

Approaches to the idea of the ‘good teacher’ in vocational education and training

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Abstract

Notions of the ‘good teacher’ are common in the field of education research but, by and large, they focus on teachers who work in school education. The idea of the ‘good teacher’ in vocational education and training is less evident – both in everyday popular experience and in research. Yet the notion of the ‘good teacher’ establishes a moral claim about the professional culture of the teacher and the occupation-al culture that they serve which apply within vocational education as much as in school education. The idea of the ‘good teacher’ is political because it provides a basis for asserting the characteristics valued in different domains of vocational education and for defending particular teaching and learning traditions that are occupationally based. It establishes an anchor point for vocational teachers who are living the rapid reconfiguration of vocational education within the globalised knowledge economy, subject to intense commercial imperatives and oriented towards learning modes that reposition the teacher and the roles they are expected to play in a self-service learning context. This paper discusses the challenges of developing an approach to defining a good teacher in VET . It canvasses alternative perspectives from which the vocational teacher can be viewed and explores connections between pedagogical and occupational identity through the interplay of texts, contexts and experience.

Introduction: seeking the ‘good’ teacher in vocational education

In the changing context of vocational education and training, I wish to explore ideas of the norm of the ‘good teacher’ and examine how it is constructed within the vocational education and training (VET) sector. The view in the school sector is relatively coherent, but in the VET sector a number of differing viewpoints can be discerned.

In this paper I will visit some of these different viewpoints to explore the constructions of the teacher that they present, and will note some of the contradictions that emerge between them. The viewpoints explored will be those of professional status; occupational identity; policy and regulation; and teacher education. In order to provide a point of reference, I will also consider some views about the school teacher. I will take as a starting point the work of Stephen Toulmin, whose investigation of the history and historiography of Modernity offers insights into some of the viewpoints discussed.

I will briefly discuss some techniques of discourse analysis as a methodology for examining this material.

The paper draws on work in progress, and is intended to be indicative of some of the points of view rather than reporting comprehensively.

The current context of vocational education and training in Australia

The current context of VET is shaped by a number of factors. These include regulatory arrangements, such as the increasing use of short-term contracts; the requirement that vocational education meet the needs of industry bodies, with the consequent shift to a client relationship between enterprises and educational providers; and the push to adopt new teaching methods such as work-based learning and online learning. (The context will change again after the middle of 2005, when the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) is to be abolished; but it is not yet clear what the impact of this decision will be.)

Views about the role of teachers (and TAFE more broadly) in relation to industry can be seen in public documents such as strategy and policy documents published by ANTA and state/territory agencies.

The subject of the VET teacher as professional has been examined in the work of Terri Seddon, Clive Chappell, Kaye Schofield and others. A particular topic of attention in recent years has been the ‘deprofessionalisation’ of the teacher resulting from the increased proportion of casual staff, the greater attention paid to the wishes of industry, and other trends. The subsequent efforts to ‘reprofessionalise’ the VET work force have also been discussed. Teachers may see themselves in relation to their students, to their industry or occupational status, or to their professional standing.

The notion of ‘quality’ in vocational education and training emerges in documents such as the Australian Quality Training Framework, and in the literature of professional development. Prominent topics in this literature are the need to satisfy the requirements of industry, the capability of staff to undertake new methods of teaching, and issues of organisational change.

The pedagogy of new methodologies has been examined by international writers such as Gilly Salmon, as well as Australian writers and practitioners. World trends in the adoption of technologies, and the interest of governments in the use of technology to support the so-called ‘knowledge economy’, have led to widespread initiatives to introduce and promote online learning, in Australia as elsewhere. In the current arena of VET in Victoria, there is a strong trend to the use of technology and technology-supported learning. While some writers on technology support the value of teachers and teaching, this support is undermined by a recurring call for independent or autonomous learning.

Little discussion is to be found, however, about the intrinsic nature of the ‘good teacher’ in TAFE, especially as concerns the relationship between teacher and student. This notion is of great importance to complete the picture of the attributes needed by TAFE teachers at a time when individual learners and industry clients are developing higher expectations of good teaching and learning in TAFE.

TAFE students are extremely varied in characteristics; some undertake long award-bearing courses, while others wish to acquire a specific competency as quickly as possible. Some become actively part of the TAFE community, while others do not; and learning takes place at varied times and locations. Students’ characteristics have been examined in a number of studies, most recently in NCVET’s report on ‘Identifying the key factors affecting the chance of passing vocational education and training subjects’ (John, 2004).

In this environment, one can pose the question whether the teacher as a vital element of the learning process has been disregarded or under-valued. In order to do this, it is necessary first to ask whether the roles and values ascribed to the vocational teacher are consistent or differ

between various categories of writers, and whether they echo or differ from the roles and values ascribed to school teachers.

Contextualising the agendas of teaching and learning in VET

An examination of the subject of teachers' work needs to be placed in context. Of necessity, it is a political subject; as Connell (1995) points out, education is an expensive business, and the greater part of the budget goes to the salaries of teachers. The conservative fiscal attitudes of governments lead inevitably to constant review of the structure and extent of the teaching force.

At the same time, it is part of the teacher's role to encourage thinking, or at the very least to disseminate information. Connell (1995:110) further asserts that:

the global expansion of Western-style schooling has both created teachers as an international workforce and placed them at the centre of battle to impose, appropriate, and resist the culture produced in the core states of the world economy. If this analysis is correct, teachers are likely to be strategic participants in the emerging global struggle either to democratise the world system or to maintain it as a structure of inequality. A new order of complexity in educational politics, and a new range of possibilities, open up when we consider the meaning of global citizenship and the ways it can be brought into being.

Education is seen by many as a transformative process, as we shall see later in this paper in the account of Ashton-Warner (1971). A central question is whether education at the VET level continues to be a transformative process or whether it serves the need for skills building in the workforce at a more instrumental level. The role of teachers is under scrutiny not only in terms of the justifiability or otherwise of expenditure on salaries, but, more fundamentally, as agents of the maintenance or challenging of the political and social status quo. This aspect of concern is rarely the subject of overt debate outside the academy, however. Generally, the value of teachers is discussed in terms of 'standards', expressed in terms such as literacy levels or VCE results.

The vocational education and training sector is concerned more than ever today with providing a skilled workforce rather than with educating the whole person. The imperatives passed down from state and national governments are about education's contribution to national competitiveness within a globalised marketplace, rather than about the place of the individual within a society. Knowledge is seen as a commodity in that commercial setting. A succinct summing up of this attitude can be seen in a British example from the White Paper *Our competitive future: building the knowledge driven economy*, which

sets out the role it [the Government] and business need to play in improving the UK's competitiveness...In the global marketplace, knowledge, skills and creativity are needed above all to give the UK a competitive edge. These are the distinctive assets of a knowledge driven economy (Department of Trade and Industry, 1998).

The prominent use of the term 'knowledge driven economy' suggests that the educational sphere has taken up the goals and language of labour-market policies, as delineated by Korsgaard (1997), pushing other educational priorities into the background, in both school and adult education.

This view of the world prevails at the policy and regulatory level in Australia, as will be seen later in this paper, and therefore clearly has a strong influence on the ways in which teachers and teaching are valued and portrayed. Its influence can be seen in many of the directions of the VET sector.

Competency-based training, introduced in the early 1990s, replaced a more holistic curriculum with units of competency, assessing students as ‘competent’ or ‘not yet competent’ and with an emphasis on measurable outcomes. The Australian Quality Training Framework, dating from 2002, lays down detailed measures aimed at ensuring that VET programs and organisations meet the needs of their clients. The Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training is an approximately 200-hour course primarily intended to ensure that industry-based trainers have at least a basic knowledge of teaching techniques. Under the Australian Quality Training Framework it is the mandatory qualification for VET teachers and trainers; a Diploma of Education (the normal graduate qualification for teachers at primary, secondary and VET levels) is no longer accepted for this purpose.

There is nothing new in suggesting that a desire for accountability, a managerialist style, is exhibited in such initiatives. But in addition it is possible to detect, at a more basic level, a hunger for tidiness, a need for certainty.

There appears, then, to be a gulf between the transformative view of education, and that which sees it as a support for economic imperatives.

One way of understanding the nature of this gulf can be found in Stephen Toulmin’s re-examination of the development of the philosophies of Modernity, and the historiography of 20th century views about its development, in his book *Cosmopolis: the hidden agenda of modernity* (1990). In particular, I refer to the ‘quest for certainty’ which Toulmin discusses at length.

Toulmin chronicles the development of Modernity from the 17th century. He dates the pursuit of rationalism from Descartes; but notes two divergent streams of thinking emerging from the Middle Ages: this Cartesian rationalism, and the contrasting Renaissance humanist stream. The rationalist stream dominated from the mid-17th to the mid-20th century; but Toulmin argues cogently that philosophies (and philosophers) cannot be seen in isolation from their times; each of us develops our ideas within the context of the world we live in.

He links the ascendancy of rationalist thought in the 17th century to the chaos and torment of the Thirty Years’ War, and the ‘quest for certainty’ in thought as well as stability in daily life that accompanied and followed it. It is not surprising, Toulmin says, that those who live through such a period of turmoil long for certainty and predictability. A parallel can be drawn with the redrawing of boundaries in Europe after the First World War, and the continuing turmoil and shifts in balance of power that followed. The situation began to change, however, in the mid-20th century*, and, as Toulmin says,

At the present time what we see is a convergence of these two traditions. The domination of an ideal of rationality rather than a reasonableness has been receding, so that now we find people in all kinds of fields recognizing that the technicalities and mathematical formulations of that tradition need always to be looked at as contributing or failing to contribute to humane ideals and to humane achievements (Lifson, 1997).

For example, new discoveries in science, such as those in the fields of medicine and molecular biology, have brought a shift in thinking which means that it is no longer possible to deal with ‘facts’ without ‘values’. In medicine, in particular, science cannot be dissociated from ethics.

* The book was published just after the break-up of the Soviet Union, and before the rightward trend of western governments during the 1990s.

So, Toulmin proposes, ‘what we have to do is make the technical and the humanistic strands in modern thought work together more effectively than they have in the past’ (Lifson, 1997).

I would assert that in the field of vocational education, the two strands co-exist, but have not yet learned to work together. The rationalist view drives the regulatory level, in my opinion, seeking to impose frameworks that give consistent, predictable, quantifiable results. While efficiency and responsibility are important, an over-insistence on these aspects falls into the trap noted by Toulmin (1990:201) as follows:

‘... we may recall the comment on social and political affairs made by that humane, grumpy, but normally clearheaded commentator, Walter Lippmann, which distils much of what has come to light in our own inquiry. “To every human problem,” he said, “there is a solution that is simple, neat, and *wrong*”; and that is as true of intellectual as it is of practical problems. The seduction of High Modernity lay in its abstract neatness and theoretical simplicity: both of these features blinded the successors of Descartes to the unavoidable complexities of concrete human experience.

Many, if not most, teachers, it can be argued, are well aware of the complexity of human experience, and the variability of human character, and base their teaching styles on this recognition. Arnold and Ryan (2003:11) argue strongly for the central importance of this complexity:

The contexts for learning now are recognizably challenging and need to be understood in all their diversity and complexity. This means that interpersonal relationships, their structure, their function, their mutability and their significance in learning contexts have to be acknowledged. This emphasis recognizes that knowledge can be acquired within dynamic contexts which shape meanings in particular ways. We need to know how learners engage (or disengage) with knowledge and contexts and how emotional connectedness is enhanced. In the same way, there is a need to understand the reasons for student disaffection. There is scope for research into teachers’ enthusiasm, their capacity to engage both with students and knowledge, their attunement to learners and their expertise in discipline and pedagogy. This is important because in school learning contexts, teachers are powerful role models and have the capacity to create significant intellectual and emotional connectedness between learners and knowledge.

If this is the case, it would be a great mistake to limit the usefulness of teaching to its quantifiable aspects. On the other hand, since we live in a world of finite budgets and other resources, it would be equally wrong to limit the value of teaching to its ‘art’, separated from practical considerations.

In the remainder of this paper I will scan some of the points of view about teachers and teaching. I will first briefly describe my approach to studying the literature, though the scope of this paper precludes a detailed analysis here.

Methodological approach: discourse analysis

Discourse analysis takes as its starting point the belief that every speaker or writer has a particular view of the world, which may not be explicitly stated, but which can be discovered by analysing the words and symbols used. Its roots may be found in fields such as sociology, ethnology and linguistics. It is in fact difficult to define precisely because of this broad range of foundations, and a variety of approaches different philosophical standpoints exist.

Stubbs (1983:1) describes it as:

- (a) concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance
- (b) concerned with the interrelationships between language and society and
- (c) concerned with the interaction of dialogic properties of everyday communication.

Gee (1999) distinguishes between ‘Discourse’ and ‘discourse’. The former is used in reference to particular groups with which an individual may be affiliated (e.g. Australians, bricklayers, movie-goers, left-handed people). Any individual will, of course, be at home in a number of Discourses. The latter refers to conversations within small groups which do not represent an identifiable group in this way.

From the various schools of discourse analysis, there are two which I consider especially suitable for the subject under discussion.

A powerful form is Critical Discourse Analysis,

‘...a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately to resist social inequality’ (van Dijk).

This approach is of interest in a study of the values embodied in various Discourses.

A technique of discourse analysis which is particularly applicable when studying the development of Discourses over a period of time is Foucauldian genealogical analysis.

Like Critical Discourse Analysis, Foucauldian genealogical analysis is concerned with power, but in this case it is based in the triad discourse/power/knowledge (Carabine, 2001), which exhibit dynamic reciprocal relationships rather than a linear progression.. Unlike Critical Discourse Analysis, it does not provide a clear step-by-step process, but a conceptual approach which is used in different ways by different researchers. Genealogy, in this sense, describes ‘the procedures, practices, apparatuses and institutions involved in the production of discourse and knowledges, and their power effects’ (Carabine, 2001:276). It thus aims to trace the history of a Discourse and the associated regimes of power and knowledge, thereby adding to our understanding about the nature of power and knowledge today.

The texts discussed in this paper, then, form part of an attempt to examine the Discourses reflected in the various perspectives nominated.

The teacher at work in the school

Close-up views of the vocational teacher at work are few. For this reason, and also to provide the foundation for a framework for comparison, I will begin by looking at how teachers in schools are portrayed.

Certain characteristics appear consistently in depictions of school teachers, in fiction and in accounts of teachers’ experience. Prominent among them are respect for the child, attentive and empathic listening, relating formal learning to the child’s experience of life, demonstration through role modelling and anecdote, and care for the development of the child. In one way or another, these appear time and again throughout the literature. I will take a couple of examples (one factual, one fictional) to illustrate this point.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s account of her experiences teaching Maori and pakeha children in the early primary years in New Zealand gives a fascinating picture of teaching from the inside – the mind of the teacher. Ashton-Warner’s passion for education is apparent in every word,

in its most fundamental sense of drawing out that which is within, using the children's inner life (thoughts, pictures...) as the stuff of their learning. Her approach is summarised by Sir Herbert Read in the introduction:

The school should be conceived, in the author's phrase, as "a crèche of living where people can still be changed," and where creative activities are the agents of this change. If we want humanity to have a future – a future of any kind – this is all that matters (Ashton-Warner, 1971:12).

Ashton-Warner's approach could reasonably be described as 'lived philosophy'. In teaching reading and writing to children who are often from violent, abusive homes, she allows them to write and draw about what frightens and disturbs them, integrating the cognitive processes with empathic interaction, creating a safe space where the children can acknowledge their own and their peers' difficulties in a matter of fact way. Nature walks are used as opportunities for learning biology and mathematics (for example, by counting the fronds on a fern). Her central premise is the importance of the 'integrated personality', building 'the bridge from the inner world outward' (Ashton-Warner, 1971:84). She stresses the importance of organic teaching, noting the 'stream of children's inexorable creativeness' (Ashton-Warner, 1971:82), and is able to channel destructive into constructive activity. For example, if a child kicks or bites, she will give it clay or chalk with which to make something.

A fictional work containing a vivid portrait of a teacher at work is *A kestrel for a knave* (Hines, 1969) (more often known as *Kes* since the film version was released under that title). The book portrays the life of an unhappy boy, with a difficult home and few friends. The child, Billy, is mocked and belittled at school and at home, and is fast becoming destructive. The central focus is the impact on his life of his relationship with the bird Kes. A secondary positive influence is his teacher, Mr Farthing, who is contrasted with the insensitive teacher Mr Crossley. Mr Crossley humiliates Billy, calling the information he has offered 'idiotic'; and he crushes creativity and activity in the class: 'his gaze raked the class, killing the sound in each face' (Hines, 1969:55).

By contrast, Mr Farthing encourages the boys to bring personal stories into the class and to build learning on their own experience. He asks the boys to think of something interesting about themselves; when one is doubtful whether the incident he has thought of is interesting, Mr Farthing tells him that 'it must be if you remember it'. After the boy recounts an incident about tadpoles, Mr Farthing 'allowed them a pause for assimilation. Then, before their involvement could descend into local gossip, he used it to try to inspire an emulator' (Hines, 1969:75). Mr Farthing clearly respects each boy's sense of himself and the value of experience; he is respected in turn by the boys, and uses the power generated by this respect to create a 'learning space' in the boys' minds. He elicits from the troubled boy the story of the hawk he is caring for, and builds trust by showing attention and interest, questioning to check his understanding of what Billy says, 'watching Billy all the time as though he was a hawk, and that any sudden movement, or rasp or chalk would make him bate from the side of the desk' (Hines, 1969:82).

Turning now to a book of guidance for teachers, in a now venerable text, Boomer (1982a) offers ten strategies for good teaching. The foundation principle of the book is that teachers, who have power and responsibility for teaching, should use them in ways which 'allow children to exercise their own powers and responsibilities' (Boomer, 1982b:3). These can be summarised as follows.

1. Apprenticeship – the teacher demonstrates how to read and make meaning, and accompanies the demonstration with anecdote about his/her own experience of the subject.
2. Bushcraft – what might now be called ‘information literacy’: knowing how to find and use texts and other resources.
3. Telling secrets – sharing the ‘underground of school culture’, talking about the journey of learning.
4. Transforming – stretching minds by transforming a topic from, say, talk to writing.
5. Connecting – making connections by means of anecdote, metaphor and analogy.
6. Imagining – finding meaning in learning by imagining what it will bring.
7. Guessing – encouraging students to frame better hypotheses by trial and error.
8. Asking – recognising the importance of questioning in learning.
9. Producing – encouraging students to build meaning rather than passively receiving.
10. Reflecting – allowing time to reflect, confirm learning and gain perspective.

If we consider the school teacher’s role as one of helping students to understand something of how the world works and what is their place in it, all these glimpses of teachers relate strongly to Toulmin’s (1990:186) first strand of modernity, which values ‘the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely’.

The views of school teachers presented here are remarkably consistent. But I will now turn to some of the ways in which the vocational teacher is discussed, where far more varied pictures emerge.

Professional identity

The status of the vocational teacher as professional has been under debate in recent years. The fear has been expressed in some quarters that teachers are being deprofessionalised; in others that it is thought that changes in education are reprofessionalising teachers. In examining theories of professionalism, Seddon (1997) concludes that a number of these theories support the assertion of deprofessionalisation. This is evidenced by ‘the growing disparity between educational and other occupations in terms of pay, status and conditions’ and the fact that they are ‘more subject to managerial regulation, less autonomous and self-regulating, less involved with educational decision making, and less well paid and satisfied’ (Seddon, 1997:231).

The advent of flexible learning, and in particular online learning, poses further challenges to the professionalism of teachers. Teaching online prompts many teachers to reflect at a deep level on the way in which their teaching approaches embody their professional values, and many find it enriching and stimulating. At the same time, however, the pressure of reduced budgets and the inability of teaching awards and performance reporting systems to adequately reflect anything but classroom teaching means that many teachers feel that their work is unrecognised (Palmieri, 2004). As Schofield, Walsh, & Melville (2000:8) report, ‘on the one hand [teachers] have a heightened sense of professionalism deriving from their involvement in online VET while organisational pressures seem to challenge their sense of professionalism and their professional identity’.

Examination of public documents such as policies and strategies brings to light the subtle ways in which the role of teachers is undermined. While, for example, large-scale professional development initiatives would appear to value and strengthen the teaching profession, rhetoric such as the call for independent or autonomous learning which has been prevalent in recent years in fact undermines this value, by implying that teachers are less than vital to learning (Office of Post Compulsory Education Training and Employment, 2000).

A feature of vocational education today is the constant call for ‘innovation’, supported by funding to identify and promote innovative practices in teaching and learning. This has profound implications for the teacher’s professional identity. As Chappell (2003:8) notes,

A common feature of [commentaries on new ways of working in education and training] is to suggest that when education and training practitioners are asked to “do things differently” in their everyday practices they are being called on to become different practitioners. That is, to have different understandings of their role in education and training, to have different relationships with learners, to conceptualise their professional and vocational knowledge differently, to alter their relationship with their organisation, to change their understanding of who they are in the new education and training landscape. In short, to change their identity at work.

Chappell (2003) suggests that changes in regulatory frameworks and other government-driven changes are likely to disturb the organisational cultures of public and private sector organisations. He suggests that the organisational culture of TAFE has in the past been built around public service and concepts of ‘public good’, but that the development of a business orientation has changed the culture to one similar to that of the private sector. In such a culture, he suggests, VET professionals must bridge the divide between the worlds of work and of education; but they must also bridge the divide between the private and the public sector. He concludes, however, that many VET practitioners employed in the public sector still adhere to values associated with vocational skills development and public service.

Judyth Sachs is one writer who overtly acknowledges the competing discourses about teachers and teaching, and specifically about teachers’ professionalism. She contrasts the idea of ‘democratic professionalism’, arising from the profession itself and incorporating notions of collaboration and cooperation, with ‘managerial professionalism’, which applies private sector business values such as efficiency, accountability and control to the education sector. Among the paradoxes which she describes as emerging from these competing discourses is the fact that ‘the teaching profession is being exhorted to be autonomous while at the same time it is under increasing surveillance by politicians and the community to be more accountable and to maintain standards’ (Sachs, 1999). A further, linked paradox which I would identify is that teachers are required to be accountable through increasingly detailed planning and record keeping, while at the same time they are exhorted to foster independence, so-called ‘autonomous’ learning and the building of learning communities among their students.

Littler (1985) notes that work has three levels of meaning: economic, social and personal. But ‘work’ can become invested with moral qualities, so that the economic meaning becomes entwined with the social meaning. For the individual, work can become a measure of one’s worth as a human being.

Littler (1985:7) further suggests that ‘the older, traditional professions were permeated by an ethic of “service”, but the newer professions of engineers and designers are permeated by a different ethos – one of “efficiency”, “reliability” and “quality control”’. As far as teaching is

concerned, an attempt to make this shift can be seen in the regulatory frameworks discussed below, but is resisted by teachers themselves.

An attempt to bring managerial concepts of performance measurement together with the views of teachers about their work resulted in two publications, MacGraw & Peoples (1996a) and MacGraw & Peoples (1996b), a set of performance measure for teaching and learning in VET derived from consultations with teachers, and a companion volume which allows the teachers to speak for themselves about their work. The latter volume reveals an awareness of the requirements of accountability, coupled with a strong focus on the importance of the way the teacher relates to students.

A union perspective provides a summary of an industrial position on professional status:

The status of TAFE teachers is linked to a number of issues, including industry and community perceptions of teachers and the quality of teaching, support for TAFE teachers from their employers, salaries and the maintenance of manageable workloads and satisfying work; teachers being well qualified for their positions, including current qualifications in technical/vocational areas and in teaching skills; and job security. TAFE teachers must be given increased access to professional development based on a set of principles including: increased funding from both federal and state governments for professional development programs; programs to be available in a range of modes, including accredited education programs that lead to tertiary qualifications; and teachers to be supported to undertake such work (Hewett, 2003).

One of the few Australian studies to look at the characteristics of TAFE teachers (Corben & Thomson, 2003) investigated the practice of eighteen teachers within one institute, on the premise that the role of educators is vital to VET.

The study showed that excellent teachers have the capacity to respond effectively to differences in learner needs, curriculum or situation. They are able to draw selectively from an extensive repertoire of resources and strategies in order to motivate learners and to encourage active learning. They give a high priority to organising and structuring the learning process so that theory is integrated with workplace practice and activities are sequenced in meaningful, holistic ways. What may appear simple to a casual observer is a complex process that incorporates planning, implementation and evaluation. ... The fourth theme concerns personal attributes, beliefs and values. Individual temperament, interests and values often lead people in their career choices and, for the teachers involved in this research, the common link is the passion they share for learning and for helping others to learn and reach their potential. Beliefs in the transformative nature of education and about the privilege of 'touching people's lives' are common among this group (Corben & Thomson, 2003:2).

Attributes were discussed under the following headings:

- Learner focus
- Technical knowledge and currency
- Expertise in teaching and learning methodologies
- Personal attributes and values
- Influences on teacher development.

These are useful headings, and further research will consider the emphasis placed on them by students as well as teachers. The teachers interviewed by Corben and Thomson strongly value and see as a privilege the ability to make a difference to students' lives (see, for example, p.

34). This position is echoed in other studies: for example, ‘the successes, when you’ve made a difference, make up for the failures’ (Palmieri, 2004:45). It is not clear, however, whether students in TAFE reciprocate the value; this is an obvious area for further research.

Occupational identity

I have referred above to Clive Chappell’s discussion of the need for teachers to span the gulf between the worlds of work and of education. Teachers in vocational education must not only know about teaching; they must know the industries they are teaching about. Most teachers work or have worked in those industries. As well as their identity as a teacher, they have an identity as a chef, a plumber, an information technology specialist or a child-care worker.

Discussing changes in the construction of vocational teachers’ work in Finland, Heikkinen (2000:9) summarises the traditional occupational identity as follows:

- Master/Craftsman in his/her occupational field
- Member of occupational network
- Gate-keeper to the occupation
- Guide to the occupation
- Promoter of entrepreneurship
- Promoter of the scientification of the occupation.

This is not dissimilar to the Australian experience. Vocational teachers were (and still are) expected to have a background in their industry field, and to keep their knowledge of the industry up to date. Part-time teachers often continue to work in their industry. Until the 1990s, subject networks allowed teachers to share experiences and expertise. In many cases, teachers’ networks of contacts within the industry opened avenues for employment to their students. And in the traditional apprenticeship system, the teacher was expected to pass on the cultural norms of the industry as well as the vocational skills.

The parallel with the Finnish experience can again be drawn in considering the changes that have taken place in the teacher’s occupational identity.

Parallel with the transformation of vocational institutions into multi-functional colleges and polytechnics and substitution of teachers’ occupational identities by theoretical and technological expertise, vocational pedagogy became substituted by managerial skills and expertise in creating effective learning environments. An indicator of the contradictory development are the changes in relations between VET and the working life. Until the 1970s vocational teachers and institutes developed their relations to workinglife directly, without bureaucracy, but since the 1980s representative and indirect mechanisms were constructed both at the national and the local level... Instead of being proponents of their occupation, teachers are becoming providers of education and training services; instead of being co-definers of occupations and occupational life-forms, vocational institutions are becoming enterprises satisfying companies’ training (Heikkinen, 2000:10).

An interesting contradiction exists at present in the Australian situation. As in Finland, and as shown in this paper, there is in managerial and regulatory circles a focus on teachers’ provision of educational services in an accountable manner, and an emphasis on the ability to use new teaching methods, especially those incorporating technology. Large-scale government-funded professional development initiatives such as Reframing the Future and LearnScope have been in place for some years to support this emphasis. At the same time,

there is a call for VET institutions to meet the needs of industry; and yet, the call is for industry to invest in training rather than for institutions to train themselves to meet these needs – see, for example, ANTA (1998).

This indicates a degree of confusion in the view of occupational identity at the broader level at least. Further investigation is needed to elucidate the views of teachers, and to ascertain whether these views are consistent across the whole spectrum or differ between teaching disciplines.

The regulatory framework

The spectrum of the teacher's work in VET is broad, and becoming broader. It encompasses the design and preparation of teaching and learning materials in various media, administrative and organisational tasks, and marketing and liaison work with current and prospective industry clients (though not all teachers may be involved in all of these). National and state agencies guide aims and processes for vocational education through a variety of frameworks, guidelines and policy documents.

VET state/territory and national systems have for many years enthusiastically embraced the idea of performance measures for the activities of their various entities and practitioners. These encompass statistical systems such as AVETMISS (the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard). Such a system must of necessity be concerned with numerical information such as number of staff and students, teaching hours and competency completions.

A more recently introduced system, the Australian Quality Training Framework, lays down extremely detailed guidelines about institutional practices, staff qualifications, processes and procedures related to training. Though it talks about training and trainers, it is especially interesting that the words 'teach' and 'teacher' are not used at all. The general tenor of the document is about the need to meet the needs of clients (i.e. industry), and to be efficient and accountable. It is certainly useful in ensuring that teaching institutions, and individuals within them, understand what is required of them, and that students are treated fairly and have avenues of recourse when they are dissatisfied. Nevertheless, it is hard to read into it, even by implication, a recognition that good teaching is at the core of an educational institution.

As an example of a state framework, I will look briefly at the *Flexible Learning Strategy for TAFE in Victoria* (Office of Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment, 2000), whose language reveals an industrial or managerial view of vocational education.

The document (Office of Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment, 2000:3), asserts the need for changes in training. These changes are related clearly to changes in industry and workforce composition:

The demands of the new information revolution have reversed the typical, machine-driven production process. New knowledge workers – growing in number to become the majority of the overall workforce – are being required to handle such a variety of different tasks that it is becoming difficult to define with precision their skill needs.

The workers who remain on production lines have to be multi-skilled, so they can switch from one task to another at short notice...

Those workers who are not trained to meet the changed needs, or are unable to adapt, inevitably risk long-term unemployment...

It is an unfortunate fact that workers with low levels of education and training or limited English are precisely the ones who participate least in processes of skills renewal. Levels of

literacy in the community leave no room for complacency. A major challenge is to assist people to overcome these deficiencies.

Such a view of a changing society strongly reflects Toulmin's technical strand of thought, and leaves little room for the more humanistic strand

In the same document, phrasing such as 'the adoption and roll-out of national competency standards, training packages, and a new emphasis on assessment' together with 'the adoption of the New Apprenticeships system' and 'the development and roll-out of a quality framework' implies a juggernaut of regulatory processes aimed at producing conformity of output standards – a production-line quality assurance system. It is notable that excellence of teaching does not feature here.

A rather different view can be seen in the work of an influential contributor to Australian VET literature, Kaye Schofield. Schofield asserts that 'the sustainability of the TAFE system is ultimately dependent on the competence of the TAFE workforce. It is the core asset of staff competence that will remain the single most valuable source of future value – process innovation and improvement quality teaching, learning and assessment.' (Schofield, 2002:4).

Schofield posits the importance of 'intangible assets' as part of the infrastructure of education, categorising them as *people assets*, *internal assets* (organisational structures, systems, processes and practices) and *external assets* (relationships such as those between training providers, government bodies, students, industry and communities). Though noting that people are not property and are therefore not strictly speaking organisational assets, Schofield includes them because of 'the capacity of individual employees to act individually (or in teams) in different situations in ways that enable desired future performance' (Schofield, 2002:16).

In discussing a further intangible asset, vocational teaching, learning and assessment, Schofield notes a far stronger emphasis in recent years on 'certain business outcomes – economy, efficiency, "value for money" and quantitative performance measurement – than on the purpose, organisation, quality or outcomes of the work being undertaken' (Schofield, 2002:23). She points out that recent development, including the importance of learning and knowledge creation, have brought teaching, learning and assessment to a new importance.

In discussing the place of teaching, Schofield quotes Terri Seddon on the essential nature of teaching: '...teaching differs from other work because the core business of teaching is not to produce fixed products – so many facts absorbed, so many competencies achieved. Rather, its object is learning. Its primary outcome is to develop in students an expansive capacity to learn and to continue learning through life (Seddon, 1999, in Schofield, 2002:26). In the same passage, Seddon refers to the processes of co-production by teaching and student which lead to increased capacities for social practice.

Schofield is in no doubt about the importance of staff (teachers and others) for TAFE. As she says, their capability 'is the single most importance source of future value in the TAFE system. Public investment needs to reflect this reality. But it is also important to bear in mind Lev's caution that... "expenditures do not necessarily create assets. Only when the benefit of such expenditures... exceeds costs is an asset created"' (Lev, 2000, in Schofield, 2002:31).

At the regulatory level, then, it seems that a multiplicity of views of the teacher may be seen. While the more instrumental view has dominated in recent years, it remains to be seen whether Schofield's commentary, and others like it, lead to a change in perspective at the government and managerial level.

Teachers' training and professional development

As part of an exercise intended to foster debate about some of the conceptual and philosophical ideas that support the TAFE system, the Victorian TAFE Association (the peak body for TAFE institutes) commissioned a discussion paper looking at issues surrounding the professionalisation of VET teachers. In discussing the value of teachers, the paper notes the tangible and non-tangible benefits of education to the individual and the community, and the fundamental importance of the quality of teachers to education systems. TAFE teachers, it suggests, are undervalued, and notes in support that

‘the fact that in common parlance the word teacher refers generically to “school teacher” unless otherwise stated is possibly indicative of the inferior status accorded to VET educators. Perhaps a further example of this is the fact that school teachers can and often do teach in VET institutions but VET teachers cannot teach in schools’ (Thomas, 2001:9).

The discussion paper approaches the subject of the qualities and needs of VET teachers under three headings: technical versus pedagogical skill; academic versus VET teaching/knowledge; and who are VET teachers and what do they do? (Thomas, 2001). The first heading notes that technical skills, i.e. those directly concerned with the practice of the vocation concerned, have been valued more highly than pedagogical skills. (This is a contrary view to that noted in the section of this paper on occupational identity). Along with this goes a de-emphasising of teacher training, culminating in the current situation in which a Certificate IV (Workplace assessor/trainer) is the required qualification rather than a degree followed by a Diploma of Education. However, the paper suggests, both ‘good teaching’ and generic skills such as team-work, communication and critical thinking are equally important. This is borne out by consultation with employers. On the subject of academic versus VET teaching/knowledge, the paper notes the debate which has followed the introduction of competency-based teaching and training packages. One side of this debate asserts that these initiatives reduce the role of teacher to a simplistic one of imparter and assessor of skills; the other side believes that they increase the teacher’s professionalism and the quality of learning by giving greater flexibility.

Conclusion

This brief scan of some of the literature relating to vocational teaching in Australia necessarily gives a superficial and incomplete picture. It nevertheless offers an indication that both of Toulmin’s strands of Modernity, the technical and the humanistic, are represented. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the technical strand is to be seen in the literature of government and regulation, while the humanistic strand is more evident in the writing of those who work with teachers and students at closer quarters. There are other viewpoints not represented in this paper. I believe that there is room for further investigation of the subject, partly through the literature but especially by investigation of the views of teachers and students themselves.

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