

## **TEACHERS PERSPECTIVES ON SURVIVING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM**

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### **Abstract**

This presentation aims to discuss findings from an ethnographic study. The purpose of this study was to map the professional development trajectories and viewpoints of 15 colleagues (14 trade teachers and one theory teacher) working together in a TAFE department and to explore issues, concerns and assumptions about change in their working lives. They had endured major pedagogical and ideological changes and yet carry on.

Initially, it appeared that diversity in teaching subjects; roles; employment categories and adopting an attitude that government intrusion is unavoidable were the keys to surviving. Outwardly they appear to comply with government directives to transform vocational education and training. However, there is evidence of teacher rebellion when ensconced in their domain, their classroom. Using their professional judgement they continue to apply teaching methods that have proven to be successful for their students to acquire a high standard of trade skills that reflect positively on themselves, when observed by their industry.

The teachers held many different assumptions and expectations of the role of manager and conversely it could be argued that managers held negative assumptions about the professional judgement of their teachers and positive assumptions about government policies.

Arguably, there appears to be a need to bridge a strategic gap between the micro, realistic view of the VET teacher's day-to-day lived experience and practice and the macro, idealistic view of government, their policy makers and the managers of their agencies. I believe that rather than a gap there is a discrepancy between their views. To borrow from Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, as relating to domination and power, I believe that what is happening is hegemony at the macro, or government level and cultural hegemony at the micro, or VET department level.

Management are domineering by coercing teachers to consent to implementing the National Training Packages and the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards.

Rather than seeking a bridge, there is an antidote or counter action to this situation. The solution is for VET teachers to retain their single-minded, realistic attitude based on a sense of ambition to achieve positive outcomes for their students and taking whatever actions they require to fulfilling their professional development needs and achieving their goals. My research identified that this is happening.

## **Introduction**

The study provided an opportunity to investigate and understand the environment and culture of a TAFE department and the working life of TAFE teachers within the department. The literature review presented the dominant discourses central to the research project. The research aim was to note the authentic, individual recollections and perspectives of the professional development journey taken by each of these teachers and their working life. The findings were gleaned from verbatim comments from each teacher to convey a greater appreciation, understanding and knowledge about their vocation, their experiences, their viewpoints and their concerns.

The responses revealed the depth of the teachers' commitment to their students and their love of teaching that remains undiminished as they faced stress, negativity and disillusionment with management, their environment, their culture and the changing nature of teaching. The TAFE teachers' comments exposed their strong commitment to developing the necessary attributes, skills, knowledge and capabilities needed to maximise student outcomes. This appeared to be a mainstay of their teaching practices and not necessarily as a direct response to Federal and State government influences.

The data identified similarities and differences but not identical maps of professional development. Further, the information enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the teachers' level of understanding of the links between the complex issues and major changes that had transformed their work. These changes had resulted from the implementation of Federal and State government's policies, driven mostly by an economic agenda aimed at reforming the vocational education and training system, and having teachers with the necessary attributes, skills, knowledge and capabilities to produce effective workers capable of helping Australia to be more productive and effective globally.

## **Research Method**

Ethnographic research techniques and participant observation were used to collect information about 15 colleagues (14 trade teachers and one theory teacher) working together in the same TAFE department (Appendix: A). Two qualitative research methods enabled the gathering of primary data and a rich description of the working life of a group of TAFE teachers in their educational environment. Ethnography adds a cultural dimension that is not readily available through the application of quantitative or experimental methods.

The ethnographic methodology (Spradley, 1979) used in this study enabled a mapping of these changes to their working lives through the eyes of the participants. The audio-taped interviews provided valuable data related to the following research questions:

- What professional development has each teacher engaged in?
- What are the teachers' responses to professional development?
- What connection does each teacher perceive between professional development and the issues and changes that have transformed their work?

- What connections does each teacher perceive between the changes to their role and professional development?
- What does each teacher value in professional development?

Deliberating on the answers to those questions identified a picture of the culture of the TAFE department in relation to professional development, and provided answers to the following questions:

- How do the teachers' perceptions suggest particular patterns of practice in the culture of the department?
- What are the implications of the cultural patterns for the department, for the teachers and for the provision of professional development?

There are three main principles inherent in ethnographic research that support the notion that this form of research methodology is valid: the research is not contrived but built around real people in real situations; what is sought is an understanding of what the members of the culture are saying and these different perspectives may lead to the discovery of new knowledge and theories.

The aim of this ethnographic research project was to learn what TAFE teachers had to say about various professional development activities and report, verbatim, their individual perceptions of issues, concerns and assumptions about change in their working lives. Individual, audio-taped interviews and the use of a schedule of research questions (Appendix: B) aimed to gather information that would reveal certain dimensions of their lives as TAFE teachers: teaching practice; history; perceptions of changes; and factors influencing their professional development.

This study involved three triangulated strategies for data collection. Each provided a different opportunity to address the research questions and identify the unique cultural aspects of the research location. The data collection strategies were: audio-taped interviews, research journal notes that included observation notes; and a range of material artefacts. Unexpectedly, two colleagues chose to hand write their responses to the research questions.

## **Findings and discussion**

The data revealed two distinct pictures. The TAFE teachers are dedicated to their students and have strong, positive feelings for their teaching but conversely feel disappointed with the role of management, their workplace, and the changing nature of teaching. Further, the teachers are aligned in their perception that professional development is vital to their professional and personal development and student's outcomes and they share an intention to continue to initiate, fund and fulfil their own professional needs.

### **Teachers' feelings about their professional development**

What is the 'professional development' of a teacher? Whilst a literature search revealed differences of opinion about the assumptions, definitions, purposes, applications and experiences of the term 'professional' and 'professional development' the term 'professional development' appeared to be interchangeable with 'staff development', 'professional education' and 'in-service education'. (Wilensky 1964; Goode 1969; Butler 1996; ANTA 2001; ERIC 2004).

In the context of the VET sector, ANTA had selected two terms that had distinct interpretations and applications for the development of teachers: staff development and professional development (OTTE, 1997 in PETE, 2000, p.2). They reported:

staff development means ‘work-related purposeful learning for individuals and groups, which is negotiated and *sponsored by the employer* (authors’ emphasis) organization (OTTE, 1997 in PETE, 2000, p.2).

Further they suggested that professional development referred to activities selected by the teacher:

This is in contrast to other development activities undertaken on the initiative of the individual and *sponsored by the individual* (authors emphasis). For instance, a VET staff member enrolling in a postgraduate course such as a Masters in Education is an example of the individual investing in his or her own professional development (OTFE, 1997 in PETE, 2000, p.4).

Nevertheless, in a 2000 report *A new model of work-based learning in the VET sector*, ANTA acknowledged that within the VET sector the terms ‘staff development’ and ‘professional development’ were used interchangeably. For the purposes of this research the two terms were also interchangeable. The data for this research did reveal evidence of this practice.

By 2004, ANTA had published their definition and broad criteria for professional practice in the VET sector:

Professional practice includes expert knowledge of the field, a deep understanding of underlying principles, accumulated experience in the practice of the profession, a familiarity with recent advances in the professional knowledge base, and mastery of the best available techniques and tools (p.7, ANTA 2004).

This contrasted markedly with the prescriptive list of 18 criteria (Appendix: C) communicated by the Victorian Minister for Education and Training, Lynne Kosky (2002, p.28).

The study revealed a range of professional development issues that were clearly the source of considerable, ongoing, negative feelings and tension between managers and teachers: concerns with mandatory professional development; a lack of management support for acquiring and maintaining computers and facilities for the new technologies; the need for shared responsibility for professional development between management and teachers; management’s apparent disregard and implied disrespect for the teachers professional judgement; the need to include sessional teachers in professional development activities; and professional development needs that had not been sought or met by management.

The teachers inferred the need to be acknowledged as professionals and consulted about matters impinging on their work practices. These significant points were raised

by ANTA (2004) in its report *The vocational education and training workforce. New ways of working – At a glance* produced by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). The report stated the need for VET teachers to be acknowledged as professionals and their leadership encouraged in order to reduce the effects of resistance to change and to improve their fulfilment as teachers.

Although all of the teachers enthusiastically expressed the need for ongoing professional development activities, it emerged that they were also totally aligned in their shared dislike of being directed to attend professional development events. One implied that managers disappointed the teachers when they failed to respect the teachers' professional judgement and preferences about mandatory professional development stating, "Some of it is pretty Mickey Mouse, I think ... [and] ... looking back over the years (32) I don't think management always guided us in the best way". The teacher offered a personal insight declaring, "It was just a case of getting something on paper, doing it. To have something done. To say, "Ok, well, you've done your professional development".

The findings reflect those of the Victorian Government research project *Have Your Say*, which was commissioned by the Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE) in 2002. The conclusions showed that the nearly 600 valid TAFE teacher responses reflected their perception that professional development activities were primarily to reach department objectives, rather than to develop teaching skills or develop skills for industry. The findings also showed that the participating teachers felt that individual department managers made the professional development decisions.

It was clear that two main issues fuelled the teacher's anti-mandatory professional development stance. One issue was the total lack of any consultation process as to the relevance of the content of the planned activity and secondly, the lack of consultation about the venue. The teachers were not happy when asked to travel to another campus or function venue. They believed that any other venue was inappropriate in comparison to what they perceived as eminently suitable spaces within their own TAFE building. This was in spite of the data revealing the teachers negative perceptions of the TAFE environment. Perhaps the teachers' feelings of dissatisfaction and resistance to attendance resulted from simply not being involved in the decision-making process.

Although several of the teachers suggested that mandatory professional development would be a useful way to inform all staff about government, university and department policies the data revealed that the majority of teachers appeared to lack not only knowledge about the government driven reform process for vocational education and training but also the reasons for the changes to their working lives.

It was further suggested that mandatory professional development was also an excellent opportunity for social interaction and that it was important to make sure that staff mingled and interacted with staff members with whom they usually had little or no interaction. This implied perhaps, that management did not acknowledge this extremely satisfying aspect of compulsory professional development.

There was evidence of a total lack of commitment by management to showing a genuine interest in how staff viewed the department's professional development events or responding to the completed evaluation forms that detailed their concerns and unmet needs. Many of the teachers described, or implied, that subsequent mandatory professional development activities repeated the same negative aspects of previous events. NCVER (2001), argued 'The issue of evaluation is critical in State and national staff development programs' (p.49). NCVER (2001) further noted that in regard to professional development 'A culture in which the importance of evaluation and quality assurance is not high appears to be developing' (p.10). However, NCVER (2001) suggested that if management had certain customs and place certain importance on staff development 'there is little need for rigorous evaluations' (p.49). They believed that staff development should be 'as a right of employees under an industrial award; as a tool for management to achieve business goals; as a means of supporting staff; to increase employee satisfaction in their work; to improve training outcomes for students and trainees; to comply with the National Training Framework' (p.49).

It was apparent that several of the teachers needed to feel comfortable about their choice to not attend a mandatory professional development event. These teachers made it clear that they would prefer a choice of attendance rather than being concerned about possible negative responses from management if they did not attend. It seems that when management directed teachers to attend mandatory professional development it was assumed that teachers understood that the organisation was implementing educational change and would accept the directive without challenge. Tiezzi (1999) referred to this purpose for professional development as the 'subordinate' assumption'.

The data revealed that some of the teachers did not want to attend some mandatory professional development activities because they felt they had the necessary skills. Tiezzi (1999) argued that if there was an underlying assumption that teachers needed to improve their skills, this was a 'deficit' assumption. Arguably, the consistent directives for the whole department to attend compulsory professional development events is further evidence that not only had the teachers not been consulted on an individual basis but also that management felt they were under performing.

Although the teachers clearly disliked mandatory professional development, there was no evidence that any of the teachers had told management that they did not want to attend. This was in spite of some of the teachers making statements that, in their professional judgement, there was no need to attend. It can be perhaps inferred that the teachers had feelings of subordination and powerlessness. Arguably, their actions were constrained by the construction, or structure of accepted and traditional rules of behaviour within their department. Giddens (1979) reports 'Structural properties exist in time-space only as moments of the constitution of social systems' (p.36).

Several teachers implied that, as it was obvious that computers were going to remain a necessary part of their teaching day, there was a need for managers to make sure that computers, software, computer systems and the related classroom facilities were not only reliable, but also maintained to a high standard. The comments suggested that management did not have the necessary principles, objectives or funds to ensure these outcomes, and the teachers were clearly frustrated by these unmet needs.

Another teacher said that he felt that the department would benefit from a professional development activity that showcased his additional skills. He explained that his skills were not currently offered by the department, but offered in industry and in demand by the public. Management had been made aware of his skills, but to date no manager had agreed to allow him to share his professional skills and knowledge with the teachers in the form of professional development. This sense of disappointment was echoed in the comments of two teachers who had enthusiastically recalled their excitement at the nation-wide success of developing a trade teaching resource referred to as a 'Toolbox' that had gained government acclaim. The teachers eagerly discussed examples of their ingenuity, new skills and knowledge that had resulted from the time they spent developing the teaching resource. It was their perception that management did not value their new skills and knowledge, nor were the projects to develop more teaching resources ever completed. They angrily described how one teacher had originally been taken away from teaching duties by management, only to be put back in the classroom and the project had lapsed. Bush (1999) advised that one of the restrictions of the hierarchical model of management in education, as revealed in this department, is that contributions by individuals are undervalued or disregarded by management.

The sessional teachers in this study inferred that generally, they were not invited by management to attend department professional activities and they speculated that management did not see them as being part of the department. Arguably, it would seem that management did not appear to recognise the value of having sessional teachers who had the potential to be a rich source of contract and on-going teachers familiar with the policies, procedures and culture of the department. One sessional teacher's angry comment revealed a lack of information about access to professional development for sessional teachers when he declared, "Professional development should be the first priority for sessional teachers. We should have meetings or conferences".

One teacher implied that there was no information on how to request a new level of qualification and several teachers stated the need for diverse professional development that was not currently offered. Several teachers indicated that they did not feel comfortable asking what were arguably questions pertinent to their professional development, or that they simply had no idea those certain questions in relation to professional development could be asked. These questions related to the possibility of attending state, interstate and overseas professional development activities, or professional development that might have seemed unusual, or very different to the activities that the teachers usually attended.

Some of the teachers were unclear if they could initiate professional development and, if they did so, whether there was the possibility of financial support from the department. One teacher recalled the unpleasant verbal tensions that would occur when a request to attend professional development of their choice was made to management. His simple solution had been to personally pay the fees so that he and his students would not be adversely affected by his non-attendance at what he judged to be professionally valuable, specialised professional development activities. A number of teachers had expressed the need for managers to tell them the cost of professional development and how they could complete professional development

without incurring fees. The data revealed that not one teacher had a negative word to say about professional development that had enabled them to qualify as TAFE teachers and teach in the department, or professional development that they had initiated and funded themselves.

It was suggested that there should be training as the need arises, rather than training being directed to skills training that is never used. A teacher explained that he still felt the need to complete a 'refresher' course regardless of having completed professional development in that area. Perhaps further evidence of the teachers' ability to recognise and fulfil, their own professional needs.

Two teachers declared that they felt the need to learn new teaching strategies as a means to find new ways to motivate their students. One of the teachers recalled that management had implied that there was a fault with teaching practices. The teacher believed that because the trade was not the students' first choice there was a lack of motivation to learn. Arguably, there may be a need for management to implement changes to the way students are interviewed, or changes to the department policy on enrolling students whose commitment to the trade has not been sufficiently investigated. Arguably, implying the need to change the 'bums on seats' attitude to 'appropriate bums on seats'.

Overall, the teachers' attitudes towards professional development were that it was absolutely vital for their professional and personal growth. However, they stated their preference for this to be negotiated with management. Tiezzi (1999) contended that an interest and involvement in 'continued growth' was one of four basic assumptions for having professional development.

The data for this research project showed that most of the teachers clearly intended to continue to initiate and fund their own professional development as the need arose. An intention noted by Harris and Simons (1999). They argued that their research had shown that teachers were more likely to independently initiate and fund their own professional development. Teachers participating in this research project implied that they would pursue their own professional development selections, even when faced with possible conflict with managers and negative outcomes.

In 2001, OTTE published a comprehensive report to guide TAFE managers to change negative aspects of their management in order to achieve a supportive environment that encouraged collaboration between management and teachers, as well as management and non-teaching staff. The report suggested that managers should lead and facilitate ongoing professional learning. However, this research project revealed that the teachers held a mixture of beliefs about the onus of responsibility for professional development. The beliefs ranged from professional development being seen as a personal obligation to one of seeing it as involving democratic negotiation between the teachers and managers. Nevertheless it was clear from the data that, regardless of department policy, and perhaps in spite of the system, the teachers were intent on initiating and self-funding their own ongoing professional development when they perceived it as necessary.

It was evident from the research data that the teachers preferred their professional development activities to be initiated then negotiated by themselves, with their

managers. The teachers' attitudes appeared to support the argument stated by Bush (1999) who contended that teachers believe that management had the competence to manage department processes and procedures because, from their perception, management had been appointed on merit. Nevertheless, there was a clear message from the teachers that the final decision was the teacher's responsibility. One of the longest serving teachers explained, "It's your own responsibility I think, you know. You can't blame someone because you haven't learnt anything can you?"

### **Teachers' feelings about changes to their working lives – issues, concerns, assumptions**

The teachers revealed experiences, insights and professional opinions of a range of significant changes that have impacted on their former 'teacher-centred' teaching practice. A few teachers recalled feeling trapped by the changes and sense of powerlessness to deal with them due to the structure of the teaching program. Others stated or implied feeling stressed because of the perceived futility of the changes and their potentially negative impact on students at risk of not achieving.

They argued that they had previously responded to students who were capable of learning at a faster pace and self paced learning was inappropriate for their trade. The teachers believed students were disadvantaged when faced with the self paced teaching method because it inhibited students' rate of learning and did not allow them to learn from one another in a form of peer group pressure. Experience had taught them that no students liked to be seen as making mistakes and being seen as the last one to learn.

### **TAFE teachers' perceptions of implementing National Training Packages and the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF)**

The teachers revealed a range of observations about their experiences when applying the National Training Packages and the AQTF to their professional practice. There were a few positive observations of personal growth and improved teaching practice because the Government now audited their professional practice. Mostly, their recollections of issues elicited strong, emotional responses such as: being bogged down by paperwork and perception that teaching duties had taken second place to administration duties (this negative attitude towards the growth in administration duties impacting on teaching duties was reported in an OTTE (2002), research project *Have your say*); having no spare moment to become enthusiastic; their disappointment with the government failure to honour a planned AQTF consulting process; what the AQTF lacks; and management-supervised execution of regular AQTF audits and having no way to avoid complying with unwelcome changes and the pressure to meet the demands.

Perhaps most importantly, the data revealed that most of the teachers voiced their professional opinion that the self paced approach inhibited students and their rate of learning, did not allow them to learn from one another and was in fact incompatible as a teaching practice for their trade students.

## **Ideological change**

Since the 1980s the Federal Government has signalled an expectation that the TAFE sector would implement an ideological shift from one that was based more on liberal human values of social justice to an economic and industry-driven for marketing and competition. The TAFE teachers were expected to add a marketing discourse genre to their everyday practice as well as endure the influence of the implementation of a market ideology on their TAFE hierarchical structure. During the late 1990s the former Principal, Vice-Principal and Head Teachers of this particular TAFE organisation became Director, Head of Department and Program Managers.

Arguably, TAFE teachers were being asked to change the ideology and culture of the institution by changing their identity and way of thinking. TAFE teachers were being transformed from educators in a learning institution, to a team of managed employees in a business that marketed 'education and training'. There was an apparent government supposition that all members of the education and training institution would accept changes to the management structure.

The criteria to be a TAFE teacher now included the skills and knowledge to be an innovative and flexible manager and facilitator, to have entrepreneurial skills needed to liaise with businesses and schools to attract clients, as well as achieving on-going client satisfaction. Arguably, it was assumed that these skills would be enhanced with the use of modern technology.

By 2002, a Ministerial Statement from the Minister for Education and Training, Lynne Kosky (Kosky, 2002) revealed that future TAFE teachers would need expertise in eighteen specific criteria to meet the demands of an ideology based on economic, social and community development (Appendix: C)

## **Surviving the implementation of Government policies on Vocational Education and Training reform.**

The word survival implies that existence has continued under adverse conditions. Given the emerging theme of survival found in many of the teachers' spontaneous use of the word when asked what advice they would give to a new teacher, the word 'surviving' was used to indicate the depth of the TAFE teachers feelings and shared perceptions of changes to their working lives. Most of the interviewed teachers have been with the same department for between ten and thirty-plus years and have lived through major pedagogical and ideological changes.

A number of survival techniques were either overtly or covertly revealed. The majority of the teachers implied that knowledge of the TAFE department culture was very important. Most of the teachers either stated or implied that this knowledge was related to whom you could trust and whom not to trust.

Arguably, the study identified that pragmatic choices to diversify were the main keys to maintaining a lengthy term of teaching within the department. The teachers recalled: training in a new trade (experiencing the change and being away from the negative politics of the former trade), initiating professional development to widen their skills and knowledge, gaining new qualifications, accepting positions that had greater prestige, involvement with significant production of learning materials,

changes to teaching practices and methods of assessment, working back in industry, collaborating with peers to produce learning materials, becoming a ‘trouble-shooter’, actively pursuing administrative roles, trying different employment hours and working with different people in different departments.

It was obvious that maintaining certain positive attitudes helped the teachers to survive the changes that they had experienced. One described the sense of security gained from staying within a familiar culture, however bad. Others described change as constant, unavoidable and a challenge to not get ‘stuck in the past’ and ‘find your way around it’. Overall, the teachers covertly or overtly implied that as TAFE teachers they had found their ‘niche’ and found teaching deeply rewarding.

## **Conclusion**

The results exposed a potentially wide and interesting field of investigation into a variety of assumptions held by stakeholders in the VET sector and identified teacher’s perceptions of a preferred working environment and professional development. The findings from such research will also have the potential to inform policy development and future professional development programs and perhaps lead to an affirmation of the value and status of TAFE teachers.

The shared intensity and number of negative, emotional complaints surrounding the topic of mandatory professional development experienced once they were accepted as TAFE teachers contrasted markedly with no evidence in the data of one single complaint in regard to mandatory professional development they experienced leading up to being employed as a TAFE teacher. However, the teachers were totally aligned in their philosophy and assessment that ongoing professional development is vital. Overwhelmingly, their belief is that the onus of responsibility for professional development lies with the individual teacher.

The teachers implied a need for change in the culture of the environment. There was a call for democratic negotiation between the teacher and management. It was clear that they preferred to initiate the activity then negotiate with their managers. The teachers inferred the need to be acknowledged as professionals and consulted about matters impinging on their teaching practices. Clearly, teachers were disappointed and disillusioned when managers failed to seek or respect their professional opinions and preferences as to the relevance of the content, the timing of the event, the location, choice of attendance and lack of interest in their evaluation of the mandatory professional development events.

Perhaps implying a lack of compulsory professional development to disseminate information about vocational education and training reform, it was suggested that mandatory professional development appeared to be unrecognised by management as an excellent opportunity to inform all staff about government, university and department policies impacting on their working lives. It was further suggested that compulsory professional development events were an ideal opportunity to promote social interaction with colleagues in different and similar teaching areas across the faculties.

There was a recurring theme of managements' lack of appreciation of the teachers' professional judgement, reliability, hard work and dedication to teaching. In a variety of ways, the teachers' comments revealed a history of total acceptance of their role as guide, mentor and support for their students. This appears to have been a mainstay of their usual teaching practice and not as a result of being influenced to change in line with Government policies.

The data revealed a common thread of blaming the National Training Packages and the AQTF that may be attributed to a lack of input and lack of relevant professional development aimed at disseminating information about changes to their working lives. Evidence of the teacher's unenthusiastic reaction to implementing the National Training Packages and the AQTF revealed their sense of being pushed to the periphery and not being acknowledged for their contribution and commitment to their students and their industry by the Federal and State governments or their management.

Many of the teachers voiced their professional estimation that the self paced approach inhibited students and their rate of learning, did not allow them to learn from one another and was in fact inappropriate as a teaching practice for their trade students. Arguably, most of the teachers had been satisfied with their teaching practice prior to the changes to implementing Competency based training, the National Training Packages and the AQTF. The teachers' responses reinforce the importance of including teacher input when the government is preparing to introduce change that impacts on teaching practices.

The teachers felt overwhelmed by administrative duties that forced teaching duties to take second place. There was sparse evidence of teachers having an understanding of government policies that had led to the National Training Packages and changes to their teaching practices. Arguably, these findings signal the need for specific professional development to maximise understanding of changes that impinge on their working lives and teaching practices and evaluation to gauge the success of the professional development activities. Perhaps consideration should be given to consulting and negotiating with TAFE teachers in order to locate teachers prepared to take on more administrative duties so that those with a desire to concentrate on their teaching practice may do so.

Although outwardly appearing to comply with the National Training Packages and the AQTF I sensed a quiet rebellion or subversiveness implied by teachers when ensconced in their domain, the practical classroom. Using their professional judgement they continue to apply teaching methods that, according to them, have a history of success and positive recognition from their Industry.

This research study showed that many trade teachers felt deeply about the importance of continuing to look to industry for leadership in the latest skills, techniques and knowledge and that they needed to feel respected by industry. Simons (1997) argued that her research showed that teachers valued their close links with industry and understanding industry needs.

It may be argued that there is a need to bridge a strategic gap between the micro view of the TAFE teacher's day-to-day lived experience and practice and the macro view

of government, their policy makers and the managers of their agencies that may be interpreted as an idealistic view. Arguably, the government and their agencies assume that the policies and set of skills they put together are correct because they are the authority on vocational education and training. I believe that rather than a gap there is a discrepancy between their views. To borrow from Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony as domination and power, I believe that what is happening is hegemony at the macro, or government level and cultural hegemony within this particular TAFE department. Management are domineering by coercing teachers to consent to implement the National Training Packages.

Rather than seeking a bridge, there is an antidote or counter action to this situation. The solution is for TAFE teachers to retain their single-minded, realistic attitude to reach positive outcomes for their students and industry. Teachers to be trusted to take whatever actions are needed to fulfil their professional development needs and achieve their goals. This research identified that regardless of management they are seeking professional development to fulfil their needs.

The data exposed evidence of a total lack of consultation and negotiation with TAFE teachers in the decision -making processes within the department and gave me the impression that the potential for valuable contributions to improve the department were simply lost. Similarly, the apparent inability of management to provide an environment that encouraged input of professional opinions and judgement from their TAFE teachers indicated that perhaps this situation was the major source of the TAFE teachers' feelings of disharmony and disappointment with their working environment and management.

There were many issues and concerns that the teachers appeared to feel reluctant, or powerless to put forward to management. Spradley (1979) argued that the role of institutional and organisational processes impact on the behaviour of members of the institution. Maybe the dominant culture of management by directives and the TAFE teachers' possible inherent respect, or fear, of the role of manager, added to their inability to approach management and voice their concerns without fear of negative consequences. It was my impression that the teachers held many different assumptions and expectations of the role of manager and some of these were arguably, unrealistic because they were assumptions about the intangible personality traits expected of managers, rather than the tangible duties and responsibilities of managers. Perhaps, the long history of certain sanctions being applied when seen as not complying with management directives had led to the decision to simply accept changes rather than apply their professional judgement and risk confrontation, disapproval and pressure to conform.

The teachers discussed their explicit beliefs in their expectations of the role of managers and their perception that their expectations were not being met. They also implied that managers needed to complete more professional development in management training. Arguably, these findings point to the need to evaluate management and their performance, management courses and the selection process to ensure having the most suitable people in the vital role of management. Perhaps all teachers should be involved in the selection process for a manager. Perhaps the teachers themselves might work together to select a fellow teacher, or two, to take

part in the selection process. Maybe this could include the implementation of a policy to include a regular appraisal process.

It appears that management would benefit from encouraging a cooperative approach when implementing any form of change to education and training within the organisation and developing a culture where all members of the education and training environment feel valued, supported and encouraged to share in achieving organisational goals. Arguably, management might sense a loss of power and/or a range of negative feelings that could impact unfavourably on the employer versus employee relationship when teachers add to their professional qualifications, skills and knowledge. It would appear that the traditional combat zone for managers has changed from management versus the union to management versus the more professionally developed and qualified employee.

Sessional teachers were clearly frustrated by management's lack of recognition of their status as professionals, as teachers. It would seem that management failed to perceive sessional teachers as a useful pool of potential contract and permanent teachers who were already familiar with certain aspects of the culture of the department and who perhaps had some knowledge of its policies and procedures. What are the practical implications of these research findings?

I suggest that it is of major significance that the teachers indicated the importance of encouraging all teachers (including sessionals) to feel that they can genuinely contribute, as informed professionals, to any of the decision-making processes at organisational and/or government levels, that impact on both their working lives and the lives of their students. This includes genuine, timely TAFE teacher involvement in Federal and State governments initiated pre-policy discussions through to the writing, implementation, evaluation and follow-up processes for any policy that directly, or indirectly impacts on the VET sector. TAFE teacher input would allow for reconsideration by Federal and State governments as to the appropriateness of the National Training Packages and the AQTF for individual industries.

Undoubtedly, this formal acknowledgement will signal trust for the professional opinions and judgement of TAFE teachers and as such will have positive repercussions for many current and future stakeholders in the VET sector. It would appear that these considerations would also be beneficial at the local, or organisational level. Direct involvement of TAFE teachers and consideration of their professional and innovative ideas may well add positively to the organisational perceptions of their teachers. Unquestionably, indisputable consideration and implementation of TAFE teacher input would add to the status of the TAFE teacher and reduce their feelings of being marginalised.

Throughout the process of reviewing relevant literature and the data analysis I discovered persistent evidence of assumptions held by a variety of stakeholders within the VET sector. There were categories of assumptions: government assumptions about TAFE teachers; government assumptions about TAFE management; management assumptions about the government and teachers; teachers' assumptions about government and teachers' assumptions about management. It would seem that these assumptions mirror the 'intuitive knowledge base' that deeply concerned Huberman (1993, p.261) and influenced his objective to find out if these opinions

could be supported or quashed. This is certainly a vast and interesting field for future, meticulous research opportunities designed to challenge these assumptions.

I propose that future research should also include an evaluation of the level of understanding and shared understanding by all stakeholders concerned with the VET sector, of government policies and implementation processes that have an impact on the VET sector and on all stakeholders within the VET sector.

The majority of the teachers implied that knowledge of the TAFE department culture was very important. When asked what they would say to a teacher who was new to the department, most of the teachers either stated or implied that they would advise the teacher about whom you could trust and whom not to trust. This revelation strengthens my belief that in order to change the culture of the department the respondents in this research project should give advice to new teachers that is framed as practical advice rather than perpetuating the negative aspects of the culture that they dislike.

The data revealed that the TAFE teachers had either covertly or overtly painted a picture of their preferred working environment and means of developing personally and professionally. Evidently they need to work in an environment that could be described as a sanctuary, a place where they can feel that trust and personal and professional respect are embedded in the philosophy and daily behaviour of the population of the organisation. The teachers signalled their need for a work environment that is professionally, intellectually and physically stimulating and encourages the full support and provision of up-to-date learning technologies, materials and professional development opportunities that extend beyond the state and national borders.

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### Appendix: A

• **Note: ‘On-going’ = Permanent – employment status**

Summary of the 15 research participants (14 trade and 1 theory) and length of service in the same department:

1. Trade	Over 30 years service	On-going and full-time
2. Trade	Over 30 years service	On-going and full-time
3. Trade	Nearly 30 years service	On-going and full-time
4. Trade	Nearly 30 years service	On-going and full-time
5. Trade	Over 30 years service	On-going and full-time
6. Trade	Over 20 years service	On-going and full-time
7. Trade	Over 30 years service	On-going and full-time
8. Trade	Over 10 years service	On-going and full-time
9. Trade	Over 11 years service	On-going and full-time
10. Trade	Less than 10 years service	Sessional
11. Theory	Over 8 years service	On-going and full-time
12. Trade	Under one year	Sessional
13. Trade	Several years – intermittent	Currently sessional
14. Trade	Several years	Currently Contract
15. Trade	over 2 years	On-going and full-time

### Appendix: B

Schedule of questions for individual interviews

‘What are your perceptions of your life as a TAFE teacher in this TAFE department in relation to:

- teaching practice/policy/philosophy?
- history/length of service/reasons for being in the department?
- changes to yourself /the department/your way of life in the department?
- professional development/definitions/experiences/memories/goals/viewpoints/feelings/influences?
- evidence of professional development/formal/informal?
- examples of impacts on teaching practice/feelings/viewpoints?
- place of professional development/past/present/future?
- choice of professional development/what/whose choice/why?
- 

### Appendix: C

The VTA (2002) cited the Ministerial Statement from the Minister for Education and Training, Lynne Kosky (Kosky, 2002). This document revealed that future TAFE teachers would need expertise in eighteen specific criteria to meet the demands of an ideology based on economic, social and community development. The Minister considered that future TAFE teachers would need to be able to:

- further develop and manage new relationships and partnerships with communities, industries, businesses and other educational institutions;
- trial new initiatives in innovation, emerging skills and industries;
- design training services for small to medium sized enterprises;
- create, adjust to and innovate change;
- increase investment from the private sector in TAFE;
- promote safe, healthy community environments and active and inclusive networks at regional, state, national and international levels;
- respond in a flexible way to clients' needs;
- provide high quality training products and quality assurance systems;
- develop new and better-articulated TAFE products and qualifications;
- work as teams;
- lead knowledge creation and innovation;
- apply existing knowledge in new ways;
- make lifelong learning a reality;
- make successful submissions for government funding;
- be recognised as education and training leaders;
- have a positive attitude towards learning and the ability to learn;
- shift between modes of employment;
- operate via flexible accountability mechanisms (VTA, 2002, p.16).