The Victorian ‘Principles of Learning and Teaching’ Program: Accountability Process or Innovation?

Abstract
During 2004 the Department of Education and Training in Victoria introduced the Principles of Learning and Teaching (PoLT) program for curriculum leaders in primary and secondary schools. This paper locates PoLT within the international accountability and pedagogy frames and critiques the way the program has been packaged and presented to teachers in schools. One secondary school in the outer Eastern suburbs of Melbourne has adapted this approach to pedagogy by not only having classroom teachers consider the principles, but by also involving the leadership team to reflect on their own professional practice in the development of a productive culture to foster learning for both staff and students. Through this adaptation of the program, the more instrumental elements of PoLT are lessened and the value and potential of the program is heightened. The authors conclude that while the core aim of PoLT is to engage Victorian teachers in powerful discussions about pedagogy, further consideration of the way the program implementation should occur would be beneficial.

Education is – will we ever learn? – no mechanical affair, and yet, astonishingly, much of the field and the public still seems to proceed upon the assumption that if we only make the appropriate adjustments – in the curriculum, teaching, learning, administration... ‘standards’ – then those test scores will soar’ (Pinar, 2001, pp. 13-14, cited in Reeder, 2005, p. 247).

Introduction
This paper focuses on the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DE&T) initiative about teacher pedagogy called ‘Principles of Learning and Teaching’ (PoLT). In order to provide helpful critique, differentiation is made in this discussion between the ‘structure’, the ‘intention’ and school-level ‘process’ of this program. If it can be assumed that PoLT was developed from the Productive Pedagogies project from Queensland (Lingard, Hayes and Mills, 2003; Gore, Ladwig and King, 2004; Gore, Griffiths and Ladwid, 2004), then it might also be assumed that the official aim, or intention of the bureaucrats within DE&T who developed PoLT was to was encourage Victorian teachers discuss pedagogy. This paper critiques the PoLT approach to pedagogy in a number of ways including locating it within both international accountability and pedagogy frames. The structure underlying ‘Principles of Learning and Teaching’ (PoLT) program is clearly based on the ‘train-the-trainer’ model which is questioned, in this paper, in terms of teacher professionalism and creativity. The teacher manuals and tools for assessing teachers’ pedagogy are also considered in the context of a discussion of paradigm. The use of such terminology as ‘survey,’ ‘data’ and ‘questionnaire’ clearly implies a positivist or post-positivist paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, pp. 191-215) and a traditional
science research context. PoLT’s location in this paradigm is considered in relation to chaos and complexity theories as well as postmodernism. Program ‘delivery’ through education faculties in universities is also of interest and the increasingly ambiguous role of academics is briefly discussed. Implications of PoLT implementation at the school level, or process is then discussed in relation to both the intention and the structure of the program. The paper then focuses on one school\(^1\) and how it saw potential in PoLT for powerful professional discussions about pedagogy. Using their professional judgement, the ‘trained’ PoLT teachers from Melba Valley High School adapted their ‘instruction’ from PoLT ‘training’ to develop a highly successful professional learning approach for their professional colleagues. Finally, the paper points to key issues requiring further consideration.

**Methodological Stance**

In keeping with postmodernism we do not present this paper in terms of a totalising grand narrative or truth claim, but as a reaction to the certainties and rationality of modernism (Alvesson, 2002). We seek to be reflexive (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000) and therefore need to say who we are in this research. One of the authors, an academic, was involved in preparing the tender and presenting the PoLT program in the first year of its operation. The other two authors attended the PoLT program as participants and, rigorously questioned it – in terms of the program content, values and processes - as they drove the two hours each day to and from the ‘training’ program. As recent graduates of Masters level degrees, these two authors are now looking to enrolling as PhD students. This study served to inform us all and develop our thinking – particularly our interest in critical pedagogy and critique. Comments from two people, in particular, have provided a guide for the tenet of this paper. Firstly, Henry Giroux (2003) said:

> [Writing allowed]…me to speak to many audiences and extend the meaning of what it means to make one’s pedagogy more public. It also allowed me to define myself as something other than a traditional academic, which always conjured up for me a kind of professional posturing defined through the degraded ritual of being disinterested, specialized, apolitical, and removed from public life. Writing allowed me to break out of the academic microcosm, take sides, fight for a position, push against the grain, and say unsettling things – all those attributes that make one “un-cool,” as one of my colleagues recently suggested of those who avoid the cleverness of academic posturing and happen to believe that intellectuals actually have some public responsibilities in fashioning a politics of resistance and hope (p. 99-100).

And secondly, Stuart Hall’s distinction between ‘academic’ and ‘intellectual’ work:

> Academic work is inherently conservative inasmuch as it seeks, first to fulfil the relatively narrow and policed goals and interests of a given discipline or profession, and second, to fulfil the increasingly corporatized mission of higher education; intellectual work, in contrast, is relentlessly critical, self-critical, and potentially revolutionary, for its aims to critique, change, and even destroy institutions, disciplines, and professionals that rationalize exploitation, inequality, and injustice. Both academic and intellectual work are political, though differently so’ (1992, cited in Olson and Worsham, p. 7).

\(^1\) Melba Valley High School is a pseudonym
Contextualising PoLT: The Accountability Culture
In this paper the potential relationship between the PoLT program and the measurement of teachers against competency standards is raised. Consideration of the accountability culture in which the PoLT initiative was developed, as well as the mismatch between its structure, intention and process, gives rise to this as a potential concern. The authors wonder about the longer term bureaucratic plans for PoLT and have identified three key questions.

1. What ‘accountability plans’ will follow the implementation of the train-the-trainer program?
2. Will teachers be assessed as competent or not against a set of pedagogy standards based on PoLT?
3. To what extent are these ‘Principles of Learning and Teaching’ (PoLT) supported by contemporary theory and research?

The PoLT program is part of the current teacher reform process in Victoria that reflects a broader culture of accountability. This culture is discussed here to provide an appropriate context for the discussion of the program.

Australian education is influenced by policy and practice as in the United Kingdom and the United States where levels of government control have increased significantly (Tickle, 2000; Cochrane-Smith, 2001; Sachs, 2003; Trotman, 2005; White, 2006). The pervasive education discourse in Australia, led by politicians and education bureaucrats, has focused on a perceived need for accountability, testing, benchmarks, standards, increased teacher professionalism and compliance (White, 2004). The standards, or ‘competence’ initiatives in the U.K. have long been discredited by education academics (Furlong and Maynard, 1995; Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting and Whitty, 2000; Tickle, 2000). While the focus of the ‘No Child Left Behind’ Act (United States Congress, 2001) is on student learning, it nevertheless belongs to the same accountability discourse as those above. It has been widely and harshly criticised (Mathis, 2003; Meier, Kohn, Darling Hammond, Sizer, and Woods, 2004).

Bill Pinar, a significant education and curriculum scholar from the US, warns of the effect of this discourse on teachers:

If we employ, for instance, that bureaucratic language in which teaching becomes not an occasion for creativity and dissent and, above all, individuality, but rather, the “implementation” of others’ “objectives,” the process of education is mutilated (Pinar, 2004, p. 25).

Echoing Pinar’s concerns, Andy Hargreaves and his colleagues have suggested that the outcomes and standards movement in education would eventually lead to teacher shortages as well as with a loss of creativity in the classroom (Hargreaves, Earl et al., 2001). Woods and Jeffrey support this view and comment that the wider educational context in the United Kingdom ‘suppresses the creativity of the teaching profession’ (1996, cited in Craft, 2001, p. 10) whereas in the United States teacher creativity and autonomy is undermined (Orek, 2004, p. 57) by ‘performative’ or external control, surveillance and measurement of the work of teachers.

Train-the-Trainer Model
The PoLT program was developed to be implemented via the train-the-trainer model which is widely used in the health field to ‘train’ workers and semi-professionals into new procedures and approaches. The train-the-trainer model (Rolheiser, Ross and Hogoboam-Gray, 1999; Bickel and Hattrop, 1995; Ross, 1990) has seen many incarnations in Victorian education, and teachers are familiar with the model. Essentially, it involves experienced teachers being ‘trained’ in programs by attending sessions of ‘instruction,’ where manuals are worked through by participants. These representatives then return to their schools and deliver the program of instruction to their colleague teachers. Rolheiser, Ross and Hogoboam-Gray (1999) report on three advantages of this model:

1. It is economic in that in-servicing a few teachers may accomplish, at reduced cost, the same result as providing instruction for all teachers;
2. It supports the development of collaborative school cultures which enable reforms to be implemented more effectively;
3. Teachers talk about their practice which provides opportunity for them to identify gaps in their knowledge and the need for change in practice (p. 3).

They identify four disadvantages of the train-the-trainer model:

1. It may elevate the status of the teacher chosen to be trained, and reduce that of their colleagues;
2. teachers chosen to be trained may resist the role of expert and not be able to overcome teacher resistance to reform;
3. Teachers may use a didactic approach to program implementation on return to school;
4. Chosen teachers may founder due to poor selection of trainers, lack of skill in the role and too little time (p. 3).

The use of the term ‘training’ rather than ‘learning’ also sheds light on this approach to teachers. Senge, Kleiner et al (1999), clarify this distinction:

The word ‘training’ originally meant ‘directing the course of the plant’: to be trained is to be controlled. But the word ‘learning’ derives from the Indo-European leis, a noun meaning ‘track’ or ‘furrow’. To ‘learn’ means to enhance capacity through experience gained...Learning always occurs over time and in ‘real life’ contexts...this type of learning may be difficult to control, but it generates knowledge that lasts: enhanced capacity for effective action in settings that matter to the learner...Training, by contrast, is typically episodic and detached (p. 24).

To control teachers by training them in how they should be teaching, rather than supporting their learning is exemplified by the metaphor of the ‘blueprint’, which is the overarching organiser of the DE&T reform agenda, in which PoLT is situated. A blueprint is a plan – someone else’s plan – that is to be followed. An architect draws up the detailed plan, while the workers – the builders, plumbers, tilers, etc enact or implement the plan. Unlike the Tasmanian experience of extensive consultation about Essential Learnings (Kilpatrick, Barrett and Jones, 2003; Hayes, 2003), in Victoria, a different, untrusting view of teachers appears to have taken hold. Ensuring that programs and the values of bureaucrats are adopted in a top down way is reminiscent of ‘teacher proofing’ movement in the US in the 1960s. The Early Years Literacy program is perhaps the worst example of this cultural value in Victoria. The debt the DE&T owes to Hill and Crevola (1999) for this attitude is significant. This seemingly entrenched attitude towards teachers leads to questions about underlying assumptions of PoLT and the reform agenda of the DE&T articulated in its Blueprint. Firstly, are
teachers professionals? Or are they paraprofessionals who need to be trained in procedures and approaches?

Judyth Sachs (2003) comments that, ‘The idea of professionals and professionalism has such common currency in everyday language that the explanatory power of these concepts is becoming meaningless…we are left asking what relevance does the concept have for teachers individually and collectively? (p. 1)’ She also differentiates between ‘old’ notions of professionalism and ‘new’ ones, particularly in relation to teaching (2003). For an illustration of the use of ‘professional’ as ‘spin,’ we need look no further than the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) who use the term ‘professional’ extensively. This organization claims as its raison d’être that it ‘is an independent representative professional body for the teaching profession’ (2004) but its mandate, established by an act of parliament, is actually to implement a politically driven competency standards agenda and manage teacher registration (White, 2004). The Australian Education Union earlier this year said that ‘The continued incapacity of the institute [VIT] to be an advocate for the profession is to be condemned’ (Leung, 2006). Similarly, the VIT has been criticised by the Victorian Principal’s Association, the Victorian Association of State Secondary principals and the Australian Principal’s Federation as not representing the profession (Leung, 2006).

Andy Hargreaves comments that discussion about teacher professionalism is ‘neglected in a lot of the reformist incantations about professional change, professional standards and the like’ (Hargreaves, 2003, p. xi). Englund (1996) argues that ‘the concept of teaching as a profession is, rather, a buzzword and a tool that has been used in attempts to create legitimacy for different developments’ (p. 75) while Mahony and Hextall (2000) devote a chapter to this concept of professionalism and its discourse. Furlong, Barton et al (2000) comment that ‘Despite the widespread use of the term, the concept of a professional remains deeply contested in our society’ (p. 4) and draw attention to Hoyle and John’s (1995) suggestion that what it means to be a professional focuses around three central issues – knowledge, autonomy and responsibility (p. 4). In particular they suggest that:

As professionals work in uncertain situations in which judgement is more important than routine, it is essential to effective practice that they should be sufficiently free from bureaucratic and political constraint to act on judgements made in the best interests (as they see them) of the clients (cited in Furlong et al., 2000, p. 5)

Furlong, Barton et al comment on Hoyle and John’s (1995) suggestion in quite an explicit way:

Of critical importance here is the suggestion that professionals make judgements on behalf of clients as they see them. It is for the professional to interpret those interests. To draw a distinction…[professionals] do not act as an ‘agent’ of someone else (for example the government”; they act as a ‘principal’ making their own judgements (Furlong et al., 2000, p. 5).

In what ways does PoLT and the reform agenda in which it sits reflect these notions of professionalism? How is teacher knowledge of pedagogy respected and included? How is this concordant with the use of ‘training’ and ‘instruction manual’ values? Are teachers accorded the respect of autonomy and responsibility? Or are they expected to act without individual agency to implement the government’s programs?
We wonder whether PoLT could be seen as an illustration of ‘performativity’ in the sense that Lyotard (1984) used the term to represent political and the bureaucratic mechanisms of control. It has been argued elsewhere (White, 2006; White, 2004; White, Ferguson et al, 2004) that Australian school systems are increasingly subjected to performative requirements in the form of political control and bureaucratic imperative. In Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, there is a strong ideological climate for the control of the teaching profession (Sachs, 2003, White, 2004). Last year White and Hay (2005) commented that a conference during 2004 in Hong Kong², where keynote speakers Allan Luke, Christopher Day, Robert Yinger, and Marilyn Cochran –Smith, all significant theorists in contemporary education, painted a troubling picture of the ‘wave of accountability’ which threatens to engulf teachers’ exercise of personal and professional autonomy. Cochrane-Smith, Luke, Day and Yinger identified three key terms associated with policy development in education internationally – ‘standards’, ‘accountability’, and ‘professionalism’, which now, in the guise of centralist and market-driven government bodies, intervene ‘in all aspects of the governance, leadership, teaching, learning and assessment in schools’ (Cochrane-Smith, Luke, Day and Yinger, 2004). Lyotard was highly suspicious of ‘institutionalized knowledge and bureaucratized control of thought’ (1984, p. 48) and the authors of this paper use his lens to examine PoLT and its context of the DE&T school reform agenda. Interestingly a spokesman, Tim Mitchell, for the Victorian Minister for Education Lynne Kosky, earlier this year let slip a revealing comment. In the context of commenting on the Education and Training Reform Act (Parliament of Victoria, 2006) which allows the Victorian government to fine parents $100 each day their children are absent from school without adequate reason, he said that while it was unlikely the fines would be used, they were necessary as part of a “carrot and stick approach” (Gough, 2006). In the current Australian educational context, performative values are prevalent in the current educational discourse and we point to the potential use and misuse of PoLT to measure the competence of teachers via a ‘carrot and stick’ approach.

**Pedagogy, Complexity and Change**

Anderson (2005) suggests that the word ‘pedagogy’ has many different meanings:

> Pedagogy determines how teachers think and act. Pedagogy affects students’ lives and expectations. Pedagogy is the framework for discussions about teaching and the process by which we do our jobs as teachers. Pedagogy is a body of knowledge that defines us as professionals. Pedagogy is a belief that all children can learn and that it is the duty of the adult to participate in that growth and development. Pedagogy is a definition of culture and a means to transmit that culture to the next generation (p. 53).

The idea of pedagogy is complex and is not easily defined, but Anderson suggests it has something to do with both the the ‘art’ and ‘science’ of teaching, learning and the profession. When pedagogy is considered in these terms, the PoLT program can easily be interpreted as narrowly conceived and reductionist. The attempt to package pedagogy and ‘train’ teachers into adopting a state sanctioned version, as seen in the PoLT program, indicates that either the complexities involved in pedagogy have not been understood, or they have been denied. At best we can hope for a little more group work and inclusion. At worst, rather than transforming education through

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critical pedagogy, teachers will be limited to maintaining the status quo of an already outdated, classed approach to schooling (Teese, 2000). As Reeder (2005) suggests: Our best efforts for change are often complicated by our own beliefs and ideas about schooling and perhaps an inability to see beyond traditional ideas about pedagogy and education. Envisioning alternatives for education calls on our ability to question critically not only our own educational experiences but also to question current education practices, constraints, and limitations, and our own ideas about curriculum and learning (p. 247).

While Paolo Friere (1971) asserted questions about power, culture and oppression within the context of schooling (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres, 2003, p. 6), this paper alludes to similar issues related to the teaching profession. We question whether teachers retain any agency, voice and democratic participation in the process of examining their pedagogy via the PoLT process. We are reminded of Friere’s ‘banking’ concept of education:

Education [teacher learning] thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students [teachers being trained] are the depositories and the teacher [trainer] is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher [trainer] issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students [teachers] patiently receive, memorize and repeat (p. 53).

Teachers are not encouraged to bring a critical perspective to PoLT but are encouraged to examine their practice in order to improve it. Friere also commented nearly forty years ago that ‘the banking approach to adult education…will never propose to students that they critically consider reality (p. 55). In light of the tenet of this paper suggesting that PoLT is part of an agenda to control and limit the teaching profession:

The more students [teachers] work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragment view of reality [the PoLT manual?] deposited in them (p. 54).

We ask, who has decided the content of the program that all teachers in the state are to be ‘trained’ in? Where is the research to support the program aims and approaches? And is this really all there is to pedagogy?

Foucault questioned what he called ‘regimes of truth’ upheld and perpetuated through the legitimation of particular knowledge “within the context of a variety of power relationships within society (Darder, Marta, and Rodolfo, 2003, p. 7). Gramsci, the Italian Marxist also drew attention to the ‘commonsense’ understandings of truth in society and the relationship between hegemony, mechanisms of social control, and politics, economics, culture and pedagogy. Darder, Marta, and Rodolfo (2003, p. 15) assert that all truth claims should be subject to critique and the authors of this paper argue that PoLT does make truth claims and that it is appropriate to question this in the interests of the profession.
Drawing on chaos theory from mathematics and complexity theory from the sciences, together with postmodernism from cultural studies, assertions of absolute truth and certainty (like a training manual about pedagogy), these days, seem absurd. The older paradigms of positivist science and modernism, with the focus on cause and effect and finding truth, are not the only model available to us. Complexity theory, for example, provides us with other, possibly more relevant, models that make sense in relation to classrooms and pedagogy (Smitherman, 2005; Toser, 2002) in that they are focused on emerging patterns, are non-linear and do not rely on causal relationships. Doll’s (2005) ‘pedagogy of practice’ is not a pedagogy of mimesis, but one of transformation of ‘an individual’s nascent, natural instincts, interests, powers, abilities into mature, reflective, successful and productive ones (p. 55).

**Intention, Structure and Process**
The implied aim or *intention* of the PoLT program is to encourage Victorian teachers to discuss and develop pedagogy. This is not supported by the *structure* of PoLT which is indicated firstly by its location in a conservative paradigm that claims truth. The second element of *structure* is the train-the-trainer approach to teacher learning, that also implies the truth. The *process* of implementation of the program also has flaws which are likely to impede the *intention* of PoLT. Firstly, the practice of delivery of the program being undertaken by non-academic ‘trainers’ employed by universities might lead to the program being delivered literally and uncritically. Secondly, the teacher chosen to undertake the PoLT program may also deliver the program uncritically and accept it as truth because of the two elements of *structure* discussed above. Or, thirdly, as pointed out by Rolheiser, Ross and Hogoboam-Gray (1999) in their critique of the train-the-trainer model, suggested that ‘Teachers who have experienced a constructivist approach to teacher learning may communicate the products of their in-service experience but use a didactic approach in conflict with the process they experienced (p. 3). In other words, no matter how good the program is, the ‘trained’ person may subsequently ‘train’ in a didactic way whereby they see their task is to communicate the truth and drill it into their colleagues. There is much room for interpretation. There is a significant potential for misinterpretation of an important professional learning program when the *structures* are explicitly based in a particular mode, while the *intention* and *process* are left ambiguous. There is a clear need for a closer alignment in the PoLT program between *intention, structure* and *process*.

**Education Faculties**
As a result of the significant funding pressures on universities, it is understandable that academics find consultancies like PoLT attractive. Increasingly, attracting consultancy funding has become as important for academic survival as publication and teaching. In 2005 PoLT represented a new way of working for the Victorian Department of Education and Training because the delivery of the program was outsourced to Victorian universities who were invited to tender for this work. To attend the program teachers were each required to pay $600 to the university working with their region. This represents hundreds of thousands of dollars each year being contributed into each university’s coffers.

Another issue worth considering is that the personnel who deliver the program to teachers for universities, are often casual staff brought in specifically for this ‘training’ purpose. Do education academics have any responsibility to use their theoretical and research knowledge to provide an independent perspective or critique?
And what might stop them from critiquing PoLT or similar projects? What purpose do the universities serve when they submit for tenders and then, like brokers, use the money to employ ‘trainers’? Is the DE&T buying credibility for their program? And are universities selling their credibility in this process? Are the universities utilising their credibility in an intellectual way? Is there a conflict of interest?

Melba Valley High School: Value from PoLT

After a call for volunteers at the school, two of the authors signed up for PoLT with little knowledge of what it was – apart from being told that it was a DE&T initiative. The critical and professional discussions between these two women had, as its impetus, a repeated reference during the training to ‘Your PoLT coordinator will…’ and ‘You, as the PoLT coordinator…’). The professional discussion began along the lines of: ‘I’m not going back to school and dictating how teachers should teach!’ and an increasing feeling of being the recipients of a veiled threat of dire consequences if they didn’t successfully implement the PoLT package back at school – even though they didn’t accept the train-the-trainer model as appropriate for working with their colleagues. Nor did they accept the truth claims of PoLT. Indeed, while they were sympathetic to the intentions of PoLT, they were not convinced by the structure and were not prepared to implement the process as expected. They initially focused on bureaucratic concerns about PoLT including how they were supposed to go about ‘tipping this content’ into the heads of their colleagues. They felt the pressure of how to get the staff all ‘component mapped,’ within the timeline of six months, as well as the pressure of organising a timetable for the delivery of the training package. Nevertheless, they each worked through the ‘component mapping’ exercise with three teachers each. Their professional discussions, however focused on the benefits and value of discussions about pedagogy, as well as the negatives – which ended up taking over. They also tried to develop a way of using the ‘Student Perception’ and ‘Student Learning’ surveys that provided some meaning beyond that of ‘data’. The pedagogical values underlying this program became a significant concern.

Given the growing unease they felt with the whole PoLT program, they decided to rescue the powerful idea of discussing pedagogy, the intention, and focus on the school leadership team. The existing collegiate mentoring program had developed strong relationships that were considered robust enough to allow for honest professional discussion about pedagogy and leadership. Instead of asking teachers to justify their teaching processes, the leadership team began with themselves and adapted ‘PoLT Component Map’ to examine their own pedagogy of leadership as well as their own classroom pedagogy. Key words were substituted accordingly and, instead of measuring competence using this tool, the school leaders told revealing narratives about their values and their practice (or pedagogy). By removing the instrumental aspects of this tool (particularly that of ranking competence on a five-point scale), these leaders became involved in powerful professional reflection on and articulation of pedagogy, which led to similar processes with teachers.

Recommendations for Further Consideration

While we looked to the background briefing paper (DE&T, 2005b) in order to understand the theoretical underpinnings of PoLT, we were disappointed. While this paper confidently defines pedagogy, and describes projects purported to be ‘research’, it provides not a single scholarly reference or any justification to substantiate its claims. We point to this as a significant area requiring further investigation. The way
that pedagogy is packaged and presented in the PoLT manuals appears to lack sophistication in epistemological understanding about teacher learning. Implied in the PoLT model of implementation is a linearity reminiscent of Tyler's (1949) model of curriculum. It is interesting to compare the two (see Figure 1. below), and suggest that this could form the basis of an interesting study using discourse analysis to elicit underlying values. The instruments of PoLT, particularly the ‘PoLT Component Map’ the ‘Student Perception Survey’ and ‘Student Learning Survey’ warrant further critical attention. The ‘PoLT Component Map,’ for example, has great potential for abuse and control of teachers, despite the warning written in bold font: ‘This instrument is not intended and should never be used for evaluation purposes’ (DE&T, 2004, p. 14). The so called ‘surveys’ do not meet basic validity and reliability standards in research(See Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, or any introductory text about surveys). But the major issue that requires further attention is the tension caused by the potential misinterpretation of the PoLT program because of the misalignment of structure with intention and process.

Figure 1.

**Tyler’s Objectives Model (1949)**  
**PoLT Implementation**

- **Stating objectives**  
  - **Goal**
  - **Selecting learning experiences**  
    - **Innovation**
  - **Organising learning experiences**
  - **Implementation**
  - **Evaluation**
  - **Outcomes**

(Brady and Kennedy, 2003)  
(DE&T, 2004, p. 38)

**Conclusion**

While the PoLT initiative has the potential to support teachers to articulate and consider pedagogy in quite powerful ways, it has some serious shortcomings. Firstly, pedagogy is conceptualised in a reductionist, traditional and limiting way. Secondly,
the instrumental and performative approach to teacher learning as mere ‘training,’ for compliance both reflects the unfortunate, yet seemingly inherent DE&T values about teachers, and seriously questions the professionalism of teachers. There is potential for this instrumental approach to be taken further with a linking of PoLT and competency standards, which is hopefully not on the agenda. The instruments for measuring teacher pedagogy: the ‘Student Perception’ and ‘Student Learning’ surveys, among others, have little validity but are allowed to be presented as trustworthy scientific research instruments. The ‘PoLT Component Map’ also has clear potential for misuse as a way of measuring teachers’ competency, but equally has potential to be used in productive and empowering ways as seen in the brief but illuminating narrative from Melba Valley High School. As discussed throughout this paper, there is a lack of congruence between the intention, the structure and school-level process of implementing this program. Most importantly, however, is the need for the program to be justified in terms of the international research literature about teacher epistemology, pedagogy and change.

References


