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Teaching VET in Victorian secondary schools

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Teaching VET in Victorian secondary schools: Introduction

This research paper focuses on the provision and teaching of Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs to young people within Victorian secondary schools.

The study identifies and discusses the way that VET in schools programs are nuanced as they are made to fit the state system, then with the individual school settings and circumstances.

These programs are important in offering a range of relevant and useful programs to a diverse range of senior secondary school students.

The study found that when a VET program is provided to students through a secondary school setting in Victoria it will,

(1)   be made appropriate for students aged 15 to 21;

(2)   occurs as part of one of the two senior secondary school certificates, and

(3)   often have undergone some modifications to its authenticity with some flow on effect to its reliability and validity due to the limitations and nature of the school-based context.

Accordingly, teachers and school administrators are required to be creative in fine-tuning their program provision as they work through issues that arise around costs, quality and effectiveness.

Methodology

Three sources of data contribute to the data matrix for this study.

The paper is structured around these three data sets.

- Part 1: Teaching VET: a selection of ideas and themes from the literature.
    - a selected review of some of the literature

- Part 2: The provision of VETiS in Victoria
    - policy and document analysis

- Part 3: Teaching VETiS in Victoria:
    - interviews with 20 VETiS practitioners, teachers, school administrators and state-wide curriculum officers

From the broader literature on teaching: the notion of pedagogy

- Central to the practice of teaching is the notion of pedagogy. Different people use the concept of pedagogy in slightly different ways. Alexander (2008) describes pedagogy as 'the big picture of teaching'.

- Watkins and Mortimer (1999) in a review of the research on pedagogy identified four different conceptualisations. They explain that pedagogy is variously used to mean a focus on: 1) the teacher; 2) contexts of teaching; 3) teaching and learning; and more recently as, 4) the complex, non-linear relationships between multiple elements, including context, content, the teacher and the learner.

- This fourth and more complex conceptualisation is used to guide analysis in this study. Subsequently, context is considered significant and in this case this is the Australian VET sector and more specifically, the context of the provision of VET programs within Victorian secondary schools.

- In these terms, this research is a study of 'the big picture of teaching' that includes 'the complex, non-linear relationships between multiple elements, including context, content, the teacher and the learner'.

Teaching VET: a selection of ideas and themes from the literature

VET pedagogy is . . .

- historically associated with the teaching and learning of a trade
  - with teachers, demonstrating, modelling and observing; and
  - with learners, observing, imitating and undertaking degrees of guided practice.
- considered practical
  - Reflecting authentic work practices
  - Competency-based
- Different when the teaching and learning is . . .
  - leading to qualifications above and below AQF level 4,
    - at level 2 & 3 to what it is at level 6?
  - on or off-the job

Teaching VET: a selection of ideas and themes from the literature

VET pedagogy is . . .

- aimed at the learning of a job and therefore associated with adult learning;

- multi-contextual . . . .

Teaching VET: a selection of ideas and themes from the literature

VET pedagogy is . . . continuing to develop . . . .

Figgis (2009) six trends in innovative VET practice
- Use of authentic learning tasks,
- the encouragement of peer learning,
- the application of e-learning,
- utilisation of workplace settings,
- personalising learning experiences and programs, and devolving the support and responsibility for teaching and learning so that it was closer to the influence of the practitioner

Teachers most likely to be looking to improve and change . .
- Tended to be reflective; respectful of learners; and networked with local enterprises and other practitioners

The provision of VET in (Victorian) secondary Schools

Hands on,

Years 9, 10 ,(taster programs) 11 & 12

VCAA

Enrolment figures . .

2008 nearly 57K, in 2009 up 5%, nearly 60K (38k)

in 2010

The provision of VET in (Victorian) secondary Schools

in 2010, 63.5k,

Eight most popular VETiS programs are Hospitality, Sport and Recreation, Building and Construction, Interactive Digital Media, Business, Music, Automotive, and Community Services

First aid and RSA (15 – 20 hours in total)

The provision of VETiS (in Victoria)

VET as part of VCE

Units 1- 4

In 2010 - 25 VCE VET programs

15 have scored assessment

VET within VCAL

Three levels of VCAL

– VET is compulsory within intermediate and senior

Teaching VETiS (Victoria)

- Mostly practical and hands on,
- But this is a double-edged sword

. . . *'VET in schools keeps a lot of kids in school who would normally leave'.*

. . . *'schools often put their kids in there … because they are not going to do well in VCE and it gets that reputation'.*

. . .*'a dumping ground for students that co-ordinators didn't know how to deal with'*

Teaching VETiS (Victoria)

- Emphasises the prospect of apprenticeship
- Excursions onto local building sites students met and talked with the tradies heard what they expected of a young person at an interview
- Disengaging and uninteresting programs v engaging and interesting age appropriate programs
- Some Cert II's very theory based

Teaching VETiS (Victoria)

- Size of provision
- Five different qualifications in one year
- RSA and first aid
- Timetabling
- literacy and numeracy integrated or separate
- One large regional senior secondary college visited had over 1200 students in Years 11 & 12. This school had five feeder schools. This allowed the school to develop a large number of program choices and provided their students with access to over 900 different VET Units of competency. Some of their students were doing short programs of less than 100 hours and other students were doing two and even three different VET programs

Teaching VETiS (Victoria)

- Different provision options
- One large regional secondary school utilises a range of provision options, amongst these were (1) the school being the RTO, (2) the VET program is auspice through TAFE or another RTO, and (3) provision occurs through TAFE or Private RTOs. Choices about who provides the program are related to comparative costs, availability of suitable space and appropriately qualified teachers.

Teaching VETiS (Victoria)

- *'previously the TAFE delivered it for us, but now we are taking it back because we have got four classes this year. Last year the TAFE wanted to charge me $90,000 for three classes, so for four I imagine we would be looking at well over $100,000 - and no teacher, not even me as Assistant Principal, earns that sort of money in a year'.*

Teaching VETiS (Victoria)

- Quality . . .
- notice a discrepancy between the student's capabilities at the completion of a program undertaken at the TAFE/RTO with what the students are able to do on completion of the VET in schools program they start to question the reliability and validity of the program
- A simple comparison of hours offered to and undertaken by the student

Teaching VETiS (Victoria)

The question of quality . . .

- Shop around for a provider who will accept the number of hours on offer

- this can lead to a questioning of national and mutual recognition, when comparability of quality in the outcomes cannot be assured across different providers

- The realities and limitation of VET programs being offered in schools is that they are rarely able to provide comparable nominal hours as the same program in a TAFE/RTO. The worst case scenario is where this leads to the VET in schools programs beginning to merely teach to produce the minimum amount of evidence needed to satisfy a potential audit.

Conclusions

- VET in schools is really important for accommodating the needs of an increasingly diverse range of students
- State authorities do a great job in devising and explaining appropriate systems, structures and methodologies for the provision of VET into secondary schools
  - (fitting a national VET program to the state system)
- School administrators do a great job in devising appropriate ways to provide VET programs in the context of their particular school
  - (fitting a national VET program to the state system, and into a particular school)
- Teachers do a great job in devising appropriate ways to teach VET programs in the context of their particular school
  - (fitting a VET program to the state system, and into a particular school, and then to the teaching of specific vocational content)
- Does the VET program loose anything in the translation?
- Is 'VET in schools' in danger of becoming 'VET-lite' ?