

Head teacher perspectives on their changing role in TAFE NSW

Stephen Black
University of Technology, Sydney
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Head teachers in TAFE NSW

- ▶ Head teacher is a VET role unique to TAFE NSW
- ▶ Head teachers are both managers and teachers. They are employed as educational leaders
- ▶ They have been referred to as 'frontline managers', occupying a role "where the rubber hits the road as far as doing business is concerned" (Mulcahy 2003, p.57)
- ▶ They have also been referred to as 'discourse brokers', occupying a role at the interface of management and teaching in TAFE NSW
- ▶ One research study indicated head teachers are compromised as educational leaders due to excessive routine administration (Rice 2005)

A changing role, new identities

- ▶ Changes in Australian VET: from 'education and training' to 'business and service'; from 'supply-driven' to 'demand-driven'
- ▶ Changing VET practitioners (e.g. Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005)
- ▶ The need for 'new' or 'advanced' VET practitioners who look 'outwards at market needs and seek to meet these needs'. Attributes of creativity, team work, informal learning, innovation (Mitchell 2007,2008)
- ▶ Working differently with industry & communities, a more entrepreneurial culture, flexible ways of delivering services (TAFE NSW 2007)
- ▶ Head Teacher Agreement under review

A research study

Aim

To document how head teachers perceive their role has changed in recent years, to reflect the 'voices' of head teachers

Method

A survey questionnaire emailed to head teachers in TAFE NSW

Approach

Quantitative e.g. Demographic data - ages, years as HT, number of teachers supervised, extent of change, satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the job

Qualitative e.g. unlimited written accounts of their views on: the administration required, audit compliance, staffing, electronic systems, workload, autonomy, pressures on educational leadership, support by TAFE staff, PD and how can the job be more effective.

Findings: Demographics

- ▶ 109 survey responses representing every Institute in TAFE NSW
- ▶ 54% female, 46% male
- ▶ 64% 50-59 years; 24.5% 40-49 years; 8% 60+; 3% 30-39 years
- ▶ Average period as HT: 8 years
- ▶ Average number of teachers supervised: 4 full time, 14 part time casual
- ▶ **Extent of change in HT work:**
91% stated 'considerable change', 9% stated 'moderate change'
no one stated 'no change' or 'minimum change'
- ▶ **Extent of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with HT work:**
16% very dissatisfied
42% dissatisfied
30% satisfied
12% very satisfied

Comments on elements of the head teacher role

Administration

'just the sheer amount of administration ... tedious, boring'
'best paid clerk in the section'
'chief cook and bottle washer'

Audit compliance

'more and more we operate for the auditors not students'
'The rules keep changing ... it's a reactive approach ...'
'I dread the day when I face a 'big' audit ...'

Staffing

'Recruitment is a LONG process and the eligibility list only lasts for 6 months!! Just stupid'
'Why can't the admin staff do this, chasing up certificates ...?'

Comments on elements of the head teacher role

▶ Electronic systems

A universal grievance (e.g. CLAMS, eECs, MEVI, REMS, CIDO)
'more than 80% of my time is spent on electronic systems'
'I was never trained in records and data retrieval'

▶ New student groups

'We are an unpaid arm of Centrelink'
'We are under pressure to take more international students'

▶ Head teacher workload

'The head teacher workload has increased ten fold'
'I do not have enough hours in my day to fulfil what needs to be done'
'I work about 60 hours a week ...'

Comments on elements of the head teacher role

▶ Head teacher autonomy

'OK, the saving grace'
'Reasonable – this is why I still like the job'
'It is a false autonomy – you think you have some control ... but in the big picture you don't'
'... basically, we are managed to death'

▶ Pressures on teaching and educational leadership – what is neglected?

'Everything to do with actual teaching'
'I do not have the time to monitor/mentor them (new teachers) as they get settled'
'Talking with staff about teaching is now almost absent'

Comments on elements of the head teacher role

▶ Support by other staff

'Support staff are great ... when you can get them'
'The higher the level the lower the support'
'Their (management's) focus is on the 'bigger picture ... they have lost touch with the teaching role'
'They just seem to want to climb the ladder and are concerned with their own careers'

▶ How can the job be made more effective?

'... an admin position to support each head teacher, taking care of what's now 75% of our work'
'No greater than 10 hours teaching for any head teacher'
'get rid of banding'

Conclusions

- ▶ A disconcerting picture – low morale and grievances but also high commitment to students, fellow staff and TAFE
- ▶ Head teachers are 'the glue between our customers and the TAFE organisation'
- ▶ Educational leadership and new VET practitioner identities are compromised by the administrative burden and low morale
- ▶ Need to address head teacher needs, especially admin support
- ▶ Need for more qualitative and quantitative research