From 'trade teacher' to 'critically reflective practitioner':
The relationship between theory and occupational identity formation in TAFE teachers

John Haycock and Dianne Kelly
Centre for Professional Education and Training Practice,
Chisholm Institute

Abstract

Our paper engages with Seddon's (2008) concept of occupational identity as it is lived through the work and learning of vocational education training (VET) practitioners, in technical and further education (TAFE). It is based on a horizontal, qualitative case study of 'trade teachers', who are linked through their participation in a VET 'teacher-education' program, the Diploma of VET Practice. This qualification focuses on developing understandings, knowledge and skills in adult learning and pedagogical theory, and contemporary VET practice. It seeks ultimately to prepare and develop practitioners for their pedagogical work in TAFE. Our research sought to track and trace theory as it developed and is transformed into practice at the same time as the practitioners are in the process of 'becoming'. Our paper discusses the tensions inherent in their dual occupational identities associated with the practitioners' previous industry fields of practice and that of teacher. It seeks to identify the impact of the teacher education program and engagement with educational theory, in enabling the supposed convergence of these dual identities into the somewhat Janus-faced occupational identity of 'TAFE teacher'.

Background and approach

As part of our pedagogical work, we are required to observe practitioners while they are involved in their pedagogical work, within a technical and further education (TAFE) institute. This observation is carried out in various contexts and comprises a component of a teaching 'practicum' that is attached to the Victorian accredited vocational education and training (VET) 'teacher-education' qualification the Diploma of VET Practice, by the Victorian TAFE Multiple Employer Certified Agreement (MECA), under which the practitioners are employed. Often when commencing these observations we have been confronted by teachers from trade areas, almost apologising for their pedagogical work. There seems a commonly held notion that because their work is not classroom-based, it is not what *we* (the observers) might recognise as real teaching. Indeed, whilst the practitioners recognise and are able to name the quite experiential work they do with their learners in simulated or 'real' work contexts such as building sites, training kitchens, or work- shop spaces simulating work environments, they do not think the assessors consider this 'real teaching' and not suitable for assessment. Our pedagogical work also gives us the pleasure of working with the same practitioners to develop knowledge, understandings and constructions of adult learning and pedagogical theory. In a similar, relevant incident during one of our theory sessions one student (later a participant in this study), took exception to the word pedagogy: "why do we use *that* word when we can just say teaching? Can't we just call it teaching?" Indeed, another student who also participated in this study later told us that at the beginning of the program he had said: "if she [the facilitator] says that word [pedagogy] or talks about reflection one more time, I swear I'm going to get up and walk out!"

Critical pedagogical encounters such as these raise questions for us about how VET practitioners understand and identify themselves in relation to their work and learning. We argue that such encounters also raise critical questions in relation to how practitioners

understand, identify and come to work with and/or put into practice adult learning and pedagogical theory. It is just such encounters and questions that have inspired this project. Whilst we accept critical pedagogical encounters as valid learning experiences for all involved and central to our own development as VET practitioners—particularly when they are reflected upon within *our* 'communities of practice'—we also recognised a need for more rigorous and critical inquiry. This paper is the result of such inquiry. It is based on and informed by a small-scale research project focussing on six TAFE teachers, whom we will refer to as (VET) practitioners by way of an anchor point for what is revealed as their somewhat elusive and shifting occupational identities. We have used pseudonyms throughout this paper to conceal the identities of the participants.

The practitioners are linked in a number of ways related to their work and learning within a large metropolitan TAFE institute (the Institute), which services the vocational and pre-vocational education and training needs of the south east of Melbourne. The project's aim was to work broadly with the following research questions, relating to what we are describing as three tiers of theory as it might be encountered, then 'encoded' in practice by the practitioners:

- 'Meta-theory': how have pre-existing theoretical frameworks led to, influenced and informed the current job-role and practice of 'trade teachers'?
- Adult learning and pedagogical theory: how have understandings of adult learning and pedagogical theory by 'trade teachers' been informed and influenced through participation in the Diploma of VET Practice program; and how have these understandings been influenced by what we have described as meta-theory?
- Theory-in-practice: what variations or new theory emerges out of interactions taking place between theory working at the more conceptual-levels we describe; and how does this work to shape, inform and influence practice?

To work with these questions we organised a focus group around the notion of guiding the practitioner-participants in taking a retrospective, rear-view gaze back to when they first became TAFE teachers and across their working careers in TAFE. The focus group attempted to get the practitioners talking together in what we perceive to be a wider community of practice related to their involvement in a Diploma of VET Practice program (Diploma program). We asked the practitioners to reflect on their involvement in a Diploma of VET Practice program (Diploma program) in relation to their current practice. Firstly we asked the practitioners to talk about what led and motivated them to working in TAFE. Secondly we sought to get the practitioners to tell their stories about their encounters with adult learning and pedagogical theory. Finally we sought to track and trace theory as it is processed or developed, and is potentially transformed into practice, within what was revealed to be various communities of practice.

Our study employed narrative inquiry framed in terms of what we describe as a constructivist methodological approach. Robson (2002, p.27) describes constructivist research as problematising notions of "objective reality" or universal truths that "can be known" and are acceptable from the perspective of all. Indeed, we have taken this approach to acquire multiple perspectives from the participants in relation to the deliberately broad research questions that underpin this study; and to generate and work with the "multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge" (Robson 2002, p.27) that have yielded this paper. We sought to work 'horizontally' with the practitioners to—through dialogic and critical inquiry—create an inclusive, mutually educative and beneficial experience for all involved (Apple 1991). To invoke such a methodology, we invited a number of practitioners from traditional trade areas to participate in a focus group that was organised as an informal, round-table discussion over a small lunch. While we provided the practitioners with some

broad questions prior to meeting, we explained that these would be used only to guide discussion. In working *with* the practitioners, we gave them the research questions and described our proposal for this study. We recorded the focus group which lasted a little over two hours, and later transcribed this recording. Following the focus group we offered the practitioners the opportunity to speak further with us individually, in the hope that we might gain more personal insights into their work and learning associated with our research project. While three of the participants sent us some very brief written responses, only one spoke further with us in an informal interview.

It is important to note here our situatedness in this study by way of, as we have previously mentioned, our involvement with the Diploma program linking all participants in this study. Kelly completed much of this program as a co-learner with the participants in this study, and Haycock co-developed and co-facilitated the program. Each of the participants successfully completed the program and received their results some time prior to the commencement of this study, and ethics approval was given by the Institute. Our situatedness within the project provided us with the opportunity for two-fold engagement with the Diploma program content as this relates to our research questions, through our active engagement with the content as both facilitator and learner. Our research also included a critical reading and analysis of the '21697VIC Diploma of vocational education and training practice' (2006) curriculum document and the program content, as this relates to our research.

Our paper seeks to set out the scope of our research, and to work with its outcomes in the form of the multiple and socially constructed knowledge and meanings, provided through the involvement of all participants—including the researchers—in this study. It commences by outlining Terri Seddon's (2008) concept of *occupational identity* that we use as a framework throughout. We describe the practitioners and their situatedness within the context of our project along three, broad categorisations. Firstly, we describe the practitioners, in relation to what is held to be their *present* occupational identity of 'TAFE teacher'. Secondly, we describe the practitioners in terms of their relationship to their *past* occupational identities as tradespeople. We suggest that once more easily defined occupational identities as chef, carpenter and teacher (in relation to our study) might, as Seddon (2008, p.2) has suggested, be "valued for their contribution to self and others", and that these past identities 'disturb' the practitioners' *present* and possible *future* occupational identities. Finally, we describe a Diploma of VET Practice program in terms of it being endorsed and 'structured' as "work-related education" that seeks to provide entry to the specific *occupational community* of TAFE teacher (Seddon 2008, p.2). We suggest that the practitioners' participation in this program provides the potential for the formation of *future* occupational identities associated with its possibilities in 'learning' the occupation of 'teaching' (Seddon 2008).

Framing the study

Our paper works with Seddon's (2008) concept of *occupational identity* and identity formation as it relates to VET practitioners working and learning within the VET context of TAFE. Seddon (2008) describes occupational identity as that which is

> consolidated by recognising and endorsing… specialist expertise. This supports the identities that are brought to these new challenges by different parties and creates resource-sharing arrangements to mobilise these different working knowledges and other resources. These relationships, and the resources that they make available, further develop expertise and endorse occupational identity by affirming the contribution that the expertise makes to addressing client or public needs (Seddon 2008, p.7).

Further, Seddon (2008, p.2) describes the formation of occupational identities as once taking place through "work-related education" which provided entry to specific "occupational communities", and through participation in those occupations. Our paper seeks to work with what might be *past* notions of occupational identity formation in the *present*, through such a work-related education program which aims at developing human capacities for the VET workforce as Seddon (2008) might suggest; and through the practitioners' participation in the occupation of TAFE teacher. The occupation of TAFE teacher is in part classified by the MECA (2003) as,

> a person employed [by the TAFE] to teach or lecture or to manage and/or develop a TAFE program or programs but does not mean a person holding a position classified as a TAFE Executive Officer.(MECA 2003, p.6).

Phoebe Palmieri (2004) also works with the notion of occupational identity and with the idea of what makes a 'good' teacher in the policy environment and rapidly changing context of the VET sector. She points out (as does Seddon 2008) that the term 'teacher' is more often attributed to those working in school education; and that in such contexts any such idea of what makes a good teacher, is at once relatively more coherent but also similar in the moral claims it makes about the professional and "occupation-al" culture of the teacher (Palmieri 2004, p.1). Adding to this confusion surrounding the occupational identity of TAFE teacher, Palmieri (2004) argues VET practitioners necessarily have to have a dual identity through which they enact the objectives of the VET sector at the coalface, in bridging the divide between the worlds of industry and of education. In doing this, we argue that VET practitioners also take on what Palmieri (2004 citing Heikkinen 2000) includes in her conception of occupational identity, attributes such as: master in their occupational field; member of occupational network (perhaps communities of practice); "gate-keeper" and guide to that occupation. VET practitioners are therefore intended by VET policy initiatives (such as AQTF 2007), to have the dual occupational identities which include those associated with their previous industry fields of practice, experience and expertise in trade areas, and that of teacher. These dual identities are then supposed converge in what we perceive to be a somewhat Janus-faced occupational identity of 'TAFE teacher'.

Our study included representations from what we will further describe as trade-oriented fields of work such as: hospitality (one), building and construction (three), automotive (one) and engineering (one). Reflecting what seems to be a trend in the institute and indeed in the Australian workforce related particularly to the latter three fields, females were under-represented with the only female practitioner being from the hospitality field (who later identified herself in terms of her work as a "chef who teaches"). The participants ranged in age from late 30s to early 50s, and all described a primary motivation for working as a means of financially supporting and allowing them more time with their families. The specific fields were not as critical to us as that participants came from what is widely referred to as 'traditional trade' areas. We describe the trade field as that involving a formal period of apprenticeship in order to fully access—to become fully-qualified tradespeople (such as through licensing and accreditation with respective authorities and boards)—these fields of work. Our description of 'trade' here is in-line with that of the Oxford Dictionary's (1996) definition of a trade as noun: "a skilled handicraft [especially] requiring an apprenticeship…" Indeed, each of the participants is linked by having successfully undertaken an apprenticeship to gain full access to their respective trades.

The duality inherent in the occupational identity of TAFE teacher however, seems to bring with it a certain amount of confusion and contradiction, particularly as this relates to TAFE teacher education programs and managerial and regulatory pressures in VET (such as the Reframing the Future initiative). These VET structures introduce an emphasis on using new

teaching methods such as, for instance, the often high-level use of technology as it is associated with e-learning and online learning pushes (Palmieri 2004), which may be anathema to TAFE teachers' previous occupational identities. We argue that the Diploma program also contributes to the pressures on TAFE teachers to take on new and often complex teaching methods and indeed, new 'occupational identities'. This program does this through teaching related to adult learning and pedagogical theory in its ultimate hope to transform 'TAFE teachers' into 'critcally reflective practitioners' who are able to enact in their practice the core values and organisational objectives of the Institute and the broader VET sector. This program too, is interwoven within the VET framework and is linked to the occupational identity term of 'teacher' through the MECA. The MECA (2003) makes achieving this qualification a requirement for practitioners to progress to the highest level of pay for a Victorian TAFE teacher; or to the middle-management position of senior educator. Indeed, student survey evaluation results for programs associated with the qualification indicate that the primary initial driver for practitioner participation in the program is to advance to these higher-pay (which can be significant in the order of $10,000 p.a.) and hierarchical levels. However, survey results—and indeed the participants in this study—indicate that whilst such incentives may have been initial motivators, participants have indicated that they have come to recognise the program's benefits for both individual and professional development within and outside the VET sector and their present occupational roles.

We add to this that VET practitioners work within a policy framework that is heavily burdened by the imposed need for compliance. Similar to what Kenway (2007) describes for teachers in compulsory schooling and, importantly, in relation to teacher 'training' programs that are expected to train student teachers in compliance and what she refers to as 'curriculum cartography' and 'accountancy'. In VET the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as the minimum requirement for teaching in TAFE, is largely structured around compliance arrangements such as the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF 2007) and cartography in terms of negotiating and implementing training packages. The Diploma program however, perhaps offers something more. Whilst it too—particularly in relation to competency units imported from the Training and Assessment training package—teaches curriculum cartography and accountancy, its 'state accredited curriculum' names "teaching methodologies, facilitation approaches and learning theories" such as: behaviourist, cognitive, andragogy, problem-based, information processing, humanistic, social, experiential, constructivist, and action learning (Bateman and Giles 2006, p.40). These are framed, through their identification and assimilation of learning into practice, as learning outcomes or measurements of competency for participants in the program. However, a contradiction perhaps exists in that the facilitation of the Diploma program takes place in classroom, theory-based contexts that are difficult to relate to the practice environments of trade teachers.

The practitioners' involvement in this program represents the most critical intersection with our project by way of our second research question. We suggest, that it is in this learning space that the practitioners most explicitly encounter adult learning, educational and pedagogical theory; and that this space becomes both a site for and a conduit in which this level of theory intersects with pre-existing 'meta-theory', before it becomes embedded and/or encoded in practice. It is in this space that we propose the practitioners potentially learn (more of) the 'occupation' of 'teaching' through the program's unwritten proposal for them to take on perhaps another, 'emerging' occupational identity as 'critically reflective (VET) practitioners'. John Guenther (2005, p.6) describes identity as it is formed and might emerge from VET programs such as these in terms of identifiable outcomes taking place

over four phases. This commences when learners enter the training context with their 'pre-learning identity'. The learners then pass through the three phases of "awareness", "capacity to act" and "decision to act", before emerging from the training context with such identifiable characteristics as "self-esteem", "ownership", "pride", "self-worth" and "dignity".

Focus group

Our fieldwork yielded multiple narratives related to the practitioners' work in TAFE; however, for the purposes and scope of this paper we want to focus on responses that we saw as relating to just three key areas: that of their dual occupational identity as 'teachers' and in association with their past trades; their responses in relation to learning the occupation of teacher through the Diploma program; and their responses in relation to their identity formation within various communities of practice. The most striking theme emerging from the fieldwork is what we interpret as tension surrounding occupational identity in respect of the practitioners' particular past trade, the present occupational identity of 'teacher' and the practitioners taking on the potential future occupational identity of 'critically reflective practitioner'. All but one of the practitioners (previously a metal worker) were reluctant to disassociate themselves from their previous trade identities (a chef, three carpenters and an auto mechanic). They variously identified or named themselves in association with their previous trades (eg. carpentry teacher). Not only were the practitioners reluctant to 'let go' of their past trade identities, we also noted a tone of rejection in relation to taking on the identity of 'teacher'. For example, 'Elizabeth', referred to herself only as a 'chef' and, she explained, only if she was further prompted about her work would she include 'teaching' in her identity naming as follows: "I am a chef who is, at the moment, teaching in TAFE." However, she added: "if I am talking to another chef… I would not tell them I was teaching because they might think I am a home eco [economics] teacher or something."

A number of the participants claimed that they never thought they'd become teachers. Matt described why he explicitly rejected the identity of 'teacher' as:

> I think it stems from your own education, because when I was at school. We used to have classes that weren't very well organised. I didn't think much of teachers from the word go. Don't even like thinking of myself as a teacher. I'd prefer to call myself a worn-out tradesman or something.

During later discussions about what had brought the practitioners into TAFE and teaching, Craig revealed that, "my wife is the bread-winner in our family, she's the professional." Later, seemingly blurring the identity bounds again, Ben talked about the nature of the role of the teacher in terms of some of his colleagues

> have become professional teachers—focusing on the teaching elements—they're not looking at, everything that's changing. We need to stay updated and current. Because they come back [apprentices] and ask you stuff about new things in industry. We've got a lot of people who aren't interested in knowing that, in keeping up—they just want to be teachers.

In stark contrast to this, Ben added: "we've got teachers there that if you call them a teacher they won't speak to. They're tradesmen. Been teaching for 10 years, but they're tradesman." We later returned to this aspect when the practitioners agreed that a (TAFE) teacher "can't just be a good tradesman…" and Elizabeth added, "You've got to have the personality, enthusiasm, the patience, the demeanour, the attitude…" All agreed that, "you've got to be thick-skinned." However, Matt further confused the identity bounds (again), defending his earlier rejection of the term teacher:

We had some woodwork teachers at [location] who weren't all that good. They were probably just tradesmen. They weren't all that good. Some of them probably were [good tradesmen] but some of them weren't. Mmm, some of them are still working here.[much laughter from all!]

In terms of dual occupational identity inherent in TAFE teachers, Craig sums it up thus: "we do two jobs. We go out and we work in a trade for 20 or 30 years, but then we come here and we're also a teacher as well." Michael explained in terms of colleagues he compared to Ben's "professional teachers":

I work with teachers who will choose a redundancy package rather than change, rather than have the changing teaching career we have. It changes all the time. Because the students, the learners are changing and the strategies are changing.

Throughout the focus group, therefore, the practitioners seemed much more comfortable talking about the content or subject matter of their teaching and seemed considerably more confident in their skills and abilities as they related to their prior trade identities, rather than their skills and abilities as they related to teaching. Indeed, it was difficult to turn the conversation away from what they not surprisingly indicated was the single most important attribute for a TAFE (or trade) teacher: "industry knowledge and currency", of the trade rather than of current trends and methodologies in teaching. In terms of what made for a good teacher for example, the practitioners mostly described colleagues who were "quality craftsmen… he was good on the tools." In relation to his early teaching work, Ben described being prepared not in terms of knowledge of or skills in teaching, but in terms of his current, working knowledge of his trade: "I couldn't bluff my way through… but I was ok, I had a good knowledge of the building industry…" All of the practitioners agreed with the statement that "90 percent of doing this…" because "[we] wanted to give something back to the trade". Eventually however, we did manage to steer the discussion to their encounters with adult learning and pedagogical theory as Ben (who tended to dominate the focus group), described as follows:

When we started doing the Diploma, and we started rattling off the andragogy and the pedagogy and all that stuff. I said, I know what it is and I know how it works but, to be honest, I do not relate it to anything I do... I had my own thoughts about what my students needed to know and needed to learn. For me, as a teacher, a facilitator or trainer, or however you want to say it, I needed to know these things so I could better myself. 'Cause I'd come in from a trade environment, where I knew no… I didn't want to do any education whatsoever, I hated school, did my trade 'cause that's what I wanted to be. But to come into this now, I've got to adapt myself not just for the students but for the other teachers, because a lot of the teachers there talk about all this sort of stuff and I sort of go: what? what did he just say? And when I talk to managers and such and they start talking about the conferences they just been on: adult learning and education for this; and how to teach youth and all that sort of stuff. Mmm? you've been on a three day conference on how to teach youth in a complex environment? Isn't that what I already do, so why do I need to go on a three day conference? So from my point of view it does help.

The practitioners also told of taking back what they had learnt about theory into their communities of practice. For the Diploma program each of the practitioners had to locate a mentor as a requirement for their teaching practicum. Stuart describes talking to his mentor about theory, "Yeah, he'll translate it back into real terms. As to why it's like that in the first place, basically it's [theory] a load of bullshit he says. But it's like this." Ben, who had the same mentor then explained,

See my mentor… he will undertake all these sorts of things, understand all of those sorts of things, which is probably a lot easier for me too. Because he understands it quite quickly and he can translate it to the way I can learn. Because I have trouble understanding that kind of stuff whereas he'll… dumb it down, I suppose. If it had have been explained in the first place to that lower degree, I wouldn't have had to go to him. Why, when you get this feedback, why don't you change it? Mmm?

> Coming to the Diploma I was expecting to learn it there, not to have to take it back and ask my mentor. I wasn't expecting to go away and learn it

In terms of the practitioners' comments about 'taking the theory back' to their work contexts, we noted that they were all, to varying degrees, participants in a number of communities of practice, wherein much learning seems to necessarily occur away from the formal educational context of the Diploma program.

Discussion

Kenway (2007) evokes both Dickens' ghost story of the haunted scrooge, and Jacques Derrida's (1994) concept of "hauntology" to give us another, important narrative about school curriculum being 'haunted' by what she refers to as the ghosts of 'curriculum' past, present and future. Derrida, as Kenway explains, uses 'hauntology' to problematise "notions of presence and present" through the "metaphysical logic of the ghost"—the ghost is present but it does not exist. Through hauntology, therefore, she joins Derrida in asking: "what is present? [w]hat is absent? What is past, what is future" (Kenway 2007, pp.3-4)? At the beginning of our paper we 'snuck' in an intricate word-game to frame the practitioners' work and learning identities in relation to our study. We used the word *present* when we described the occupational identity of the practitioners as teacher. But this term never really stood in the present alone—it was always pre-supposed by TAFE or another occupational 'signifier' relating to a trade, as if to suggest that it wasn't a real teacher! We used the word *past* when we described the practitioners' prior occupational identity as it was associated with a particular trade; and we used the word *future* when we described the teacher-, work-based education program for the future possibilities that this program might provide in its hope to transform TAFE teachers into and perhaps take on yet another identity as 'critically reflective practitioners'. In between and over the course of this we encountered identities that were never static, that seemed informed by fluid cognitive and theoretical frameworks always, seemingly in the process of becoming within individuals, within their complex communities of practice. Through all this however, not unlike Kenway's (2007) curriculum, the practitioners have been haunted by ghosts of occupational identities past, present and future; and like Kenway, therefore, we have 'conjured' Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology to try locate these practitioners' occupational identities that seem always bound up in the action of becoming.

At the beginning of our paper we described and attempted to locate in the possibility of the present, the occupational identities of the practitioners as TAFE teachers—as Janus-faced tradespeople and teachers—and as potential critically reflective practitioners. This was as we pointed out, how they were held to be by the structures of the VET system that attempts to bind all three possibilities in time and space together. We have seen however, that each occupational identity is somewhat disturbed by each other identity and is haunted by ghosts of occupational identities past, present and future. They are haunted by ghosts of schooling and education histories past; ghosts of present professional teachers and teachers who are not professionals; by the ghosts of past tradespersons who are teachers and who are not teachers; by ghosts of present teachers who are tradespersons are who are not tradespersons; by ghosts of present educational spaces that are not classrooms… We have seen teachers of teachers and teachers as learners as legitimate peripheral participants within intricate, organic and complex communities of practitioners, haunted by ontological and epistemological ghosts. Indeed, we have had our own ontological perspectives and epistemological frameworks haunted and transformed by these tensions and negotiations of identity ghosts past, present and future!

Our study has conjured all of these ghosts. Yet, whilst none of these ghosts is more or less important than the other, or more or less implicated in the formation of occupational identity, all these ghosts were conjured through just one: the ghost of occupational identity future, the Diploma program which has brought the practitioners (and the authors) together. Like the other ghosts, this ghost disturbs the possible present with its attempt to bring into being within the practitioners the future occupational identity of critically reflective practitioner. Their participation in this program therefore, disturbed the practitioners' present and past occupational identities in a number of ways: they were disturbed by the concept of reflection, they were disturbed by the language of teaching, and they were disturbed by the space in which the program was taught and in the first instance, proposed to be learned. Most of all, however, in terms of this study, and within all of this, the practitioners were disturbed by the notion of theory and the proposal to put this into practice.

Griff Foley (2004, p.8) describes theory in adult educators as being "bound up together" and almost inseparable from practice. He argues that it is common for practitioners to have set values associated with teaching, favoured techniques and even dogmatic principles that they apply in their teaching, often developed or arrived at early in their teaching careers (ghosts of occupational identities past). He examines these values as being based on the "deepest possible understanding of the context of their work" (Foley 2004, p.8) (ghosts of occupational identities present). Somewhat pedagogically, he encourages adult educators to "critically examine their practice and theory, and to develop frameworks for understanding and acting on their work", by reflecting and theorising on practice. To become more effective practitioners he describes the need to intersect the bonds of theory and practice and to become more aware of and work to develop "theoretical frameworks" (Foley 2004, p.8). For us here, Foley goes part way to describing the 'occupation' of the critically reflective practitioner (the ghost of occupational identity future). According to Foley (2004) therefore, cognitive frameworks should continually develop throughout out our lives, as both filters which allow us to make sense of our experience and as frameworks through which we make sense of and come to understand the world. To us Foley is essentially asking adult educators—in perhaps taking on the future occupational identity of critically reflective practitioner—to critically examine and reflect upon, and come to know a core part of their identity in terms of their epistemological frameworks and ontological perspectives. We saw our concept of (a) 'meta-theory' was related to ontology, the underlying perspective from the core of our identity, through which we determine the theory we put into practice. Boden et al (2005) argue that while epistemology is about what exists *as*/what *is* knowledge; and in relation to this, ontology is about the nature of the knower, their place in the world from the perspective of their identity and embodied experiences. Derrida's (1994) neologism 'hauntology' is not only a *spook* it is a *spoof*! In Derrida's primary language of French it is a play on the word ontology.

We have seen and heard much to indicate that each of the practitioners thinks about and reflects on theory as it relates to them; to their meta-theory, theoretical frameworks or ontologies. They think about it and reflect on it as it disturbs their occupational realities. They tell stories about it and reflect on it in their various communities of practice, those associated with their past, present and future occupational identities. And the identities that haunt these communities—collective identities in the process of becoming—are future identities and future theory being made and becoming the stories of the practitioners as they work and learn and importantly, critically reflect together on their practice and on theory as it is practiced. Not only this, we have found that these practitioners juggle and reconcile these ghosts and continue to learn both collectively and as individuals through their

engagement and participation within their communities of practice. Wenger (1998) describes members (or participants) in a community of practice as being

> informally bound by what they do together—from engaging in lunchtime discussions to solving difficult problems—and by what they have learned through their mutual engagement in these activities (Wenger 1998, p 2).

In their often-quoted work in VET literature, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) describe communities of practice as situated learning contexts where implicit learning takes place as a result of the engagement of members through their 'legitimate peripheral participation' in the socially laden activities of everyday life such as a workplace. Our study revealed that each of the practitioners were legitimate peripheral participants in a number of communities of practice, within the context of the Institute, in relation to their occupational and learning identities. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that a newcomer (a new participant in a community of practice) moves from the periphery of the community to its centre as they become more involved in the community until they too become the old timers in the community from whom they have learnt (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In the non-theoretical world (if such a space exists)—the world of practice—we can locate the movement of these practitioners as gatekeepers, not only in relation to their dual occupational identities of 'trade teacher' but also in relation to their emerging occupational identity of critically reflective trade teacher. Many of the practitioners have now taken on the role of mentors for up-and-coming trade teachers who have seemingly entered their communities of practice as legitimate peripheral participants (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Conclusion

Our paper has been an exploration of how 'taught' theory is intercepted by already developed and operating theory present in VET practitioners. It was intended to also be about theory-in-practice; however, we found that our study outlived the scope of this paper. We also discovered that we perhaps missed an important step in practitioners' learning the possible future occupation of critically reflective practitioner: that learning from any work-based education program such as the Diploma needs to be taken back and worked through, translated, modified and importantly reflected on in a number of communities related to occupational identity and practice. By far the most revealing and surprising thing to emerge from our study is an apparent transformation taking place in practitioners, through their participation in the Diploma program, that seems to enable or empower them to move from legitimate peripheral participants, further towards the centre—or towards master—within their communities of practice.

This study has therefore given us (and we would like to think other teachers-of-teachers), valuable insights into our pedagogical work and into our future occupational identities in teaching teachers about the occupation of teaching and the occupational identity of teacher. It has taught us that against apparent and much-limiting undercurrents that "tradies can't or won't handle theory": they can and do put complex theory into practice, but it has to be taken back and processed and reflected on in their operational contexts, in their communities of practice. To us this does not call for a patronising dumbing-down of curriculum but rather perhaps, a disarming of the academic language. We would like to argue that it is not adult learning and pedagogical theory that is rejected but rather the language of the academy.

Our study also tells us that any theory has to become part of the stories of occupational identity, to become part of the ontology, the frameworks and the identity of 'TAFE teachers'. It needs to be reconciled and processed with the complex meta-theory of practitioners. Importantly, it needs to become part of the individual stories of the

practitioners, part of the collective story of the communities of practice and part of the lived practice of becoming in both the individual and their communities of practice. We would like to finish with a quote from a participant in this study, Craig, who after our persistent prodding in the hope that he might articulate his theoretical framework:

"I swear the next question you are going to ask me is what I think the meaning of life is."

We have been asking this all along. Identity goes to the core of who we are, in who we have been and is part of the transformative process of who we will become. By way of our ontological perspective, it *is* for us, our story on the meaning of life. That any theory can be adopted and practiced must therefore become part of that person's history, life story and therefore core element in that person's identity.

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