

‘Quality’ training – challenges for teachers of workplace training for trainees and apprentices

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Abstract

The world of teachers who provide ‘on the job’ training in the workplace for trainees and apprentices has been one of constant change in the last decade. This case study, located at Kangan Batman TAFE, set out to explore the issues faced by teachers following reviews of the Apprenticeship and Traineeship training system, particularly the Schofield review of training in Victoria in 2000. Findings revealed that the issues for teachers are many, including meeting the demands of regulatory compliance, changes to the roles of TAFE teachers, concerns about the transferability of skills of trainees, reluctance of some employers to release trainees for training, the time taken to travel to workplaces and concerns about funding. Of significance is that the teachers’ concepts of ‘quality’ training are different to that of Schofield as theirs have a student focus rather than a process driven origin. Teachers understand the need for accountability but found compliance to be time consuming, thus distracting from the teaching activities. There are implications for the study as it revealed a need for efficiencies in compliance systems, a review of teacher and administrative roles and a common understanding of ‘quality training’. The paper is a summary of a Master of Education thesis completed in November 2002.

Introduction

In 2000 the Victorian Government commissioned a report to examine the quality of training in Victoria’s Apprenticeship and Traineeship system. The review, conducted by Kaye Schofield, influenced many aspects of the state and national systems including the Victorian Government’s State Training Board, the (then) Australian Recognition Framework and provider registration. Schofield made 23 recommendations for change which resulted in key policy changes by the (then) Office of Post Compulsory Education Training and Employment (PETE), now the Office Of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE). This case study is underpinned by the Schofield review and the recommendations which relate to workplace training and auditing as they have significant implications for teachers delivering workplace training to apprentices and trainees.

Kangan Batman TAFE (KBT), located in Melbourne’s north west, is a major provider of apprenticeship and traineeship training in Victoria. KBT offers 270 qualifications under a Performance Agreement with OTTE, which defines standards for the Apprenticeship and Traineeship Training Program (ATTP). KBT delivered 1,141,542 student contact hours under the program in 2001. Delivery methods vary according to the qualification. Most apprenticeship qualifications such as Automotive, Engineering, Building and Construction and Aeroskills are delivered ‘off the job’, on campus in what is known as ‘block release’ wherein apprentices are released from work to attend formal classes. The other model of training is ‘structured workplace training’ whereby teachers visit the workplace to plan, conduct and assess training on

the job in respective qualifications (largely traineeships). The term ‘workplace training’ used in this paper complies with OTTE’s definition of and standards for ‘workplace based training’.

In 2001 KBT teachers trained over 800 trainees in the workplace. The teachers not only deliver training to trainees and apprentices but also must demonstrate compliance with the Victorian and National policy requirements. Anecdotal evidence suggested many issues had arisen for those teachers charged with the implementation of policy changes in the last decade, particularly those resulting from the Schofield review. This study was designed to explore the main issues faced by a small group of teachers who deliver training in the workplace.

Literature Review

Literature was reviewed in order to examine the current discourses on changes to TAFE teachers’ roles, issues of teacher identity and constructions of ‘quality’ in the context of training, particularly Schofield’s construction as it influenced her recommendations for change in the Victorian Apprenticeship and Traineeship Training Program (ATTP).

A recent study of Harris, Simons, Symons and Clayton examined the changing role of VET practitioners, including TAFE teachers, over the past 5 years. The researchers argue that teachers have been subject to dramatic changes that have influenced the Australian workforce in the last decade at the same time that they are expected to support and facilitate the change process (Harris et al 2001 p.1). Trainers, as participants of the study, reported that there had been a major shift from that which they were originally employed to do with a greater emphasis on ‘facilitation’ rather than ‘traditional’ teaching. Such ‘facilitation’ was seen to require knowledge and skills required for online delivery, flexible delivery, workplace training and assessment with a greater emphasis not only on assessment but also in demonstrating validity of assessment outcomes. Greater accountability of teachers was also emphasised. Other changes in roles included that of building and establishing networks and of becoming managers and administrators. The burden of administration was seen to be a significant change:

Teachers perceive their passion for teaching is being destroyed by administrative battles, where teachers are being paid to do paperwork instead of interacting with students. The increased amount of paperwork is linked to being ‘audit compliant’.... Administrative load is taking more and more time, and there is the expectation that teachers will do the extra work (Harris et al, 2001 p.2).

The teachers’ passion for teaching is being destroyed by more than increasing administrative and compliance activities. As will be demonstrated in the findings their passion is also being eroded by the tension between teaching and compliance and by the reconstruction of a new teacher identity in times of constant policy flux. The issue of the teacher identity is a further challenge for teachers. As Chappell notes for more than a decade:

TAFE teachers have...experienced a set of policies and related discourses that have not only changed their educational institution but have attempted to change their understanding of their educational roles, privileging new pedagogical practices, new knowledges, new skills and new relationships with students and employers” (2001 p. 23).

Chappell defines the historical and contemporary discourses within the institution of TAFE and described the changes in vocational education and training (VET) systems and noted the changes experienced by teachers in their “everyday pedagogical practices” (2001 p. 22). Chappell argues that historical discourse influences TAFE teachers in a way that is different to other teachers. TAFE was constituted as an institution which provided industrial skills and TAFE teachers have specialised vocational knowledge and, until the emphasis on work-based and work place learning, passed on these skills “in public education institutions away from the workplace” (Chappell 2001 p.26). This location has created tensions between the TAFE teacher constructed as ‘industry practitioner’ and TAFE teacher constructed as ‘educator’. Chappell concludes that the tension is increased by the discourses of new vocationalism “by privileging industry relevance and workplace learning over the other goals, previously ascribed to the institutional work of TAFE” (2001 p.31). In the workplace the teacher’s industry skills must be current and credible and the constructions of ‘industry practitioner’ and ‘educator’ seamless. “TAFE teachers do identify with the world of work, constructed by the discourses of new vocationalism but, at the same time also identify with the world of education constructed by the discourses of liberal education” (2001 p. 35).

Chappell also noted that teachers have been the focus of policy discourses related to quality and accountability in education: “Teachers need to be more entrepreneurial, quality focussed (sic), customer-oriented, efficient and flexible in the new institution of TAFE...Consequently teachers must focus more on quality...” (2001 p.33). The recommendation that teachers must focus more on quality supports Schofield’s view that quality training is a prerequisite in an apprenticeship and traineeship system.

For the purpose of her review of the ATTP Schofield interpreted quality according to the definition from the Australian National Audit Office:

Its broadest sense (quality) incorporates assessment of outputs, processes and outcomes and takes into consideration the relevant objectives and resources. Assessment of quality involves the use of information gathered from key interests to identify differences between expectations and experience of users (2001 p. 5).

In this definition of quality Schofield adheres to a model developed in a manufacturing context where the measurement of outputs and outcomes are easily measurable. They are less measurable in training. As Schofield notes, “Measuring the quality of training and assessment in any form of training is a most imprecise science (1999 in NCVER 2001 p.81). The imposition of Schofield’s quality model to the teachers’ world may not necessarily be an ‘easy fit’ for teachers who enact the ATTP policies.

A major finding of Schofield related to ATTP audit programs. Evidence of the emphasis on the need for an improved audit system in Victoria is that 8 out of 23 recommendations made by Schofield relate to audits. Recommendation 12 is that: “From the start of 2001, PETE should implement a more rigorous, holistic and field based audit system for the apprenticeship and traineeship training system” (Schofield 2000 p xii). As a result of this recommendation TAFE institutes are now audited on the quality of their training. TAFE teachers have to not only deliver quality training, which is in compliance with the defined standards, but also be able to meet the challenge of demonstrating evidence of the quality according to Schofield’s construction.

Research Method

I selected a case study as the research method to examine the issues for KBT teachers of apprentices and trainees under the Victorian ATTP in the second semester of 2001 and the first semester of 2002. Several factors influenced the choice of case study as the research method used in this project. The method needed to be one which elicited the meaningful reality of the teachers whilst having minimum impact on their day to day activities. A case study provided the method to establish “generalisations about the wider population to which the unit belonged” (Burns 1997 p.36).

The case study model also provided the method to interview informants with specific expertise and availability; that is teachers who were delivering training in the workplace in a range of industry areas and willing to devote time to the data gathering activities of a focus group and recording a log of activities. Three data collecting activities were used so that data from one source could be used to support (or refute) data from another.

Table 1 Summary of data gathering activities

DATA	METHOD OF COLLECTION	CODE
Focus group interviews with teachers	Audio-taped and transcribed	Pseudonyms representing teacher names*
Time spent on teacher activities	Activity logs	Letters representing clusters of activities/time
Policy documents	Literature review	Standard referencing

* *In this paper direct quotes of teachers have been cited by showing the initial of the pseudonym given to the informant and the transcript page in the appendix of the thesis, for example, (R p. 55).*

Focus groups

Two focus group sessions were conducted at a time and venue to suit the participants. The same questions were asked at both focus groups although the wording of the first question was slightly changed to clarify it. The questions emerged from the literature review and were identified as the practice of policy, the changing role of teachers, greater accountability and audit compliance.

Log of activities

An aim of the study was to compare teacher’s perceptions of the demands of demonstrating quality with reality. To collect this data a log of activities was

developed on which teachers recorded the time, in minutes, spent on each activity over a 2 week period. The list of activities was influenced by OTTE's Performance Agreement which is specific in the auditable requirements under the ATTP. Activities were clustered around 5 themes: teaching and assessment, administration, compliance, travel and liaison with employers. Several teachers examined the list and made suggestions for change.

Documentary evidence

OTTE's Performance Agreement with providers was examined for detail of the auditable requirements of the ATTP, particularly the requirements for structured workplace training. The Performance Agreement underpins delivery, assessment, recording and compliance activities of teachers as it prescribes the standards which must be met.

Limitations of the study

In a case study, "reliability cannot be established in the traditional sense and external validity with a single case is also unavailable" (Burns 1997 p. 385). Burns also notes that "case studies provide very little evidence for scientific generalisation" (1997 p.390). This case study does not claim to represent all TAFE teachers nor all teachers at Kangan Batman TAFE. The sample size was small. Eight teachers participated in the focus groups and 8 (not all the same as in the focus groups) maintained activity logs.

The study does not claim to have captured all workplace training activities. A 2 week span of time for recording activities in the data log is limited and it is acknowledged that "the snapshot" may not have included all training activities that are covered throughout the duration of a full time training agreement which may be up to 4 years.

The classification of teacher activities in the log of activities is open to interpretation. Several activities (such as conducting a pre training review and developing a training plan) are auditable activities but they also assist in the delivery of 'quality' training. To overcome this limitation both classifications were used to define the percentage of time spent on them. The line between administration and compliance is similarly blurred as many of the administrative tasks are for the purpose of compliance.

Similarly, the content analysis of the focus groups interviews is open to criticism because the content may have been influenced by the prepared questions. Some questions, however, triggered a greater response than others and from the richness of responses it was possible to verify the key themes.

So, then, to the findings.

Findings

Workplace training - the practice of policy

Focus group participants were asked what the main issues were in workplace delivery.

Schofield had drawn a 'line in the sand' (2000, p.82) between off-the-job training and fully on-the-job training wherein trainees are not given time away from routine work duties to gain underpinning knowledge and skills. A policy decision, made by OTTE not to fund fully 'on-the-job' training, manifested in the department's Performance Agreement with training providers. The Performance Agreement stipulates conditions for structured workplace delivery. The conditions include the number of minimum visits which must be made to workplaces, monthly contact by the teacher to the trainee by phone, fax or email, specific minimum amounts of time for trainee withdrawal from routine work duties, a pre training review and the development of a training plan. These all represented forms of evidence that training was not fully 'on the job' and teachers were ensuring the training delivery was structured.

The first concern of teachers was that not all employers are supportive of training. If an employer is not "*on side*" teachers felt they were "*pushing uphill*" (G p.71). Non compliance with the requirement to release trainees/apprentices from routine work duties on the part of employers/supervisors must be reported to OTTE. This created tension for some teachers who found the reporting of non-compliance by employers created friction between the teacher and the employer.

There is also tension when the employer's motive for employing a trainee or apprentice is largely the Federal Government Incentive payments, State funded training and the payment of a trainee wage which is generally twenty per cent lower than award wages in recognition that the trainee is gaining skills. As one teacher noted: "*And they (the employer) know they only want the money, so then it makes it harder because then the trainer involved has to work twice as hard to get anything out of that trainee*" (L p. 71).

Another issue for teachers is travel. Under the user choice policy employers select the training provider of their choice to deliver the training. Workplaces may be distant from the teacher's home campus and travel time can be substantial – especially when trainees are absent without warning. The logs of activity, which measured travel time, supported teachers' estimates. Of a total of 6154 minutes the 8 teachers had spent on workplace training activities, 21 percent of the time was spent travelling to work places.

A fourth area of concern is doubt that the workplace training was providing trainees and apprentices with transferable skills. One teacher's response reflects a commonly held ambivalence about delivery of transferable skills in an enterprise: "*They're actually getting experience on the job that is invaluable. There is nothing like actually doing something to learn it but that is a very positive side to it but I do feel they learn THAT job. I don't know that those skills are always transferable....*" (R p.53)

The final major source of tension for teachers is funding. If trainees or apprentices leave their jobs before evidence of their participation in learning has been established, there is no funding for the training provider. Teachers had visited workplaces several times to "*set up meetings with employers and pre training reviews and we go through all of these processes, maybe 1 or 2 visits, we still have no evidence of participation. And what happens at the end of the day is that the trainee sometimes drops out and we haven't got any money into the department for that*" (G p.73).

The concern for funding shows the teachers' understanding of the focus on commercially focused activity which now "counters TAFE's traditional identity as an institution of public service and liberal education" (Chappell, 2001 p. 320). But it also highlights that putting OTTE's policies into practice do not necessarily result in payment nor fully account for the time the teacher has spent in establishing the training according to the evidence of participation as outlined in the Performance Agreement.

The focus group participants' world of workplace training is governed by OTTE's policies. Implementing the policies has resulted in a range of issues: of tension in situations where employers are not cooperative (particularly in monitoring the trainee's withdrawal from routine work duties), extensive travel, difficulty in demonstrating evidence of participation with subsequent effects on funding and pedagogical concerns that trainees are not always gaining transferable skills. These issues were, however, overshadowed by the demands of demonstrating that they were delivering 'quality training'.

Quality as compliance

The second major theme to arise out of the focus group interviews is that of the meaning of quality. Schofield's construction of quality, based on that of the Australian National Audit Office, is one which relies on defined standards against which quality can be assured. The teachers' and Schofield's construction of quality differ as the following exchange between teachers illustrates:

"In itself as an idealism wanting to achieve a quality outcome or a quality product I don't have any qualms about that and I have no doubt umm previously some teachers may not have delivered the goodies or whatever but it seems to have gone totally the other way hasn't it? It's almost negating, negating the teaching..."

"and the teacher's personality..... "

"yes..... "

"and the teacher's ability..... "

"that's it"

"to adapt and to use different types of methods...."

"absolutely to umm use those methods...."

"and because we're very strait-jacketed by the requirements..... "

"yes, exactly it" (C&R p. 56-7).

The exchange illustrates the tensions teachers feel; conflict between the teacher's personalities and the demands for compliance and the need to be flexible and adaptive at the same time that they, themselves, feel restricted. Thus, standards introduced to ensure quality training were seen to be in conflict with, or 'negating' the teaching and the very personality of teachers who have their own construction of quality. Compliance was seen as bringing *'everything to a conscious realm of recording of script writing and a lot of the teacher skills, quality skills, are put into abeyance that's how I feel anyway C p. 55'*. It is with concern for the abeyance of 'teacher skills, quality skills' that the teacher reveals a different version of quality than Schofield.

The ability to be adaptive to students' needs indicates flexibility of pedagogical response which is now perceived to be of less value than being able to demonstrate compliance to an auditor's requirements. The teachers experience a real dilemma. Their professional instincts are to respond to students' needs. Audit requirements restrict them in meeting these needs and so their value system is at odds with that put into place to assure quality. The teachers' comments support Chappell's view that the experience of a set of policies and related discourses has challenged TAFE teachers "understanding of their educational roles" (2001 p. 23). The teachers experienced restraint on teachers' methods, the questioning of their professionalism and a lessening of their ability to meet students' needs: "*And so instead of meeting a real need within that student, which as professionals over the many years we have developed an ability to see that and adapt, whatever, we have to keep pulling. It's if we are pulling the reins in on ourselves all the time and we are conforming continually and I really feel that the student suffers for that*" (C p. 55).

All focus group participants agreed there had been constant changes to forms (such as the training plan and log of contacts which had been internally redesigned to ensure compliance), duplication of recording information and there was a need for internal streamlining of reporting mechanisms.

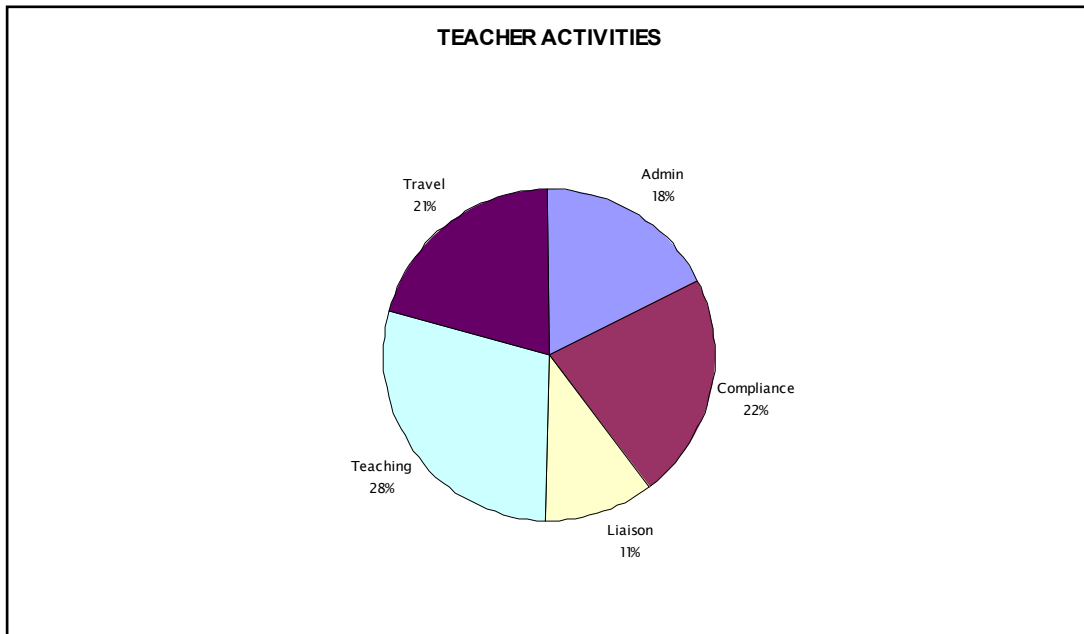
The focus group participants were not, per se, opposed to the principles of compliance to quality assurance mechanisms. The issue is Schofield's construction of quality varies from their own and instead of being able to adapt and respond to students' needs teachers feel constrained and 'strait-jacketed' by the quality assurance measures. All focus group participants agreed that it took a substantial amount of time to collect and file evidence of compliance.

Time for compliance

To assess whether gathering and recording evidence of compliance was, in reality, a time consuming process for teachers at KBT, teachers were asked to estimate the time spent on the administration of audit requirements. Estimations varied from fifty to sixty per cent of time: "*Instead of teaching 90% and admin 10% I'd say it's now moved almost to say 60% admin and 40% teaching, teaching has certainly taken a much lower*" (R p. 54).

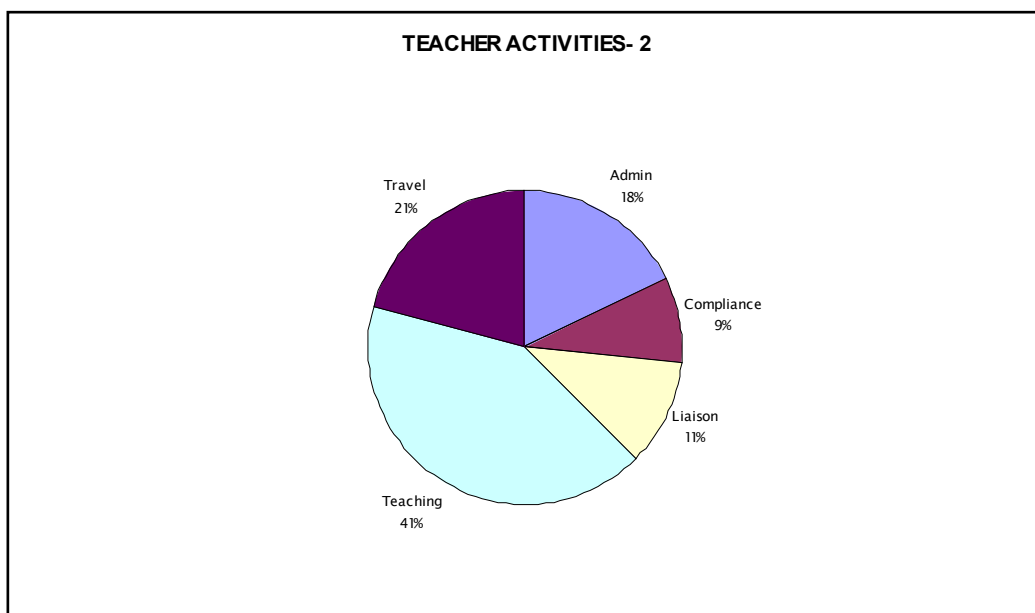
The log of activities supported their perceptions that compliance and administration activities consumed more than half the teachers' time. Of a total of 6154 minutes of time spent on ATTP activities, 28% of time was spent on teaching activities, 22% on compliance, 21% on travel, 18% on Administration, and 11% on liaison. Whilst the sample size was small, the findings resonate with the teachers' wish to devote more time to teaching and less to administration and compliance activities which are graphed below.

Chart 1 Breakdown of teacher activities including pre training review and training plan



It can be argued that some of the activities such as the pre-training review and the training plan which were classified as ‘compliance related’ (because they are defined in the Performance Agreement and auditable) are also teaching duties and will enhance trainee and apprentice learning. If these activities are classified as teaching activities the proportions change from 28% of time on teaching to 41%.

Chart 2 Breakdown of teacher activities excluding pre training review and training plan



There still remains 9% of time devoted to compliance and only 41% to teaching. It is ironical that, for the KBT teachers who participated in this case study, the very measures introduced to assure quality of teaching have taken a considerable amount of

time away from their role of the teachers of workplace based training. To them quality compliance represented often tedious tasks rather than measures to ensure Schofield's aim of quality training was being met. To the teachers, compliance and teaching seemed poles apart. Certainly, the requirement for compliance had affected teacher roles.

The job of workplace trainers

One aim of the focus group interviews was to capture the teachers' views of the nature of their roles. Their responses included "diverse and autonomous", "ever changing, flexibility and focused on the AQTF", "trainer, a little bit of consulting with industry, a little bit of coordination and exciting", "busy", "teacher", "fascinating" "file management", "motivator, excellent communicator...communicator in a triad" (employer, trainee and teacher), "overseer", "policing", "assessor", "assuring quality - we see that as our major role", and "administrator".

The responses reflect diversity, flexibility and the application of a wide range of skills required for teachers to respond effectively to the nature of their jobs. They also reflect the multiplicity of their roles and the way the nature of their jobs had changed. Compliance and administrative tasks were seen to be changing the nature of teachers' roles: *"That is not why they are employed, they're employed because they're good teachers. So it is going to impact on teachers and we are going to become, need to become more organised so that we can manage all those extra things that we need to. (L p. 72).*

It was the nature of the changes that was the issue particularly in what was seen to be a 'policing' role. One teacher describes what he is reluctant to call a 'debt collecting role': *"So I wouldn't regard myself as a debt collector but there are plenty of times which I have had to diplomatically extract over time if you like, it is probably not the best choice of words, an enrolment fee from someone who's sort of not really wanting to pay" (A p. 72).*

Such changes reflect a change in roles from one in which pedagogy is the primary focus to one in which organisational and administrative skills, are to the fore. *"It's almost a more bureaucratic skill rather than a trainer or teacher requires rather than a humanistic or a knowledge" (C p. 55).* This statement again highlights the tension between teaching and administration.

Harris et al (2001) found after 'unparalleled change' in the last ten years TAFE teachers have been required to develop new skills and knowledge and to meet the challenge of coping with that which Schofield described as 'the flexibility genie'. If teachers are involved in workplace delivery they may be driving long distances to train and assess in workplaces, motivating trainees/apprentices and employers, collecting enrolment fees, recording and documenting everything they do. They are negotiating with the employers who don't want to release trainees from routine work duties and reporting and recording all they do as evidence which may be scrutinised by an auditor. They are developing materials, photocopying, liaising with stakeholders and promoting their 'products' to 'clients' to bring additional 'business' to their institute. Consistent with Chappell's findings in 2001, the reality of their world of work reflects complexity, multiplicity, hybridity and constant change.

What then can be made of the findings of this study?

Implications for policy and practice

The findings of this case study have implications, internally, for KBT and externally, for OTTE and the Federal Department of Education, Science and Technology (DEST) which funds the employer incentive payments.

For KBT, findings relate to both systemic and process performance and present an opportunity to influence strategic and business planning and rethink processes and roles. The finding that teachers' roles are changing can advise future professional development. That administrative activities involve a substantial component of teachers' time has implications for human resources and staff deployment. The finding concerning time for compliance implies an opportunity for efficiencies in records management. Externally, there are funding implications for OTTE and the opportunity to streamline compliance measures. Similarly, DEST may clarify employer responsibilities on Training Contracts.

Conclusion

Implementing state government policy about workplace training has presented challenges to teachers of trainees and apprentices. The teachers expressed concerns about meeting the demands of employers and the needs of trainees, the change of roles of teachers (particularly the expansion of administrative tasks), the time taken to travel to workplaces, funding and doubts about the provision of transferable skills. The change of roles is exemplified by the finding that compliance, administration, liaison and travel activities consume more than half the teachers' time. The issues raised by the teachers were not at odds with those discussed in the literature. Despite their concerns, they demonstrated they had adapted to the changes required of a teacher to survive in the new VET world. The teachers wish for the introduction of efficiencies so that the record keeping and evidence requirements are clarified, duplication minimised and their skills utilised to the benefit of their students' learning which they saw as inherent in quality training.

The teachers' vision and Schofield's is the same: a high standard of quality training. Tension stems from Schofield's interpretation of quality. The origins, in a system designed for manufacturing, of Schofield's construction of quality, exemplify "practice and forms of conduct that are drawn from one world and imposed on another" (Chappell, 2002, p 31). This may explain the difficulties teachers face in enacting the policies that were influenced by Schofield's recommendations. The policies do not reflect the complexities and fragmentation of workplace training. The teachers' construction of quality teaching is less process driven (and measurable) than it is a pedagogical ideal of responding to students needs in a flexible, individualistic way in a complex environment. This creates tension for them when they comply with quality assurance measures that are process driven. Tension between achieving and demonstrating 'quality' workplace delivery was due not only to definitions of quality but also to the amount of time taken to provide evidence of compliance.

To the KBT teachers who participated in this study, there is little evidence that the quality assurance measures introduced as a result of the Schofield review have resulted in such efficiencies expected in a quality assurance system. What is in question is whether the teachers' passion for teaching will be extinguished by having to comply with Schofield's construction of quality training and the commensurate measures to demonstrate it. Perhaps what is required is a new definition of 'quality training' that achieves the vision of both Schofield and the teachers. What is definitely required is a more streamlined approach to collecting evidence of 'quality' training so that teachers have more time to devote to their students.

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The paper contains extracts of focus group interviews conducted as part of a Master of Education research project. Direct quotes have been cited by showing the initial of the pseudonym given to the informant and the transcript page in the appendix of the thesis, for example, (R p. 55).