

# **In search of an educational theory informing practice in TAFE: a case study of one pre-vocational adult educator**

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## **Abstract**

For most teachers working in the largest sector of vocational education and training (VET) in Australia – Technical and Further Education (TAFE) – the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training (recently superseded by the national Training and Assessment training package) is the only mandatory ‘teacher training’ qualification. Largely instrumental in intent and content, this qualification focuses mainly on developing skills to deliver and assess VET learners against national competency standards. While some attention is paid to ‘adult learning principles’, trainees are given relatively little exposure to educational theories relevant to teaching in the contemporary TAFE context. Lacking a sound grasp of curriculum and pedagogical theory, these teachers frequently struggle to make sense of, and understand the possibilities and limitations of, their teaching roles and practices once they begin delivering VET programs in TAFE.

This paper seeks to understand how practitioners learn about, develop and work with educational theory, and how this informs and influences their practice. It is based primarily on an in-depth interview with one pre-vocational program teacher working in a large, metropolitan TAFE institute. It also draws on the contributions of several teachers who participated in a small-scale action learning/research project facilitated by the author in his workplace, aimed at exploring relationships between educational theory and practice in a TAFE setting, and assisting participants in developing new understandings of their work, identities and practice as adult educators. In light of the research findings, this paper argues that the development of an educational theory, together with an understanding of wider contextual issues shaping the VET system, significantly empowers TAFE teachers in their roles as adult educators.

## **Introduction and approach**

My paper works with the question of how adult educational traditions, beliefs and theories inform the practice of TAFE educators, working in a large, metropolitan TAFE institute. I examine how these theories are learnt and applied by educators; and how dominant belief systems and traditions in adult education shape the beliefs of educators and the development of their theories and practice in the TAFE learning environment.

The primary research is based on an in-depth interview I undertook in 2006 with an adult educator called ‘Anne’, who works at ‘Central Institute of TAFE’ (CIT). Anne has three roles in the TAFE context: her primary role is that of a pre-vocational facilitator in a ‘Practice Firm’, and her focus in our discussion related primarily to this role. At the start of the 2003 academic year, the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) teaching centre for which Anne worked, abandoned the practice firm in favour of more “academic”, “easy to facilitate”, “less funding dependent” classroom-based learning. Anne was, therefore, ‘transferred’ back to the classroom at CIT; however, she still facilitates a practice firm at another large, metropolitan TAFE. Anne’s secondary role, that of a consultant with the Australian Network of Practice Firms (ANPF),

warrants a mention as it both influences her practice, beliefs and values as a pre-vocational teacher and contributes to her adult education theoretical framework. The ANPF is a network of virtual training businesses, called 'practice firms', which VET learners manage and operate as part of their learning programs (ANPF, undated). Anne describes her job with the ANPF as involving "promotions to schools, training staff in schools", referral of funding opportunities to head office, and "offering advice".

I also draw on contributions from a group of four TAFE educators and a senior educator who participated in an action learning/research program I facilitated in 2006. The senior educator, along with senior management of the ICT teaching centre, initiated this program, with their stated objective: to 'rectify' the problem they perceived as 'dealing with' and engaging younger (18-24 years old), disengaged learners within the teaching centre. The program was aimed at participants sharing and constructing new knowledge and understandings of their practice and identities as adult educators, through exploring relationships between educational theory and practice in their daily work as TAFE educators.

I critically examine three texts that encode and represent the pedagogical theories and techniques espoused by CIT, in order to understand their influence on the practice of the TAFE educators. Firstly, I critically examine the 'Learner's Pack' for the 'Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training' (ANTA, 1999), in terms of its claims regarding adult learning theory and TAFE pedagogy/andragogy. This text represents part of the only mandatory 'teacher training' qualification required by TAFE educators. The national Training and Assessment (TAA) training package recently superseded this qualification, however, little has changed with regard to the adult learning theories it espouses and it is this older qualification that all research participants possessed in common. Secondly, I look to a text titled 'Professional Standards for Teachers' (CIT 2004) that has been institutionalised in the quality management system, and which endorses Malcolm Knowles' (1990) adult learning principles as part of the procedures, policies and processes for TAFE educators working at CIT.

Finally, to provide clues as to how the educators come to understand and put into practice 'experiential learning', the pedagogical method favoured by ICT teaching centre management as the most desirable adult learning condition, I examine CIT's (2004) 'Diploma of Vocational Education and Training' course book. This Diploma of VET teaching qualification has been linked through Victorian TAFE system policy to the progression of TAFE educators to the highest level for teachers (T4.2) and promotion to the middle management position of 'Senior Educator'. It represents a knowledge-as-power chain that implies the text has a 'higher authority' on TAFE teaching practice and adult educational theory than the other texts I have examined. Of those who participated in this research project, only the senior educator (and I) possessed this qualification; however, I want to suggest that this text forms the basis for a 'commonsense' understanding of experiential learning for the managers of the ICT teaching centre and all except one of the educators who contributed to this research project.

My research project focuses on the formal, institutionalised context of TAFE and the interview and action learning/research program has yielded data that foregrounds the theories and traditions espoused by the texts; however, I also frame my thesis around the theories and concepts of two adult educational theorists who are rarely associated with TAFE. Indeed, the theories of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire are more

frequently discussed in literature dealing with ‘radical adult education’ (see, for example, Coben 1998; Mayo 1999). I frame the Australian VET system and its espousal of dominant adult education and learning theories and traditions in terms of Gramsci’s (1971) concept of ‘hegemony’ and Freire’s (1970) concept of ‘banking education’. Gramsci understands hegemony as a necessarily educational relationship, “a social condition in which all aspects of social reality are dominated by a supportive or single class” (Livingstone 1976 in Mayo 1999, p.35). He argues that social institutions such as the education system are not neutral, but rather serve to bolster the existing hegemony and are tied to the interests of dominant social groups (Gramsci 1971). I contend that the common perception of TAFE is as a ‘working-class’ (non-dominant class) education or training and that the adult education theories and traditions that dominate teacher-training literature in the Australian VET sector are intrinsically hegemonic.

Freire (1970) proposes a dialectic based upon relations of power and domination, whereby ‘oppressors’ (people with privilege and power) exert control over the ‘oppressed’ (those whom they exploit): people from marginalised groups such as those denoted by such impersonal and dehumanising labels as ‘unemployed’, ‘disabled’, ‘uneducated’ and ‘welfare recipients’. Freire (1970) contends that this hegemonic relationship is facilitated by, among other things, traditional mainstream education, which he refers to as ‘banking education’, and that this is one of the ‘methods’ the oppressors use to ‘deal’ with the oppressed. ‘Banking education’ has students in a passive role as empty vessels into which teachers (or trainers) deposit ‘universally good’ information, designed to adjust these ‘incompetent and lazy’ marginals to the patterns of a healthy society, through changing their mentality, values and attitudes, ultimately leading to their domestication and subjugation (Thompson 2000).

Within the broader context of Australian society, the distinction between being considered gainfully employed or not employed, or indeed employable, is an important consideration in relation to the role of TAFE: to prepare people for work. In this role, although not an explicit part of its ‘mission’, TAFE also *deals* with the political problem of what to do with people who cannot get jobs: the ‘long-term unemployed’ and learners unable to gain entry to university (Taylor and Henry 1994). In recent years, in CIT at least, there has been an obvious movement towards classroom-based environments that seem only to allow for a more teacher-centred, academic learning approach, or a banking education more commonly associated with compulsory schooling. Indeed, it was due to problems ‘dealing’ with young learners from marginalised groups, who were reacting negatively to such an environment, that prompted ICT centre management to initiate the action learning/research project.

The next section summarises my interview with Anne, and then critically analyses her responses and some contributions from the action learning/research program, in terms of dominant adult educational traditions and theories. I contextualise Anne’s theoretical framework within the TAFE sector and examine her facilitation of adult learning, arguing that her theoretical framework significantly informs her practice in the learning space she constructs within her pre-vocational program.

### **Educational theory informing practice in TAFE**

Anne has been teaching in pre-vocational ICT and business-related areas in TAFE for 15 years. From the outset, Anne has wanted to be involved, not so much in “[teaching] adults but in vocational education and training”. She makes a clear distinction between

this form of education and what she refers to as “academic education”. Prior to working in TAFE, Anne worked in industry to obtain “essential business and industry experience”. Anne is a firm believer that TAFE educators require not only specialist “teacher training” for adult educators that exposes them to learning theories and teaching techniques, but also relevant industry experience:

It is not necessarily about upgrading teaching skills—in VET you need to upgrade business skills. Industry release should be a standard for TAFE teachers. The problem with many TAFE teachers is not having recent industry experience. Some teachers don’t know what they are teaching.

Conversely, Anne accepts that whilst some teachers have a good deal of industry experience in the field related to their teaching, they may not have the skills to effectively impart that knowledge to learners:

This is why the Cert IV [in Workplace Training and Assessment] was brought in – I think that that’s a valid thing – it is quite manageable (to do)... I can honestly see why they would ask you to do a ‘Cert IV’. Got to maintain a standard. TAFE teachers are the oldest in the system, average age is 48. Some of them are happy because they churn out the same stuff year after year and they are opposed to all this change. They really need to get out and get industry experience – industry is dictating to us what is needed but people are still teaching in their old fashioned way. If they have come in with teaching skills ... a teaching qual of some sort, which is probably over the cert four and then experience in teaching, I don’t think they need to do Bachelor of VET or Dip VET. They still need to keep abreast of changes in the VET system but this could be done with ongoing PD [professional development].

In 2000-2001, Anne undertook an undergraduate course in adult education and training at a university. She describes it as being beneficial to her understanding of her role as a vocational educator and her “fit” within the VET sector. Anne believes it is important for VET educators to understand the broader contextual issues relating to VET:

The ... course really did put it all in perspective for me. Where and how we fitted in, who ANTA was ... Knowing about it caused me to question it and I think it is really important to question where it comes from. I think it is a responsibility of TAFEs to keep teachers informed about this [the broader VET contextual issues]. I think they could manage it better—perhaps politics comes into this too.

Here it should be noted that Anne’s educational background differs somewhat from that of the majority of TAFE educators, in that it has been concentrated in the field of adult and vocational education. Of the participants in the action learning/research program, the senior educator had a Diploma of VET and only one contributor had a qualification in adult education other than the Certificate IV; one was qualified with a Diploma of Education, and had worked for a while as an English teacher, whilst the others had bachelor or master degrees relating to science and ICT. In response to my question about how knowledge of the wider VET context has shaped her practice, and whether the university course has influenced her approach, Anne replied:

Probably only marginally. I think it helped me to understand management better and why they were asking things of me ... not really guided practice, but put things into perspective. Don’t think it has changed my teaching styles but has shown me where things fit in.

Anne protested a little when I turned the discussion to adult education theory, saying she didn’t believe she knew enough about the topic. Her responses indicate otherwise:

I believe in action learning – in the practice firm ... I believe that students need to practise the skills –learn by doing. Action learning is my learning theory. This is why I wanted to go into vocational education—students know where they want to be, what they want to learn. This is why I'm not in secondary or tertiary [teaching]—I'm not into throwing out chunks of information to learners saying ... now digest that and throw something back at me and move on to the next subject.

Anne's descriptions of her practice, beliefs and theories relating to learning in the practice firm exhibited a working understanding of one 'experiential learning' cycle:

[Learning theories] that centre around that self-directed learning and action learning: plan, act, reflect, understand. I don't think that this can happen in the classroom but in the practice firm, yes. We encourage them to make mistakes in the practice firm. Do it. It didn't work. Why? Think about what you are doing, do it again. It is that plan, act, reflect, understand cycle that is important. Experiential learning can take place in an environment where learners are able to make mistakes. I don't think that in the classroom at Cert IV level that you have experiential learning taking place. You are always devising situations for them but they are always contrived so it's not the real world.

Anne further discusses her understanding of learning theories in adult education:

Whose the guy with the andragogy? They [adult learners] come with all of this background of ethics, morals, beliefs that are quite well developed and that all interplays with the ways they go about learning... Yes, that's him, Knowles...

It seems apparent from my interview with Anne and through working with the adult educators and ICT management in the action learning/research program, that two streams of 'adult educational theory' have combined to become dominant, or hegemonic, in the TAFE context: one is based on Malcolm Knowles' (1990) theory of andragogy, while the other is based on understandings of 'experiential learning' theory. The understandings of these theories and some of the implications they have for the practice of educators in the TAFE context, is the topic of the next section of my paper.

### **Andragogy and 'pragmatism': a TAFE pedagogical approach?**

It is not surprising that the theories of Malcolm Knowles should arise in a discussion about adult educational theory with a TAFE educator. Indeed, it is hard to for a TAFE educator to escape Knowles! His theory of 'andragogy' is implicitly institutionalised, indeed is hegemonic, in TAFE's teacher 'training' courses: the TAA (previously AWT) and the Diploma of VET. Knowles' (1990) six assumptions about adult learners, forming the basis for his concept of 'andragogy' appear in ANTA's (1999) 'Learner's Pack' for the 'Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training'. According this uncited prescription for the 'trainer' who is "working with adult learners", these assumptions relate to adult learners' need to know, self-concept, personal experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and motivation (ANTA 1999, p.27). Knowles' (1990) assumptions appear again (this time Knowles is cited though not referenced) in the 'Professional Standards for Teachers' for CIT. Knowles' theory of andragogy is proposed as theory that can be "applied to the real world of teaching" in TAFE through the provision of "real or simulated experiences through which the learner can experience the positive benefits of knowing and the negatives of not knowing" in "a climate of mutual trust, co-operation and clarification of expectations" (CIT 2005, p.7). Clearly, Anne subscribes to Knowles' (1990, p.57) third assumption, that of "the role of

the learners' experience", where Knowles (1990) contends—differentiating adults from youths—that adults come into the learning environment with both different qualities and more life experience.

In their chapter titled, *Pragmatism: A Genuine American Highway*, Finger and Asun (2001) discuss the mainstream traditions of adult education, in terms of their theoretical and intellectual foundations, arguing (as suggested by their title) that two 'pragmatist' approaches to adult education, originating in North America and now dominant throughout the English-speaking world, have emerged. The first of these approaches or streams of pragmatism, they refer to as 'experiential learning', naming Lewin, Kolb, Argyris and Schon as the chief proponents; and the second they call 'symbolic interactionism' which, they argue, has been influenced by Jarvis and Mezirow (Finger and Asun 2001).

As already suggested, it is in the terms of the pre-vocational educational 'space' constructed by Anne, and to a lesser extent the learners in the practice firm, that she identifies her overarching educational theory, initially naming it "action learning"; however, action learning defined by Dick (1997, p.1) as "a process in which a group of people come together more or less regularly to help each other to learn from their experience", describes a learning environment that is less formal than that of the practice firm. Anne's theory seems more to describe 'experiential learning' and she later used this term to refer to a learning cycle that includes the elements of "plan, act, reflect, [and] understand". She later iterates and adds a further dimension to this cycle with the processes: "do it [action], make mistakes, reflect on experience and do it again". Anne's theory seems to be constructed from a combination of Dewey's 'learning circle', Kolb's 'experiential learning cycle' and Argyris and Schön's 'double-loop learning theory' (Finger and Asun 2001, pp.33-46).

As with Knowles' theories, it is difficult for TAFE educators to escape hearing about 'experiential learning', though its intricacies are seldom fully understood. This is hardly surprising given the variations on the theme that have emerged out of various adult educational fields over the short and sparse theoretical history of adult education. Experiential learning is espoused as a desirable learning condition and institutionalised in CIT in its own teacher training courses. For instance, CIT's (2004, p.55) 'Diploma of Vocational Education and Training' course book dedicates one page to experiential learning, where the theory is associated with "Mezirow, Friere [sic], Rogers and Kolb". CIT (2004, p.55) points out here that this group of "researchers" emphasised the importance of experience in adult learning and that a learner's critical reflection on this experience is the "real heart of learning". Experiential learning is then described in terms of a simplified version of Kolb's (uncited) learning cycle (CIT 2004).

The TAFE educators, the senior educator involved in the action learning/research program and the managers who initiated this—and indeed, it seems many of the TAFE educators I have discussed experiential learning with—seem to fail to grasp the essential *critical reflection* element, and come to understand that any learning involving 'doing' is experiential and, therefore, practical and 'good'. This is the 'version' of experiential learning they espouse as 'good practice' within the teaching centre; however, Anne's practice is informed by an understanding of theories of experiential learning which differs from that promoted in the ICT teaching centre. She explains that "experiential learning can take place in an environment where learners are able to make mistakes", that it "cannot take place in the classroom". In this "academic education" environment,

Anne argues, the educator is always devising contrived situations, “so it’s not the real world”. Anne’s educational theory seems most closely aligned to Finger and Asun’s (2001) description of Kolb’s experiential learning cycle in that her facilitation of learning in the practice firm provides for:

- (1) the capacity of having concrete experiences; (2) the capacity of making reflective observations; (3) the capacity of making abstract conceptualisations; and (4) the capacity of making active experimentations. (Kolb in Finger and Asun 2001, p.43)

Anne points out that the practice firm, because it is a simulated environment, provides a space for learners to make and reflect upon mistakes. Finger and Asun (2001) are somewhat critical of this type of learning for, as they point out, the learner has to make a mistake in order to reflect on it, and therefore they are effectively learning by trial and error. They contend that Argyris and Schön add a new dimension to “pragmatic learning theory” (Finger and Asun 2001, p.45) with their ‘double-loop learning theory’. Unlike other versions of experiential learning, it is not necessary to progress through the entire double-loop learning cycle. Rather, one can learn by critically reflecting on and revising their theory before putting it into action (Finger and Asun 2001). Anne’s description of some of the learning taking place in the practice firm is akin to Argyris and Schön’s double-loop learning cycle.

For participants in the action learning/research program, knowledge of adult educational theory evidenced by their contributions to the sessions was seemingly limited to what was contained in the three texts. They had heard of Knowles, but not all remembered his concept of andragogy. Their concept of ‘experiential learning’ as any ‘learning by doing’ seemed to be largely reflective of the management’s push to position this version of experiential learning as the desired learning method within the department.

Anne’s practice starts with the learner and her role as a “facilitator” involves working to construct spaces in which her experiential learning-based cycle can occur. Comparisons can also be drawn between Anne’s role as a facilitator and that of the mentor or coach who guides learners toward critical reflection in Argyris and Schön’s ‘double-loop learning’ theory (Finger and Asun 2001). Participants in the action learning/research program also credited the role of a mentor or coach, described as one who leads or teaches through example, over that of the more traditional perception of a strictly didactic teacher. However, a statement by one participant, supported by all participants, seems to suggest that they were significantly limited in their attempts to employ such an approach in their practice:

It’s the way that the classrooms are set up ... teacher at the front, and the big projection screen for PowerPoint [presentations]; and all the desks in rows with computers. It forces us [the educators] to be down the front, giving lectures while all the students just turn on the computer, surf the Net and tune out. How are we expected to teach them anything?

This situation seems to frame the teacher, in the position of what Anne might call an “academic educator”, or what Freire might refer to as a ‘banking educator’. However, in contrast to the banking education which centralises the role of the teacher, Anne’s design of learning programs starts with the learner and subscribes to the Knowlesian (1990) adult learning principles of ‘need to know’ and ‘readiness to learn’:

It is opportunistic ... Organising to get the delivery across at the next possible opportunity... You need to know where each learner is at where they are up to ... The majority [of

learners] become quite enthusiastic and want to get on with it ... You have got your overall structure/guidelines so you know what has to be met within that year ... you have topics that you have to address and you have to ensure that the opportunities arise for you to deliver those topics. You wouldn't do it in a didactic teaching environment ... you get that theory across in the learning.

As previously stated, Anne strongly dissociates herself from being an “academic” or ‘banking educator’; however, she contends that such a ‘banking pedagogy’ is the dominant approach used by educators in the more “academic” courses (such as ICT) in TAFE.

### **Challenges: contextual issues**

What I will refer to as a ‘meta-narrative’ informs Anne’s construction of the pre-vocational educational environment of the practice firm and her practice within this learning space. Embedded within this meta-narrative are Anne’s beliefs and values in relation to employment in Australian society and the role that TAFE plays in what she perceives as preparing VET learners for work. Anne referred to this role as her “role in social change”, in helping learners “to make guided decisions ... to the way their career path might go”:

I don't think you can survive in society without a job ... Everybody has a role to play and I'd like to see people out there playing it. I'm happy to help people to get out there to get that job. I would hope that having a job would make people more responsible and if they weren't working—accountability as to how they behave, how people treat others. I think you need someone [an employer] compassionate to give him [her] a chance. For this there needs to be vocational education and training. [There should be] “action learning” in TAFE and there is a difference between higher-ed and VET ... The profile needs to be raised toward a different form of learning ... There is a place for vocational training, for all ages. For people returning to work—young mums. I managed this project ... for women who had to drop out of school because they had a family. [It was] aimed at 15-25 year olds who didn't go so well in their school studies but when they got in to do VET ... they got quals ... It gives confidence and esteem to get back into the workforce.

The ICT teaching centre has experienced a recent decline in student numbers, but an increase in the number of younger adult learners from marginalised groups. Amongst this new cohort of learners, TAFE educators have noticed a greater number of what are commonly referred to as ‘second-chance’ (learners for whom compulsory schooling has not been successful) and disengaged learners. One of the contributors to the action learning/research program redefines his role and identity in relationship to this cohort of learners in terms that are perhaps not uncommon among TAFE teachers (Pritchard & Anderson 2006), but which differ from official images and public perceptions of a TAFE education within the wider context of Australian society:

We are babysitters, that's what we are. A day-care centre for these dropouts that no one will employ. They are not here to learn, just to claim their payment every fortnight.

This response was not rejected by the other contributors, and reflects a sentiment that seems common among TAFE educators at CIT; however, in a more positive vein, Anne’s proposal (or hope) for learners from this group follows:

If you stick them in a practice firm you have a greater chance of getting them involved in learning. More opportunity to get them involved... they have the opportunity to get into a

more work-based project, more responsibility for their learning ... opportunity to interact with each other.

Anne states that the greatest challenge facing her as a TAFE educator is “management and bureaucracy”. She cites the abolition of the practice firm in the ICT teaching centre and it is clear that such a move has significantly reduced the potential for TAFE educators to provide spaces for and facilitate experiential learning, even if they do—like Anne—understand and work to support this learning style. Further, many of these learners do not seem to ‘fit’ the Knowlesian (1990) assumptions that are the cornerstone of the adult education theory within the TAFE hegemony. Perhaps Knowles’ most problematic assumption relates to the role of the learner’s experience in learning. Knowles himself (with Holton and Swanson 1998, p.139) problematises this assumption, arguing that it can create “biases that can inhibit and shape new learning”. The trend to replace experiential learning spaces such as those present in practice firms, seems to put TAFE’s second-chance and disengaged learners on a collision course with its recommended application of Knowles’ (1990) assumptions and theory of andragogy. Without experiential learning spaces, these learners face only a reproduction of the conditions that have not worked for them in the educational context of compulsory schooling.

## **Conclusion**

Veering off Finger’s and Asun’s (2001) ‘Pragmatist Highway’, I want to turn back towards and reflect on a field of adult education theory that seems lost in our age of advanced capitalism; where adult educators have been re-framed as ‘human resource developers’ or ‘workplace trainers’, and where the specified role of the TAFE teacher is only to prepare people for work. Foley (2001) examines the condition and position of ‘radical adult education’ in this contemporary social-scape of triumphant neo-liberalism/conservatism. He defines it as a departure from dominant practice at one or more of the levels of process, outcome and/or content. However, his most useful illumination here is his discussion of ‘spaces’, in which adult educators can work within and against existing hegemonic arrangements. Given their lack of any real agenda for radical social change, it would be a stretch to consider the TAFE educators from my research field, as radical adult educators. Whilst her work is significantly informed by her so-called “social change agenda” meta-narrative, Anne’s activities serve only to fulfil the expectations of TAFE hegemony: to prepare TAFE learners for work, in effect, teaching working class kids for working class jobs. The TAFE educators involved in the action learning/research program, although not content to be identified as such, seem unable to reject their roles—as suggested by one participant—as “baby sitters” for ‘second chance’ and ‘disengaged’ learners. Further, due to the significant limitations imposed on them by the common (mis)understandings of experiential learning theory and the arrangement of the learning environment, they seem able only to perpetuate the dominant, banking mode of education.

Anne, on the other hand, with her theoretical framework firmly planted in the dominant, ‘pragmatist experiential learning’ ‘camp’, has been somewhat empowered to reject the banking education approach and therefore, enabled to carry out her work as a pre-vocational educator in the TAFE context. In line with Foley’s (2001) proposal for a ‘radical adult education’, Anne, on a number of levels, has departed from the dominant practice espoused in CIT; and her understanding of the wider contextual issues of the

VET system has enabled her 'practice firm project' to locate and utilise a space within the TAFE hegemony, albeit for hegemonic activity.

My paper has therefore suggested that contextual issues relating to TAFE, adult education and broader hegemonic arrangements within Australian society have a significant impact on the development of theory, values and beliefs, and the ways in which theory is put into practice. I have further suggested that Certificate IV and Diploma TAFE educator 'training' courses lack the attention to adult educational theory and the wider contextual issues, which seem to be required by TAFE educators for their practice within the TAFE context. Perhaps venturing off the 'pragmatist highway', down "roads less travelled" such as that of radical adult education, might better empower TAFE educators for their work within the challenging context of TAFE. Whilst the scale of my research for this paper is limited, it nonetheless provides a useful model for further research into the important, but under-examined, questions of how adult educators in TAFE construct their theoretical frameworks and how they shape and inform their practice. Such understandings could be used to contextualise and problematise adult educational theory and traditions in relation to VET and also hegemonic arrangements in adult education, thus helping VET educators to refine their theoretical frameworks and practices for the challenges they face.

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