

Developing a dual identity

Does maintaining industry currency hinder the development of advanced teaching skills for VET teachers?

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Background

This is a research project 'in progress'

Undertaken for PhD studies Griffith University, Queensland

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The research project - methodology

- Part of a larger qualitative study which is investigating 'advanced skills' for VET teachers and how they are development.
- Multiple case study methodology
- Cases: 2 x TAFE Queensland 'regions', one large Queensland RTO
- Data collected from interviews with managers and teachers with advanced skills (selected upon professional recommendation from managers and peers)
- Interviews from each organisation/region analysed to identify themes and to develop the case
- Cross case analysis to identify convergent and divergent themes

Rationale and background

- Dual identity refers to the requirement that VET teachers develop and maintain the practice associated with one or more vocational roles as well as that of a VET teacher.
- The challenge, complexity and tensions associated with inhabiting a 'dual identity' as a 'dual professional' has been well established, and is a contemporary topic in the discourse on the quality of VET teaching and VET teachers' skills

(e.g. Palmieri, 2004; Orr, 2008; Wheelahan & Curtin, 2010; Choy & Hodge, 2017; Tyler & Dymock, 2017)

- Assumption that teachers with advanced skills = the 'excellent' teachers in VET (quality VET teaching)

Question?

‘Does maintaining industry currency hinder the development of advanced teaching skill for VET teachers?’

The Standards: teachers must come to VET teaching role with existing current skills



Trainers and assessors must have:

a) vocational competencies at least to the level being delivered and assessed;

b) current industry skills directly relevant to the training and assessment being provided; and

c) current knowledge and skills in vocational training and learning that informs their training and assessment.

(Standards for Registered Training Organisations, 2015)

What are Current Industry Skills?

‘**Current industry skills** are the knowledge, skills and experience required by VET trainers and assessors and those who provide training and assessment under supervision to ensure that their training and assessment is based on current industry practices and meets the needs of industry.’

(Standards for Registered Training Organisations, 2015)

What comprises industry currency?

According to the standards a broad range of activities can constitute industry currency

Current industry skills may be informed by consultations with industry and **may include, but is not limited to:**

- a) having **knowledge of and/or experience** using the latest techniques and processes;
- b) possessing a high level of **product knowledge**;
- c) understanding and **knowledge of legislation** relevant to the industry and to employment and workplaces;
- d) being **customer/client-oriented**;
- e) possessing **formal industry and training qualifications**; and
- f) **training content that reflects current industry practice.**

(Standards for Registered Training Organisations, 2015)

Emerging findings from the research project

- Both teachers and managers agreed it necessary for VET teachers to maintain industry currency

HOWEVER

- Varying views on how industry currency can be achieved

AND

- Some felt that a ***focus on industry currency activities hindered the development of advanced teaching skills***

Interpretation of the standards – divergent views on how currency can be achieved

That the only way to achieve currency is to ‘work on the floor’

OR

That it is possible to be ‘current’ through other means

Linda, Manager: felt that teachers must work in industry to remain current

'VET teachers need to get out into industry... to ensure that they are still across all their industry, that they understand their industry and that the information they are giving their students is current and relevant.' (Linda, Manager)

Loretta (teacher): shares Linda's (manager's) view

'...reading materials, going to a trade show, going to a network event...I just don't think it is enough.. I really don't think it is enough. And so, for me, working in industry, and managing that on a regular basis is really important.'

Divergent view - Alexandra (manager): Teachers can achieve currency through other means

'It doesn't make them a better teacher, working on the floor – you can research and read and get your currency in another format'

So what? Views on the effect of Industry Currency activities on the development of teaching skills

1. That to be great VET teachers, they must have both education skills **and** be an industry expert
2. Not only is it **difficult to juggle two identities** (moving to and from each) but that it can be **detrimental to the development of teaching practice and identity as a teacher**
3. That maintaining both identities can be **simply exhausting**.

Sandra (teacher): that Education + Industry skills are needed

'It's great to have awesome currency, but unless you balance that out with great educational [knowledge and skills], I don't believe that's the making of a good practitioner. You've got to have education with Industry.'

Jon (teacher): that emphasis on industry currency does not improve teaching performance

'As an Institute, it seems to me that they are now stuck on industry currency. And industry currency is not improving teaching performance, because if you want better teachers you have to focus on their teaching skills. Industry currency can improve their knowledge, but not their teaching skills'

Jon (teacher): problematizing the notion of dual identities and its impact on the development as a teacher

Why I have such a problem with that [the focus on industry currency] is that I think that a significant percentage of community services teachers did not actually polish their teaching skills. They are still operating in a community services framework. They were counsellors and now they are counsellors and teachers as well. And they think that they need to do things in the Community Services fashion...and it is not Community Services, it is education, and it needs to be dealt with differently'

Alexandra (manager): that it can be exhausting!

'...they focus so much on your currency as a nurse and full timers have to get part time jobs on the weekend to maintain their currency, rather than focusing on making them a better teacher. They get so rundown and tired because they have to do the extra work on top of what they are doing here, and I don't think that it makes them any more current'

Where to?

- Explore ***interpretation*** of requirements expressed in standards?
- ***Revisit industry currency requirements and practices in training organisations*** to ensure that industry currency can be maintained without losing one's identity as a VET teacher?

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