

**PREPARING TO TEACH IN TAFE:
A CASE STUDY OF INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE
VICTORIAN TECHNICAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Sandra Walls

Aim of the study

This study aims to investigate initial Technical and Further Education (TAFE) teacher education in Victoria and determine methods and models for best preparing teachers for today's Victorian TAFE system. It is a case study of initial TAFE teacher education in Victoria and will pursue responses to the following research questions:

- Accounting for their unique roles and identities how are teachers best prepared to teach in contemporary TAFE?
- What model of teacher preparation best provides for teaching in the Victorian TAFE system today?

This study will answer these questions firstly by reviewing the existing literature on the role and identity of a contemporary TAFE teacher; secondly by analysing the current initial teacher preparation for TAFE teachers in Victoria and existing and possible models for TAFE teacher education. Thirdly the study will undertake empirical research to explore the ways teachers are best prepared to teach in contemporary TAFE and their unique roles and identities and finally it will aim to establish a possible good practice model for initial teacher education for the Victorian TAFE context. The research aims to provide an interpretation of the role and professional identity of TAFE teachers as informing the initial teaching preparation that is and could be provided to Victorian TAFE teachers. Specific issues to be explored in the empirical research will be based on the themes and issues that emerge from the literature review.

The empirical research will involve interviewing three Victorian senior TAFE managers, nine Victorian experienced TAFE teachers and nine Victorian beginning TAFE teachers; analysing the curriculum documents for Certificate IV in Training and Assessment¹; and analysing the standards developed by the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO)². This approach will contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding the training needs of beginning TAFE teachers in Victoria. It will determine the usefulness of Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in meeting those needs and determine a framework for models for initial teacher education to meet the needs of Victorian contemporary TAFE teaching.

Key terms

- i. initial teacher education
- ii. TAFE teacher roles and identities
- iii. teacher preparation.

Methodology

This qualitative case study aims to investigate how TAFE teachers in the Victorian TAFE system are initially prepared to teach and how they might best be prepared. A qualitative case study methodology will support the exploration of the skills and knowledge that TAFE teachers require in order to teach in TAFE as perceived by experienced and neophyte teachers. It will support the exploration of the suitability of the existing initial teacher education model, namely the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, and further support the conceptualisation of a framework for an initial teacher education model that might best prepare teachers to teach in TAFE.

A distinction between what knowledge to shoot for fundamentally separates quantitative and qualitative inquiry...Quantitative researchers have pressed for explanation and control; qualitative researchers have pressed for understanding and complex interrelationships among all that exists (Stake 1995, p.37).

1 Standard 1.4 of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) 2007 mandates Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (Training and Assessment40104B) as the minimum qualification for delivering and assessing accredited vocational education and training.

2 FENTO – A United Kingdom government organization responsible for regulating compulsory teacher qualification for further education teachers and for improving teacher education and professional development for new and existing further education teachers (Lucas 2004, p35). Lifelong Learning UK: helping secure the workforce that organisations need. www.fento.org/

This study will adopt an interpretivist approach as understood by Merriam (1998) where empirical data will be gathered through the stories and experiences of the interviewees together with the interpretation of curricula and standards documentation.

In interpretive research, education is considered to be a process and school is a lived experience. Understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive, hypothesis–or theory generating (rather than a deductive or testing) mode of inquiry. Multiple realities are constructed socially by individuals (p.4).

Research context

The context for this research will be TAFE institutes and TAFE teaching and management staff in Victoria. The Victorian context for this case study has been chosen even though the national statutory regulations regarding who can teach Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses are ostensibly the same for TAFE institutes throughout Australia. Victoria is chosen firstly because of greater access by the researcher to Victorian TAFE teachers, senior managers and TAFE policy makers as a result of collaborative links established during seventeen years of employment as a TAFE teacher, senior educator and manager at a Victorian TAFE institute; secondly, that by limiting this research to the Victorian context some of the complications caused by varied State and Territory award working conditions for TAFE teachers will be avoided; and thirdly, Victoria in the 1980s and 1990s was a site of intense research into initial teacher education for TAFE teachers. This final point leads to a subsidiary goal for this study, namely that the study will reinvigorate research into initial TAFE teacher education good practice in Victoria and provide other States with the opportunity to benchmark their own initial TAFE teacher education practices³.

Background

Since the 1980s there has been considerable research into the job role and identity of the TAFE teacher (Chappell 1998; Schofield and McDonald in Mitchell 2004, Chappell, Bateman and Roy 2006; Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman and Ro 2005; Smith, 2005; Seddon 2008; and Mitchell 2008). Whilst this

³ Eighty per cent of all VET training is delivered in States along the eastern seaboard. Therefore Victoria has been chosen because the quality of the preparation provided to practitioners is of particular interest. There is a tension between quantity and quality here. I would delete this. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/statistics/vet/ann06/sum06/sd07507.pdf>

research continues, the impact of this research is not evaluated according to the needs of TAFE teacher education.

In the 1980s and early 1990s initial teacher education for TAFE teachers was a strongly researched topic (Hall Dean, Guthrie, Hayton, Mageean and Scarfe 1991 and Scarfe 1991⁴). Unlike research into TAFE teacher identity and job role, it has not continued with the exception of the writing of Smith (2005), Mulcahy (2003) and Seddon, Penna and Dart (2004). In the main, inquiry into initial TAFE teacher education has been subsumed into more general debates concerned with professional development for existing TAFE teachers.

The reasons for a lack of interest in the quality of an initial Australian or Victorian TAFE teacher education model need exploring. In the United Kingdom vigorous debate exists concerning the quality of their initial teacher education model for further education teachers (Guile and Griffiths 2001; Fisher and Webb 2006; Lucas 2007; Cunningham 2008; McNally, Blake, Corbin and Gray 2008). This debate is fostered by the UK Labor government which acknowledges the interdependence of initial teacher education, the need to develop quality further education teachers and their impact on the effectiveness of the learning and skills sector.

The Australian context has different industry and political pressures to those of the UK, especially those surrounding perceived skill shortages⁵ and the proposed new contestable funding model for vocational education and training⁶. However as there are enough other similarities in the two vocational education systems it indicates a seemingly general complacency around initial teacher education in the Victorian TAFE system.

Overall, this portrayal of the field of research into initial teacher education research in Australia during the last decade suggests a relatively weak epistemological base, small-scale and isolated studies, and variable research quality (Nuttall et al 2006, p.325).

This lack of debate and research in Australia around what constitutes good practice for initial teacher education is a driver for this research study.

4 Scarfe's literature review outlines major reviews and reports of the 1970s and 1980s into initial TAFE teacher preparation.

5 See in particular *Maintaining the Advantage* (2004), a Victorian government initiative aimed at coping with the skill shortages.

6 The Federal government is considering a new funding model for VET. 'The current training system is highly centralised, with state run TAFE institutes dominating the market and government funding delivered primarily to these and other public institutions' (*Skilling Australia for the Future*, March 2008)

Study contribution

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding initial TAFE teacher education in Victoria and aim to further the debate to a position that will better support beginning TAFE teachers. The study will also contribute to critique of the curriculum for initial TAFE teacher training provided throughout Australia as Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. The study will investigate the acceptability of this course for initial TAFE teacher training by eliciting the views of experienced and beginner Victorian TAFE teachers. Overall it will contribute by providing reasons for continuing with current debates or for starting new conversations around models for initial teacher education for the Victorian TAFE system. Finally the study will contribute to the current needs for initial TAFE teacher education, as determined by the study's research, by providing a scenario or framework for future initial teacher education in the Victorian TAFE system.

Time line

The following is a suggested timeline for this study. It is considered to be achievable and has hopefully accounted for those events that will occur outside of the control of this study.

Event	Finish Date	Progress
Presentation of proposal (seminar)	22 April 2008	Completed
Research proposal (10,000 words)	27 August 2008	In Progress
Ethics requirements	December 2008	In Progress
Literature review	April 2009	In Progress
Data collection questions	August 2009	
Field research	December 2009	
Data analysis	March 2010	
Thesis completion	December 2011	

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