Literacy/Numeracy Support and Team Teaching in VET

TAFE Teachers reflect on their practice
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September 1996
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This is a report of a small scale research project funded originally with the purpose of demonstrating the effectiveness of literacy and numeracy support for students undertaking vocational courses in NSW TAFE, provision known as Tutorial Support (Course No 8999).

It was decided however, at the initiation of the researcher and following consultation with the project’s management team from Foundation Studies Training Division (FSTD), to increase the scope of the research to include the ‘practice’ of Tutorial Support and also to focus exclusively on ‘team teaching’ within Tutorial Support. This was based on the following factors.

First, Tutorial Support remains largely unresearched relative to other courses within Adult Basic Education (ABE), such as Literacy/Numeracy Pre Vocational, despite the apparent priority assigned to Tutorial Support in some TAFE Institutes. Teachers working on Tutorial Support have little research to refer to as a guide to their teaching. While there is some work in progress to begin to remedy this (see introduction), it was considered important to take this research opportunity to document issues of ‘practice’ within Tutorial Support as a means of better informing both ABE and vocational teachers.

Second, as the introduction to this report indicates, team teaching is a preferred means of teaching Tutorial Support. This has been the case for some years and can also be seen as one way of effectively ‘integrating’ literacy and numeracy with vocational education and training (VET). There are so many important issues and dilemmas involved in ABE teachers working with vocational teachers in a team teaching situation in TAFE that it seemed appropriate to focus exclusively on team teaching. Withdrawing students from vocational courses for one-to-one or small group tuition is far less problematic in terms of teaching pedagogy.
I would like to acknowledge the support of the management team for this project, comprising Ian Fegen, Jane Kirton, Pam Osmond and Mary Regan. I would also like to acknowledge the following TAFE teachers who were interviewed for this research project: Laurinda Allan, Wendy Blair, Debbie Brinson, Bill Ebzery, Julie Frail, Bill Hadlow, Dianne Hill, Gary O’Rourke and Lyn Wilson. Without exception they cooperated fully, providing me with valuable insights into the workings of team teaching. I hope this report can accurately reflect their professionalism and their genuine concern to develop the pedagogical structures which best meet the needs of their students.

Finally, I thank Kathy Salter for her comments on the first draft of this report and Kay Thorp for proofreading the report prior to publication.

Stephen Black
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SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Introduction

English language, literacy and numeracy support is provided to students undertaking vocational courses in NSW TAFE with the course ‘Tutorial Support’. The aim of this provision is to ensure that students do not fail or drop out of their courses due to difficulties in English language, literacy or numeracy.

This research report focuses on two main aspects of Tutorial Support: its effectiveness and some of the pedagogical issues relating to its ‘practice’. To date, Tutorial Support is relatively un researched, but with the current emphasis on ‘vocational’ education and training (VET) and the ‘integration’ of English language, literacy and numeracy with VET, Tutorial Support assumes special significance.

In particular, this research looks at issues relating to literacy/numeracy support and team teaching involving ABE and vocational teachers in TAFE. Team teaching is a preferred Tutorial Support delivery mode, but many of the issues involved in team teaching have not yet been explored in any detail. This research begins the process of exploring the complexities of team teaching in Tutorial Support.

The research approach is qualitative. Interviews were held with several ABE teachers and the vocational teachers they work with in providing Tutorial Support, and the research data are based on the verbatim transcripts of these interviews. The intention is to outline the perspectives of these teachers in response to a series of integral questions and issues in Tutorial Support. There are no definitive answers provided to these questions, but rather, the research indicates the range and complexity of the issues involved.
Research findings:

How effective is Tutorial Support?

Teachers were unanimous in indicating that Tutorial Support is highly effective in preventing failure and drop out in vocational courses. Without it vocational teachers indicated they would have to spend far more time with individual students, time they do not have due to the pressures of covering their course content. But it was not just the time involved; some teachers acknowledged they did not have the specific skills or the training to enable them to identify and provide assistance to students with literacy or numeracy difficulties.

Effectiveness could not be seen just in terms of reducing student failure or drop out. The research indicated there were pedagogical advantages to ABE teachers and vocational teachers working together. Teaching styles and methods were found to improve with greater awareness of language, literacy and numeracy issues.

What counts as team teaching?

Several ‘models’ of team teaching were presented, ranging from teachers sharing the whiteboard, or at least having equal access to it, to models involving vocational teachers teaching the class as a whole while the ABE teacher supported individual students who were having difficulties. In some cases the vocational teacher took a ‘practical’ session while the ABE teacher worked on theoretical aspects with the other half of the group. In a self-paced, modularised course, vocational and ABE teachers worked individually with students but nevertheless as part of a ‘team’ of specialists. In view of this range of models a definitive answer to what counts as team teaching was found to be problematic.

Team teaching or withdrawing students?

Teachers explained that many ABE and vocational teachers preferred students to be withdrawn from class to receive Tutorial Support, largely because this was an easier option. Most teachers in this research project argued against withdrawing students, explaining that it often leads to students being negatively labelled (the ‘dummies’) and also missing out on important aspects of their course. Withdrawing students seemed to occur mainly when students were failing their assessments, and as a result ABE teachers found they were working only on assessment tasks and not supporting students generally in their courses. Providing additional workshop/revision classes was one option but this too presented problems for students who already work full time.

How are roles developed in team teaching?

Team teaching requires a lot of time to negotiate and plan and roles change over time. ABE teachers explained that they had to work at being ‘accepted’ in vocational areas and that a lot of compromise is required. Sometimes ABE philosophy has to be put on hold for a time as teachers grapple with the day-to-day pressures of getting students through a course in the time available. ABE teachers need time to become aware of the ‘culture’ of the particular vocational field before they can effectively take an active role in many of the practical aspects of courses. Some vocational teachers did feel some anxiety at working with an ABE teacher largely due to concerns that their teaching was being judged.

What ‘support’ do students need?

It was explained that literacy and numeracy often cannot be viewed as separate skills, that they are integrated. Often the teacher may be seen as the maths or numeracy teacher but in fact they teach language and literacy also as they assist students in trying to interpret written questions. It depends largely on the vocational areas and the characteristics of the students. In Hairdressing, for example, some non English speaking background (NESB) students have difficulty with the ‘jargon’ of the trade. Others may have problems with the science, especially if they had difficulties with the subject at school. In Fitting and Machining the main difficulties related to trigonometry and the transposition of formulae. Student populations are changing. In some trade areas there are fewer young apprentices and more older students who are
there for retraining. This has implications for the type of difficulties students might have with language, literacy and/or numeracy.

**How much specific subject knowledge does an ABE teacher need?**

ABE teachers are not expected to be specialists in the vocational field in which they are providing support. However, some teachers indicated difficulties in providing support in literacy or numeracy if they did not have knowledge of the vocational area and therefore were unable to contextualise this support. There are arguments both ways. While some knowledge of the vocational field was deemed essential, there were also advantages to not being a specialist in the field. In some cases it provided the opportunity for the ABE teacher to work with all the students in a group, learning from more advanced students and then relating this knowledge to those in need of support. There was also the view that ABE teachers could work jointly with students as ‘more of an equal’ if they were not specialists in the vocational field. Students might be more comfortable seeking support from such an ABE teacher.

**Should ABE teachers be involved in theory or practice or both?**

Often ABE teachers are expected to work on the theory with students while the vocational teachers provide the practical side. In some cases this was a clear cut and agreed role demarcation but not in others. It was argued that there is often a strong case for the ABE teacher to be involved in the practicals. It meant literacy and numeracy could be directly related to how they are incorporated ‘in practice’. In Hairdressing, for example, the ABE teacher had a role working alongside NESB students while they were with clients to assist with any communication difficulties. Involvement in the practicals also gave ABE teachers greater awareness of and insight into the vocational field and therefore a better understanding of the support students might need.

**Complexities and dilemmas**

In the concluding comments teachers outline some of the personal dilemmas that can result from team teaching. What do you do, for example, if team teaching is organised through a head teacher in a vocational area, but an individual teacher resists it and suggests instead that students receive support in their own time? Do you accept this or do you report back to their head teacher and ‘feel like a dobber’? Or if the students do not like a vocational teacher and convey this to the ABB teacher. Is it your job to defend the teacher? ABE teachers are there to provide literacy and numeracy support but when problems develop in the class quite unrelated to literacy and numeracy, students may well turn to the ABE teacher for assistance. These are issues of role conflict for teachers where they are forced to make choices about who and what they have responsibilities for.

A final point draws attention to the priority of Tutorial Support within the overall ABE program. Are Tutorial Support hours those that are left after the bulk of hours have been allocated to small group literacy and numeracy classes, or should they come first?
INTRODUCTION

Tutorial Support in NSW TAFE

Tutorial Support has long been an integral feature of NSW TAFE course provision. The rationale for Tutorial Support is as follows:

A number of students in TAFE have needs in the areas of literacy, numeracy, English language, maths, communication, science and computing. The needs translate into difficulties to progress in their enrolled course and may lead to failure, decreased self-esteem and possibly non-completion.

By making tutorial/educational support an integral part of TAFE’s course offerings, this policy aims to minimise the number of students repeating modules/subjects and reduce attrition rates (NSW TAFE Commission 1994:2).

Formerly known as ‘Remedial Reading’ and ‘Remedial Mathematics’ and then ‘Refresher English’ and ‘Refresher Maths’ (see NSW TAFE 1988), Tutorial Support is provided primarily by ABE, ESOL and Individual Learning/Adult Study Centre staff in TAFE colleges. In this research project the focus is on the literacy and numeracy support provided by ABE staff.

The status of Tutorial Support relative to other ABE or ESOL courses is a little unclear. Currently in the Sydney Institute of Technology it is written policy that Tutorial Support is a priority for ABE, ESOL, Disabilities and ILC sections (Kebby 1995), and this view, although not explicitly stated, appears to prevail in many other Institutes. This is likely to be due to the strong ‘vocational focus’ of Tutorial Support (NSW TAFE Commission 1992:40-41) which is seen to be appropriate for TAFE, and possibly other historical factors associated with providing ‘remedial’ support to the ‘trades’ areas.

To date there have been few studies conducted into the literacy, numeracy or language difficulties encountered by students in undertaking TAFE vocational courses. There have been some unpublished studies in NSW from students undertaking higher education courses (eg Cameron 1987, Duff-Forbes 1987, Flood 1987, Ireland & Clapham 1983), and

there are some interstate and national studies (eg Mealya 1986, Morris & Cope 1982, TAFE National Centre for Research and Development 1983), but it is largely the continued anecdotal evidence from TAFE vocational teachers that indicates the need for Tutorial Support provision.

Interestingly, the issue can become very political, as Terry Metherell the NSW Minister for Education in 1988 demonstrated when he released information to the press indicating thousands of TAFE students ‘are so illiterate they cannot read their own textbooks ... ’ (The Daily Telegraph, November 21, 1988:1). Part of his solution, according to the press report, was for TAFE to run ‘intensive remedial classes’ to bring students up to standard, a recommendation which appears to echo the Tutorial Support in practice for many years.

Its effectiveness

As indicated in the preface, Tutorial Support is a relatively unresearched area. Moy (1994) recently began the process of examining the effectiveness of Tutorial Support with a statewide survey of current practices and issues. One of Moy’s observations is that while there is a lot of information on Tutorial Support, ‘much of it is available in raw form, uncatalogued and unanalysed’ (Moy 1994:2). Moy provides an extensive list of recommendations for the further development of Tutorial Support but does not actually address the issue of effectiveness.

There has been no comprehensive study of the effectiveness of Tutorial Support in NSW TAFE. The only available data relate to the situation at individual colleges (eg Kajda 1995) or in a particular trades area in one college (Lvone 1994). It needs to be recognised, however, that determining the effectiveness of Tutorial Support with hard data is highly problematic. There are so many variables to account for, including lack of consistency across student groups and varying teaching styles and methods, which makes it difficult to isolate just Tutorial Support. Further, Tutorial Support comprises but a small part of any course: it is not expected to exceed 10 per cent of vocational course resources. Also it is designed for the minority of students and is optional (NSW TAFE Commission 1994:2-3). In view of these factors it is not
surprising that effectiveness is usually measured on the basis of informal comments made by vocational teachers and their students (NSW TAFE Commission 1992:41).

**Team teaching and the ‘practice’ of tutorial support**

Team teaching is often promoted as a valuable and in fact the preferred delivery option in Tutorial Support (eg Kebby 1995:2). According to Kebby (1995:2), ‘This works best for the student in that the content area and support service are delivered concurrently’. However, there is little documented research or guidelines to assist teachers to team teach, notwithstanding some limited but useful papers outlining the advantages of team teaching (eg Glossop 1990, Kelly 1989, Randazzo 1989) and a short paper by Riley & Daley (1989) which provides some practical advice for teachers. Also, more recently, Hogan (1994) has conducted a small survey on team teaching in NSW TAFE, indicating the range, purposes and some of the planning and implementation issues involved in team teaching.

The research base will improve with a forthcoming publication of a set of guidelines for teaching Tutorial Support, a comprehensive document which provides much needed information on teaching strategies and teaching models, including team teaching (Salter & Allan forthcoming).

**Within the broader vocational agenda**

Issues relating to Tutorial Support and team teaching in particular have never had more significance than in the current situation. Within the fields of English language, literacy and numeracy both nationally and at state levels there is a major focus on integration with vocational education and training (ALIO 1993:7, 1995a:4, Courtenay & Mawer 1995, Pegent 1995a, Jackson 1995a). Integration with VET covers all aspects of English language, literacy and numeracy, including curriculum (ACTRAC 1993), assessment (Quirk 1994:9), program delivery (ALIO 1995b) and reporting (DEET/ANTA 1995).

Tutorial Support, including team teaching, appears to fit well within the concepts underlying integrated approaches in that it addresses language, literacy and numeracy ‘as an integral part of vocational competency development’ and these skills are seen as a ‘social process’ operating within a specific vocational context and not in isolation (see Courtenay & Mawer 1995:75-79).

Tutorial Support is therefore presented specifically as an integration model (Jackson 1995b:20, Warwick 1995:14) and team teaching has an important role in the delivery of programs within this model (Pegent 1995b:24-26).

**Research questions**

This brief introduction, outlining the literature to date on Tutorial Support and its role within the broader VET agenda, provides a context for this present research project. As indicated, there is little research into Tutorial Support. Little is known or at least documented about its effectiveness or how to undertake team teaching. Only those teachers who have been involved in teaching Tutorial Support over the years have insights into these issues but as yet they are largely undocumented. This project begins the research process of documenting these insights by asking teachers for their views.

Many issues and questions are posed in this research project which relate to the effectiveness and the practice of Tutorial Support. The key ones, which form the chapter framework of this report, are as follows:

- **How effective? What if Tutorial Support was not available?** Would failure and drop out rates increase? Should effectiveness be measured only in terms of student outcomes? For example, in a broader sense, do teachers gain additional skills through team teaching ‘with teachers from another discipline?’

- **What counts as team teaching?** There are many different programming arrangements involving vocational teachers and ABE teachers but which ones can be considered team teaching?
• Team teaching or withdrawing students? What are the issues? What are the advantages/disadvantages of withdrawing students relative to team teaching?

• How are roles developed in team teaching? How do teachers begin? What joint planning is required? What are the expectations of both vocational and ABE teachers? How might expectations change over time?

• What ‘support’ do students need? Do they need help with just literacy or numeracy, or are these integrated? To what extent are their difficulties in these areas contextualised within the subject area?

• How much specific subject knowledge does an ABE teacher need? Can ABE teachers just focus on literacy and numeracy and not need knowledge of the specific vocational area?

• Should ABE teachers be involved in theory or practice or both? It is usually the theory area that ABE teachers provide support in but does it help to be actively involved in the practical sessions as well? What do vocational teachers think? Are ABE teachers welcome in the workshop?

• Complexities and dilemmas. What sorts of issues arise when teachers from different subject disciplines need to work closely together in team teaching?

There is considerable overlap between many of these questions and the issues are often quite complex. The intention is not to provide definitive answers to these questions but rather to make explicit some of the major issues in Tutorial Support and present the views of some experienced teachers on these issues.

Research method

All the data presented in this research report are based on interviews conducted with ABE and vocational teachers in NSW TAFE from October to December 1995. Most interviews were between the researcher and a teacher, although in one case two teachers were interviewed together in a single interview session.

The teachers will be referred to in the following chapters by their first names. They include ABE teachers: Debbie, Dianne, Julie, Laurinda and Lyn, and vocational teachers: Bill (B), Bill (H), Gary and Wendy. In the extracts from interviews presented in the following chapters, teachers will be identified by their first name initials. The vocational areas covered by these teachers are: Electrical Trades (in two colleges), Fitting & Machining and Hairdressing. In each of these areas I have interviewed both the ABE and the vocational teachers who worked together in a team teaching situation.

The emphasis throughout this research has been to provide a rich ‘qualitative’ picture of team teaching in Tutorial Support, to present some of the complexities and deeper insights that are rarely articulated in the more common survey-style research designs which usually include a greater number of participants. Clearly care needs to be taken in generalising any of the findings across to other colleges and subject areas in TAFE.

The interviews usually lasted between thirty and forty five minutes and were later transcribed in full. A copy of the transcription was then sent back to those interviewed to give them the opportunity to verify the transcription and to comment on what was said in the interviews.

It will be clear from the data presented in the following chapters that all interviews were interactive. I did not attempt to play the passive, listening role commensurate with the traditional interviewing paradigm (see Oakley 1981). Instead, I contributed actively in the reflections and in the ‘debates’ that occurred in some of the interviews. As an ABE teacher with many years experience and with first hand knowledge of many of the key issues involved in Tutorial Support, I thought it was important to engage in real dialogue with the interviewees in order to provide an exchange of views about pedagogical issues that directly affect our professional lives.
There was some structure to the interviews. I did have a set of focus questions to ask but as the interviews proceeded and my confidence grew I relied on them less and less. This interview structure draws on the semi-structured interviews Dowsett explains he uses in order to obtain rich qualitative data (Dowsett 1986). It also follows my own experiences of interviewing in recent research studies (eg Black 1995).

In the following chapters I present some fairly extensive extracts from the transcriptions of the interviews in preference to presenting just selected quotes from the transcripts. This should provide a fuller context in which to judge comments made by the participants.

Verbatim extracts from interviews can present some difficulties for the reader. The spoken mode, with all its hesitancy and repetition, is more difficult to understand at times. However, on balance, I have resisted the temptation to edit the transcript material unduly due to the loss of authenticity that would result from it. The aim is to let the teachers speak for themselves, to present their 'voices'.

CHAPTER ONE

How effective? What if Tutorial Support was not available?

This chapter provides the opportunity for the documentation of some teachers' comments on the effectiveness of Tutorial Support. The issue of effectiveness was covered in all the interviews with teachers and was couched in terms of the question, what if Tutorial Support was not available?

- 'We did it once, a few years ago, without ABE ... and the failure rate was that much higher' (Gary)

All of the responses included the issue of more students failing the course or dropping out if Tutorial Support was not available. Bill (E) for example, claimed he would lose the majority of his Electrical Trades class:

S: Steve (interviewer)
B: Bill

S: ... If that tutorial support wasn't available, what situation would you be in?
B: OK, got a class of fifteen, I would lose nine of them, they'd be back next year
S: Right, they'd have to repeat
B: Yep ... There's no way that I could put the effort in to do it. With the support what happens is the effort's now threefold ...

Julie, the ABE teacher who team teaches with Bill, also felt strongly that Tutorial Support reduces failure rates, which is why sections ask for it:

S: How effective is it, tutorial support? ... If they didn't receive the tutorial support?
J: I think it's very effective. Before we had tutorial support in Applied
Electricity, they had a fairly high failure rate ... which is the reason they asked for tutorial support.

S: Because of failure or dropping out of the course?

J: Failure which lead to dropout ... When tutorial support came in the failure rate decreased, maybe not drop out, but, you know, those people who were hanging in there were improving ... My experience is that when tutorial support dropped off, the experience I’ve had is that ... people see it as a loss ... they’ve seen it as a loss, so when they’re asked if they want it back, teachers are saying, yes please, so that’s about the only concrete evidence I have ...

Similarly, Gary, also in Electrical Trades, felt strongly that when Tutorial Support was not available it lead to students failing:

S: If tutorial support wasn’t available, how would things run, would it have much effect ... ?

G: We did it once, a few years ago, without ABE ... and the failure rate was that much higher, so the students at risk were identified earlier and their needs were met quicker ... The success rate is greater.

And Wendy in Hairdressing saw the absence of Tutorial Support leading to increased drop out:

S: ... If that tutorial support wasn’t there, would it make much difference? ... So how effective is it?

W: Oh extremely effective ... we use them right from the beginning right through to the end ... and without them students drop out

S: There’d be a high drop out would there?

W: Yeah, yeah, definitely, they drop out ... I mean we’ve seen it when we haven’t been able to get an ABE teacher in time for someone or you know, not at the right time or something, they drop out.

Most of the above comments relate to the general provision of Tutorial Support, but Dianne provides details of how the absence of Tutorial Support would probably result in failure for the two students she currently helps with some maths modules in the Fitting and Machining course. Because this course is conducted in self paced mode at this particular college, she is able to provide continued maths support over a longer period of time in order to get these students through the maths:

D: Both of the ones I’m working with at the moment, as I said, are not very good at the maths, and ... they wouldn’t be able to go on ... the way they’re doing it and the way I think works well is they only do those maths modules when I’m there, otherwise they do another at another time.

S: So ... the rest of the time they just get on with the things they can do

D: With another module, a different module, not the maths module, because they really can’t go on with it ...

S: So if you didn’t give them any help, what would they do?

D: I don’t know, they certainly wouldn’t pass ... I dare say they’d just drop out in those subjects, they would fail those subjects.

S: Is it crucial to the course as well, the maths ... Can they get past it without the maths?

D: No, they can’t pass the course without the maths. There are the two maths modules, there’s more maths in it, but that’s just adding and subtracting ... these two scientific calculations modules they need to pass the course ...

- 'It would mean that my teachers would have to spend much more time with some students, and other students would suffer' (Bill H)

It is not surprising that teachers should identify failure and drop out rates as the significant factors given that they underpin the very rationale for providing Tutorial Support as indicated at the beginning of this report. But linked to these responses was the view that with no Tutorial Support vocational teachers would have to spend more time with particular students and they don’t have that time, as Bill indicated above. For Gary this was a structural matter: he couldn’t see how he could organise classes so that he covered the two groups that he currently shared on a team teaching basis:

S: And would you have the time to work on it anyway, I mean, if someone’s got some basic maths problems?
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G: Not in the class structure as it is now ... it’s more advantageous to the students the way it runs now
S: So you could actually do the tutorial support, but it’s mainly in terms of your use of time
G: No, I couldn’t do both, because I’d have to teach the practical sessions that’d berunning at the same time
S: You just haven’t got the resources ...
G: Physically ... it’s a resource problem, you know, if I’m finished with one group I neglect the other half, I have to do that as well ...

Dianne provides some idea of the pressures vocational teachers are faced with in trying to get through their courses in the time allowed and suggests they just don’t have the time to focus on specific aspects that might be causing problems for some students. She refers here to the situation in Automotive Electrical where she did some team teaching:

D: It’s a classroom thing, and if they just don’t get it, he hasn’t enough time, there’s so much to get through in the time, that he hasn’t got the time to go over it, to spend the whole lesson going over one mathematical principle
S: So he’ll just go straight through, make an assumption everyone understands it
D: Yes, do you understand that, yes, off to the next one

• ‘It would certainly affect the quality of their learning, the depth of learning’ (Bill H)

But the issue is not just a matter of vocational teachers not having the time. Interestingly Bill (H), who works in Fitting and Machining, and Laurinda, one of the two Tutorial Support ABE teachers who work with that section, referred to the ‘depth’ of learning that would be affected if Tutorial Support was not available. The question was put in terms of whether vocational teachers could do the Tutorial Support themselves. This was Laurinda’s response:

S: There’s an issue there ... should or could or can the trade teachers actually teach tutorial support? ... Or why can’t they?

L: I think, from what I’ve seen they know their work so well that they have trouble breaking it up, understanding what a student needs when they don’t understand some of it, like, say with the maths, if they don’t understand the maths concept the trade teacher might be able to explain the concept in a few different ways, but ... they won’t have thought through just the smaller steps in the maths or the really basic stuff that might be underpinning it, and they won’t go down to that level, whereas I think that’s what we have skills in
S: And they may not be aware that the student has needs
L: No, that sort of thing about when you can do it you ... you don’t realise the lack of understanding that some people might have ... they just go step, step, step, this is how you do it ... but some of those steps might be incomprehensible to the student ... the trade teacher often won’t pick that up, just won’t be aware ...
S: How do you think they see your role down there, the trade teachers, do they see it as a particularly valuable role or does it release them?
L: I think it releases them to do other things, because I’m there spending two hours talking and working with students the whole time, and that’s two hours that they don’t have to do that, and they wouldn’t do it, they wouldn’t do what I’m doing in the depth that I do ...
S: They couldn’t afford to spend that long with one person
L: No, no, they might spend ten minutes at a time with a person and then move on ... So I’m really working with people who need more than that, who need more time, more explanation, more practice ...

There is recognition from vocational teachers that ABE teachers have particular skills that they don’t have and this relates to the effectiveness of Tutorial Support. Bill (E) for example, stated ‘... for me, ABE teachers are just, they’re a specialised trade, they’ve got their own special trade’. He demonstrated this by explaining the way Julie quickly identifies those students who are likely to experience difficulties with the course:

B: For me, I need both of them in parallel from day one, from the very first lesson ... so that the ABE teacher has a chance of identifying people that I would identify in week four, you see, I wouldn’t be able to have that ability to identify someone in trouble until week four, particularly
if they don't say anything, some kids are very quiet and bright, some are quite frightened, so ...

S: So how does Julie pick it up, is it because she's working round the group all the time?

B: Well I don't know, I think it's a skill, it's her trade that she's got, so I don't know how she does it ...

Bill (H) had a somewhat similar comment to make in explaining that if vocational teachers were to do the Tutorial Support then they would need some training in identifying students with difficulties:

'You people are trained, you know when someone is hiding, you know when someone's, you know, disguising the fact that they can't read or they can't do maths ... What we need is a tutor with the empathy, with the skills to see through the facade that some of these students throw up, that's my personal thoughts.'

Wendy adds an interesting dimension to these issues because she has in fact undertaken some ABE and related professional development courses and plans to do some more. But even so, she feels that in teaching her own class, there is the need for an additional teacher to provide support. She is already doing all she can to get students through the course:

S: Is it possible for you to actually do the tutorial support?

W: Oh, that's a hard one, because I've done the ALT course, I've done TESOL Certificate ...

S: Oh, you've done more than most, you've done ALT?

W: Yeah, and I'd like to do Working Together as well, but, there's a problem with familiarity I think, if you're the teacher for four hours and then you're also doing the tutorial support ... I think there is a problem there ... I think the way of the world is we'll end up being our own literacy support teachers really, but I don't want to be ...

S: If they put you through Working Together ...

W: I could go into someone else's class and do a whole lot better than on my own, I couldn't do it on my own because I'd still give them exactly the same perspective I've just given them, so I'd have to do it on someone else's ... So I literally become an ABE teacher

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S: And you haven't got the time anyway have you ...

W: No ... Oh no you need the second person however it is, so yes, I could go into someone else's class and feel confident that I could help the students, but to do it on my own class as part of my normal teaching ... I'm already doing the best I can and these students need more, so my best isn't good enough for some of the students

- **Steve:** It's not just the success rate?
- **Lyn:** No, it's changing teaching approaches, which is desperately needed in vocational training

In looking at the effectiveness of Tutorial Support an important issue raised was the extent to which vocational teachers improved their teaching practice as a result of working with an ABE teacher. This is the point Lyn makes above: the idea that effectiveness might be measured in ways other than by statistics indicating success or failure rates. Lyn looks beyond this in beginning to analyse how team teaching can improve the way vocational teachers teach. The following interview transcript features the interviewer (Steve), Lyn and Julie:

L: It depends on what you're after and I suppose in the end we're all after the students benefit, the results for students etc. But I mean, part of, one outcome is the effect on the vocational teacher, to try and make them aware of some of the literacy, it's the Working Together stuff, you know, making them a bit more aware, and just by you being in the room, I'm sure ...

S: It's not just the success rate ...

L: No, it's changing ... teaching approaches, which is desperately needed in vocational ...

S: Do the trade teachers get anything out of you? Do they learn from you?

J: I think they do

L: Yeah, and I don't think it's necessarily by modelling you, by you being a model teacher, it's by you being in the room, and picking up on the fact that you're a literacy teacher, and it just forces them to become aware of literacy issues ... I mean, stuff that you've discussed with them privately they then might ... change their practice next lesson or they might slowly, it's just, it's an awareness raising thing
J: I think that’s very important, I mean I finish at twelve ... when I finish, there’s always a good fifteen, twenty minutes left with the teacher going through why I took that approach in a question and, you know this was the process that I was looking at here, and all of that kind of thing, and I feel that I come away from some of those discussions, and I feel drained ... or sometimes you’re doing something, like, I tend to be fairly loud and do it up on the board, and sometimes I look up, and notably have I got the one guy that I was talking to, but you know, four or five others sitting there looking, and at the back is the teacher ... you mightn’t be the world’s best teacher, but they’re looking at how you’re doing ... 

S: Because those teachers probably don’t get that feedback, do they, I mean normally ... the students will either just switch off or, they’re not going to be honest with them, so, you questioning them makes them almost look at their, what they’re presenting anew in a way ... 

Later in the interview I followed the issue up further with Lyn and Julie to get them to explain in more detail how this transfer of skills might work in practice:

S: Do they actually modify their teaching as a result of, I mean, they’re becoming more aware all the time, but do you think they actually change their approach to teaching or do they make things more explicit or ... the way they present things on the board, less didactic

L: I think they make things more explicit, what I’ve noticed, and what Kerry has noticed in hairdressing too, one teacher said to me last week, she’s actually much better than she was three semesters ago ... she’s actually slowed down, the processes have become a lot more important, rather than ...

J: Well I think, more aware of language usage. I’ve noticed with some of them that they said, oh, you know, these students won’t understand calibration, because calibration’s a big word, so they spent a bit of time on calibration, but range, which is a fairly major thing that I’ve just been doing today, and so they whip through this ... Span, little words, yeah ... And so they can’t understand why these kids can’t understand, you know, a simple question, what is the span? why not? They can’t do the calibration, well that’s OK, because calibration’s a big word ... that’s one thing that they’ve learnt, is to take more time, and sometimes I’ve noticed, last year when I was with one teacher, that if I was sitting up the back, while he was doing a bit of theory, he would always be writing, and when he stopped writing he’d actually look at what he’d written and try and pick one or two small words to see if they, you know, so I mean he was really trying to think more about his writing on the board, how he was phrasing things and what effect that might have ...

It was interesting also to follow up with Bill (E) who team teaches with Julie to see how he saw this process - what did he think he learnt from working with Julie?:

S: Seeing the way Julie teaches the maths side of it, does that help you in any way, I mean does that change your teaching style, or is there anything that you can learn from the ABE teacher?

B: Oh, yeah, because what happens ... what I have to do on the board is a lot clearer, I have to break it down more and more so that Julie not only sees what I’m trying to get at with the gear, but she can relate back to the board all the time, whereas normally you just write the formula in ... as you would in a normal trade class, now I have to bust it down into little segments ...

S: You have to because Julie says something or just the fact that she’s there ...?

B: No, because she uses my board as a notepad for herself as well, and she has to basically, see what’s happened there on the board, can you get that step? You know, so you’ve got to do, so you and I might transpose in one hit, they have to do it over three hits

S: So, because you know she’s going to use that, then, then the way you write it on the board ... is perhaps a bit more explicit or clearer

B: Clearer is a better way, yeah, for these kids, yeah I’ve learnt a lot from the way that Julie operates, but also I have to fit in with her as well as she fitting in with me, so it’s, you know, the old days of chalk and talk, where you know, people (with) a competent level of power, they can really rack through it, but with these guys you can’t do that until you get them rolling

Later in the interview Bill provides another specific example of how his pedagogy is being influenced through working with Julie in a team teaching situation:
CHAPTER TWO

What counts as team teaching?

As the introduction to this research report indicates, team teaching is the preferred delivery mode for Tutorial Support, but what is team teaching? Riley & Daley (1989:44) explain that team teaching 'is where two or more teachers plan, teach and evaluate a segment or a whole lesson for a group of students'. They add however, 'it is sometimes difficult to interpret what is actually meant by ‘team teaching”, and they go on to illustrate how team teaching varies in a number of TAFE vocational programs (Riley & Daley 1989:46-48). Similarly, teachers interviewed for this research project provided a number of different examples of how team teaching can operate. In fact, in one or two cases it is a little unclear whether the Tutorial Support programs they work on can be considered team teaching.

- ‘Equal access to the board’ (Julie)

Julie provides what might be considered an ideal team teaching structure, based on her work in Electrical Trades:

J: I reckon that good team teaching is when you have equal access to the board ... the teacher’s working, and when I’ve been able to come up and work on the board on the teacher’s work, is a really effective ...
S: That’s true team teaching really in a sense ... two equals
J: Yeah, but to me that’s a real indicator, if I can go up on to the board and write over the teacher’s writing and they still feel comfortable, then that’s real acceptable, and they can come back and then rub mine out ... that’s really effective

Bill (E) who team teaches with Julie seems to concur with this practice: ‘...we’re doing it together as a building thing, so, if I have to rewrite it on the board differently, that’s what I do’.
• ‘Equal role without equal responsibility?’ (Lyn)

Lyn, a colleague of Julie, adds to this team teaching ‘ideal’ with her explanation of what she considers is the most effective team teaching, relating it to experiences she had while working in the school system:

‘The most effective team teaching I’ve been involved in was in schools, when we were two on par, we were two teachers, you know, really understanding the content level to the same extent, two English teachers ... I was remedial and, and we knew what areas we were covering and there was a shared agreement, not perhaps written down but we understood what the agreement was for the outcome of the lesson, where we had to reach. The trouble I have in hairdressing is sitting down there, almost as one of the students because I’m not sure where Wendy wants to get to, at the end of that lesson. I’ve got the unit of work, but it’s hairdressing science, and a lot of the time I’m trying to pick up, as well as help, so, I mean in a real team teaching situation if I understood where she was going, and that had been mapped out beforehand, then I could take an equal role, but equal role without equal responsibility.’

But should the Tutorial Support teacher have an equal role? Equal ‘access’ to the board is one thing, but an equal role in teaching a vocational subject is something different, as Julie points out in discussion with Lyn:

J: But isn’t that a hidden factor of ABE tutorial support ... if you do tutorial support I don’t think you’ll ever be able to team teach on an equal ...

S: It’s called support isn’t it?

L: Yeah, that’s right

J: So the team teaching you do will never be like two English teachers or two maths teachers, because there’s always going to be, I mean the core of what they’re doing is the trade, and no matter how much theory you learn, you can’t teach the trade. I mean, I had a chance in Elec trades to actually teach a unit of work, because there was no other teacher, so I went in as a trade teacher to teach a unit of work, and it was very clear, although I knew all the work, and they all passed, I did a good job of teaching, but there would never be a case where I had enough trade knowledge to actually be on a par with the trade teacher, I mean from my experience that’s what I’ve found

• ‘Well, Lyn sits with the three students that she’s there for’ (Wendy)

A common form of team teaching is for the Tutorial Support teacher actually to sit with students who are experiencing difficulties with either the literacy or numeracy aspects of the course. The vocational teacher addresses the whole class and the Tutorial Support teacher tries to provide support whenever she can to those who have been identified as needing support. Wendy explains the situation in hairdressing:

W: Well Lyn sits with the three students that she is there for. They actually sort of sit with her, and then when we stop, for whatever reason, someone wants to talk about something or whatever, she’s always got a break and I always sort of wait for her to finish explaining that last point to them, go back over it again with them, rather than at the end of two hours, try and fit in two hours more work, it’s better if we do it in chunks

S: You’ve basically got a content to get through haven’t you ...?

W: Yeah

S: Which is fairly tight anyway isn’t it?

W: So, then we have, say after our science lesson they’ve got about half an hour till their clients come in, so after that she spends some time with them, the other students go off and use the computer which is their assessment for science, they have to, it’s with computer managed
learning, so they have to go up and do that, so while one lot go up to the computer she sits with her students, then her students can go to the computer while the others go up to morning tea, and they go up for morning tea, so they've got half an hour to be flexible ...

In this model Lyn simply has to fit in support when she gets the opportunity. It's a model she has some reservations about, at least in relation to team teaching:

'... and I mean what is team teaching? Certainly what I'm doing I don't really consider to be team teaching ... I'm in the classroom, I'm sitting near a whole lot of target students who need help, so I sit in a group amongst them, and I'm sort of like, second guessing and, and interpreting, and talking over the top of it ... and I can see that it would change, after eons, because I take notes and then I go through the notes with those students.'

Bill (H) from Fitting and Machining also has some reservations and he has specifically avoided this type of team teaching due to what he sees as the inevitable 'divided attention':

'... I've never been in a team teaching situation and I've often thought I wouldn't want to be because I can see divided attention, tutor at the back or sitting in the class with the student, teacher trying to teach, and who does the student listen to ...?'

Similarly, Laurinda states:

'If the trade teacher is always up front talking at students, it's very hard for the tutorial support teacher to be going around helping them work on something so the only trades I've been happy about team teaching in have been the ones where there's been a prac session where students are working on stuff, they're not getting new information, they're having to work through exercises and then you can actually help them.'
S: And you've already identified those who are likely to have problems have you?
D: Yeah, yeah

In this model therefore, the two teachers aren't teaching together as such, although Gary indicated that on certain aspects of the course sometimes he takes the whole group, sometimes Debbie:

G: So I take the other half of the class and we do that, and another thing we do sometimes is if we have targeted activities, such as transposition, equations, scientific notation, you know, fractions and things like that ... sometimes Debbie'll give a lesson ...
S: To the whole fifteen?
G: Yeah, she'll give a half hour or three quarters of an hour lesson because, you know, I can teach something like that and Debbie can teach another way and we've found that sometimes if we can try both we can reach different students with different techniques, so it's quite common that she might identify a problem that she finds fairly common, so she might give a lesson, you know, half an hour, three quarters of an hour on that topic ... We're flexible enough in that group to be able to do that

Both Gary and Debbie were happy splitting the group into two, teaching the practical and the tutorial separately and neither of them could see benefits in other models. Gary for example, did not want Debbie to assume a secondary role to his teaching, providing support only if it was needed, and he also couldn't see the point of sharing the board:

S: I'm interested in the structure of team teaching
G: See, they're both teachers, and I don't believe in saying to Debbie, oh, you know, I'll run the lesson, you stay there, if we need some help you can be involved, you know, that's not really a lot of use to anybody ... I find that Debbie's interactive for the two hours, and she starts when we start after the break, come back, students get very accustomed to the procedures, do this and this, you know, we have a structure which I think works well
S: It's team teaching in the sense that you're both in the same room but you're not sort of jointly using the whiteboard at the same time

G: [inaudible] I wouldn't go up and start writing things when Debbie's writing on the board, I think you've got to ...
S: So you never sort of jointly teach them, you're never sort of both up there taking it in turns type of thing with the group?
G: Ah, no, well, I might teach them something and Debbie would reinforce it when she went round
S: Right
G: Personally I don't know how you would do that ... I don't know how you can have two people sort of delivering information on the same topic ...

Debbie appeared to share this view:

S: Do you ever share the blackboard/whiteboard, are you ever up there, like two equals or is it, the trade teacher's the expert you're the support person ...?
D: Oh I use it, I use the whiteboard, but I thought you meant like I've heard of people who, they'll be sort of at the whiteboard and as the trade teacher [explaining things they'll be] putting vocabulary on the board and stuff like that ... I don't do that

- 'The ABE teacher and the trade teacher are basically there as a reference, and a resource' (Laurinda)

Tutorial Support in the Fitting and Machining section in this research project is different because it is based on self paced, modularised learning in a study centre. Students either do practical work in the workshop area or they are in the adjoining study centre working on theory. As Laurinda explains:

L: Well, I go in once a week for two hours ... I go down to the study centre and work with anything from one to three or four students
S: And there could be a lot of students in there at one time couldn't there?
L: Yeah, there's usually fifteen to twenty students working either in the study centre or on the workshop floor, and it's up to them where they
want to work, whether they want to work on theory or whether they want to do practical and there's usually one Fitting and Machining teacher based in the learning centre, and one on the floor, but they just move where students need them basically, it's not sort of fixed

S: How do you actually get to see the students, I mean, do they basically put their hands up and say they want help or ... ?

L: Yes, sometimes they'll just grab me as I'm going past, but other times one of the teachers will tell me that someone's having some difficulties with something or they think someone is going to need some help, and it's mostly with maths, but it's sometimes with literacy ... I've been surprised because they're working on self-paced modules and I would have thought there would have been a lot more literacy difficulties, but there doesn't seem to be

But is this team teaching, with a vocational teacher and an ABE teacher working in the same study centre, but working individually with students?

S: Actually, it struck me, is it actually team teaching in a sense, because it's different isn't it, Fitting and Machining? It's a bit like withdrawal but with a trade teacher there on call

L: It's not team teaching because there's no formal teaching in the sense that you would normally have in a trade classroom. The ABE teacher and the trade teacher are basically there as a reference, and a resource, and the students work through the modules, I mean if they don't understand something then they ask a teacher about it

S: Yeah, but it could also technically be mixed in quite a bit, you know, you've got your trade teacher providing a little bit of help, and then you come in and help

L: Yeah, it's not just me that works with the maths, the other teachers do the same thing

S: So essentially it's different isn't it?

L: Yeah, it's quite a different way of working ... I like it because you can help the student when they've got the problem, with someone there to help and the culture of the place is different to a normal trade classroom, they're on first name terms, there's no Mr and Miss, and people are really comfortable with saying, look I don't understand this bit can you show me, or can you go through this with me, I think that's probably taken a little bit of time to develop but it seems to be quite strong now, that people aren't shy about getting help when they need it

Bill (H) disagrees, however, over the issue of whether this is team teaching. He states that 'it's the ideal team because you're working as a team, not in opposition'. By opposition he was referring to the 'divided attention' which he perceived as a problem with the more traditional team teaching model in which the ABE teacher provides support to students during classes conducted by the vocational teacher. His view of a 'team' became clearer later in the interview as he explained the role of the different Fitting and Machining teachers and how ABE fitted into this team:

B: The first thing we learnt ourselves as teachers down there was to say I don't know, let's sit down together and learn, or lets go and ask Dallas or Ron ... I don't know this particular topic, lets go and ask someone who does

S: Are there teachers there with particular areas of expertise?

B: Yeah, yeah, I mean Dallas is a brilliant machinist, but he's got pretty much no idea about fluid power and hydraulics and stuff like that, so when a student asks him about hydraulics he virtually, oh, don't ask me, it's all piss and wind, but he's also prepared to sort of say, well look, I don't know, but let's go and ask Ron

S: Yeah, and actually Laurinda sees herself down there as (inaudible) teaching the maths, just like, different teachers have got a different speciality, she sees that as her area, she's just one of the specialists down there

B: I mean, to be honest, if a student ... I did sine and cosine rules and that when I did an actual engineering certificate many, many years ago, and it's never been in our trade until just recently

S: Right

B: If a student came to me and asked me about the cosine rule, I'd say we'd better sit down and learn this, but if Laurinda was there I'd have no qualms about sitting down with the student and Laurinda and saying, listen, show us both ... That's a real bonus I find down there

S: Yeah, well that's a really flexible team teaching situation ...
CHAPTER THREE

Team teaching or withdrawing students?

It’s an issue in TAFE colleges whether to provide team teaching or whether to withdraw students either individually or in small groups from their vocational class for Tutorial Support. This chapter outlines some of the arguments involved.

- ‘... it (team teaching) involves more than just teaching’ (Lyn)

Lyn and Julie consider ABE staff are often reluctant to be involved in team teaching. Withdrawing students is more popular because it is so much easier:

J: Historically, I feel, there has been a reluctance for ABE people to go into other areas to team teach tutorial support and maybe areas, well, like Applied Electricity
S: Because they have to negotiate with a trade teacher?
L: Yes, it’s almost like you’re on your own, you know, you go up there ... because it involves more than just teaching, it’s liaising, it’s negotiating with the teacher, it’s finding a secure role for yourself ...
J: It’s also foreign material
L: When you go up there ... the teaching that goes on in the trade areas is so much different than the teaching that goes on in ours, that you often feel like either you’re not going to shape up, you haven’t got that style that’s required or you’re horrified, and it’s just too hard to broach negotiating in new areas ... there’s even a step before that, there are people who won’t actually go into team teaching, I mean, we only know that because we’ve gone into the team teaching, there are people who won’t even broach it
S: But the people are happy to withdraw that student and you’ve got one hour or two hours a week?
L: In fact I’ve set up team teaching in Hairdressing and this is what has happened, the result has been that now they’ve withdrawn them and they’re down to withdrawing one or two people
They started off in the classroom ...?

Well that was the negotiated thing, I negotiated with the head teacher, and what's happened is that they've been withdrawn ... so even when you've got a head teacher that supports the team teaching, you know, unless you're teaching with her class it's very easy for other teachers to go and withdraw them

'... if they were withdrawn from the class then you call them dummies ...' (Bill E)

There may be a preference for withdrawing students on the part of some ABE teachers, but the vocational teachers interviewed in this research were against it. Bill (E) explained that it was largely a matter of stigma, withdrawing students isolated them from their peers, whereas in a team teaching situation support can be provided quite informally at times, and the whole group can be involved, not just those in need of support:

... if you isolate them out they feel rejected, if you take them from the group sort of thing, you're out the door, so team teaching in my opinion is the only way to go

So Julie can actually teach them round here without any stigma, they're quite happy to get assistance, but if they were withdrawn from the class it would be different

That's right, if they were withdrawn from the class then you call them dummies or the parlance is, what, second string students ... But either case the kid feels lousy

I hadn't really thought of that, whereas the way it operates in the team teaching, they're not so aware of that even though they could give the same amount of input probably to an individual

Oh yeah, more, and also what happens is, as Julie's between them working away, the other guy's, you know, a bit shy, will be looking over the shoulder, because they're essentially doing the same thing, even though they get out of whack with the different problems and when Julie goes, they talk to each other, you know, what did she say? ... The good thing about Julie is she's aware of that, so she lets them, she lets them do it, she's very clever like that

She also says she learns from others in the class that are competent, but if she wants to know something, you might be busy or something, she's quite happy to go to one of the students who does know it, and learn from them and then go back and teach the others

Well I've got an idea that's part of her strategy to make sure that everybody in the class sees her as being a resource that they can lock on to just like a calculator ... a person can really help you out here

So she has some contact with just about everyone, even though it's probably, you know, maybe a third or so that actually really need it

That's right ... And you have some of these kids coming in, there's one kid at the back, he's been labelled by teachers at high school I would imagine ... He's got this or, deficiency, attention deficiency syndrome. He doesn't have any of that problem at all, it's attention seeking stuff, you gotta ignore those sort of people ... Team teaching in my opinion, for next year is going to be very important in this school

An alternative perspective is provided by Dianne working in Fitting and Machining. She has found that some of the older students do experience some embarrassment working in close proximity to younger students, and therefore she has started to withdraw them on a one-to-one basis. In the self paced mode of Fitting and Machining however, this can be accommodated quite easily. A student might meet a teacher in another classroom somewhere and the rest of the class would be unaware of it because everyone is working at their own pace.

'We really can't afford to have them out for very long' (Wendy)

For Wendy in Hairdressing the issue is rather more pragmatic, as she explains:

One of the problems in ABE is trying to get people involved in team teaching because very often they just want to take their student, take them out to a classroom

Well, I've had a couple of requests for that from people here and we can arrange it sometimes, but most of the time we can't, it either has to be before, or after or during lunchtime, you know, we really can't afford to have them out for very long
Because otherwise they’d miss important content ...?

Look, our theory component is 30 per cent, our practical is 70 per cent, and with no English they can get through the 70 per cent if they’re reasonable hairdressers, you know, they can get their 50 per cent out of that so we need them to be there to make sure they can get that much, otherwise we’re going to disadvantage them further by taking them out.

Another factor for Wendy was that by withdrawing students, skills are being taught in isolation and they are not being contextualised within the vocational subject:

‘And probably for the student for their language needs at that time it probably is the most efficient, but they don’t understand then, if they’re not in the classroom they’re not seeing how things happen and how kids have to be able to think on their feet ... Then they don’t understand the needs, all the needs of that hairdresser ... It’s OK to teach them the language but it’s not contextualised enough then.’

... so you’re an assessment support teacher, that’s the only thing I get out of withdrawal ...

(Lyn)

Julie and Lyn make an interesting observation about withdrawing students, that it usually happens only because particular students are failing the assessments:

What happens when you withdraw people or you do the one-to-one self referral stuff, what you inevitably focus on is assignments, it’s all assessment driven, you don’t look at the content of the subject and the value that they’re getting out of the subject or any of that kind of stuff, you’re really focussing only on the assessment, so you’re an assessment support teacher, that’s the only thing I get out of withdrawal, you know.

Well I take Associate Diploma Business tutorial support, and that’s withdrawal, and they come out, and the real problem there is that I teach the textbook, and they come down and say, chapter thirteen this week, you’ve got an hour, you know ... there’s no interaction about how they’re working, and all I’ve got to go on is the notes that they’ve scribbled from the board, chapter thirteen, and five questions that they’ve got to have for next week, and I don’t find that quite as rewarding as, you know, the team teaching

But that’s all they want though, isn’t it, the student, they just want to pass, from week to week

Well, irrespective, they all want to pass just week to week, and I mean, you know, they’re coming down ...

But the ones who present for self referral are doing so because they’re failing assessment tasks ... they’re not coming because they want a deeper involvement in the subject area

No ...

Someone said you’re going to fail unless you get ...

Yes, that’s right ... And then you get all those extra complications about how much help do I give this person in this assessment task ... the boundaries become blurred between student and teacher rather than teacher and teacher like it does in team teaching, the dilemmas between ...

‘A trade workshop’ (Julie)

Related, but different to withdrawing students is to hold a separate Tutorial Support class in the students’ own time. Julie taught a timetabled class for students to attend if they wished, in which they could get additional support. For Julie this was an opportunity to teach within a strong ABE pedagogy (eg negotiated, individual goal setting) but focus on a trade content:

Last year I had hours to be in class, and then I was running a, I used to call it a trade workshop, one night a week for people to come in, and I would do an ABE approach to something

With the teachers or the students?

With the students, and I’d been in to hear the class with the students, and the students came back, they were quite keen to come back, and in fact it got to the stage where I had to say, look I can only take six in this class, I can’t take more ...

So it was like a RAWFA in Elec Trades?

Mm, and I had the module ...

Was it just an allocated time?
J: Yeah, Wednesday nights, seven, and it got to the stage, because I was getting a regular lot, and I was seeing them for an hour in the day. I was saying to them, right, I’ll do (inaudible) diagrams next week. And I would teach it as an ABE, like a RAWFA.

S: A revision exercise?

J: Yeah, but it was a completely different approach and that worked really well, because they would go back, in fact they actually asked me could I do the one before, which I didn’t think worked quite as well, but you know, next week they knew in class they were going to do this ...

L: Oh I see, so you would teach it prior.

J: But it didn’t work as well because I hadn’t heard, I hadn’t heard the lesson prior.

L: So you should have been doing it after?

J: Yeah, so it’s better to do it after, that’s just a thing with tutorial support.

S: Well, that’s interesting.

J: It was quite effective, and worked really well.

S: It’s another model of tutorial support.

L: It’s another mode of delivery isn’t it?

J: Because I think the effectiveness of that, was that these six to eight students that I was getting, towards the exam, they were actually coming up and saying, right, can you do this, and another one was saying can you do this, so in fact, the group did become like a RAWFA, where they had individual programs, because they were saying, right, can you set up, you know ...

L: How long did this go on for, how many hours?

J: Two hours a week.

L: That’s great.

Debbie in her college had also run a similar two-hour class for Electrical Trades students who were struggling and needed more support than she could provide in the team teaching.

One of the problem with classes such as these, however, is the time factor. Most students are working the rest of the week and have just the one day at TAFE. In Hairdressing for example, students work long hours and it’s not easy for them to find the time or inclination to attend additional classes in their own time:

W: Oh, well they’re working, a lot of them don’t get time off, but if they do get time off the last place they want to come is here ... They’re already working the rest of the week, and they do work long hours.

S: And they can’t really do it in their lunch hour, I mean, it’s a long day.

W: Oh, you’ve only got half hour lunch, you know, and eight hours of TAFE class ... and who wants to go on for another hour?

S: A lot of trade areas try it though.

W: Ultimo (TAFE college) used to have teachers in, sort of 7.30 in the morning, and 5.00 o’clock at night, but I couldn’t see that those students were going to get benefit out of it.
CHAPTER FOUR

How are roles developed in team teaching?

Team teaching is not something that ABE teachers can just walk in and do. It requires a lot of discussion with the vocational/trade teachers, planning, and negotiating just what role is expected of the ABE teacher and how they will fit in.

- ‘... once you’re accepted you can define your role then ...’ (Julie)

The first stage is for the ABE teacher to be accepted, which is not always easy working in a pedagogical environment that is so different to ABE. Julie explains how she works at that initial acceptance:

S: Do you go in there with a particular method or philosophy or is it just a matter of absorbing yourself in the culture there and ...
J: If you’re teaching in Elec Trades you don’t absorb yourself in the culture I can assure you
L: Or you don’t get any acceptance, or your philosophy doesn’t get any acceptance either
S: So what is your actual approach then? You just fit in
J: Initially? When I initially walk in I totally disregard, you know, in a total male dominated area, I initially walk in and work my little butt off to be accepted, whatever the genre is at the time, I’ll slot into it just to get accepted
L: Yeah, I agree
S: You go with it
J: You’ve got to slot into whatever it is, within reason, just to be accepted, and then once you’re accepted you can define your role then, like once they’re willing to accept me I can define that I’m not the trade expert so you’ll have to tell me, you know, the theory and information, and I’m there for support, but my first role there is to be accepted, which means getting at the staff room fifteen minutes before the class starts and having a cup of tea with them, to be accepted
L: Yeah, I agree
‘... the responsibility for negotiating your role is broader’ (Lyn)

Negotiation between ABE and vocational teachers might be difficult, but it is essential. Lyn explains the broader negotiating role, the idea that the ABE teacher may have to make compromises on pedagogy, at least initially:

L: Well at least in ABE you’re only negotiating with a student, with tutorial support you’re negotiating with another teacher and students, so if you want to carry ABE philosophy over to another section, you know, and you’re true to it, then you’ve really got to, I mean, the responsibility for negotiating what your role is, is broader and you’ve really got to accept at the time that ABE philosophy ain’t going to work, and you’ve got a teacher centred approach, and they’ve got, you know, this many learning outcomes out of this lesson and they’ve got this module to complete, and you won’t get your apprenticeship if you don’t pass it all in five weeks time.

S: You don’t have time to sit down and negotiate goals

L: No, no,

The compromises also work the other way. Bill (E) for example, explains that when he plans a lesson with Julie he can’t do what he would normally do:

‘OK, well I can’t do it the way I would normally do it, you know, like write a lesson plan and go step one, two, three, four, so I sit down with Julie and I’ll say to her the basic problem I’ll have in this lesson is that they’re going to have to do this mathematics, so, the lesson’s fully practical in the first two hours where all the equipment’s out, so the kids are touching and learning that way, then I’ll put the mathematics and pose questions on the board, solve this question, how do you do that with this equipment ... And they’re all thinking about the mathematics ... And then Julie goes in behind that, so my job is to teach them how to use the equipment and be a practical person, like a trades type guy, and her job is to come through and help them solve the practical problems that are posed on the board’.

Negotiating and planning is essential if two teachers are to work closely together in a team teaching situation. Dianne provides an example of the consequences if there isn’t any negotiation. She was asked to provide a team teaching role in Automotive Electrical, a role she had never undertaken before, and one that was not negotiated. It seems to have been assumed Dianne could provide this role in an unproblematic fashion. In fact, after several weeks the team teaching was discontinued and, although the precise reasons were not provided, it is clear that lack of negotiation and planning created problems and tensions. She explains, for example, her concern at the lack of revision, and the way she was forced to react to what was happening in the classroom, rather than be a part of the process and know what was happening, and also that the structure of the classroom activities was not made clear to students:

D: ... See he doesn’t do any revision sheets ... these teachers in trades are not teachers, right, they’ve come in from industry (inaudible) ... so they don’t do any revision sheets or anything like that. I could do that. There’s quite a group sitting there that are quite weak in it, and then all of a sudden he says you’re having a test next week ... I thought, gee, better summarise this, so I sat in ten minutes and summarised what they had done in that unit, I only had time to do it, didn’t have time to photocopy it, gave it to the middle bloke, and said, look, here’s a summary of everything you’ve got to do, what you’ve got to do, where you can find the bits in the textbook etc - if the others want it they’re going to have to copy it off yours etc ... Now he came second in the test, and this is a student who would be having quite a lot of difficulties in the maths, so that’s the type of help they need

S: So you were taking the subject and simplifying it and presenting it to them, you were sort of filtering ...

D: And also going around when they’re doing the maths, explaining to them how to change the formula and what it means, kind of thing, having a science background helps

S: So there are sections when he’s a full-on teacher explaining something, and then what

D: And then they do exercises and they go out and do some practical
And that's when you walk around

And help ... like last week I could have been there helping them with all these mathematical problems they had to solve, but they were all out doing the practical, right, and he said to them, he said why don't half of you go in and do the problems while you've got the maths tutor here to help you, but of course none of them paid any attention, they were all there clamouring for his attention ... It would have been great if he had broken the group up into two, but he only suggested it, he didn’t say, you, you and you, you go in and do the problems and get the help, and none of them took his advice and did it.

And would many of them need help to get through that course

... I could see where you could make a role for yourself, but it does take that long ... (Lyn)

Roles change over time in team teaching. Julie explains how it took several years of experience and experimentation before she took the more active role in team teaching that she is now comfortable with:

The team teaching has developed over time, I would suggest. I've been going over there for three years ... initially there was a real, come in sit at the back of the room, and when I've finished helping those who need it, but then with a couple of teachers it was, next week we're going to do percentages, can you do fifteen minutes at the beginning and explain percentages, and then we can work together on percentages, which is an interesting one ... That didn't work, can I say, that's a really terrible thing to do, I have to say, because ... to do an introduction didn't link in with what they were going to do for the next three hours, so I found it a really, not a very useful ...

Was that the only time you've taken a lead role in the team teaching?

No, before they do their practical the teacher will do an hour’s worth of talking and writing, and then I also have ten minutes before they finish to talk about percentages, and that's much better.

Lyn is also learning as she's going and changing her practice. For example, she now gets involved with students while they are doing practical work; she's producing notes for everyone not just those identified in need of Tutorial Support and she is at the stage where she is prepared to suggest to the vocational teacher that she (Lyn) take a more active role in the class:

‘During the prac sessions that they’re cutting people’s hair, when they finish and when they’ve got a break, and someone’s sitting under the hair drier, I’ll whip over there, all right now’s a good time to grab you and go through what we did ... so, you’re sort of on the spot, and reacting to the moment stuff, but other students in the class are now saying, can we have those notes ... So now I’m running off enough for everybody, and if I was here next year and with the same students, it may get to the stage where I would say to Wendy, look, how about if you want to do something else, or if you just want to stay here, how about I go through these again, just for a recap, I could see where you could make a role for yourself, but it does take that long, you have to make a role for yourself.’

As Lyn explains further into the interview, she had to work at developing her own role in the practical area, and move on from the easier option of withdrawing students:

... well you see I’m in there for four hours. Now there’s only actually an hour of theory in that, but there’s three hours of practical, and I’ve been asked to go in there. Now what used to happen is that I would take off and go upstairs and do a bit of withdrawal from some of the other classes, feeling like a bit of a, you know, hanging round like a bad smell, and then I stopped doing that, and I thought there must be something I should be doing in here, rather than just leaving as soon as I could, and I thought there must be something I should be doing in here, rather than just leaving, because as the clients arrived, there must be something, you know, so I had to get over my awkwardness there, just sitting there not doing anything, sitting on your bum and watching for a while doesn’t hurt, just to pick up on what’s going on.

Wendy explains, with particular reference to Lyn, that teachers need to understand the ‘culture’ of Hairdressing and they should in fact spend some time sitting in the salons and observing before they work out their role:

And the first time they do it they’re flying by the seat of their pants, they know the language, they don’t understand the jargon often, so
they're just staying ahead of the students ... The second time round they're terrific and of course it's really important about the personality of the person too ... the culture of the industry has to be understood to some extent and after they've sat in with hairdressers for a while, then they're starting to understand it, but first time in to the salon it takes them a while to suss out that culture that's there ... 

S: Yes, she said just in terms of finding her role, she's got four hours, didn't quite know what to do with herself to start with until she ... 

W: ... Got into it ... Because it's combined theory and practical too it makes it a bit more difficult because when they're doing something completely practical when they're on the road, they already know what they're doing, then she's got nothing to do for that moment ... So, what she's managed to do is manage her time very well and then goes to the other students who are at a different stage and then she comes back down to mine, so she can fit it all really well, she's really good at organising that ... Some other teachers that we've hadn't been ... 

- ... my students seem to be coping pretty well, so why do I need someone else?" (Wendy)"

The attitude Wendy alludes to above appears quite common among some vocational teachers. They feel as though their teaching is being judged if they are required to team teach, and this causes anxiety and the possibility again of the easier option of withdrawing the student: 

W: Some teachers are a bit against team teaching ... I don't like someone in there, you know ...

S: Is that an initial thing do you think, does it wear off? 

W: Oh they get used to it, yeah they get used to it, especially at this college, you know, don't give them any choice, they've got to have someone in there and 

S: I mean everyone feels a bit funny to start with, another professional teacher in the same class 

W: Well I started team teaching in 85 or 86 or something and you get a teacher today that's never done it and suddenly you give them a new teacher, I forget for the minute how they feel about it ... The first time you do it, yeah, you nearly die ...
• ‘We’ll put her in front of the camera and she’ll do a video on transposition of formula’ (Bill H)

As indicated earlier, the Fitting and Machining courses featured in this research are self-paced. The issues to do with developing roles covered so far in this section are not so significant for Fitting and Machining given that everyone is working individually and at their own pace. Nevertheless, Laurinda demonstrates how her role has developed in the time that she has worked there.

As she explains, it was suggested recently that she should feature in a video explaining some of the maths required in the course. To assist self-paced learning the Fitting and Machining staff have made many videos demonstrating different aspects of their courses. To make a maths video featuring Laurinda is an indication of the acceptance of her role as another specialist in the section – as part of the team:

L: ... one of those guys, he’s taken on the role of video person and he’s videoing Bill and some of the other teachers and some of the other modules, and I was with John when he was doing some editing, having a look at it, and part of that video was a teacher talking about some maths, and when I saw what they’d done, I thought I could make some suggestions about other things they could do, and so I talked to them about it, and they sort of came back and said, well, why don’t you make a maths video, and I haven’t followed it up ...

S: So this sort of thing, like planning lessons and stuff, it’s not conducive to that is it ... Whereas in a team teaching situation in the traditional sense you might meet with the teacher before the class

L: But in this you’ve got, with your fifteen students they’d be working on anything from stage one to stage three. Some of them, they do other modules, they do an electrical fundamentals with the electric trades, so some of them go up there one afternoon a week, some of them do occupational health and safety at different times, so they’re all doing different things and I think the trade teachers have different specialties too. I’ve noticed they’ve got a list, each trade teacher is a specialist in a number of different areas. It probably means they’ve got a general knowledge across the whole lot, but they’re better at some than some others, and I’m just seen as the maths person.

CHAPTER FIVE

What ‘support’ do students need?

This chapter focuses more on the specific difficulties students encounter in their courses and why they need the support of an ABE teacher. It looks at particular language, literacy and numeracy issues, and the extent to which they can be isolated, or whether they need to be seen as integrated issues.

• ‘... it’s a real integrating of lit/num’ (Julie)

In Electrical Trades Julie is always introduced as the maths teacher, because it’s maths that is considered to be the problem for students. In practice though, it’s not just maths that she teaches but an integration of maths and literacy:

L: There’s also bit of a difference between literacy and numeracy support isn’t there ... I mean, are the definitions clearer as a numeracy support than they are in literacy support?

J: Well, you see, I’d argue no, because I’m always told that I’m going in to do tutorial support with maths ... And I’m always finding, more than other areas, that the literacy is really overlapping ... the language and the way they’re using the language and how the structure of the language is really unique to the trade, and I spend a lot of time looking at the language and the literacy

L: So do you go in to a specific session on maths and the trade?

J: No, I go into just a straight class that will have some theory but it’s a four hour class, and I’ve only got two hours, so ... be doing a bit of theory and a bit of practical ... and this is why I find the language so important, going round to all of them and saying, well, why are you scrwering that, expressing it, if someone asks you, or what does that sign mean?

S: So you’re not the maths teacher, you’re the literacy and numeracy teacher?

J: Well, I’m always introduced as the maths teacher

L: In fact that’s not the case: No, I’m here to help everyone with their maths, now that Julie’s here you’ll all pass the maths, but personally I find ...
L: Because to them that’s their burning issue, that’s the agenda, that maths causes the problems

J: Except, I have to say, the students keep saying oh, I can do the maths, I can do the maths, I mean they’re all failing ... the real problem that I find most students have is that they can’t get from the question to pressing the buttons on the calculator. It’s a real integrating with lit/num

Similar comments were made by Debbie who also teaches in Electrical Trades but at a different college. She highlights the fact that the language of Electrical Trades is not easy but trade teachers are often unaware of this, believing the main difficulties to be the calculations, the maths. One of the main issues for Debbie is that of interpretation, of going from the written question to the mathematical representation of that question, a process in which literacy and maths are integrated:

D: ... and the other thing is too that the language is not always easy in electrical, like the question sometimes is so convoluted, you know, what the boys are being asked to do isn’t clear

S: These are written instructions?

D: Well, just calculation type questions where they talk about the installation of a circuitry and they give all this information, and so it’s really important to be aware of things like plain English, to be selecting out the grammatical constructions that they don’t need but focussing on the language that they do need which you have to keep reinforcing, and I know for a fact the trade teachers are often unaware of that, Gary’s not

S: Well he’s not aware because, I said, do they need much literacy help and his view was, well, no they don’t, it’s maths, you know, it’s basic maths, it’s transposition of formulae, all that sort of stuff ... What he doesn’t really understand is that the literacy’s tied into that very much as well

D: Yeah, it is, I mean he’s right, it is mostly the maths but when it gets more complex, like the subjects become more complex, it’s also the language ... and they complain, they say, what’s this mean, and you have to explain to them that this is what you’re going to see when you’re in a test, this is the way it’s phrased, and what I try to do is teach them how to select out what they need and just throw away the rest, but they’ve got to be used to seeing it and they’ve got to understand that ... So I’m aware of things like that, see I don’t talk to Gary about the language ...

S: Yeah, it was interesting, he’s not really aware that, because it’s all those assumptions, I mean, he assumes that they’re picking up the language and doesn’t realise that it needs to be made a little bit more explicit, and you’re pulling out the language as well as the maths ... And in a sense, you’re integrating them aren’t you?

D: Yeah, yeah

S: Because you can’t separate them

D: You can’t. There are very few kids that I’ve ever seen who had literacy problems, one or two of hundreds of apprentices that I’ve seen, usually it’s maths but like I said, it’s all tied up with having to interpret, and to go from a written question to the mathematical representation of that question, and that’s the thing they can’t do ...

In both of the above examples, literacy and numeracy are integrated as skills and integrated within the vocational subject. It is not just literacy or numeracy per se, as distinct skills, but how they are integral to understanding the subject area. As Bill (E) explains, it’s a matter of relating these skills to the practical:

‘Well in my case what I need the teacher to do is to make the mathematics and the literacy part of it, relevant to what the kids are doing, so the biggest problem we have in instruments is that it is conceptual thinking, physics basically, and what happens is when you do a practical experiment and they can actually get on to that and see what’s happening, then we try and relate the mathematics, which is what I get Julie to do, relate the mathematics to the practical experiment, so if they have to convert one pressure to another pressure, say from kPa to inches water gauge, that they can actually see it happen with the different thermometers and equipment, but then they have to be able to do that mathematically, and that’s what I get Julie to do.’

• ‘... the jargon becomes the big problem ... and (when) we teach them science, they all throw their hands up in horror’ (Wendy)

Every vocational subject is different, requiring knowledge and skills from a range of areas. Maths, for example, is a major focus in both
Electrical Trades and Fitting and Machining, although language and literacy also play a role as indicated above. For Hairdressing, the other subject area covered in this research project, there are two key areas of support needed for students: language and literacy relating to the ‘jargon’ of the trade and science, as Wendy explains:

S: But what are the main issues they're looking at, what do students have trouble with most?

W: The majority of students in our section are NESBs, so a lot of it is simply second language difficulties, but there are also those from an English speaking background that have had some literacy problems and so the jargon then becomes a big problem. I mean it's a huge problem for the NESBs, but even for the English speaking people.

S: It's primarily literacy and not numeracy is it?

W: Yes, literacy ... Numeracy is a very small amount of our course, because it's measuring the peroxide to go with a tint, and because it's a very repetitive thing nearly all of them get it without any trouble in a short period of time ... So it is literacy.

S: Lyn was saying it was basically science as well.

W: Science yeah, that's the area they find the most difficult because, remember the sort of kids we find coming into hairdressing have been often told by their parents they're not much good at school so get out and be a hairdresser. You can't be a nurse anymore because you have to go to Uni, so, you know, be a hairdresser, and then they come here and we teach them science, they all throw their hands up in horror ... I don't want to do science I just hated it at school ...

- 'The things most people have trouble with are transposing and trigonometry' (Laurinda)

The situation in Fitting and Machining is different again, especially with the course being self-paced. Initially in early 1994 when self-paced delivery was being introduced it was believed Tutorial Support would be essential in the literacy as well as the maths area because each student has to work independently through modules. In fact this has not been the case, as Bill (H) explains:

S: What sort of role does the ABE teacher have in tutorial support in your area?

B: Taking into account that it's self paced learning?

S: Yeah.

B: Basically assisting students with mathematical problems, we haven't really used the English tutors, Laurinda and Dianne are both basically maths.

S: Did you anticipate that when you first started?

B: No, no, I would have thought there'd be a big use for both, literacy and numeracy ... We're finding that the students are actually reading more than we thought they would, because our course is based around reading, reading, reading, they have to be able to read.

S: That surprised me actually, when I first came down over a year ago nearly two years ago now, I thought because it was self paced they're going to have to read all this stuff and it's going to surface a lot of literacy problems but it doesn't really seem the case does it?

B: No, no, no ... I mean they all have literacy problems, we all have to a varying degree, and yes they could do better if they understood more if they could read better, but there's no one I've found that just cannot read.

Essentially it has been the maths, and in particular transposition and trigonometry that both Laurinda and Dianne have provided support with in Fitting and Machining. And, unlike the 'integrated' literacy and numeracy/maths that Julie and Debbie refer to above, much of the support, at least in the early trade maths modules, has been with maths that is not strongly contextualised with Fitting and Machining:

S: Technically you go down there just to help with the maths, but can you do that?

L: In the Fitting and Machining I find I can, because with the module structure they've got two specific maths modules that really don't, I mean, they bring in the context and I had to learn that bit of the context, so I had to go and ask questions quite a few times, and I'm still picking that up, but, yeah if I'm dealing with the maths then I can do it pretty much ...
S: Because those modules are self contained mathematics, in fact if I remember, straight out fractions and decimals aren’t they?

L: Yeah, fractions and decimals

S: Almost doesn’t have a Fitting and Machining context

L: It starts off without the Fitting and Machining context, and then the transposition without the context, and then you start to get into the context with trigonometry and then with power, work and levers and all that sort of stuff they start bringing in contextual stuff

- ‘And is that the trend ... for retraining the older workers rather than taking the younger apprentices?’ (Steve)

The issue of what ‘support’ students need is related to the type of students who are attending vocational courses. Bill (E) for example, raises two issues of significance. First, he explains there is an issue relating to the quality of apprentices:

B: So, we’ve got a problem there too, whereas in the old days, say, Qantas or ICI would screen 1500 people for their three or four jobs, so what they would do they would analyse that out and finish up giving the kids a screen ... (inaudible) but now of course, Qantas and ICI and the other big companies are not taking apprentices ... In many cases the big companies are farming it out to contractors ... So Skilled Engineering for argument sake would supply people to ICI, which means that Skilled Engineering then are the people who are going to employ the apprentices, and they subcontract further, and you finish up with somebody’s brother’s aunt’s son ... who’s got the job because somebody knows him.

S: And when they cover the course they probably have no idea of the mathematics that’s required

B: No, no ... and you’d have to see it to believe it, you can’t really believe that in many cases Higher School Certificate people have no real skills

The second issue Bill raises is the focus on retraining older workers because companies are not employing people now in the Instrument Trades area:

B: Well, the school’s dying basically, because instruments as a thing ... people aren’t employing them anymore, so we’re pulling back in again from industry all the 35 year olds and upwards, people who haven’t been here for, I don’t know, twenty years, and they are, the attrition rate on that is horrendous, because their self esteem is attacked, so, team teaching in that first few weeks is going to be critical.

S: Oh right, that’s interesting, so even though their actual practical skills might be good when they have to do anything theoretical and they haven’t done any school work for many many years ...

B: That’s right, they’re shot to pieces ...

S: And is that the trend, the trend is more for retraining the older workers rather than taking the younger apprentices?

B: Well the latest ETU figures in my area, five years ago they were employing 8,000 apprentices a year, now they are down to 5,000, and it’s dropping rapidly, and it goes back to this idea of subcontracting it out, the big companies don’t want to employ anybody.

The situation is similar in other trade areas. Bill (H), for example, indicates how Fitting and Machining students have now changed. There are older students and also relatively unskilled workers who are attending for retraining purposes:

S: There are a lot of older ones there?

B: Yeah, there’s two groups of older ones. There’s those that are working towards their own education and there are others that are coming in here that are now trainees, and people with multitasking - we’ve got seven people from Hoover on a Friday morning, and they’re doing fairly basic trade modules really, very basic trade modules. They’re process workers who’ve been reclassified at Hoover, and now they’ve actually, well they’ve been wrongly reclassified, and now they’ve actually gaining some training to bring them up to the classification they’re being paid at ... They’re adults, they’re mainly non English speaking backgrounds, mainly well and truly over thirty, and there are other older people there, one sixty three year old who works for himself and wants to learn to do certain machining operations, plus we’ve got the normal trade apprentices

S: But there’s not so many of them now is there?

B: No, there was a time when we were all apprentices, it’s gradually ...
CHAPTER SIX

How much specific subject knowledge does an ABE teacher need?

This chapter and the next one on the role of ABE teachers in class ‘practicals’ are quite closely related, and they both present dilemmas for ABE teachers for which there are no clear answers.

- ‘... she says you don’t need to know the content you just have to be able to do the maths’ (Debbie)

The conventional wisdom is that ABE teachers are not expected to be experts in specific vocational subjects but rather, experts in literacy or maths. Their role is to provide support with these basic skills. Debbie, for example, said she often had discussions with her Head Teacher over this very issue, but Debbie remained unconvinced:

‘... but the thing is, you can’t read the lecture book, you can’t get to the maths unless you understand the theory, you can’t connect the question, you don’t understand the question and so if the trade teacher is going to do that bit, he may as well finish the calculation, you know, over to you Debbie, I mean, it doesn’t work, so, you just can’t connect it ...’

Gary, who works with Debbie, tends to support her efforts to become more knowledgeable in the Electrical Trades area, and understands it to be an advantage

S: How much actual content knowledge of elec trades should the ABE teacher have in order to be able to help people in tutorial support?

G: They’d have to have a reasonable working knowledge ... there’s two trains of thought ... I suppose you could say all right if a student was to present a problem and they have everything there in front of them, the ABE teacher could obviously read and assist. With Debbie she found that she felt more comfortable with giving assistance if she had a better working knowledge ... to that end she made an effort to learn the content ... Now I think it works quite well if she has some content knowledge. I’m not saying that it’s absolutely necessary for an ABE teacher to have content knowledge, I would say it would be an advantage
Bill (H) explains how in practice it is hard for an ABE teacher to focus on one area of support, such as maths, when they don’t have a knowledge of the subject context:

S: ... do you see the tutorial support teacher as needing much content knowledge for Fitting and Machining, to provide assistance ... Trade specific?

B: Yes and no ... There are some areas that are generic and they can just help with transposition or something like that ... There are other times when they need to know what it is, they need to know the application and quite a few times they’ve actually come to us and said they want to know about such and such, you know, where do you use that, or, what’s this ... Like there’s one workshop formula we use, which is very much an approximation, and Dianne sort of said, where does this formula come from? And we had to explain that it was a, you know, a thousand times V over X D, and you divide X into a thousand and it comes to roughly 300. As soon as she saw that, oh, it’s fine, but to look at the formula, where does it come from?

S: So she had to know the context and had to realise where it fits in to the overall scene

• ‘... as part of your responsibility, you really need to be just a square ahead of them ...’ (Lyn)

One of Lyn’s concerns in providing team teaching in Hairdressing is to ensure, not that she’s an expert, but that she has sufficient knowledge of the subject area to remain ahead of the students. She feels it is a professional responsibility to read in the area, to remain on top of the content:

L: ... and you really need to, as part of your responsibility, you really need to be just a square ahead of them, just a square ahead of them, you know what I mean, you can’t just go in there and presume all you’re doing is supporting, that you’re just literacy and numeracy.

S: But that’s the way it’s presented ... that you don’t have to be an expert in science, that you just teach them the numeracy or the literacy

L: But you’ve got a responsibility to at least keep up, I mean that just requires reading and making sure that you’ve at least got some ...

S: So you have to be on top of the content?

L: Yeah, yeah, I wouldn’t say an expert

Julie follows on from this to show how lack of specific knowledge of the subject can be turned to her advantage in the way she structures her team teaching:

‘Not on top, what I find that I always do is that if we’ve got a question that we’re working on ... if I don’t know something I go to one of the more advanced students in the group and I’ll ask a question, explain to me how this happens? And it means that I’m really working with all of the students, but he’s actually teaching me ... Why did we use fifty there? And he’ll explain to me why ... So I’m learning on the job, I never prepare beforehand ... You never know what they’re going to do anyhow, but that’s one way, and I see that as an effective team teaching ... you’re using all of them, where you’re going to the brighter ones and saying, tell me why you’ve got this or whatever, and then I use that information, walk across the room, and say OK let’s have a look at ... and I’ve heard the language also, that the student is using in his explanation, so I know what form to approach my questions’.

Both Julie and Lyn are critical of the notion that as ABE teachers they should become experts in vocational subjects:

J: I think that brings up an important point that in tutorial support, I think you’ve got to be up front, and you’ve got to let students know that you’re not, you know, God’s gift

L: I am not a hairdresser

J: And I keep saying to them, I’m asking you to tell me what it’s about, because I don’t have to know, you have to know, and if you don’t use the language that’s required, so I’m always talking about the thingummyjig you know this thing, and they have to tell me what it is, because I don’t know what terms they’re using and I think it’s important for them to be able to articulate whatever’s the ...

• ‘I’m not an expert ... I’m working through it with them ... and they feel more of an equal in that process’ (Laurinda)

As Julie’s comments above indicate, not being a subject expert can be turned into an advantage. Laurinda takes up this point when asked
whether in fact students feel more comfortable seeking her support because she is not a subject expert:

S: I wonder if the student feels more comfortable with you as a maths non Fitting and Machining person

L: I think they feel more comfortable with me in the sense that I'm not an expert in that trade, and I'm not an expert with that trade maths, so often when I'm working through the maths, I'm working through it with them, almost in an exploratory sense, rather than telling them this is what I know, and they feel more of an equal in that process and I think, yeah, it's not as intimidating for them ... So I can say I don't understand, and they can say they don't understand

S: Whereas I think with a trade teacher they may be a little bit reticent at being so honest about the problems they're having

L: It's when a trade teacher has spent ten minutes explaining something to you, and they obviously really understand it, it's really difficult to turn round and say, look, I still don't know what you're talking about, whereas they do that to me

CHAPTER SEVEN

Should ABE teachers be involved in theory or practice or both?

In many vocational areas, and especially the 'trades', courses require theory and practical work. It's often when students encounter difficulties in literacy or numeracy in the theory that ABE staff are asked to provide some support. But is it only in the theory area that the ABE teacher has a role? As with the last chapter looking at the extent to which ABE teachers need to have specific subject knowledge, for some teachers there is an issue about whether or how far their role should extend into the practicals.

- 'No, it's not my role ...' (Debbie)

For some teachers, roles are quite clear cut. Gary for example, could see no role for Debbie in the Electrical Trades practical area:

S: Does she ever get the opportunity to be involved in the practical session or is it mainly ...?

G: Not really because that is more an electrical background ... where they're doing measuring and recording electrical quantities, you need to have an electrical background before you understand what's going on in that area

S: So it's mainly the theoretical side of it, people who are struggling?

G: Oh it can be, not only people who are struggling, it can be just general enquiries,

you know, she has a skill level now in our area, she's quite able to answer questions

S: Because she's done it a while?

G: She's been doing it a while you know, and she's sort of adapted herself to learn I suppose, or skill herself up in the area ... She doesn't only provide support for students that are at risk ... she also helps with the general maths in the class

S: So it is primarily in the non practical areas, areas that they may be having problems, theoretical, and exams and stuff, preparation ...
Debbie therefore does not see herself as having a role in the practical area because she (and Gary) perceive it to be the domain of the trade specialist. Clearly it could be seen as dangerous. However, both Gary and Debbie perceive the question as relating to actually teaching the subject in the practical, rather than providing literacy or numeracy support, which all depends of course on the extent to which literacy and numeracy are involved in the practical sessions.

• ‘... they really need to be in the practical classroom ...’ (Wendy)

The situation is different for Hairdressing. Lyn, for example, sees the practicals as an opportunity to reinforce language issues which are so important for many of the NESB students:

‘I mean I try ... if she’s talking to this lady who’s having her hair cut ... Oh, with one woman in particular who finds her oracy, you know, just the pits, poor thing, she knows it ... I get her to explain to me, now what are you doing, well I’m taking this mesh here, and taking it at an angle of, and I’m doing this, this, this and this, and since I’ve started doing that, I’m picking up what she’s doing, and I can transfer a bit of the knowledge myself and I correct her, and I never thought, I was never sure whether that was the right thing for me to be doing, but I’m still not sure, correcting her in front of the client, but it’s what she wants me to do so that she can feel comfortable talking ...’

The Hairdressing teacher Wendy fully supports Lyn’s involvement, because spoken communication is so important for the students when dealing with clients. But there are other roles for Lyn in the practical sessions:

S: She said, even with the practical, when they’re cutting someone’s hair sometimes, she’s sort of leapt in there, especially someone who’s having problems with the language

W: If someone says I want it this long, and they’ve not understood it, Lyn understands it and she’s quick to jump in and say, no, no that’s not what they said ... So she’ll help in that way as well ...

S: Because in your area that communication is very important ...
W: Especially where haircuts are concerned ... Also they have to analyse hair and that's during the practical they have to do that, so whether it's by a sheet that we hand out to them or we write some points on the board that we want them to tell us about the client's hair, she then goes over what that particular thing means, (inaudible technical terms) they have to draw a structure, a graphic, a plan of a haircut, then she can help them with that
S: Because that's quite technical language especially if it's a non English speaking background student
W: Very, yeah, very jargonistic ... And then instructions on packets, if they're doing a perm, she helps them with that as well, and that's in the middle of a practical, that's not before
• '... so the theory of it, is I think, is kind of secondary' (Julie)

Interestingly, with Bill (E) and Julie in Instruments, we find almost the reverse of the traditional model presented at the beginning of this chapter. It is considered so important that Julie gets involved in the practical sessions that it is 'the hard theory' that Bill covers after Julie has left. Bill explains that he does a lot of the practical work 'and her job is to come through and help them solve the practical problems that are posed on the board':
B: We do that for around two hours or so, and then generally that is enough, they've had enough
S: I thought she only has a couple of hours
B: Yeah, and then when Julie goes, in the second part of it I then bring a lot of the theory in, the actual, you know, the hard theory, the stuff you have to learn like a parrot ... so, yeah, it works well ... More importantly what happens you get a carry over, that I can carry on with what Julie's left them
S: So Julie can get involved in the practical, she's not just doing the theory
B: No, it's most important that she can twist the knobs and move bits as well, because she can move the equipment and I know she's enjoying herself because she's learning a whole lot of stuff that is not learnt, instruments is really interesting

J: Julie sees a dilemma in Tutorial Support, whether the main role is in the theory or the practical, but she has resolved it by giving priority to applying the theory 'in practice':
J: And you can see the contact between the students and the teacher ... but I think it's important to be there for the practicals because that's where the student really has to know the maths, well in my area it's reading scales, right, they're looking at machines, and they look at a piece of paper and they have to set a machine up and they can't read ... that's really the practical that they want, they want to know ... it's a dilemma for tut support. Are you there when they're learning the theory or should you be there when they're doing the practical, so you can ask them the questions?
S: You're making a case for team teaching aren't you, really, because if you pull them out for just one hour and you just go through their notes with them, you don't really know how they're going to act when they're actually in a practical situation?
J: And for all the trades there is practical isn't there?
• '... instead of just being a big, dirty, greasy mess out there, they'd say, oh yes, he's working on a lathe, or he's working on a mill ...' (Bill H)

Bill (H) in Fitting and Machining has considered the idea of ABE teachers having a role in the practical area:
S: ... is there any role for the ABE teacher in the practical sessions here, because at the moment they go down and they work perhaps on the theory, they work through the modules, is there any role for them out in ...?
B: Yes, yeah, not so much hands on, but our students have to be able to calculate cutting speeds, feeds for milling and gearing calculations and I guess up to now they've been using the ABE teachers for the theoretical side of it and they've been taking that out and applying it ... There's no reason why they can't come in from the workshop where the ABE tutor goes out to the workshop and say, look I'm calculating this, I mean, it's never been tried, it's never been done, but I can see it as a way to be more flexible
Later in the interview he clarified his views further. What he really wants is for ABE teachers to do some practical work themselves in order that they have a greater awareness and insight (and possibly an appreciation) of the practical application of what the students are doing:

B: ... what I'd love to see is both Laurinda and Dianne and anyone else who would care to come down and do some actual, practical, hands on ... work on a lathe, even for just four hours, come down and get a cutting tool, cut some metal, calculate some speeds, see what happens when you run it too fast or too slow

S: Could they do that, would that be on the cards, they'd be allowed to would they?

B: Oh shit yeah, yeah yeah I'd love it, because suddenly they'd have that much more insight, that much more empathy, that much more knowledge of what these people are doing in the workshops, instead of just being a big dirty greasy mess out there, they'd say, oh yes, he's working on a lathe, or he's working on a mill or ... I don't mean to go through and finish the trade course ...

S: I think the more they work down there the more they're defining their role all the time and I think that could well happen

B: I'd love to see Laurinda or someone, you know, one day, just say to the student, look take me out there and do some machining and show me

S: And there's nothing preventing that, all they have to do ...

B: As long as they've got glasses and a pair of shoes ... I think that'd be great, but also it suddenly puts the student in a different role, got some authority, they're actually showing the teacher something

S: That's right

B: Talk about culture changes, there is a big culture change down there, I can see that as another step ...

Laurinda recognises that the linkage between theory and practice is important and there is a need for ABE teachers to know more about the practical side of the equation. Part of the issue is that the course is self paced and students work their way through the modules. Laurinda is not sure at this stage how the theory and practice is linked in all of these modules:

S: Is there a role for you at all outside in the practical session where they work on a machine?

L: Yeah, that's interesting, it's one of the things I did when I was getting to know students when they were working on the machines when I got there, I'd go and talk to them about what they were doing and get them to explain it to me, and that sort of thing, and I think it would help me with the maths if I understood more of the practical, because I'd be able to relate it for the student ... Be able to say well this is what you're doing when you do that job ... which they probably do without thinking very much, but they don't relate it to what's on paper in the calculations module, and I can't do that yet because I don't have that knowledge of the on the job stuff

S: Well the way it's set up there are two separate domains anyway aren't there, out there with the machines or in this room, and doing the theory

L: I haven't looked at the other modules to see how much, because you know, when they go into a practical task it's from ... one of the modules tells them they've got to go and do that, so I don't know how much in the other modules that the theory and practice are linked, particularly with the maths, how much is spelt out, interesting to follow that up ...
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Complexities and dilemmas

In view of the many issues covered in this research project so far, it is clear that while being very successful in preventing students from failing or dropping out of courses, providing Tutorial Support in TAFE colleges is far from a straightforward process. There are so many variables. The type of Tutorial Support will depend not just on the particular vocational subject and the student groups but also on the views and dispositions of the teachers, both vocational and ABE, and it has already been demonstrated how teachers can hold diverse views about the preferred structures of Tutorial Support. It has not been the intention in this project to pass judgement on these diverse views but rather to make these views explicit and leave it to the readers to make their own judgements. Any teachers contemplating providing Tutorial Support in TAFE colleges would need to weigh up many factors in deciding how best to proceed. The issues involved in team teaching are particularly complex and this concluding section serves to add to this by outlining a couple of difficult dilemmas for teachers.

- ‘... you’d feel like a dodger ...’ (Lyn)

Because team teaching brings teachers so close personally, due to the need to negotiate and spend much more time than would ordinarily be the case in teaching a class, inevitably there will be disagreements. Lyn highlights a couple that have resulted in her feeling compromised and in a dilemma. She explains first, how, after negotiating with the Senior Head Teacher about the provision of team teaching across a whole teaching section, when it came time to start the course the individual teacher baulked at it and suggested Tutorial Support take place in the student’s own time instead:

‘Yeah, that’s been the big fight, that was the big fight last year, there was the Senior Head Teacher who wanted real team teaching, with naughty teachers, in a sense ... you would negotiate at the beginning of the year that you would be in this class with this teacher, and you’d
go up there and present yourself before the course starts, and she says, well if they want to do it they can do it in the lunch hour, so, you know, you then go back to the Senior Head Teacher, and you'd feel like a doober, and you necessarily then become embroiled in all of this faculty politics because she wasn't doing the right thing with these people..."

An even more serious issue developed when Lyn became aware of an element of racism in a class:

L: Well sometimes that's the complexities of the support role too. I have been in a terrible situation last year, with students complaining about the way the teacher was treating the Asian students in the class, so they would come to me because they saw that support thing, this must be the first person to talk about this, so then it was up to me... I sat on it for such a long time, because I didn't know politically what was the correct thing to do... In the end I went to... he then said why didn't you let me know about this ages ago, and took it to task, changed classes and everything else, but... you had to pay the price for that because I can't really work, go back to...

S: With that teacher?
L: No, I can't...

Lyn highlights the issue that if students are having problems in a class they may well turn to the ABE teacher first. As Julie and Lyn discuss, ABE teachers often unwittingly find themselves cast in the role of counsellor, even though this is not the support role they expect to undertake when they take on Tutorial Support:

J: When students want support, they don't necessarily say well, you're only this support so I can't do that...
L: Yeah, counsellors, I've got disabilities, I've got multicultural, I've got ABE, which one do I go to, you're here
J: Exactly
L: You represent the whole package

- `... the boys there did not like the teacher ... they kept telling me, didn't like him, useless, whatever ..." (Dianne)

Dianne recounts another team teaching dilemma she was involved in, in which students in the class did not like the subject teacher, and as a consequence she felt the students were playing her off against the subject teacher. Dianne's response was to defend the teacher on the grounds that she thought he was doing a good job under considerable pressure to get through the course:

D: ... they just didn't like him
S: You could feel the animosity?
D: Yeah, well they kept telling me, didn't like him, useless, whatever...
S: They told you that in the classroom did they?
D: But I feel it was fine, I think they just misunderstood, he has so much information he has to get done, he's got two weeks to do this and they've got a test, and was giving them a test, like he'd be finishing that, and he'd give them a test after the break, they didn't even have that night to go home and study it to do the test, and that kind of aggravates them
S: Pressure all the time
D: Yeah, and they didn't like that, but then it's not his fault, he had this many weeks to get them through this topic, so he wasn't able to... if they didn't understand it spend the whole lesson or the whole half day on that one thing, so he was ploughing through it, and they weren't understanding it, but he was... but I felt he was a good teacher, that's what I tried to explain, look he has to get through this in a certain amount of time, it's not his fault

Julie also mentioned that at one time she was put in a difficult position in team teaching, not because the students did not like the teacher, but that he was a beginning teacher, and students took advantage of the situation:

'I had one example, where, they had a teacher that had never taught before, and I had been with the students for a year, had gone through the day release, and this teacher came in who had never had a class before, and they very well played me off against the other, and the teacher wasn't sure, they were saying can you go and do this again, and that was a real difficult time..."
‘I don’t think enough hours are allocated in Tutorial Support’ (Lyn)

To complete this section and the report, some comments are presented from Lyn and Julie about the number of hours allocated to Tutorial Support in colleges. Team teaching, in particular, takes a lot of time and not just the teaching but organising, liaising and negotiating. Tutorial Support is supposed to be a priority but too often it gets the hours that are left after mainstream literacy and numeracy provision is accounted for:

L: The other problem is that I don’t think enough hours are allocated to tutorial support in ABE ... I think in ABE we allocate our hours to RAWFA, Maths Workshop, CAFE, and whatever’s left, you token a couple, and I think what happens is that each year we say tutorial support is an important part of ABE, we need to get out and make ourselves more known, we get out and make ourselves more known, and we’ve got two hours or three hours

S: Yeah, all these demands you can’t ...

J: Exactly, or like in this case, because I wasn’t over there at all, the teacher comes over and says, you know, I demand some hours, and we have to find them. And I mean the reason I stopped going over there was because I didn’t have any hours

L: And for the other reason too, that you really can’t effectively do, if you’re the person for Elec trades, you can’t do it in two hours ... In that four hours isn’t with one class, it’s how I can best allocate my four hours, based on students that are in hairdressing on Monday mornings, that takes up liaising with teachers and flitting from one salon to the next, and you really can’t do it by just giving one hour here or two hours there, you encourage the withdrawal, you encourage piecemeal attempts, you don’t allow for liaison and all that kind of stuff. So I can go down there and we can promote ourselves to death at the end of this year, but, see Helen Kebby said on that thing didn’t she that we were meant to, I gathered it was a directive, that as of this year, next year, that tutorial support will receive priority in ABE sections for our staffing allocations, so it should come first.


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ABBREVIATIONS

ABE Adult Basic Education
ACTRAC Australian Committee for Training Curriculum
ALIO Adult Literacy Information Office
ALT Adult Literacy Teaching
ANTA Australian National Training Authority
AVTS Australian Vocational Training Scheme
CAFE Certificate in Adult Foundation Education
DEET Department of Employment, Education and Training
ESOL English to Speakers of Other Languages
FSTD Foundation Studies Training Division
ILC Individual Learning Centre
NESB Non English Speaking Background
RAWFA Reading and Writing for Adults
TAFE Technical and Further Education
TESOL Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
VET Vocational Education and Training