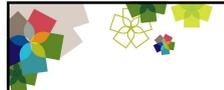


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## The glue of the competencies?

Researching the role of 'vocational meaning perspectives' in VET

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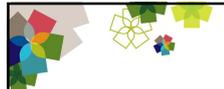
## The 'fragmentation thesis'

- Broudy (1972), Ashworth & Saxton (1990), Hyland (1993, 1997), Collins (1993), Brown (1994), Cornford (1997), Blunden (1997), Wheelahan (2004), Darwin (2007)
- VET curriculum based on the analysis of work roles in terms of discrete units impairs learners' ability to form a unified understanding of work roles



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The assumptions underpinning this system about the nature of work are limited. At best they provide an incomplete basis for engaging with the changing nature of work. At worst they inhibit our understanding of how work is evolving. Few, if any people, today want to define jobs in narrow, occupational terms. But dismembering work into thousands of units of competence misses the point. Instead, it is the cluster or ensembles of capability that give people the capacity to do things – not an aggregation of discrete skills. When it comes to being competent the whole is definitely more than the sum of the parts – or in particular, units of competence. (Buchanan et al. 2009)



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## Transformative learning

- A theory developed by Jack Mezirow
- We know and act in the world based on systems of assumptions which Mezirow (1978) calls 'meaning perspectives'
- Meaning perspectives can be challenged by experience, become unstable and transform
- For Mezirow (1978) the process of perspective transformation is the essence of adult learning



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## Researching transformative learning in VET

- Case studies of three learner groups: youth work, frontline management, motorcycle maintenance
- Cases focused on learner experiences and the experiences and practices of the learner group trainers
- Included interviews with industry specialists to learn about any meaning perspectives shared by effective workers in the occupations aligned to the cases



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## Meaning perspectives, occupations and VET curriculum

- There are meaning perspectives common to effective youth workers, frontline managers and motorcycle mechanics
- 5/5 youth work, 2/3 frontline management and 3/3 motorcycle maintenance industry specialists said the meaning perspective wasn't fully or wasn't at all reflected in the competencies

## Youth worker meaning perspective

Assumptions include:

- Young people are interesting
- Young people are innately good
- Poor environments lead to problematic behaviour in young people
- Youth work clients need good adult role models
- Youth workers have to reflect on their own behaviour with clients

## Meaning perspectives and learning in VET

- 5 out of 12 learners in the youth work group experienced transformative learning
- In 3 of these 5, new meaning perspectives aligned with the youth work vocational meaning perspective
- Most of the learners who did not experience transformative learning already possessed perspectives aligned with the youth work vocational meaning perspective

## Vocational meaning perspectives as glue of the competencies?

- The learners in the youth work group who experienced transformative learning or already possessed the youth work perspective appeared to relate the content of specific competencies to the assumptions of the perspective

## Some questions about vocational meaning perspectives and VET:

- Should VET explicitly seek to develop vocational meaning perspectives?
- Is the development of meaning perspectives compatible with CBT?
- How does the concept of vocational meaning perspectives relate to existing proposals to address fragmentation (e.g. Hagar 1995, Cornford 1997, Wheelahan 2004)?
- How do the concepts of vocational meaning perspectives and vocational/occupational identities relate?

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