

Torquing up TAFE teacher traction through a critical spirit discourse

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Overview of the research

- TAFE teachers in Queensland and Western Australia
- At the intersection between these teachers' identities and new vocationalism
- Explored the notion of critical spirit and how it was used by TAFE teachers to 'gain or keep traction'

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Critical spirit?

- Dispositions of critical thinkers (Siegel, 1988, 1933)
- Elements of critical spirit
 - Independence of mind
 - Openmindedness
 - Wholeheartedness
 - Intellectual responsibility
 - Respect for others (Oxman-Michelli, 1992)

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Research question

How might an explicit engagement with and reflection upon a critical spirit discourse be of value to particular TAFE teachers in relation to their identities and their relationships with TAFE as an organisation?

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A critical spirit discourse

- Gee's (2005) theory and method of discourse analysis, "how language gets recruited on site to enact specific social activities and social identities" (p.1)
- Gee's 7 reality building questions that one can ask of discourse (p. 11-13) were deployed in relation to critical spirit
- A critical spirit discourse framework was developed and overlaid onto TAFE teacher case narrative artefacts (Tyler, 2008)

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A critical spirit discourse (cont.)

- TAFE teachers were engaged in credibility checks
- Explicit discussion around a critical spirit was undertaken during interviews

A critical spirit discourse was enacted

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Findings

The value of critical spirit to particular TAFE teachers.

Valuable as:

- a reflective tool
- A construct to increase understanding of self
- a construct of practice
- as an identity

Findings (Cont.)

- Examples of particular social identity construction
 - Emulating past teachers
 - Assembling identities as capable teachers and also stressed teachers
- Mostly, were assembled identities that aligned with concepts of liberal educators with a focus on lifelong learning, personal transformation, collaborative relationships and social responsibility.

Findings (Cont.)

- These were positions that contested notions of themselves as exhibiting teaching identities that aligned with marketing, customer service, entrepreneurship and facilitators of learning
- Their identities as TAFE teachers were not satisfied with the VET training qualification Cert IV TAA.

Thank you