & Matheson, G 2000, 'Australian attitudes to unemployment and unemployed people', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 35, no. 3.
- Eardley, T, Abello, D & MacDonald, H 2000, *Is the job network benefiting disadvantaged jobseekers? Preliminary evidence from a study of non-profit employment services*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney.
- Eardley, T, Saunders, P & Evans, C 2000, *Community attitudes towards unemployment, activity testing and mutual obligation*, Social Policy Research Centre Discussion Paper 107.
- Edley, N 2001, 'Analysing masculinity: interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions', in M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S.J. Yates

- (eds), *Discourse as data: a guide for analysis*, The Open University, Milton Keynes, pp. 189-228.
- Edwards, R & Usher, R 1994, 'Disciplining the subject: the power of competence', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 1-14.
- Ellis, R 1986, *Understanding second language acquisition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- ____ 1994, *The study of second language acquisition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Essed, P 1997, 'Racial intimidation: sociopolitical implications of the usage of racist slurs', in S.H. Riggins (ed.), *The language and politics of exclusion*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California, pp. 131-52.
- Evans, M & Kelley, J 1986, 'Immigrants' work: equality and discrimination in the Australian labour market', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, vol. 22, pp. 187-207.
- ____ 1988, Migrants - do employers discriminate?, vol. 1, no. 2, *National Social Science Survey Report*.
- Fairclough, N 1989, *Language and power*, Language in Social Life series, Longman, London and New York.
- ____ 1992, *Discourse and social change*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Farrell, L 1999, 'Learning the language of work in the new work order', paper presented to European Conference on Educational Research, Lahti, Finland.
- ____ 2001, 'The 'New Word Order': workplace education and the textual practice of economic globalisation', *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 57-74.
- Finn, D 1997, *Working nation: welfare reform and the Australian job compact for the long term unemployed*, Unemployment Unit, Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS).
- Foster, I, Marshall, A & Williams, L 1991, *Discrimination against immigrant workers in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra.

- Fotiadis, P 1989, *Retrenchment of Greek women in the textile, clothing and footwear industries: its effects and implications*, Australian Greek Welfare Society, Richmond.
- Foucault, M 1971, *L'ordre du discours*, Gallimard, Paris.
- _____ 1972, *The archaeology of knowledge*, Tavistock, London.
- _____ 1979, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- _____ 1980a, *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* (C. Gordon, ed.), Pantheon Books, New York.
- _____ 1980b, *The history of sexuality*, vol. 1, Vintage Books, New York.
- _____ 1982, 'The subject and power', in H.L. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (eds), *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, Harvester Press, Brighton.
- Freebody, P 1997, 'Assessment as communal versus punitive practice', *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 5-17.
- Friedman, M 1953, 'The methodology of positive economics', in M. Friedman, *Essays in positive economics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- _____ 1962, *Capitalism and freedom*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Friedman, M & Friedman R 1980, *Free to choose: a personal statement*, Penguin, Harmondsworth UK.
- Fryer, D 1987, 'Monmouthshire and Marienthal: sociographies of two unemployed communities', in D. Fryer & P. Ullah (eds), *Unemployed people: social and psychological perspectives*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, pp. 74-93.
- Gale, T 1999, 'Policy trajectories: treading the discursive path of policy analysis', *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 393-407.
- Gee, JP 1990, *Social linguistics and literacies*, 1st edn, The Falmer Press, London.
- _____ 1996, *Social linguistics and literacies*, 2nd edn, Critical Perspectives on Literacy and Education, Taylor and Francis, London.

- 2002, 'New times and new literacies: themes for a changing world', in M. Kalantzis, G. Varnava-Skoura & B. Cope (eds), *Learning for the future: new worlds, new literacies, new learning, new people*, Common Ground Publishing, Melbourne.
- Gee, JP, Hull, G & Lankshear, C 1996, *The new work order: behind the language of the new capitalism*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.
- George, S 1999, 'A short history of neo-liberalism: twenty years of elite economics and emerging opportunities for structural change', paper presented to Conference on Economic Sovereignty in a Globalising World, Bangkok, 24-26 March 1999.
- Georgopoulos, D 1994, 'The impact of training reform on NESB women', paper presented to National Training Reform and NESB Workers, Melbourne, September.
- Goldberg, DT 1993, *Racist culture*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Gonas, L & Westin, H 1993, 'Industrial restructuring and gendered labour market processes', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 14.
- Goodwin, N 1996, 'Governmentality in the Queensland Department of Education: policies and the management of schools', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 65-74.
- Gordon, C 1980, 'Afterword', in C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977 by Michel Foucault*, Random House, New York.
- Gowen, SG 1992, *The politics of workplace literacy: a case study*, Teachers College Press, New York.
- Graham, L 1995, *On the line at Subaru-Isuzu: the Japanese model and the American worker*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York.
- Green, B, Hodgins, J & Luke, A 1995, 'Introduction: debating literacy in Australia. A documentary history 1945-1994', in B. Green, J. Hodgins & A. Luke (eds), *Towards a history of adult literacy in Australia*, NSW Adult Literacy Research Network, Sydney.

- Gregory, RG & Meng, X 2001, 'Immigrant employment and economic change in Australia', in J. Borland, R.G. Gregory & P. Sheehan (eds), *Work rich, work poor: inequality and economic change in Australia*, Centre for Strategic Economic Studies, Victoria University, Melbourne, pp. 60-77.
- Hage, G 1998, *White nation: fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*, Pluto Press, Annandale, NSW.
- Hall, R, Buchanan, J & Considine, G 2002, 'You value what you pay for': *enhancing employers' contributions to skill formation and use*, ACIRRT/Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Ultimo.
- Halliday, MAK 1985, *Spoken and written language*, Deakin University Press, Geelong.
- Halliday, MAK & Hasan, R 1989, *Language, context, text: aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Hamilton, C 2003, *Growth fetish*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, Sydney.
- Haraway, D 1986, 'Primatology is politics by other means', in R. Bleier (ed.), *Feminist approaches to science*, Pergamon, New York, pp. 77-118.
- Harding, S 1987, 'The instability of the analytical categories of feminist theory', in S. Harding & J.F. O'Barr (eds), *Sex and scientific inquiry*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, pp. 283-302.
- Harris, C & Redundancy and Unemployment Research Group 1987, *Redundancy and recession in South Wales*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Hartley, R 1989, *The social costs of inadequate literacy*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Melbourne.
- Haworth, JT 1997, *Work, leisure and well-being*, Routledge, London.
- Hawthorne, L-A 1994, *Labour market barriers for immigrant engineers in Australia*, Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, Melbourne.
- Hayek, FA 1944, *The road to serfdom*, Routledge, London.
- ____ 1960, *The constitution of liberty*, Gateway Editions, South Bend, Indiana.
- Hirst, P & Thompson, G 1996, *Globalization in question*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

- Hodgens, J 1994, 'How adult literacy became a public issue in Australia', *Open Letter*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 13-24.
- Hofstede, GH 1980, *Culture's consequences: international differences in work-related values*, Sage Publications, Beverley Hills, California.
- Hofstede, GH 1991, *Cultures and organisations: software of the mind*, McGraw-Hill, London and New York.
- Hull, G 1994, 'Hearing other voices: a critical assessment of popular views on literacy and work', in P. O'Connor (ed.), *Thinking work*, Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Action Coalition, Leichhardt, Sydney, vol. 1: Theoretical Perspectives on Workers' Literacies, pp. 41-71.
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1996, *State of the nation 1996: a report on people of non-English speaking backgrounds*, HREOC, viewed 20 February 2002, <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/reports/index.html#nation96>.
- Iredale, R 1989, 'Barriers to migrant entry to occupations in Australia', *International Migration*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 87-106.
- ____ 1992, *Minimising diversity: employers' attitudes and practices towards overseas trained professionals, managers and technicians*, Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, Wollongong.
- Jackson, N 2000, 'Writing-up people at work: investigations of workplace literacy', in *Working knowledge: productive learning at work*. Conference Proceedings, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney.
- Jahoda, M 1982, *Employment and unemployment: a social-psychological analysis*, The psychology of social issues, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- ____ 1987, 'Unemployed men at work', in D. Fryer & P. Ullah (eds), *Unemployed people: social and psychological perspectives*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, pp. 1-73.
- Jamrozik, A, Bolland, C & Urquhart, R 1995, *Social change and cultural transformation in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Jones, B 1995, *Sleepers, wake!*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Jones, R 1990, 'Educational practices and scientific knowledge: a genealogical reinterpretation of the emergence of physiology in post-Revolutionary France', in S.J. Ball (ed.), *Foucault and education: disciplines and knowledge*, Routledge, London, pp. 78-104.
- Jones, R & McAllister, I 1991, *Migrant unemployment and labour market programs*, Bureau of Immigration Research, AGPS, Canberra.
- Junankar, PNR, Paul, S & Yasmeen, W 2002, *Are Asian migrants discriminated against in the labour market? A case study of Australia*, School of Economics and Finance, University of Western Sydney, Sydney.
- Jupp, J 1998, *Immigration*, 2nd edn, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- Kalantzis, M & Cope, B 1994, 'Cultures of the workplace', in P. O'Connor (ed.), *Thinking work*, Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Action Coalition, Leichhardt, Sydney, vol. 1: Theoretical Perspectives on Workers' Literacies, pp. 72-81.
- Kamler, B 1999, 'Literacy narratives of crisis and blame', *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 65-73.
- Keenoy, T & Kelly, D 1996, *The employment relationship in Australia*, Harcourt Brace, Sydney.
- Kemp, D 1998a, Fact Sheet: 'Mutual Obligation,' Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, viewed 1 January 2004, <http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/ministers/kemp/kfs_mo.htm>.
- _____ 1998b, 'Questions and Answers: Mutual Obligation,' Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, viewed 1 January 2004, <http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/ministers/kemp/kqa_mo.htm>.
- _____ 1999, 'Government Tightens Literacy Requirement for Unemployed,' Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, viewed 1 January 2004, <http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/ministers/kemp/k0501_210199.htm>.

- ____ n.d., 'Questions and answers: literacy and numeracy training,' Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, viewed 1 January 2004, <http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/ministers/kemp/kqa_lit.htm#top>.
- Kenway, J 1990, 'Education and the right's discursive politics: private versus state schooling', in S.J. Ball (ed.), *Foucault and education: disciplines and knowledge*, Routledge, London.
- Kinnear, P 2000a, 'Mutual obligation: ethical and social implications', Discussion Paper, The Australia Institute, Canberra.
- ____ 2000b, 'What's wrong with mutual obligation?' *Impact*, pp. 8-9.
- ____ 2002, 'Population ageing: crisis or transition?' *Issues*, vol. 58, pp. 14-22.
- Kipp, S, Clyne, M & Pauwels, A 1995, *Immigration and Australia's language resources*, Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, AGPS, Canberra.
- Kress, G 1985, *Linguistic processes in sociocultural practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- ____ 1990, 'Critical discourse analysis', *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 11, pp. 84-99.
- Lave, J & Wenger, E 1991, *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Lawson, T 1997, *Economics and reality*, Routledge, London.
- Leontieff, W 1982, 'Letter', *Science*, vol. 217, pp. 104-7.
- Lever-Tracy, C & Quinlan, M 1988, *A divided working class: ethnic separation and industrial conflict in Australia*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Lo Bianco, J 1989, 'Science or values: the role of professionals in language policy making', in C.N. Candlin & T.F. MacNamara (eds), *Language, learning and community*, National Centre for English Language, Teaching and Research (NCELTR), Sydney.
- Luke, A 1988, *Literacy, textbooks and ideology*, Falmer Press, London.
- ____ 1997, 'New narratives of human capital: recent redirections in Australian educational policy', *Australian Educational Researcher*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 1-21.

- Lyotard, J-F 1984, *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Macedo, DP 2002, 'The ideological construction of language and culture', in M. Kalantzis, G. Varnava-Skoura & B. Cope (eds), *Learning for the future: new worlds, new literacies, new people*, Common Ground Publishing, Melbourne, pp. 31-58.
- Macintyre, C 1999, 'From entitlement to obligation in the Australian welfare state', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 103-18.
- Manne, R 2001, *The barren years: John Howard and Australian political culture*, Text Publishing Company, Melbourne.
- Mares, P 2002, 'Reporting Australia's asylum seekers "crisis"', paper presented to Media, Terrorism and a Culture of Peace event, Perth, Australia, 26 – 28 June, viewed 1 January 2004, <<http://www.admin@apo.org.au>>
- Marginson, S 1993, *Education and public policy in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- ____ 1997, *Educating Australia: government, economy and citizen since 1960*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Markus, A 1994, *Australian race relations 1788-1993*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards.
- ____ 2001, *Race: John Howard and the remaking of Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- Marshall, JD 1990, 'Foucault and educational research', in S.J. Ball (ed.), *Foucault and education: disciplines and knowledge*, Routledge, London, pp. 11-28.
- ____ 1995, 'Foucault and Neo-Liberalism: biopower and Busno-power,' *PES Year book*, Philosophy of Education Society, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Martin, H-P & Schumann, H 1997, *The global trap: globalization and the assault on democracy and prosperity*, English edn, Pluto Press, Leichhardt.
- Martin, L, Gutman, H & Hutton, P (eds) 1988, *Technologies of the self*, Tavistock, London.

- Mathews, J 1989, *Tools of change: new technology and the democratisation of work*, Pluto Press, Sydney.
- Mawer, G & Field, L 1995, *One size fits some: competency-based training and non-English speaking background people*, AGPS, Canberra.
- McNay, L 1992, *Foucault and feminism: power, gender and the self*, Northeastern University Press, Boston.
- Morrissey, M, Dibden, M & Mitchell, C 1992, *Immigration and industry restructuring in the Illawarra*, Bureau of Immigration Research, AGPS, Canberra.
- Moss, J 2001, 'The ethics and politics of mutual obligation', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 1-14.
- Mukkatesh, L 1986, 'Persistence in fossilization', *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 24, pp. 187-203.
- Nance, J 1991, 'Poor literacy costs industry millions', *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 February.
- Niland, C & Champion, R 1990, *EEO programs for immigrants: the experience of thirteen organisations*, Bureau of Immigration Research, AGPS, Canberra.
- Norris, C 2000, *Deconstruction and the 'unfinished project of modernity'*, The Athlone Press, London.
- Norris, GM 1978, 'Unemployment, subemployment and personal characteristics', *Sociological Review*, vol. 26.
- Nozick, R 1974, *Anarchy, state, and utopia*, Basic Books, New York.
- Nussbaum, MC 1999a, *Sex and social justice*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- ____ 1999b, *Women's capabilities and social justice*, UN Secretariat, Paper presented at UNDP Global Forum.
- O'Connor, P 1994, 'Fears, fantasies and futures in workers' literacy', in *Literacies and the workplace: a collection of original essays*, Faculty of Education, Deakin University, Geelong, pp. 55-102.
- O'Donnell, M & Ibrahim, S 1994, *Immigrant women and post-Fordism: workplace restructuring in the New South Wales public sector*, Melbourne,

- Paper presented at the Conference of the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand.
- OECD 1990, *Labour market policies for the 1990s*, OECD, Paris.
- Office of Multicultural Affairs & Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 1989, *National agenda for a multicultural Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, July.
- Office of Multicultural Affairs and Workplace Studies Centre 1994, *National training reform and NESB workers: seminar proceedings*, Workplace Studies Centre, Victoria University, Melbourne.
- Ohmae, K 1991, *The borderless world*, New York, HarperCollins.
- O'Loughlin, T & Watson, I 1997, *Loyalty is a one-way street: NESB immigrants and long-term unemployment*, Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT), Sydney.
- Ozolins, U 1993, *The politics of language in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Pearce, A, Bertone, S & Stephens, J 1995, *Surviving retrenchment: experiences of NESB immigrant workers in the western region of Melbourne*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Pearce, D, Disney, J & Ridout, H 2002, *Report of the Independent Review of Breaches and Penalties in the Social Security System*, Sydney.
- Peel, M 2003, *The lowest rung: voices of Australian poverty*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Pennycook, A 1998, *English and the discourses of colonialism*, The Politics of Language, Routledge, London.
- Petersen, P 1999, 'Non-English speaking background migrants, unemployment and employment assistance in Australia', Masters thesis, University of Sydney.
- Phillipson, R 1992, *Linguistic imperialism*, Oxford Applied Linguistics, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Pica, T 1983, 'Adult acquisition of English as a second language under different conditions of exposure', *Language Learning*, vol. 33, pp. 465-97.

- Pienemann, M 1980, 'The second language acquisition of immigrant children', in S. Felix (ed.), *Second language development: trends and issues*, Gunter Narr, Tübingen.
- Pienemann, M, Johnston, M & Brindley, G 1988, 'Constructing an acquisition-based procedure for assessing second language acquisition', *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, vol. 10, pp. 217-43.
- Piore, M 1980, *Birds of passage*, Cambridge, London.
- Piore, M & Sabel, C 1984, *The second industrial divide*, Basic Books, New York.
- Pixley, J 1993, *Citizenship and employment: investigating post industrial options*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Pocock, B 1998, 'All change, still gendered: the Australian labour market in the 1990s,' *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 580-604.
- Potter, J & Wetherell, M 1995, 'Discourse analysis', in J. Smith, R. Harre & L. van Langenhove (eds), *Rethinking methods in psychology*, Sage, London.
- Probert, B 1994a, 'Making the in/visible', *Refractory Girl*, vol. 47-48, pp. 70-3.
- ____ 1994b, 'Thinking about the White Paper: problems for a working nation', *Australian Geographer*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 103-9.
- ____ 1995, 'A Restructuring World?' in A. Edwards & S. Magarey (eds), *Women in a restructuring Australia: work and welfare*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, St. Leonards, N.S.W.
- ____ 2002, '"Grateful slaves" or "self-made women"? A matter of choice or policy?' *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 17, no. 37, pp. 7-17.
- Probert, B & Wajcman, J 1988, 'Technological change and the future of work', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 30, no. 3.
- Productivity Commission 2002, *Independent review of Job Network, draft report*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.
- ____ 2003, *Social capital: reviewing the concept and its policy implications*, AusInfo, Canberra.
- Pusey, M 1991, *Economic rationalism in Canberra: a nation-building state changes its mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- 2003, *The experience of middle Australia: the dark side of economic reform*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Putnam, RD 2000, *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*, Simon and Schuster, New York.
- Putnis, P 1992, 'Cultural generalizations: help or hindrance?' paper presented to International Conference on English for Professional Communication, City Polytechnic of Hong Kong, March.
- Quiggin, J 1998, 'Social democracy and market reform in Australia and New Zealand', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 76-95.
- Ram, K 1996, 'Liberal multiculturalism's NESB women: a South Asian post-colonial feminist perspective on the liberal impoverishment of 'difference', in E. Vasta & S. Castles (eds), *The teeth are smiling: the persistence of racism in multicultural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, pp. 130-44.
- Raper, M (ed.) 1999, *The independent social security handbook: a practical guide for advisors*, Pluto Press and Welfare Rights Centre, Annandale, NSW.
- Reich, RB 1991, *The work of nations*, Simon and Schuster, London.
- Reid, I (ed.) 1987, *The place of genre in learning: current debates*, Centre for Studies in Literary Education, Deakin University, Geelong.
- Rich, K, Murphy, K & O'Brien, C 1996, *Evaluation of the language and literacy elements of the Special Intervention Program: 1994-1995*; Interim Report; Case Study Component, Report 1/96, Department of Employment Education and Training: Evaluation and Monitoring Branch, Canberra.
- Rizvi, F 1996, 'Racism, reorientation and the cultural politics of Asia-Australia relations', in E. Vasta & S. Castles (eds), *The teeth are smiling: the persistence of racism in multicultural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, pp. 173-88.
- Robeyns, I 2000, 'An unworkable idea or a promising alternative? Sen's capability approach re-examined,' Discussion paper 00.30, Center for Economic Studies, University of Leuven,
<<http://www.ingridrobeyns.nl/Downloads/unworkable.pdf>>.

- Robinson, C 1995, *Employment case management and public sector reform*, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, 10 July.
- Rutherford, J 2000, *The gauche intruder: Freud, Lacan and the white Australian fantasy*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- Said, E 1979, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York.
- Salvaris, M 1995, 'Jeff Kennett's anti-government', in S. Rees & G. Rodley (eds), *The human costs of managerialism: advocating the recovery of humanity*, Pluto Press, Leichhardt, Sydney, pp. 145-58.
- Sanguinetti, J 1999, 'Within and against performativity: discursive engagement in adult literacy and basic education', Doctor of Philosophy thesis, Deakin University.
- Saunders, P 2003, 'Time limits on unemployment assistance will work', *The Australian Financial Review*, 12 September.
- Scates, B 1997, *A new Australia: citizenship, radicalism and the first republic*, Studies in Australian History, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Schmidt, VA 2000, 'The role of values and discourse in welfare state reform: the politics of successful adjustment', in F.W. Scharpf & V.A. Schmidt (eds), *Welfare and Work in the Open Economy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, vol. 1: From Vulnerability to Competitiveness.
- Scholtz, S & Prinsloo, M 2001, 'New workplaces, new literacies, new identities.' *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 44, no. 8, pp. 710-4.
- Selby Smith, J 1995, *The National Competition Policy Review (The Hilmer Report) and its implications for the Vocational Educational and Training system*, Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), Brisbane.
- Sen, A 1999, *Development as freedom*, Knopf Publishers, New York.
- Sennett, R 1998, *The corrosion of character: the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*, WW Norton, New York.
- Silverman, D 2001, *Interpreting qualitative data: methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*, 2nd edn, Sage Publications, London.

- Somers, MR & Gibson, GD 1994, 'Reclaiming the epistemological "other": narrative and the social constitution of identity', in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Social theory and the politics of identity*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, pp. 37-99.
- Stephens, J & Bertone, S 1995, *Manufacturing uncertainty: non-English-speaking-background women and training*, Bureau of Immigration Multicultural and Population Research, AGPS, Canberra.
- Stratton, J & Ang, I 1994, 'Multicultural imagined communities: cultural difference and national identity in Australia', *Continuum*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 124-58.
- Stromback, T 1988, *Migrants, ethnic groups and the labour market*, Office of Multicultural Affairs, AGPS, Canberra.
- Stromback, T & Preston, A 1991, *The cost of low levels of English proficiency amongst immigrants in the workforce*, Bureau of Immigration Research, Canberra.
- Stuckey, JE 1991, *The violence of literacy*, Boynton/Cook Publishers, Heinemann, Portsmouth, New Hampshire.
- Swain, M & Canale, M 1982, 'The role of grammar in a communicative approach to second language teaching and testing', in *Issues of language assessment: Foundations and research*. Proceedings of the Annual Language Assessment Institute, Evanston, Illinois, 17-20 June 1981.
- Textile Clothing and Footwear Industry Training Board 1991, *Industry training plan*, TCFITB, Melbourne.
- Thew, H 1991, '\$763m price of "poor" English', *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, Tuesday 5 February, p. 9.
- Thompson, JB 1991, 'Editor's introduction', in J.B. Thompson (ed.), *Bourdieu, Pierre: language and symbolic power*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Threadgold, T 1997, 'An interview with Terry Threadgold on critical discourse analysis', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 437-52.

- Tight, M 1998, 'Education, education, education! The vision of lifelong learning in the Kennedy, Dearing and Fryer Reports', *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 473-85.
- Tollefson, JW 1991, *Planning language, planning inequality: language policy in the community*, Longman, Harlow, Essex.
- Toohy, B 1994, *Tumbling dice: the story of modern economic policy*, William Heinemann, Port Melbourne.
- Vasta, E 1996, 'Dialectics of domination: racism and multiculturalism', in *The teeth are smiling: the persistence of racism in multicultural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, pp. 46-72.
- Virgona, C, Waterhouse, P, Sefton, R & Sanguinetti, J 2003, *Making experience work: generic skills through the eyes of displaced workers*, National Council for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), Adelaide.
- Walby, S 1988, 'Segregation in employment in social and economic theory', in S. Walby (ed.), *Gender segregation at work*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, pp. 14-28.
- Waters, M 1995, *Globalisation*, Routledge, London.
- Watson, I 1996, *Opening the glass door: overseas-born managers in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra.
- ____ 2000, 'Migrants and long-term unemployment', in S. Bertone & H. Casey (eds), *Migrants in the new economy: problems, perspectives and policies*, Workplace Studies Centre, Victoria University, Melbourne.
- Watson, I, Buchanan, J, Campbell, I & Briggs, C 2003, *Fragmented futures: new challenges in working life*, The Federation Press, Sydney.
- Watts, R 1993/4, 'Government and modernity: an essay in thinking governmentality', *Arena Journal*, vol. 2, pp. 103-57.
- Webber, M & Weller, S 2001, *Refashioning the rag trade: internationalising Australia's textiles, clothing and footwear industries*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney.
- Webber, M, Campbell, I & Fincher, R 1992, *Migrants in manufacturing*, AGPS, Canberra.

- Webster, E 1997, *Labour market programs: a review of the literature*, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne, Working Paper 23/97, MIAESR, Melbourne University, Melbourne.
- Wetherell, M & Potter, J 1992, *Mapping the language of racism: discourse and the legitimization of exploitation*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York.
- Wickert, R 1995, *No single measure: summary report (revised)*, Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), Canberra.
- Wickert, R & Baynham, M 1994, “‘Just like farmland and goldmines’: workplace literacies in an era of long-term unemployment’, in *Literacies and the workplace: a collection of original essays*, Faculty of Education, Deakin University, Geelong.
- Wickert, R & Kevin, M 1995, *No single measure: a survey of Australian adult literacy: the final report*, Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), Canberra.
- Williams, B 1987, ‘The standard of living: interests and capabilities’, in A. Sen (ed.), *The standard of living*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 94-102.
- Williams, C 1992, *Beyond industrial sociology: the work of men and women*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney.
- Wode, H 1976, ‘Developmental sequences in naturalistic L2 acquisition’, *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, vol. 11, pp. 1-13.
- Wooden, M 1990, *Migrant labour market status*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Wooden, M, VandenHeuvel, A, Cully, M & Curtain, R 2001, *Barriers to training for older workers and possible policy solutions*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs through the National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University of South Australia.
- Worth, T 1999, ‘Youth literacy and numeracy: our mutual obligation,’ Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, viewed 1 January 2004, <<http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/ministers/worth/ws190399.htm>>.

- Yeatman, A 1990, *Bureaucrats, technocrats, femocrats: essays on the contemporary Australian state*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- _____ 1992, *NESB migrant women and award restructuring: a case study of the clothing industry*, AGPS, Canberra.
- _____ 1994, *Postmodern revisionings of the political*, Routledge, New York.
- Yuval-Davis, N 1992, 'Fundamentalism, multiculturalism and women in Britain', in J. Donald & A. Rattansi (eds), 'Race', culture and difference, Sage Publications, London, pp. 278-91.