

Response to Options Paper – The Quality of teaching in VET

As a teacher in the VET sector for over ten years, I have first hand knowledge of the workings of teaching and administration in the sector. In 2005 I saw the need for research into pedagogical practice in Design in VET and undertook a Masters of Education (postponed but still in progress). I worked in collaboration with Dr. Damon Cartledge in a competitive research grant through NCVET and was successful in gaining funding in the highly contested open ‘category’.

The research culminated in a report “Creating Place: Design Education in VET”ⁱ (Cartledge & Watson 2008) and entailed a national online survey of VET educators working through a network of Industry Training Boards.

We presented preliminary findings at an inaugural International Conference in Design Education “Connected Ed 2007” with the report published in 2008.

In 2008 I had two students shortlisted for Industry Training Awards, one achieving the ‘runner up’ award in Furniture Design and the other winning the outright award for Interior Design and Decoration.

The Victorian Government was undertaking a VET review at the time and the Bradley Report was in its infancy, and there was hope for the future of delivering knowledge and skills to young and old Victorians.

In 2008 I was told that I was to be made redundant as the VET review led to management deciding that courses with low enrolments would be terminated.

My course in Furniture Design was shut down and the design studio converted to an upgraded facility to train International fee paying students in Cabinet making.

I managed to get a sessional position at another TAFE delivering the same course and the identical thing happened.

This set of circumstances forms my views on the quality of teaching in the VET sector and I have to be mindful of maintaining a ‘balanced’ view in what I hope I have evidenced as an ‘imbalanced’ system.

Wise counsel has also warned me of the ramifications to reemployment prospects within the VET sector should I be too explicate in my use of ‘personal’ case studies to exemplify my views. While ‘wise’ it also gives a clear indication of the problems of democracy and freedom of thought, with ‘fear and favour’ as management tools.

Question 1: do you believe that current arrangements for assuring the quality of VET teaching are satisfactory?

There is a process in VET for assuring quality of VET teaching but it is being abused and misused. The AQTf is a fine document with good intent but it is just a document and is interpreted with a view to compliance but open to abuse.

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Question 2: To what extent do the options outlined here allow teachers, RTOs, and/or VET more broadly to build on existing processes to improve and ensure the quality of VET teaching?

So, where is the problem?

It lies in the dual level delivery in VET of Training at Certificate level and Education at Further Education level. As VET is dominated by training delivery in trade certificate training, management is dominated by trade qualified personnel with an entrenched resistance to ‘degree qualified’ Further Education educators taking over.

Having taught alongside apprentice teaching staff it is almost ‘unAustralian’ in an egalitarian society to use education standards to discriminate against your peers, but a teacher is a teacher in VET whether that person has a Masters or a Certificate. Strange that in an educational institution, education qualification holds supreme while professional qualifications are dismissed.

Teacher training is at issue here and I am of the belief that Certificate qualified training staff are not experienced or thereby suitable candidates for education delivery and management at least in the Further Education sector of VET.

Question 3: do you find helpful the paper’s presentation of options in stages: stage 1 – the augmented status quo, stage 2 – intermediate enhancement, and stage 3 – ambition?

Let’s move to ambition! Where is the Education Revolution?

A quick fix would be to segregate the two, training at certificate and further education at Diploma in line with the American system as espoused by Marginsonⁱⁱ in the preliminary paper to the Bradley Higher Education review.

“TAFE institutions and all private training institutions offering two-year full-time equivalent (FTE) tertiary programs should be designated as ‘higher education’. This would be consistent with the OECD definition of tertiary education and with the United States’ definition of ‘higher education’, which includes the community college sector. (Marginson 2008, p. 8)

I have just completed a review for VCAA on Design and Technology – Systems Engineering at VCE level and the response from teaching staff in secondary was resounding, that the system was failing students by maintaining them at secondary ‘compulsory’ education and not assisting them in achieving VET qualifications of significance enough to be accepted by both VET and HE.

As the principal psychology is to keep students with their cohort without sending them off to a ‘Technical institution’ the logical move would be to include ‘trade training’ in Secondary.

I do not know the reason why trade is needed to be taught separately at a ‘remote’ venue, in an egalitarian society, my report to VCAA called for the consideration of a Victorian Certificate of Industry, citing the Canadian Curriculum with its segregation by curriculum only of the cohort into Workplace, College / University and Open education.

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This opens Secondary Education up to be more in line with the current Government ideology of increasing trade certificate training at Secondary where teaching can be better managed away from the pressures of Industry dictation on content and the private delivery of trade training by Non Government Organisations or private enterprise which although ascribing to the necessary quality frameworks has been proven to be lacking, at least in the ‘Compulsory’ education level.

Question 4: do you find helpful the paper’s analysis of VET teaching into elements –

The structure of the VET teaching workforce
Developing master practitioners
Cross sectoral teachers
Staff data collection
Entry level teacher qualifications
Mentoring and supporting new teachers
Continuing teacher education qualifications
Continuing professional development
Maintaining teachers’ industry currency
Research on VET pedagogy and models of teaching
Accrediting qualifications
Registering VET teachers
Evaluating the quality of VET teaching

The above list is fine, but you are going to get a ‘tiered’ level of interpretation, ability to interpret, and execution of the above.

As Marginson suggests, if Further and ACF Education were delivered instead of ‘dual sector’ but single sector, the misuse and abuse by trade qualified management will be marginalised (no pun intended).

Question 5: have we missed any element or might some elements be combined?

The Elephant in the room is the ‘need’ for a separate sector for VET.

History has shown us that the separation of Secondary Education and Technical Education did not work, all the establishment of the TAFE VET sector has done is move the trade into Further Education and by sheer weight of numbers has eclipsed the intent and opportunity for students to progress at that level.

I would suggest (with no evidence to back it) that the divide between Educated teaching professionals in Secondary and Trade trained teaching staff in Secondary still remains the major hurdle to an inclusive approach to a satisfactory education experience for Secondary Students.

Like wise the divide between Higher Education and Further Education, I recount a presentation by a leading education researcher at an NCVER conference where it was stated that TAFE educators did it tough as ‘remedial educators’, I thought the assembled would have torn him limb from limb, but such is the subservience of FE to HE that it barely raised a murmur.

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The ‘Elements’ as you put it are fine but they need to be embedded in a unified FE / HE context, and competency based education practice has roundly been denounced at HE level.

Question 6: is there any option that we have missed that you believe should be considered?

So far the Education Revolution has only resulted in ‘Building’ literally, I have only been employed part time for the last 18 months while the GFC rages across the world, the BER strategy is stated to be aimed at job creation but hasn’t happened for me.

(I got an email yesterday from an Indian architect in India who is contracted to design and draft school building documentation, and he cheerfully cites that “We have also successfully documented a project for Australia..A 20 million dollar school in XXXXXXXX from here for my previous office XXX..It was tough but a good learning experience and we got it done in a months time..have got good staff of four people to document projects of Australian Standards...

(names removed to maintain anonymity)

Australian students deserve better.

ⁱ Cartledge, D & Watson, M 2008 *Creating Place: Design education as vocational education and training*. NCVET Adelaide

ⁱⁱ Marginson, S 2008, Preliminary submission to the Australian Government Review of Australian Higher Education, 21 April,
http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/people/staff_pages/Marginson/Submission%20to%20HEd%20Review%20210408.pdf