

Surviving Government Policies: VET Reform

- **Research:** Investigating & understanding the culture of a TAFE department & the working lives of 15 Teachers
- **Title:** Mapping Professional Development in TAFE
- **Welcome** – to my presentation - Trish

Research: Ethnography & Participant Observation

- Why? Most appropriate way to study a culture in depth
- **3 principles:** real people in a real situation, understand what the members of the culture are SAYING & different perspectives may lead to the discovery of new knowledge

Research aims

- To more deeply understand the lived experience of a TAFE Teacher
- The findings may have a positive influence on Professional Development programs in VET at government & organisational levels

Findings – 2 distinct, contrasting pictures

- **Dedicated to students and teaching**
- **Disappointed and disillusioned** with:
 - The changing nature of teaching
 - Role of management
 - Their workplace

Findings continued

- **All** believe - Professional Development is **VITAL** for professional and personal growth
- They will continue to initiate and self-fund their own professional development needs

Findings continued

- They detest mandatory professional development activities
- They feel their professional judgement is disregarded and disrespected
- Sessional teachers feel they should be supported and included in professional development activities

Findings continued

- Professional Development should be a shared responsibility between managers and teachers
- Professional development should be initiated by the Teacher BUT negotiated democratically
- Final person responsible? the **Teacher**

Findings continued

- Management - total lack of consultation re: relevance of the content & venue for professional development events
- Management - lack of genuine interest in Teachers' evaluations of mandatory professional development activities – negative aspects continue

Findings continued

- History of management by directives & not consultation
- History of sanctions applied for not conforming
- Feelings of ongoing powerlessness and subordination
- Hegemony? – Managers coercing Teachers to implement changes to their working lives

Findings –National Training Packages & the AQTF

- Teachers scarce evidence of knowledge & understanding of the Australian Government's, mostly economic agenda, impacting on changes to their working lives
- Evidence of blaming management for unwelcome changes to their work practices

Findings – attitudes to National Training Packages and the AQTF

- **Positive:** 1 Teacher claimed 'to better at explaining things to apprentices'
- 1 Teacher said the 'self-paced' approach enabled him 'to hand over the learning more to students'
- 1 Teacher said 'They've become more responsible [&]It has to be done because the state government audits us'

Findings continued – NTPs/AQTF

- **Negative:** 'Pain in the backside' stated or implied by majority
- 'bogged down by paperwork'
- Teaching taking 2nd place to administration duties
- Reduced enjoyment in teaching – less time
- Not appropriate for their trade
- Not consulted by government
- Suspicious and paranoid about who is watching them – not trusted?

Findings: Survival techniques

- **VITAL** – knowledge of the department culture – related to trust &
- **Continuous diversity:**
- Train in new trade/subjects/roles
- Work back in industry
- Try different modes of employment hours
- Maintain positive attitudes - change is inevitable – ‘don’t get stuck in the past’

Survival techniques continued

- Initiate & self-fund professional development activities
- Maintain close links with Industry & a high level of respect for providing excellent apprentices
- Design & develop learning materials to show ingenuity & gain government acclaim
- ‘Trouble shoot’ & mentor new teachers

Survival techniques continued

- Satisfaction of watching their students develop the necessary knowledge & skills
- Positive feedback from their students that they enjoy learning
- Feeling appreciated by students and acknowledged by industry as competent teachers
- Feel that they have found their ‘niche’

Recommendations

- Acknowledge the micro view or **realistic**, lived experience of the Teacher and their working lives & **compare** with
- the macro or **idealistic** view of government, their policy makers & the managers of their agencies – hegemony?

Recommendations continued

- **Solution** to the contrasting viewpoints :
- **Trust** the professional judgement of Teachers – allow them to retain their realistic attitude aimed at achieving positive outcomes for students and the ongoing respect of their Industry.

Ideal environment

- A **change** in the culture of the department to: A psychological **sanctuary**
- An environment of trustworthy, respectful behaviour
- An environment that is professionally, intellectually & physically stimulating
- Management support & provision of up-to-date learning technologies

Changing the culture – How?

- When mentoring new Teachers – only share pragmatic advice
- Why?
- Sharing negative aspects of a culture may continue the negative perceptions

Points to consider: Management

- Perhaps the negative perceptions of management are influenced by **assumptions** about the **tangible** role of management & the expected, **intangible** aspects of personality
- The Teachers have an inherent respect for the role of Manager but believe it should be further developed, evaluated and regularly appraised
- Perhaps Teachers should be involved in the selection process and appraisal

Points to consider continued

- Management - benefit from encouraging a cooperative approach when implementing any form of change & develop a culture where all members feel valued, supported & encouraged to share in achieving organisational goals
- Management – benefit from gaining innovative ideas from staff

Points to consider continued

- Management – benefit - fully supporting sessional teachers = pool of trained teachers familiar with the culture, policies and rules of the department
- Teachers – benefit from genuine, timely Teacher involvement in the decision making process at government and department levels
- Teachers – benefit – signals **trust** for their professional opinions and judgement & reduces feelings of being marginalised

Final considerations

- Found persistent evidence of **assumptions** or '**intuitive knowledge**' base held by stakeholders within the VET system
- **Future research?** Support or quash this '**intuitive knowledge base**' (Huberman, 1993)
- **Future research** – an evaluation of the level of understanding & by all stakeholders in VET sector of government policies & implementation processes that impact on the VET sector and wider community

Conclusion

- THANKYOU
- Any questions and/or comments?