# WHAT IS MISSING FROM INNOVATIVE PRACTICE IN VET?

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## Introduction

Among ANTA's Best Practice Awards for 1998 is a training program that has been documented and published as *Opening Doors: Enterprise Based Training in Action,* (Virgona, Sefton, Waterhouse & Marshall, 1998). In addition to the initial case study text is a video and a professional development kit. The kit is intended for use in programs that focus on the initial and continuing professional education of VET practitioners. As an educator, teaching within post graduate AVET courses, these materials are a very important and useful resource. In the first instance they provide a wealth of information and first hand description of enterprise based training. Secondly, they provide a valuable example of practitioner research. Thirdly, they go some of the way in describing the complexity of the interaction that occurs between context and practice.

*Opening Doors* stands as an exemplar of innovative practice within the VET sector that has been developed by enterprise based vocational educators. Significantly, these practitioners are generally considered to be amongst the best in the country. In rolling out descriptors for this program it stands as an example of contextualised and customised, integrated and holistic training. As such it is celebrated and promoted as worthy of wider emulation and obviously becomes the subject of further and on going analysis.

The purpose of this paper is to consider how these materials might be used within a post graduate program that focuses on Adult and Vocational Education and Training, (AVET). Teaching within a university program is in many ways working within a privileged space. It is privileged in the sense that there is a greater degree of autonomy and access to resources that are not necessarily found in other educational sectors. However this autonomy and relative freedom for personal decision making in program content and focus has led some academics to make claims for emancipatory practice which have been criticised by others as being ungrounded and unrealistic. In response to this, others especially those working from postmodernist and poststructuralist frameworks have called for more modest claims for educational practice, (Richard Edwards 1997). Likewise, Jennifer Gore (1998) has suggested that as well as identifying and theorising possibilities for critical practice, a dual agenda is needed to overtly consider the limitations. She beliefs that it is very important to realise what is possible, in a given context, at a particular time.

## How might *Opening Doors* be used within AVET programs?

*Opening Doors* is an innovative enterprise based training program for Operator and Production level workers. As such it provides many possibilities and its own 'multiple tales for training', (Peter Waterhouse 1996). How then is *Opening Doors* to be contextualised within post graduate AVET program? It is suggested that these materials provide AVET practitioners with data that enables them to begin to look at the opportunities and constraints that surround enterprise based training; what constitutes innovative and 'educational effectiveness' within the VET sector, and even to begin to examine the nature of VET as a sector of education. In conjunction with data from similar publications of earlier programs it enables a comprehensive review of the evolution of Operator and Production level training programs.

The next section of this paper provides a very brief description of three enterprise based training programs for Operator and Production workers. The first is called *Triform Training*, and is drawn from the Food Processing industry. This was part of a pilot study to implement a module from the then newly developed national certificate, (NFITC 1993). The second example is a set of programs developed and implemented as part of a model of integrated training in the vehicle manufacturing industry. These have been published as *Breathing Life into Training,* (Sefton, Waterhouse and Deakin 1994*)*. The third program is *Opening Doors*, (Virgona, Sefton, Waterhouse and Marshall 1998*)*. While *Triform Training* and *Breathing Life into Training* are predecessors to *Opening Doors*, *Breathing Life into Training* is the direct predecessor.

It is assumed that an aim of post-graduate programs in AVET should be encouraging what Stephen Brookfield has described as 'critically reflective teachers'. Brookfield (1995: 8) explains,

reflection becomes critical when it has two distinctive purposes. The first is to understand how considerations of power undergird, frame, and distort educational processes and interactions. The second is to question assumptions and practices that seem to make our teaching lives easier but actually work against our own best long-term interests.

Given this aim, a two tiered framework is suggested for reviewing these programs. The first tier is directly derived from these exemplary innovative programs. This framework is intended to show what constitutes educational effectiveness in this sector. However it is argued that this framework alone provides only a technicist approach to instruction. Subsequently this leads to the second tier of the framework aimed at gaining an understanding of the social vision and politics encapsulated by the programs. This is aligned to some of the more critical adult educators involved with the development of pedagogical praxis and who include the development of 'power awareness' as an intention of their pedagogy, (Shor 1992, 129 and 1993, 32).

Foucault's notion of discourse is important to this review. According to McHoul and Grace (1993, 31) Foucault conceptualised discourse not as language or interaction but as a relatively well bounded area of social knowledge. Therefore, at any point in time it is only possible to write, speak or think about social practices in certain ways and not others. In this way 'a discourse' would be what constrains but also enables writing, speaking and thinking within such boundaries. Ball (1990, 2) describes this form of discourse as embodying meaning and social relationships. 'Meanings . . . . arise not from language but from institutional practices, from power relations. Words and concepts change their meaning and their effects as they are employed within different discourses'. Sara Mills (1997, 17) explains that 'a discourse is something which produces something else, rather than something which exists in and of itself and which can be analysed in isolation'.

Richard Edwards (1997) points out that within such conceptions of discourse, knowledge becomes contingent and situated. This has led to the idea that instead of one positivistic notion of truth their are in fact 'regimes of truth'. Different and competing discourses providing different truths. Chris Weedon (1987, 41) has pointed out that 'Discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power'. Some discourses take on the status of representing the common sense view of the world at a particular time. These powerful discourses are called dominant discourses. However as Anita Devos (1998) citing Ball explains, as discourses are constituted by inclusions and exclusions they therefore stand in antagonistic relations to other discourses, other possibilities of meaning, other claims, rights, and positions.

VET, along with specific training programs and even VET practitioners are simultaneously located within dominant and competing discourses. The dominant discourse defining what is included and what excluded is therefore argued to have substantial influence upon training programs. Linda Fore (1998) has shown in her research how the dominant discourse contextualises and subsequently directly impacts upon a program's structure and content.

# Program 1
# Triform Training and the Certificate of Food Processing

Triform training was a pilot program. It involved monitoring the delivery methods for one module in relation to the teaching approaches appropriate for a group considered to be typical operators and production workers in the food processing industry. Triform training was innovative in that it utilised and combined three different methods of training. Over the course of a week the program involved a group training session, a one on one session and a self paced project. It was also a part of implementing the newly developed national Certificate of Food Processing. This certificate is in many ways a classic enactment of important aspects of the Carmichael Report (1992). As such the certificate has both an educational and industrial function.

The Certificate of Food Processing has been designed to have three levels. These corresponded to the ASF levels 1, 2 & 3. The course design requires that learners complete and obtain a set number of points at each of the levels with a point being equivalent to a nominal student contact hour. Successful completion of a competency based module that has a nominal duration of 40 hours equals 40 points and a 20 hour

module obtains 20 points. To successfully complete the Certificate (III), learners must obtain credit for 900 points.[1]

The design and content of the second program is different from the first in that it is developed from the specific work practices of the enterprise where the training is to take place. It represents a model of Integrated Training in the vehicle manufacturing industry, (Sefton, 1993; Cooney, 1993; Sefton, Waterhouse and Deakin, 1994; & Deakin, 1995). One significant advance is that the program involves the educational practitioner in the design phase of the curriculum development process.

# Program 2
# A Model of Integrated Training in Vehicle Manufacturing

In 1993-94, the National Automotive Language and Literacy Coordination Unit (NALLCU) developed integrated training to implement the Vehicle Industry Certificate (VIC). They reported on implementation in six workplaces across the industry. Each case study involved different strategies as dictated by the needs and expectations of the particular workplaces. These are published in *Breathing Life into Training*. The VIC is an accredited competency based curriculum developed to offer training to operators and production workers in the vehicle and component parts manufacturing industry.

This project was conducted in the vehicle manufacturing sector of the automotive industry at a time of massive restructure and industry change. The need for international competitiveness was well recognised and government plans for the industry included reductions in tariffs and rationalisation of the industry.

The project arose from a proposal that a model of training which integrated key elements of the training, would provide a more effective strategy for addressing not only the literacy and language issues, but also other issues of workplace reform, (Sefton et al: 1994:7). The report clearly places the training within the context of industry restructure and workplace change. In this particular case, this was highly influenced by the Button plan[2], and in a somewhat different direction by aspects of the national training reform agenda. Workplace change is described in the report as being tripartite with support from industry, unions and government, with an agreed agenda reached on the ways in which reform would be introduced. Changes in work practices are also detailed with one example being the move to the Japanese 'lean production system'. The report uses a diagram to illustrate the contextualisation of integrated training with four other areas which it names as the Global Context, Enterprise Strategies and Directions, National Directions & Policies and Union Strategies and Directions, (p. 16).

These first two programs were developed under the auspices of the previous Labor government and their national reform agendas for workplace change and training. As such they show the evolution within a different policy context than the third program. The third program occurred within the policy context of the more conservative coalition and their policies of increased market liberalism. This was also the guiding star of the previous government however it has been even more marked under the coalition. While the seeds were all sown under Labor this has had a significant effect on coalition led changes particularly in industrial relations.

# Program 3
# Opening Doors: Enterprise Based Training in Action
# (The Tickford Project)[3]

This is an example of an enterprise based training program for shop floor employees at Tickford Vehicle Engineering conducted by Workplace Learning Initiatives. The program identified the key steps in the design and development process used by the company in

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[1] Brown and Rushbrook (1995, 31) have shown the alignment between the completion of modules with skill based classifications and corresponding pay points.

[2] The Button Plan was an Industry Plan for the automotive industry that was launched by the Minister for Industry John Button in 1984 updated in 1989 and again in 1991. It called for a winding down of tariff protection, an increase in restructuring assistance and a rationalisation of producers.

[3] This program is worthy of further examination as it offers a great deal in the way of complex issues for VET researchers to consider. The 165 page case study, the video and the professional development kit can be ordered through the web site of the private provider, Workplace Learning Initiatives at <http//:www.wli.com.au>

producing high performance cars. These steps were replicated by the trainees in designing and building billy carts. The program adopted the same team structure, reporting and monitoring procedures that are used in authentic product development teams.

The program was delivered as a unit within the Vehicle Industry Certificate covering almost 50% of the course outcomes. It therefore offers a model by which industry competencies can be accounted for within an integrated, holistic program.

The project was nominated as a demonstration of best practice in educational effectiveness by ANTA. The ANTA funds allowed this private provider to make a video, prepare a professional development kit for industry trainers and write up a full case study.

These materials describe the program and how it was established as an example of an approach to VET which is context based, integrated and responsive to enterprise needs. It discusses the principles that made it successful and identifies features that are transferable to other work locations.

adapted from Crina Virgona's (Abstract) in Framework for Innovation, Australian Competency Research Centre (1998:35)[4]

Jennifer Gore (1993, 6; & 1998, 273) has explained that the notion of pedagogy has two aspects. The first is about instruction while the second is about social vision. Based on this idea the first analytical framework for the review is focused on showing the quality of the instruction or what ANTA calls the 'educational effectiveness'. The second analytical framework concentrates on understanding the political nature and social vision encapsulated by the programs.

## The First Tier of the Analytical Framework (Educational Effectiveness & Instruction)

This first analytical framework is used to look at how these programs are considered to be innovative and represent educational effectiveness. From the three programs it is possible to derive characteristics that represent innovative approaches to the design and development of the instruction with respect to enterprise based training programs. However, in some ways these may represent what Michael Collins (1991, 5) has referred to as part of the adult educators obsession with techniques that are aimed at improving the efficiency of learning. Consequently some caution is required in their proclamation as in their own way these may constitute a technicist approach to instruction.

With respect to innovative and 'best practice' for educational effectiveness, six key factors are identified.

➢ **integrated training** is used in three different ways. Firstly it can mean the integration of modules, where the learning outcomes of two or more modules are mixed together (ie. integrated) and assessed through the completion of some more holistic task such as a project. Secondly, it can involve the thoughtful integration of work and the on-the-job learning with training and learning done off-the-job. Thirdly, it can refer to the way that training is integrated with workplace change.

➢ **embedded English language and literacy:** This refers to the way that English language and literacy are learnt as needed, in this case within a VET program. This language and literacy learning occurs incidentally and secondary to skill development.

➢ **authentic learning,** involves the worker/learner considering and learning from content derived from their actual work. Consideration of real work situations, practices and issues is the basis of the training. Hence the learning is not simulated or generalised but is instead real, authentic and specific*.*

➢ **situated learning** refers to the way that the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are learnt are connected with the specific environment, situations and practices where they occur and where the worker/learner encounters them; the learning of embedded knowledge.

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[4] This description of the Tickford Project is directly adapted from the abstract of Crina Virgona's conference paper *Best Practice Project: Opening Doors - enterprise based training in action*, given at and included within the proceedings of *Framework for Innovation*, Australian Competency Research Centre, (1998:35)[4]

> ➤ *customised curriculum* refers to the way in which educational practitioners re-interpret learning outcomes or competencies so as to fine-tune and align them to the particular situation and environment in which the learners will be working. Educators doing this aspect of curriculum development work must make interpretations and decisions about what the documented competencies will actually mean in relation to where the worker/learners perform their work. . (Lynda Wyse and Kath Brewer-Vinga, 1996: 55- 66, describe an example from the food processing industry).

> ➤ *contextualised curriculum* takes its meaning from the way that situations and conditions familiar to the experience of the worker/learners are used to contextualise the content of the curriculum. Throughout this paper it is used in two ways, these occur at a macro and micro level. The first refers to the way that the VET sector is located within dominant and competing discourses. The influence of these discourses shaping the structure and the design of programs and their curriculum. At the micro level the term is about the development of an 'indigenous' workplace curriculum or program which is driven by the specific requirements of a specific site and returns to accredited curriculum and pre-specified learning outcomes only as a secondary or final concern.

## The Second Tier of the Analytical Framework: (The Politics and Social Vision)

While the impetus for this tier comes from Jennifer Gore (1993, 6; & 1998, 273) it is also aligned to Brookfield's (1995) notion of developing critically reflective teachers. Three concepts are introduced.

*Power/Knowledge* is a concept instigated by Foucault which recognises the nexus that exists between power and knowledge. Foucault (1980:52) wrote, 'the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power'.

Power/Knowledge allows us to examine whose knowledge is privileged and whose is excluded, whose truth and whose world view prevails. These three programs like most other VET programs all have project advisory committees. The membership of these is very similar across the three programs in terms of representation of interests. Typically there are representatives of key employers, union officials, training boards, training providers and even government departments. While *Breathing Life into Training* uses a graphic (p. 16) to show that there are competing workplace reform agendas espoused by key stakeholders, the integrated model is depicted as developing and operating within the common ground - the intersection shared by these agendas. The program publications provide little acknowledgment of adversarial relations between employer representatives and union officials. Norman Fairclough (1992, 92) writes, 'hegemony is about constructing alliances, and integrating rather than simply dominating subordinate classes, through concessions or through ideological means, to win their consent'. Subsequently, it may be possible to describe these programs as representing a unified or 'corporate pedagogy'.

*Human Capital Theory:* this is a theory which is claimed to operate at two levels. In the first instance it occurs at the level of a group such as an organisation. Under this arrangement the organisation can invest in the development of its human capital by running training programs for its employees. Hence the organisation sees its most valuable asset as its people, or as 'human resources' and seeks an advantage from developing this resource and in adding value to their employees.

The second level at which it operates is that of the individual. Here the individual employee can choose to undertake extra education and training. This is considered to be an investment on their part in the development of their own human capital. For the investment to be realised the education and training must lead to an increased financial return in the form of higher wages. Peter Watkins (1991, 42) notes that human capital theory has come under question from a number of quarters. Nevertheless human capital theory has become an almost taken for granted assumption in justifying participation in vocational education and training programs.

The discourse of training reform is inexplicably tied to a belief in human capital theory. This can be seen where pay points have been negotiated to correspond with completion of sections of training programs. Brown & Rushbrook (1995, 31) have shown an extract from a training agreement within an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement where completion of specified modules are shown to directly correspond to Industrial classifications and rates of pay. This theory is the basis of the industrial and training reforms advocated by the ACTU and is the carrot held out by some employers.

Union officials occupy positions within their unions that are comparable with upper and middle level management within industry. Tom Brambles (1996) in his work on union leadership describes them as

occupying a privileged layer of the labour movement. In addition he argues that broking between capital and labour is the reason they exist. As such their interests can sometimes be enshrined within pragmatic and conservative behaviour. Pragmatic in the sense of providing their constituents with access to industrial classifications and pay points as set out in skill based awards and agreements. At the same time though it is also conservative in that learner/workers stay tied and invested to the wage/labour relations of capitalism.

Peter Ewer (1998, 17) has shown how some unions such as the Vehicle Division of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), which has a majority of its members working as Operators and Production workers, has been able to procure substantial gains under these arrangements. This union has negotiated access to accredited training programs in most of the major car manufacturing plants and a high number of the network of component parts manufacturing. Ewer explains that rather than attempting to instigate a trade equivalence program of approx 960 hours of student contact time, the Vehicle Division opted instead for the VIC, a qualification with nominal contact hours half that of trade programs, but with a pay point of 96% of base trade wages. Thus putting their own spin on the notion of 'strategic unionism'.

***Managerial prerogative***: the term 'prerogative' means an exclusive right or privilege attached to an office or position. In this case it is the privilege attached to management. In the wage/labour relations of the workplace, the employer is the purchaser of labour. They pay wages to workers in exchange for their ability to do work. As the purchasers they exercise their right to make certain demands and determinations in line with their marketplace power. In industrial relations circles this power has been described as an 'inequality in bargaining power', (Buchanan 1996, 128).

Some policy analysts have already noted that in times of high unemployment, governments look to place excess labour market participants into education and training institutions. What is more governments need to involve the industrial parties - those directly involved in the wage/labour transaction. This gives the training credibility and turns these parties into powerful allies and advocates of training and education. This is done through involving them in the training processes, fostering their commitment and allowing them to develop ownership of the process.

Significantly, the training programs are all competency based. This is attractive to the industrial parties especially employers as it shows an attempt at building quality assurance into the training system. The achievement of the outcomes as pre-specified by the industrial parties being a means of assuring the quality and of certificating the worker/learner's labour power. This assurance of the quality of the labour power, (the level of skills, knowledge and attitudes) goes some way towards the removal of the uncertainty within the employment contract, in industrial relations this is called 'the inequality of uncertainty', (Buchanan 1996, 128).

Involvement of the industrial parties extends down to specific ownership of the curriculum. This is done by involving representatives of the industrial parties in each level of the reform agendas, in overseeing the development of curriculum, and its implementation within enterprises. By implicating the representatives of the employers and of the unions, governments are able to cut criticism of the training system and of the various programs being implemented. This results in what could be described as 'the corporate capture of curriculum' though in reality it represents more of a willing, handing over of the curriculum to corporate interests.

## Conclusion

What this paper shows to be missing from the analysis of innovative VET programs is overt recognition and discussion of the politics. All education is political, (Ira Shor 1993), and all curriculum development has been described as being a manipulative strategy, (Murray Print 1993, 15). Consequently, VET programs set out to provide worker/learners with particular knowledge, skills and attitudes. These knowledge, skills and attitudes are not neutral. Instead they are those that have been identified by the industrial parties and especially the employers as having value within the labour market. They are the skills, knowledge and attitudes which they are prepared to reward and remunerate. In fact they reward only what is in their interests. Contextualised and integrated enterprise based programs go somewhat further in supplying those skills and knowledges which have value in the internal labour market of the specific enterprise in which the worker/learner is employed. It is in this sense that the outcomes of these programs have direct relevance and utility. In fact individual employers have less interest in achieving industry wide competencies instead they care only about meeting the competencies required to do the work in their workplace.

Ira Shor (1992, 143) has raised objections to the subordination of curriculum to business interests when he writes,

> ... curriculum should not be driven by business needs because business policy is not made democratically at the workplace or in society. Business, industry, and the job market are not democratic or public institutions. They are operated hierarchically and privately from the top down. Why should education in a democracy subordinate itself to an undemocratic sector of society?

Yet this subordination rather than being treated as problematic is an ingrained, accepted and defining principle of VET programs.

The three program publications provide a rich array of data and materials for consideration within undergraduate and post-graduate AVET programs. On one level they are ideal for showing the evolution of Operator and Production level training programs within different policy contexts. They show creative approaches to instruction and they begin to show the limitations. On another level they stand as an example of what Dennis Carlson and Michael Apple (1998) call Power/Knowledge/Pedagogy.

A number of important questions arise on the nature and role of training programs in the dissemination and induction of worker/learners into the dominant discourse, (Schied et al 1998). This is especially problematic considering the variation in the outcomes that these discourses of economics, quality, teamwork and 'best practice' have come to mean for working people. It is also interesting to consider how training programs might be encouraging and coopting the active participation of working people to the implementation of lean production. Maybe these are the questions that can be asked within post graduate AVET programs?

Finally, Tom Inglis (1997, 4) explains the difference between empowerment and emancipation, ' . . . empowerment involves people developing capacities to act successfully within the existing system and structures of power, while emancipation concerns critically analysing, resisting and challenging structures of power'. Gore (1998) argues that we need to consider the limitations that exist for radical pedagogies and empowerment derived from the institutions and contexts where they occur. It is important to realise that in a sector that cannot even talk openly about politics it stands to reason that the best that can be hoped for are small reforms. For some it may even seem like working in a confined space. In fact to profess more radical approaches within VET immediately identifies those making such claims as unrealistic, positioning them outside the dominant discourse, and able to be excluded as irrelevant.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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