



# TAFE TEACHER EDUCATION: What do we need and how do we get it?

*This article examines how we might best prepare TAFE teachers for the present and future. It asks: what sort of teachers does TAFE need and what sorts of initial teacher education program might meet this need?*

• Establishing an identity as a TAFE teacher is critical in the transition from discipline expert and possibly industry trainer to career TAFE teacher. •

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Over more than two decades the scope and complexity of TAFE teaching has increased. TAFE teachers have been expected to do more with less. Their roles and practices have diversified in relation to administration, teaching and assessment. TAFE teachers are expected to be able to work in diverse locations whilst integrating new technologies. They are expected to meet the needs of learners across a wide age spectrum, from VET in Schools and alternative Year 12 programs to degree level qualifications. There is no other sector that is required to accommodate this diversity of learners in relation to age or level of study.

During the same period, the level of initial teacher training has been reduced from a substantial university based, post-graduate

qualification to a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (CIV TAA). Intuitively, there is a mismatch in these events.

### **From industry expert to TAFE teacher**

Let us follow the path of an individual who is about to become a full-time TAFE teacher. We can assume that this individual has, at least, a basic qualification in their primary industry occupation and a number of years of industrial experience. They may have been responsible for an apprentice or worked as a workplace trainer and would have completed a CIV TAA. As a trainer in industry the competencies to be achieved are, at least largely, determined by the employer for compliance, production and employee development purposes. This may be closely linked with a

human resource management plan. Whilst it would be uncharitable to suggest that the person was concerned with the welfare of the learner-workers, this is likely to have been secondary to meeting the needs of the enterprise. Interpretation of competency statements is driven by the specific workplace context. It is also probable that their teaching experience has been associated with the completion of individual competencies, often over relatively short time frames. Through the human resource management system there are likely to be measures to deal with participants who choose not to comply with training requirements.

If the incoming TAFE teacher is employed to become an industry based trainer, the major change to the persons working experience may be the expectation that they work in a range of enterprises and/or industries engaging in negotiation of competency requirements, training and assessment strategies. In such a case the transition to becoming a TAFE teacher requires the transfer of skills from one context to another and is not unproblematic.

As a teacher in a TAFE college, the transition will be equally or more complex. The incoming teacher is likely to be expected to

teach within one or more programs with a team of other teachers. Here, learner participation is often self-initiated and self-funded. There is an expectation of not only achieving the skills and knowledge required for current employment but also for personal and career development over a lifetime. Interpretation of competencies is no longer enterprise specific, but needs to cater to a diverse group of learners. A suite of competencies often need to be 'clumped' into a coherent teaching and learning experience leading to a complete qualification from Certificate to Degree levels. This means that the teacher needs to maintain the interest and enthusiasm of learners over an extended period. Methods to manage those who chose not to comply with training requirements are likely to be less developed than in enterprises.

The differences in the roles of the industry trainer and TAFE teacher have consistently been neglected in vocational education policy which has adopted a one-size-fits-all approach in relation to initial TAFE teacher education. The skills, knowledge bases and dispositions required of teachers are as different as the contexts. Establishing an identity as a TAFE teacher is critical in the transition from discipline expert and possibly

industry trainer to career TAFE teacher. This involves challenging and revising one's professional identity, a process that can be disruptive and disturbing. The first design element of a desirable initial TAFE teacher education program is the provision of opportunity for the development of professional identity. The incoming TAFE teacher also needs to address the need to re-contextualise what they know and what they can do into a coherent teaching, learning and assessment approach. This requires the new teacher to make often implicit knowledge and skills that sustain industry discipline expertise explicit and is the second desirable design element of an initial TAFE teacher education program.

Lee Shulman is well known for the introduction of the idea of pedagogic content knowledge (PCK), an amalgam of content and pedagogic knowledge that distinguishes the novice from expert teacher. In *Expert teaching. Knowledge and pedagogy to lead the profession*, Rosie Turner-Bissett builds on the work of Shulman to propose 12 knowledge bases. These include: subject and learners; curriculum, educational contexts, purposes and ends; general pedagogic knowledge; beliefs about subject, teaching and self; and PCK. Importantly, the

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development of PCK requires experience in a range of contexts over time with reflection on practice. It is my assertion that systemic support for developing expert TAFE teaching practitioners requires the development of the full suite of teacher knowledge bases including PCK and this is the third design element required in initial TAFE teacher education.

At present, the CIV TAA is the default minimum requirement for TAFE teachers and is the prerequisite for enrolment in the Diploma in Training and Assessment (Dip TAA).

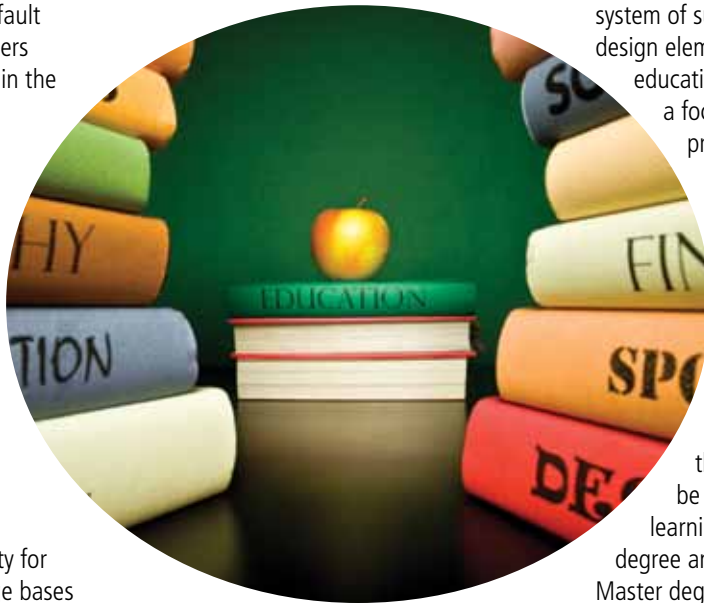
My recent audit of units of competency for the CIV TAA<sup>ii</sup> makes a number of conclusions: there is no explicit opportunity to engage in critique of existing VET policy and practices; development of curriculum knowledge, knowledge of educational contexts, ends and purposes is limited to the nationally endorsed Training Package approach; there is opportunity to develop a minimum level of general pedagogic knowledge, but no explicit opportunity for participants to develop the knowledge bases of beliefs about subjects, teaching or self.

A similar audit of the Dip TAA concludes that, here again there is: no explicit opportunity to engage in critique of existing VET policy and practices; limited opportunity to develop curriculum knowledge, knowledge of educational contexts, ends and purposes beyond the Training Package approach; opportunity to consolidate and extend general pedagogic knowledge and; limited opportunity for participants to develop the knowledge bases of beliefs about subjects, teaching or self in the single competency *Provide advanced facilitation to support learning*.

The competencies of the CIV TAA provide no explicit opportunity for incoming teachers to develop a personalised teacher identity and this opportunity is limited in the Dip TAA. There is limited opportunity to make implicit industry knowledge and skills explicit in the CIV TAA. Some opportunity is provided in the Dip TAA. The CIV TAA competencies do not provide the opportunity to develop a full suite of teacher knowledge bases including PCK. The Dip TAA may provide limited opportunity to develop the knowledge bases of beliefs about subjects, teaching and self. However, the development of PCK requires time, experience, reflection and critique of practice, the capacity of the Dip TAA to achieve

this is doubtful.

To summarise, this discussion has identified three design elements that are desirable in initial TAFE teacher education. There is a need to provide opportunities to allow incoming TAFE teachers to develop their identity as teachers, to make implicit industry knowledge and skills explicit and to develop



a full suite of teacher knowledge bases including PCK. This sort of initial TAFE teacher education requires time, support, exposure to a range of experiences and opportunities for critique and reflection of personal practice as well as vocational education policy. Neither the CIV TAA nor the Dip TAA are consistent with the three design elements described.

### **Towards a model of initial TAFE teacher education**

Initial TAFE Teacher Education is not only important because it provides incoming TAFE teachers with the opportunity to begin their transition from identity as an industry expert to identity as a TAFE teacher, but because it also legitimises a particular form of teacher identity.

The CIV TAA may be adequate to develop TAFE teachers capable of work that is compliant with official requirements in a supportive environment and contextually routine circumstances. However, if TAFE teachers are to be able to work autonomously in diverse environments with a spectrum of learners addressing non-routine issues then the CIV TAA is not suitable for the task. The Dip TAA competencies are more suited, but fall short in providing adequate opportu-

nity to support the development of teacher identity or a full suite of knowledge bases required of expert TAFE teachers.

So what sort of Initial TAFE Teacher Education is likely to prepare TAFE teachers for the needs of today and the future? One option would be recruiting graduates and providing them with a six week induction program accompanied by two years with a system of support. This would provide the design elements for initial TAFE teacher education of intensive induction with a focus on general teaching skills, practical placement with support and ongoing study at a university level over an extended period.

Internationally, the *Bandung Declaration on TVET Teacher Education*<sup>iii</sup> endorsed at the First World Congress on Teacher Education for Technical and Vocational Education held in Indonesia in July 2008 proposes that TVET teacher education should be university based with 4500 learning hours awarded to a Bachelor degree and another 3000 hours to a Master degree.

Given that TAFE and secondary school are different sectors with different needs and expectations, and the nature of TAFE in Australia is different from vocational systems in other countries, I am not proposing that we should adopt the ideas of the *Bandung Declaration on TVET Teacher Education* without critical review. However, if TAFE in Australia is to make a productive contribution to productivity and innovation through the preparation of a skilled workforce then the minimum qualification of TAFE teachers needs to be reconsidered. ❖

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#### Endnotes

- i Turner-Bisset, R. (2001). *Expert teaching. Knowledge and pedagogy to lead the profession*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- ii Robertson, I. (2008). *VET teacher's knowledge and expertise. International journal of training research*, 6(1), 1-22.
- iii See [www.itb.uni-bremen.de/tt-tvet/](http://www.itb.uni-bremen.de/tt-tvet/) for further information.