

Vocational educational training policy and practice essay

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Abstract

Recently there have been unprecedented levels of structural policy changes in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia. The economic crises, demographic change, the impact of globalisation are examples of current and future challenges that continue to bedevil the VET sector in Australia[CITATION Lou04 | 2057]. Socioeconomic as well as political forces have contributed to major changes in the VET system. The economic discourses have dominated these changes pointing to the need for educational systems to contribute to economic development by equipping the future workforce with needed knowledge and skills. Diversification and immense needs of the economy have increased demand for skills in specialized fields. Economic rationalism and new vocationalism are two discourses overhauling the Australian educational system. The Policy framework, that drive VET reforms were numerous and complex[CITATION Aus10 | 2057].

The changes point to the unknown future direction that the VET policy has taken and the significant implications on the learners and teachers. The development of human capital and open market policies are the two major economic factors. There have been major impacts of this transformation on the identities of practitioners or teachers working in the changed environments and students. Today's VET practitioner should not only have technical training qualifications but also sound academic foundation, personal skills and higher-order thinking skills. This paper seeks to examine these radical changes and their corresponding impact on the operation of the VET system. The paper also explores the shape of the curriculum and

detailed operation and the impacts of this transformation on the identities of VET practitioners and students in the changed environments[CITATION Sar991 | 2057].

1. 0 The Changes in Policy framework affecting the VET system

The Policy restructuring in the VET sector are multi-faceted. The economic discourses dominated Vocational Education and Training Policy changes pointing to the need for educational systems to contribute to economic development by equipping the future workforce with needed knowledge and skills. There have been efforts to both reduce costs and re-focus the vocational education and training (VET) curriculum as a narrower and more skills-driven model. The steps to bring these changes can be traced back to previous governments whose goal was to Marketize the Education system through re-organization of the curriculum. The Marketization of the System put emphasis on efficiency measures which resulted in an increasing pressure to drive down labour costs, in particular through casualization[CITATION Ste03 | 2057].

The recent regime's relentless push to promote privatization of the system and further vocationalization of the curriculum, led to narrowing of the curriculum. This Marketization Policy and the narrowing of the curriculum have affected teachers significantly. The curriculum has become unclear and they have lost control of syllabus decisions. The practitioners could now not make right professional judgment about appropriate pedagogies.

The reform of the TAFE was also critical in which unions were allowed to play a key role shaping policy as they agreed with the Government[CITATION

Depnd I 2057].

Another major policy change is the restructuring and reorganization of government departments. In relation to VET reforms the government have had far reaching effects on the system due to reorganization and restructuring of departments. A case in mind is the formation of the Department of Child Safety in the recent years to address child protection. The recent change in government (2009) resulted in a department restructuring in which the Department of Child Safety was merged with other eight departments to form the Department of Communities. In this case it called for a sharing of limited resources and reorganization of the VET programs under the merged departments. This amalgamation of department has been an ongoing and dynamic process that has affected not only the work of practitioners but also the diversity of the context and the clients of the system. The merging of departments has broadened the diversity of the clients so that workers who previously got training under different departments or were never trained are now trained under the same department. As a result the VET practitioners have had to change the approach and the content of the teaching materials to suit this diversity of the clientele. The unexpected changes in the training department lead to the establishment of the Learning Solution Unit (LSU) to review the training materials accordingly. Being a member of a training unit of one of the merged departments I am required to come up with measures to cut cost and restructure the training programs according to the government set agenda on Education reform. Needless to say different governments have had different priorities and strategies depending on their manifestos, which

have adversely affected the system changes. The merging of departments has been mainly driven by limited resources available for vocational training programs[CITATION DIA00 I 2057].

2. 0 The Marketization Policy and VET Restructuring and Operation

The Labour and Liberal Party commitment to reforms that are market driven has contributed in shaping the VET policy. Competition, user choice and Privatization have defined the TAFE sector. The market driven reform have contributed to the decline in quality in VET. From the perspective of the TAFE it is evident that under user choice and competitive tendering quality has declined rather than improved as expected. The modest improvements were observed in non-TAFE VET providers. It was clearly noted that in TAFE institutes, there was less sharing of information, the resources were diverted from training delivery to marketing and administration. Due to the competitive tendering and user choice there was more emphasis on cost-cutting strategies at the expense of quality improvement. The market forces seem to be significantly changing the priorities, motivation and values VET providers. These changes have a potential of adversely affecting the interests of the public in the system. The TAFE institutes are motivated more by financial and commercial goals and efficiency rather than equity, knowledge and skills development goals[CITATION Arm03 I 2057].

The wider importance of market competition are overshadowing the two major government VET provision drivers, namely planning priorities and policy. The market players as a result aim purely at profits and overlook the responsibilities of TAFE providers and the value of the public interest. The persistent rise in forces of the market has been seen to introduce discipline

on the sector aimed at reducing cost and thus increasing the value for money[CITATION Aus10 I 2057].

The drive to control costs in labour intensive industries like education affect labour force directly. As a result TAFE teachers have experienced unprecedented levels of casualization[CITATION Aus10 I 2057]. The industrial relations reforms led by the Australian Workplace Agreement have undermined teaching conditions in relation to non-attendance to workplace, course preparation and correction time and teaching hours. These have critically undermined a profession that is already demoralized, deepening the negative effects of marketization. There is an appalling state of employment arrangements due unclear shared responsibility between governments and ‘ autonomous’ institutions. There is apparent underfunding of the system which has critically affected the operation of the VET programs. There is a looming crisis at the level of contact between the VET students and their TAFE instructors. The teachers are bearing the greatest impact of the policies. Using the design of ‘ industry expert’ the system has normalised poor employment practices. The VET lends itself to the industry specialists to tap and institutionalise the existing industry experience. The casual and contracted teachers don’t demonstrate teaching skills; have an inaccurate understanding of their industry. In addition the casual TAFE teacher productivity is not in line with the standard requirements, since they are ‘ industry experts’ and not professional teachers. There is also disillusionment among the TAFE teachers who desire permanent employment. The open market has led to undermine the power and influence of the[CITATION DIA00 I 2057].

3. 0 The Impact of VET policy Change and Curriculum operation and Assessment

The VET curriculum has been very dynamic recently as the industries evolve to meet the market challenges. In the face this reforms the VET practitioners have had to be equally dynamic and innovative in order to keep in step with the ever changing curriculum. The model of delivery in the VET system has been recently influenced by the concept of experiential learning. Industrial Training Packages came into play to guide the VET techniques. The VET trainers were faced with the challenge of equipping themselves with the knowledge of training packages for them to work effectively[CITATION Arm03 I 2057].

The educators who specialize in training a particular industry need to directly participate in a form of direct experience to acquire the relevant skills and knowledge and to remain updated with any changes or developments in the industry[CITATION Won03 I 1033]. The trainers were also faced with the challenge of updating themselves with qualification, guidelines, assessment and competency standards of training packages. The VET practitioner has become more knowledgeable not only in curriculum content but also on the standards and other national requirements. With the introduction of training packages that underpin CSO staff, for example, have undergone extensive learning/training in adult education, training packages, competence based training and curriculum development (P. Palmer & B. Rowland, 2011).

The Economic challenges have had an adverse effect on the VET system, the learners as well as the work of the VET practitioners. The government reduced funding to the VET sector by 22% and ultimately reduced student

intake. The system being heavily dependent on government has therefore suffered significantly especially with regard to staff development. . With dwindling funding it means that the trainers may be incapacitated to some extent in the provision of quality training. On the positive side though as the boundaries between VET and tertiary education have become narrower recently the VET providers are now providing Bachelor degrees in applied courses not being adequately addressed by the Universities[CITATION Depnd I 2057].

The involvement of higher education by RTOs recently has therefore expanded the work scope as well as qualification requirements of the VET practitioners[CITATION Sar991 I 1033]. The VET programs have also been diversified and restructured to meet the societal and industrial needs. For example the training for CSOs currently equates to a Vocational graduate. In addition the department is developing an integrated learning system that allows the staff to undertake various trainings leading to one of 12 certificate IVs or one of the 9 diplomas (P. Palmer, personal communication, February 17, 2011). There is increasing demand for multiple skilled personnel in the dynamic labour market which calls for the VET practitioners to be flexible and versatile[CITATION Har01 I 1033]. The economic constrains have dictated that industries cut down on their labour force by maximizing on the skills of fewer employees hence the concept of multitasking has gained popularity. There has also been a growing reliance on contracted/ temporal employees. The VET practitioners therefore have had to be innovative so as to be able to increase the competence level of the contract employees who often have lower academic qualifications. In addition VET trainers have been

encouraged to enhance their knowledge and skills in various areas to keep abreast with the changing industry disciplines and teaching competencies. The said teaching competences range from classroom-related delivery methods to administrative requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework[CITATION Kim09 | 1033]

The CBT model has been individualistic with a minute approach to the curriculum. It paved the way for the de-skilling of teachers' labour process and its associated effects on TAFE teachers' work. The changes have finally led to the development of ' Training Packages', which are narrow, formulaic ' skill kits'. The Training packages constituted of minute, reductive and prescriptive lists of competencies. The model has been void of knowledge acquisition and resulted in poor learning in which learners did not acquire the 'learning to learn' skills necessary for today's changed and complex world. The CBT basically constituted codified skills (which do not impart knowledge) that reflect past and present workplace practices and not those required for constant change. Furthermore, VET packages are too narrow and directed to work only while leaving out broader attributes, knowledge and skills which are important in managing and moulding a person's career in a transforming world. The final effect is that the citizens fail to adequately contribute to development in their communities and broader society.

[CITATION Sar991 | 2057]

4. 0 Impact of policy changes on the daily operation of VET

The main policy change that has had profound effects on my work as a VET is the restructuring of the departments by the government. This

restructuring, driven by the economic constraints, has seen several departments merged to cut on the operational costs. The merging of seven departments has created the learning solution unit (LSU) to which I belong. This merger has created areas of conflict and misunderstanding because the members of the newly formed department do not fully understand the role of the new department. The ever changing structure and roles of the departments, as a result of political manoeuvres, have both short term and long term implications on my work. The harmonization of structures, roles and policies of the different departments has led to the re-writing and redevelopment of hundreds of policies. In other words where each department had individual policies the policies have had to be unified and harmonized to cover the super departments. The major challenge emanates from the fact that though these changes commenced 12 months ago they are only coming into effect today. The resettling of the departments and management of the changes that are ongoing becomes particularly challenging where the practitioners don't clearly understand the new framework [CITATION DIA00 I 2057].

There is also a lot of uncertainty with regards to the mandate of the newly formed departments in relation to the mandate of the original (parent) departments. For instance where a department that was mandated to do training is merged with one that had a different mandate there is confusion on whether the newly formed department will carry out one of the mandates, both or a totally new mandate. The great level of uncertainty has left VET practitioners unsure of what is expected of them especially because communication and

directions on the policy changes[CITATION Ste03 | 2057].

Suffice to say that the policy changes affecting the scope of operation and assessment system in VET have resulted in the diversification in terms of both context and the clientel. This has particularly affected the work of the practitioners requiring them to be more knowledgeable and open minded. For instance with the merging of departments a child protection trainer is now expected to train a wider range of clients including justice workers, youth detention officers, youth workers, active recreation workers and many more[CITATION Sar991 | 2057]. This basically means that the context, content and approach (pedagogical approaches) of training have to change in order to accommodate and suit the new range of clients. My department has to evaluate the efficiencies and training needs of the newly formed departments thus trainers will begin to train more workers from different areas (previously different departments). Some of the workers never received training from their previous departments but due to the merging of departments they now have access to a wide range of training.

The restructuring of departments necessitates the review of the training materials to all training materials thus creating new goals for the LSU. The LSU has the mandate of identifying common areas of efficiencies and training to avoid reinventing the wheel. For example for the topic of work place health and safety, which was common in most departments, the same materials, resources and facilitators can be used to increase efficiency. This approach will provide flexibility for workers wishing to transfer from one department to another. The combination of resources, materials, facilitators and participants will not only improve the efficiency but also reduce the cost

of operation. However this will expand the scope of the trainers' job who thus must be versatile and flexible. The LSU has also been mandated to determine the specific materials required for specific units and review the materials existing in other departments to see whether they can be used or modified for the specific units other than developing new materials. As a result of the departmental restructuring the LSU has also been given the mandate to review any new training materials and evaluate the quality, relevance and integrity of such materials. In addition the LSU will also review the old/outdated workplace training concepts and advice appropriately. As part of this review of materials I have identified 23 qualifications and I am mapping them to essential knowledge, essential skills and performance criteria identified in the units of competence for the 23 qualifications. The 23 qualifications range from Cert IV, Diploma, Vocational Graduate Certificates and also Vocational Graduate Diplomas[CITATION Rus00 I 2057].

5. 0 Conclusion

The economic discourses have dominated these changes pointing to the need for educational systems to contribute to economic development by equipping the future workforce with needed knowledge and skills. Economic rationalism and new vocationalism are two discourses overhauling the Australian educational system. The Policy framework, that drive VET reforms were numerous and complex. The changes in the VET system have necessitated changes in the roles, responsibilities and the entire work of VET trainers. The changes have presented major challenges that have forced the VET practitioners to change their approach and perspective of their job. It is now imperative VET practitioners should not only possess technical training

qualification but also sound academic foundation, personal skills and higher-order thinking skills[CITATION Aus10 I 2057].

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