

The Continuing Professional Development of Further Education Teachers: Comparative Study of TAFE NSW Teachers and Further Education Lecturers in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

A reading of recent Australian literature relevant to VET pedagogy indicates there are several key aspects of VET teaching and learning that require a planned approach to provision of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in TAFE institutes (McNickle & Cameron, 2003; Mitchell, 2003).

Research relating to the roles of teachers and head teachers in TAFE NSW (Clayton et al, 2005; Stehlik et al, 2003) indicates the pressures on these staff to develop the wide range of knowledge and skills required in the training package context. Yet there doesn't appear to be a systematic approach by TAFE management to the planning and funding required to meet the CPD needs of these staff. There is evidence that full-time teachers are overloaded and in many cases teachers fund some of their own CPD (Palmieri, 2003).

Other Australian research (Junor, 2005; NCVER, 2004a) indicates that a very high proportion of TAFE NSW teachers are part-time or casual, and 66% of permanent staff are aged 40 years or more (NCVER, 2004b). This profile implies significant succession planning issues for TAFE management not yet being addressed in CPD planning (Palmieri, 2003).

UK research indicates that there are also serious challenges facing Further Education (FE) managers that have not yet been addressed (Loveder, 2005).

The paper reports on research conducted in TAFE NSW and the UK, during August and September 2006 and funded under the NSW Teachers' Federation Eric Pearson grant.

The research aimed to document key information about NSW and the UK FE colleges, in particular:

- the main new ways of working in VET expected of NSW and of Scottish and English FE teachers; in other words, the main aspects of the emerging NSW and UK VET pedagogy
- the full-time/part-time (casual) teaching workforce profile in TAFE NSW and in Scottish and English FE colleges
- the types of continuing professional development (CPD) each of the workforce groups obtain access to and how is it funded
- how the FE colleges in the UK determine the CPD needs of each group of teachers
- whether there are useful CPD models in UK FE colleges that enable casuals as well as full-timers to gain access to PD that is critical to the demands of an emerging VET pedagogy and to their institutions' succession planning

Introduction

Clayton et al (2005) claim that sustaining the skill base of the TAFE workforce in each Australian state has become a critical issue. These authors indicate that not only do vocational education and training (VET) teachers have to train people to live and work in a constantly changing world of work, they also have to simultaneously deal with the changing nature of their own working practice.

There are several key factors that are currently impacting on the nature of the TAFE teaching workforce skills base. These include the changing type of pedagogical practices expected in the VET sector, the types of professional development programs required to meet this changing pedagogy, the casualisation of the TAFE teaching workforce, and the demographic profile of the VET workforce.

Against this backdrop, the study aimed to document key information relating to these issues in TAFE NSW and in UK FE colleges in England and Scotland.

This brief conference paper summarises just a few of the findings relating to these issues, a fuller account of which is being prepared for the New South Wales Teacher's Federation.

Methodology

The study used the following sources to gather information:

- literature search for VET teaching and learning and CPD issues in NSW, and in the UK FE systems in England and Scotland
- internet search engine Google "Alerts" for key web and news items. The key words used to elicit the "alerts" were: *further education in England; further education in Scotland; vocational education and training in England; vocational education and training in Scotland* (monitored over a period of a few months)
- twenty one interviews conducted with :
 - teacher union officers at the Educational Institute of Scotland and the University and College Union in England
 - teacher union representatives at several colleges in England and Scotland
 - other key informants who have been involved with researching CPD issues and needs in UK FE colleges, or whose role is to develop CPD activities for teachers in FE colleges

Changing VET Pedagogy in TAFE and in UK FE Colleges

Several recent reports indicate there is a growing body of research on VET teaching and learning that implies a distinctive VET pedagogy that has emerged in Australia and other similar countries, in the context of competency-based training and rapidly changing workplaces.

A summary of this literature implies the key features of VET teaching and learning as including:

- Learning aligned to industry standards, thus practitioners being expected to adopt 'best practice' according to industry standards

- Collaboration/relationships with industry
 - Adult learning principles
 - program and resource development skills
 - VET system knowledge
 - Management and leadership
 - VET system knowledge
 - Management and leadership
 - Learner-centredness or knowledge of learner styles
 - Flexible delivery/blended learning, using a range of new technologies
- [Clayton and Blom, 2004; Guthrie, 2006; National Centre of Vocational Education Research, 2004; TAFE NSW, 2004a; Waters, 2005].

Whilst some aspects of these features are not new to VET teaching, the current government and employer agenda for more direct links between VET and workplaces means there is a push for a stronger focus on the first two features in particular.

Analysis of the research relating to VET pedagogy provides a useful list of pedagogic knowledge, skills and strategies that can be summarised under learning approaches, professional practice and industry knowledge (sometimes called technical currency), on which CPD can be based.

The Consortium Research Program: Supporting vocational education and training providers in building capability for the future, is another rich source of information about the nature of VET pedagogy in Australia. Hopefully, once all the research projects being conducted by the Consortium are completed, the key insights will inform the Federal and state VET policy and funding decisions.

The interviews in the UK, with FE lecturers and PD managers, indicated that similar types of skills and knowledge are expected in the colleges there.

However, a checklist approach to VET pedagogy would be simplistic, given the complex nature of human learning, and the atomized approach to competency-based training that sometimes occurs (Wheelahan, 2005). Webb and Cox (2004) suggest that pedagogical practices have both generic and subject-specific aspects, and that conceptions of pedagogy are changing in response to developments of our understanding of cognition and meta-cognition and in response to the perceived opportunities offered by information and communication technologies (ICT). These insights need to be taken into account in planning CPD activities for VET practitioners.

Casualisation of the VET workforces in TAFE NSW and the UK

Australian research (Junor, 2005; NCVET, 2004) indicates that a very high proportion of TAFE teachers are part-time or casual. The authors claim that 78% of teaching staff in NSW (by head count) are part-time or casual. Although, there have been two Staffing Agreements between DET and the union since this data was collected. The most recent agreement commits to increasing use of permanent full-time and part-time employment ... *where this is appropriate and sustainable, based on TAFE business and education*

needs (Office of the Director-General, NSW DET, New TAFE Staffing Agreement, 1st March 2007). Evidence from the TAFETA is that only some Institutes had been working towards increasing the numbers of full-time staff under the earlier agreement (NSW TAFETA, 2006).

In 2004-05 there were 74,632 full-time equivalent teaching staff in England's FE colleges; 49,860 were full-timers and 24,772 were part-timers (62% by headcount); 62,112 had permanent status, 36,253 were fixed term, 7,101 were casual, and 10,601 were agency staff (Learning Skills Council, 2006). According to the union, the casualisation of the teaching force has de-professionalised this workforce. It sees the move to the "license to practice" as a positive one in terms of building professionalism again.

In Scotland 63% of teaching staff (by headcount) were part-time in 2004-05, with 81% of part-timers having temporary, and 19% having permanent, status. Data by full-time equivalent (FTE) indicates that 30% of the teaching workforce is part-time, with 58% of these having temporary status (Scottish Funding Council, 2006).

A highly-casualised staff profile implies significant succession planning issues for TAFE management not yet being addressed in professional development planning (Palmieri, 2003). As Junor points out, there is an urgency to adopt a stable approach to staffing the TAFE sector, due to its central role in securing national skill requirements.

An Australian Senate Committee Report, *Bridging the Skills Divide*, claims that the casualisation of the workforce has led to the erosion of the TAFE teaching skills base. Casualisation also causes problems for access to professional development. A study by Stehlik et al (2003) of contract and casual VET teachers involved in providing flexible and online learning, found that professional development opportunities were more accessible to full-time and permanent educational staff. This was despite the finding that many contract and casual staff often carried out the same range of teaching and other educational functions as their full-time and permanent colleagues. The authors conclude that access to professional development by contract and casual staff is vital for succession planning. They claim that professional development in underpinning educational knowledge, learning styles and curriculum development are as important for skilled and flexible responses as are technical skills (for the online environment), industry knowledge and content skills.

In most of the other literature relating to CPD needs, however, there is little distinction made between full-time and part-time (casual) teachers' needs, and none made between the differing states' needs. In NSW there is a case to more clearly differentiate the skill needs of full-time and part-time (casual) teachers, given that 78% (by headcount) of teaching staff are part-time (casuals) and given that NSW has unique central curriculum and resource development facilities (albeit under-funded), unlike most other states. It can be argued that TAFE NSW should be better placed to deliver more consistent national training package qualifications and skill sets than other states that do not have state-wide curriculum facilities, if it were not for the huge task of providing CPD to the significantly high proportion of part-time (casual) staff in this state.

Continuing Professional Development of TAFE Teachers in NSW

- There are several types of CPD activities provided by a variety of organizations, including by the TAFE Institutes, but with little coordination and/or planning of targets
- the Annual Department of Education & Training Report does not provide data on CPD expenditure.
- TAFE NSW has a model for ascertaining current and emerging CPD needs of teachers in general in each of its eleven Institutes, and for prioritizing these, via its Professional Development Framework for Teachers.
- The Framework doesn't distinguish between the needs of full-timers and part-time/casuals.
- There is no state funding model that commits to targets, nor a model that ensures all teachers who need access to particular CPD activities are given such access, regardless of job status.

Continuing Professional Development of FE lecturers in the UK

In the UK:

- Sector Skills Councils are the national bodies responsible for identifying the skills and training needs of their sectors, for maintaining national occupational standards for those sectors, for gathering labour market information and for workforce development planning
- UnionLearn is the skills & education program run by Trade Union Congress (for whole workforce CPD); uses Learning Representative model – currently 14,000 trained reps to assist members access learning; in the FE sector, the role of the Learning Rep is to assist the lecturer to work out what CPD courses may assist them in their career enhancement or in meeting targets in the PD Plan agreed to in their annual review.

In England:

- 47 local Learning & Skills Councils, responsible for identifying regional & local skills & training needs; the Lifelong Learning Skills Council is the one responsible for the professional development of everyone working in the learning and skills sector, including further education lecturers.
- A 4-yearly cycle of inspections, with results used as part of the funding formula & comprehensive reports of each college publicly published
- From 2007 a “license to practice”, includes CPD requirement to have license renewed; those full-timers on new contracts need to complete 30 hours CPD each year (part-timers pro-rata)
- 25% of FE colleges covered by Learning Reps

In Scotland:

- Employers are represented on college Boards of Management
- A lot of colleges have research units; a lot of system-wide research has been done on CPD needs

- Each college a separate entity – has led to lack of coherence, re-invention of “the wheel”
- There is a benchmark of 35 hours of CPD to be completed per year by full-timers (part-timers pro-rata)
- 100% of FE colleges have Learning Reps, who complete a 5-day university course to be appointed
- Professional standards are set for CPD – contain prescriptive statements of what lecturers are expected to be able to do and indicative content of programs to meet the standards

Summary – the Context of CPD

The literature and the interview data indicate that the general trends in further education in all three systems are similar. NSW TAFE and the providers in Scotland and England have the following features in common:

- Qualification frameworks for competency-based delivery
- strengthened relationships between industry and FE providers at the local level
- curriculum increasingly directly driven by industry need
- increased focus on provision for young school students within a changed school curriculum
- “quality” frameworks in place
- the notion of “life-long learning”
- push for more emphasis on the teachers/lecturers continuing professional development
- push for more ICT in delivery
- high proportion of part-time and/or casual teachers, although NSW stands out as having the highest proportion

Thus the broad pressures on FE teachers/lecturers appear to be similar. In the UK the interviewees spoke of the constant pace of change and the challenges they were faced with. Timely and appropriate CPD was seen by many of the union representatives interviewed as one important strategy for assisting members deal with the VET pedagogy issues that confronted them.

Discussion

It could be argued that what has been termed “changing VET pedagogy” reflects, in part, the workforce changes identified by writers like Buchanan (2006), Hall (2006) and others. Hall, for example, argues that the imposition of business models in the public sector has led to work intensification, labour flexibility management pressures, and flatter organisational hierarchies. He claims many professionals have borne the brunt of organisational restructurings and often have to manage the consequences of these restructurings for their areas of responsibility. Added to this are the changing technological demands, which sometimes see new communication technologies (like mobile phones, laptops, PDAs, email, etc) blurring distinctions between work and non-work.

Teachers and head teachers in particular, in TAFE NSW, are juggling complex administration, management, teaching, and industry liaison roles within an ever-changing technological context. The UK interviews also indicated that the curriculum managers' role (similar to that of the NSW head teacher) was becoming difficult to manage.

Keep (2005) claims that governments in England have created what he calls "a state of permanent revolution" in the institutional structures that control, manage, fund, inspect and deliver VET. This concept of permanent revolution could also be said to currently apply to VET in NSW, given the number of restructures of the TAFE system as a whole and of the internal reorganisations that many individual Institutes have undergone in the past few years.

The flatter organizational structures noted by Hall and others, tighter (locally-managed) budgets, insufficient administration/clerical support, as well as the constant pace of change in the over-arching institutional structures (that Keep speaks of) all make the teacher and head teacher role more work-intensive.

Continuing Professional Development

Given this context of TAFE teachers' work, it has to be argued that good models of CPD need to be based on appropriate understandings of teacher (and head teacher) roles and the appropriate allocation of time to attend CPD activities. In a realist analysis of the challenges facing those who design PD programs, Hall (op cit) identifies several key challenges, some of which include:

- managing the tyranny of operational demands
- developing the job as well as the professional
- developing professionals as managers
- acknowledgement of the need to sustain multiple identities (as professionals, workers, family members, mentors, learners, etc)

Loverder (2005) in his summary of world trends in staff development and their implications for colleges, cites Cort et al as suggesting institutions should use CPD approaches that do the following:

- integrate practice and on-the-job learning in the teacher's classroom with theory
- utilize flexible, modular approaches that meet needs & background of teachers
- use "bottom up" approach that encourages teachers to reflect on own teaching practice
- use "study circles" and/or "communities of practice" of staff across different departments, disciplines or institutes
- use ICT to encourage active participation

Loverder claims CPD is too important to be left to individual teachers' own motivation, saying it should be regular and compulsory, and adequately supported by management both time-wise and financially.

Good practice CPD model

Analysis of all the data associated with the project indicates the following several aspects could inform a good model of CPD for TAFE NSW:

- appropriate balance between the three types of CPD activities –
 - those that support professional teaching practice
 - those relating to “reforms” in the VET sector (eg, provision of information on things like New Apprenticeships)
 - those that support institutional operations, including policy changes (eg, OH&S, EEO, copyright) (see Harris et al, 2001)
- a recognition that there are individual needs (like career development and job performance confidence) that are met through effective CPD (Scottish Further Education Unit, u.d)
- a strategic, systems-based approach to ICT and on-line delivery that is underpinned by appropriate understandings & research of VET pedagogy and of specific ICT-discipline relationships (see Segrave et al, 2005; Webb & Cox, 2004; Wheelahan, 2005)
- setting professional standards for CPD (see Scottish Executive, 2006)
- implementing a CPD log, for reflection as well as a better record of all CPD (for audit purposes, this may become more critical with the new 2007 AQTF Standards for RTOs outcomes-based auditing processes) (for CPD log & “toolkit” see Scottish Further Education Unit, u.d.)
- a professional organization for VET teachers in NSW to lift their professional status (eg VISTA in Vic, the Institute of Education in England, the Scottish Further Education Unit; note the TAFE Futures - Institute for teachers)
- funding levels that allow teachers to:
 - reflect on their practice at regular intervals (reflective practitioner skills – see ICVET, PD Models & Frameworks, 2006) since the cascade model of CPD may not work (Webb & Cox, 2004)
 - use an appropriate model for remaining abreast of technical/industry skills
- a funded, pro-active role for the union, along the lines of the Learner Representative model in the UK

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