



The textual coordination of front line work in Vocational Education and Training

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Institutional Ethnography: 'ruling relations'

‘A mode of ruling has become dominant that involves a continual transcription of the local and particular activities of our lives into abstracted and generalized forms. It is an *extralocal* mode of ruling. ... It involves the construction of the world as texts, whether on paper or in computer, and the creation of a world in texts as a site of action.’

(Smith 1987, p.3)



A hierarchy of ruling texts in VET

Australian Quality Training Framework

A text that governs the *delivery & management* of vocational programs

Training Packages

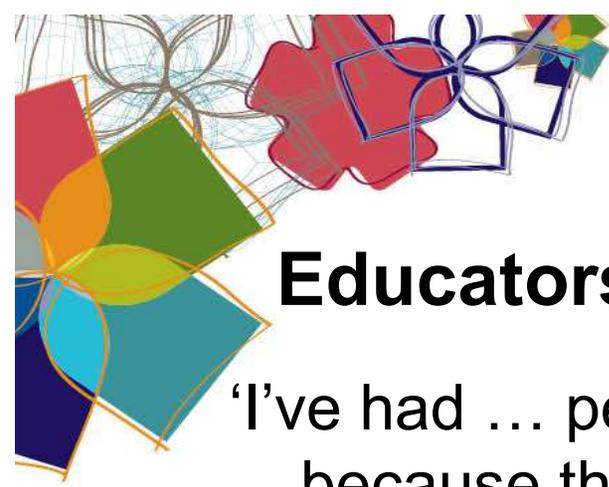
Texts that govern the *content* of vocational programs



(Adapted from Smith 2006, p.3)

The 'rules of the VET game' 'in a symbiotic relationship'
(Schofield & McDonald 2004, p.8)

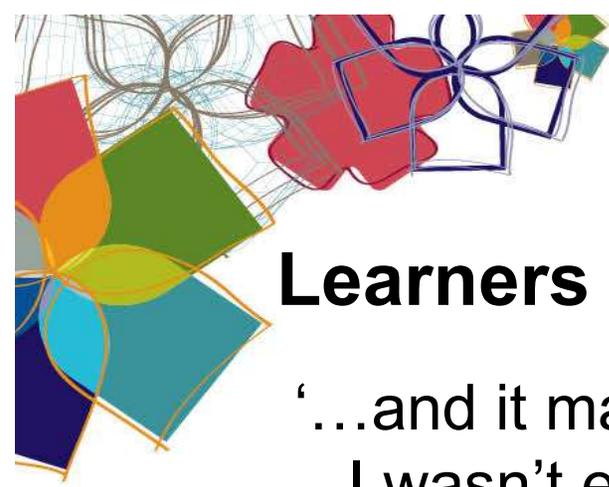




Educators talking about Training Packages

‘I’ve had ... people new to training in workplaces ... drop out because they *feel* what they’re faced with is *too* much. ... I do all these nice touchy-feely things at the first session, ... and I say “Honestly, this is not as bad as you think it’s going to be”. And I go through this process of translation and. “All it is is this, I *know* you’re doing this already”. So you’re trying to *win* people over before you even get there because you know what’s coming as soon as you *whip out* the competencies and duck ’cause they’re gonna go “*Aaarrrgh!*” I get that reaction *so often*’. (Fiona)





Learners talking about Training Packages

‘...and it made me feel really dumb. *Really* dumb. Because I wasn’t expecting not to understand what was given to me. ... I didn’t know whether I was going to finish the Diploma, because it was just *too hard*. There was just *too* many barriers there for that. And I felt really stupid, because I couldn’t finish this *vocational* qualification, and that was just beyond me. I thought “What? I can’t get it”. And I never really thought that there was something wrong with someone else. It was me. *I* was the problem. It’s quite instilled in the whole system’. (Christine)





Educators talking about the AQTF

‘... basically everybody went totally nutty last year trying to prepare for this audit. And they had people, ex-auditors, coming in and doing professional development sessions with us, evaluating our materials, telling us what was what. ... These auditors were saying things like “You *must*...” ... “You’re *not allowed* to ...” There was all these no-no’s. ... So we were told by our management “Do what they say”. We were running around like chooks without heads, changing all our unit outlines and assessment tools’
(Louise)





VET Managers talking about the AQTF

‘... what we’ve actually done is created a situation where compliance equals bits of paper. ... I want them to focus on what they need to do to *become* compliant, not on what bits of *paper* are going to get [the auditor] off their back. ... we’re trying to say “No, put the focus back on your own practices and *why* you’re non-compliant in the first place. ... There *has been* a compliance focus. And I don’t think that [the AQTF] has created it necessarily ... it’s the way we’ve implemented it, that I think has reinforced that.’
(Taryn)





Training Packages and the AQTF as an 'accountability circuit'

(McCoy 1998, p.407)

- VET educators participate in self-governance by developing accounts of their professional practice in a form that makes that practice accountable at audit.
- They enter a circuit of accountability in which they report on local activities in terms meaningful within the regulatory texts
- Reshape professional practice to align to categories and terms set up to be answerable to the ruling texts
- Are then held accountable as their learning and assessment plans are audited against compliance requirements



Just some of the implications:

- AQTF and TPs reveal institutional messages about how VET educators are to understand and conduct themselves
- Educators are responsible for significant elements of organisational compliance, but were invisible within the text of the AQTF at that time
- Responsibility for compliance shifted *onto* educators, accompanied by a paradoxical *erosion* of freedom to exercise their professional judgement
- Organisational and individual interests *appear to* coincide, but the range of options available to educators is reduced



- Vocational educators must undertake ‘work’ in order to navigate the accountability circuit while still achieving their goals. EG:
 - Hiding compliance information at the back of the student booklet, hoping students won’t read that far
 - Handing compliance information out on different coloured paper, saying that reading it is optional
 - Uploading the compliance information onto an RTO Intranet and just giving students the link
- Even those educators who resisted what was happening accepted the inevitability of being positioned in this way





That was then – what about now?

Training Package Development Handbook Guidelines:

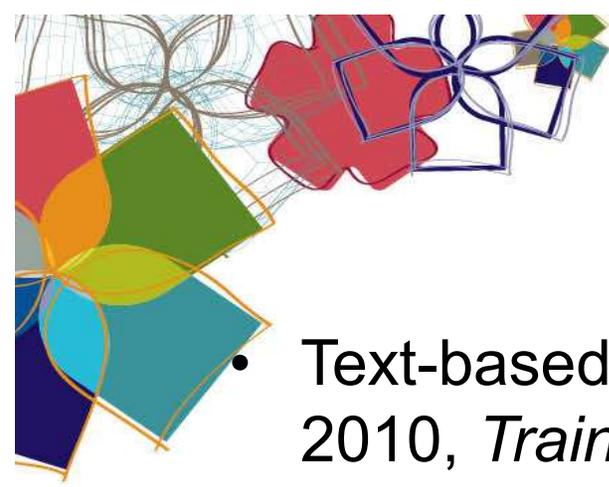
'Use plain English: Do not use jargon; unclear language and terminology beyond workplace requirements may disadvantage learners.' (Ver 4.0, p.5)

AQTF 2010:

The AQTF 2010 Standards are (self-)described as 'simplified and streamlined' with the focus (self)identified as being on 'outcomes' and 'quality assurance'

(DEEWR 2010, p.3)





Time to revisit my research

- Text-based review of current iterations of the texts (AQTF 2010, *Training Package Development Handbook Guidelines*, some Training Packages)
- Interviews with people in VET who work in areas that fall within the authority of the AQTF and Training Packages
- Interested in more information? Please contact:

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