

Capabilities and context:

What are advanced skills for VET practitioners?

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Purpose – why is this important?

- The capability of VET teachers is a prominent topic in contemporary VET discourse (Harris, 2015)
- There is a well established link between the quality of VET teaching and learner outcomes (Walker, 2012; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2010).
- Multiple attempts have been made to categorise and assess VET teacher's skills and their skills development through various capability frameworks, however these primarily focus on the 'competent' teacher in VET, rather than excellence.
- Mitchell has produced a significant body of work around advanced skills, but has not touched on the influence of context on the way that these skills are identified and recognised.
- Reporting on research undertaken for a PhD.

Related research

2001: Corben & Thomson small scale study of 18 TAFE teachers in the North Coast Institute of TAFE

2003: Chappell & Johnston – described the ‘new VET Practitioner’

2006: Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman & Roy expanded upon the definition of the ‘new’ VET Practitioner

2008 – 2010: Mitchell (& Ward) - described the emergence of an ‘Advanced VET Practitioner’

2016: Smith & Yasukawa, current Australian Research Council Linkage project which is investigating the impact of VET teacher qualifications on quality

Capability Frameworks a number of capability frameworks that attempt to describe VET educator abilities but not all attempt to differentiate advanced skills

The research project - methodology

- Part of a larger qualitative study
- Comparative analysis of two case studies
- Each case is a TAFE Queensland 'region'
- Data collected from narrative interviews with managers and practitioners with advanced skills
- Data from each organisation/region analysed to identify themes and to develop the case

Case A - Context

- At the time of data collection, Case A was conducting an internal recruitment process for a new 'team leader' initiative
 - restructuring the way that teaching teams are managed and led, with an aim to improve quality and productivity
 - teachers who are successful in the recruitment process will provide leadership to teams of teachers working in a similar vocational teaching area

Case A managers and perceptions of advanced skills

- The team leader initiative was a key focus for all managers interviewed from Case A, a focus which is reflected in their discourse
 - leadership
 - high level communication skills
 - Mentoring
 - accountability

Leadership and mentoring as advanced skills

*To me, and my experience in the VET sector, the advanced skills are around....the leadership of teams, mentoring skills of other teachers, being able to work across vocational areas, certainly having an accountability
(Manager, Case A)*

Case B - context

- Case B was heavily involved with the development and implementation of teaching and assessment materials that TAFE Queensland was developing for use by all its regions.
- This initiative required significant investment, and as one manager explained, it was necessary to ensure that the products were well utilised to ensure a return on the investment.

Case B - context

- The discourse around advanced skills for Case B's managers was not so much on leadership, but on the ability of teachers to use ***technology for educational purposes.***

Teachers' views

- Consistently, and across both cases, teachers identified a set of knowledge, skills and attributes that they associated with advanced teaching practice.
- These were not dissimilar to the knowledge bases described by other educational researchers e.g. Shulman (1987) and Turner-Bisset (1999)

Teachers – focus is more likely on teaching and student outcomes

‘.... whichever mode it is, whether it’s blended, online, face-to-face, we came here to be teachers... and that is the key to everything we do here, now, and in the future. Everything we market, everything we sell, everything we have and everything we do; without that real engagement that links to a successful student outcome, we have nothing.’ (Teacher Case A)

Emerging findings

- Managers and teachers subscribe to the concept of advanced skills but may disagree about what they are.
- Managers' conceptions were more likely to be aligned with organisational goals – influenced by context
- Teachers appeared to agree on a core of skills shared by advanced teachers

Managers and teaching as core skills

- Both managers and teachers value teaching skills.
- However, managers were more likely to view teaching skills as ***core to the teacher's role*** and advanced skills as ***additional skills*** and value that the teacher brought to the organisation

Tensions between views of managers and teachers

*'....what I think of as being advanced and
what I think management sees as
advanced practice, or values, are two
different things...'
(Teacher, Case A)*

Tensions between teachers and managers' views

Teachers are aware of the dichotomy between their views on advanced skills and those of their managers.



This may create a tension for some which in turn may influence the skills that teachers make visible to others, and the skills that they practice in the sanctity of their classroom



May also have implications for recognition and reward of advanced practice and provision of professional development

Questions?



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