FOURTH NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON VOCATIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION PAPER

Professional Development of TAFE Lecturers: Collaboration with Universities

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Conducted at Hawthorn Institute of Education
10.45 – 11.45am Friday 14th October 1994
Professional Development of TAFE lectures:  
Collaboration with Universities

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This workshop paper has as its objective to provide a forum in which useful and formative discussion takes place on the collaboration of universities and TAFE for the professional development of vocational teachers.

As such, this paper does not claim to have a final model to offer, but rather aims at initiating discussions about professional development for TAFE teachers. This paper has been prepared in collaboration and will be presented in an interactive mode in an attempt to reflect current thinking on partnerships. It should be noted that the views expressed in this paper do not necessarily represent institutional policies of TAFE or Murdoch University.

* Situation in WA regarding Professional Development and Teacher Education for TAFE lecturers.

In Western Australia, it is to the universities that the Department entrusts the major initial teacher education component and significant ongoing teacher education. The teacher education qualification requirement appears likely to remain in teacher award conditions although it now is seen as a responsibility of the staff member. Thus the Department does not meet HECS or provide time release.

The WA Department of Training through its TAFE colleges, employs around 1850 full time (and 2300 part time) teachers. On recruitment, 78% do not hold formal teaching qualifications. Of the full time workforce, 25% are not formally teaching qualifications. Of the full time workforce, 25% are not formally teacher trained and this proportion is increasing each year. About 110 teachers are currently enrolled in university teacher training across three institutions.

During 1993-94 the WA Department of Training approached and reviewed its relationship with all WA Universities. One major outcome has been the opening and broadening of teacher education providers for TAFE teachers. The collaboration process with universities aims to share the strengths of both organisations to mutual benefit - the professional development of TAFE teachers to provide superior quality of training.
**Murdoch University approach to Teacher education**

A few years ago, the School of Education at Murdoch University started restructuring its teacher education program for the adult sector. The restructuring process, which is still in progress, has offered a unique opportunity for negotiations with the Western Australian Department of Training (as well as with other clients of the program) to ensure that the program that would be developed met the professional needs of teachers of adults. A major decision has involved the separation of the teacher education program targeting teachers of adults from the teacher education program preparing school teachers. A separate committee for Tertiary and Adult Education has been established and a number of members external to the University have been invited to represent specific client groups (such as TAFE).

The program which is currently offered is not restricted to the preparation of vocational teachers, but caters for anybody involved in any field related to the education of adults. The program attracts nurse educators, adult literacy teachers, community adult educators, professional trainers, industrial training officers, along side with TAFE teachers and university lecturers. A recent survey showed that the large majority (90%) of students enrolled in this teacher education program (including the group of TAFE lecturers) found the interactions and exchange between adult teachers from various professional backgrounds to be highly beneficial for their personal professional development. The issue of the specific needs of particular groups of teachers of adults has been given careful attention within the program, and this will be discussed below.

**Advantages of collaboration between university and TAFE**

*Expertise available*

A number of advantages of collaboration between university and TAFE have been identified. The first advantage refers to the expertise available in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment; curriculum and program development; political, economic, sociological and psychological issues related to vocational training; adult education and lifelong learning; as well as other more specialised areas.

TAFE whilst being a major training provider, does not possess the resources, talent, experience and accreditation necessary to professionally develop its staff to a nationally recognisable tertiary level. Philosophically it could also be desirable for staff to be trained at least partially off-job to maximise desirable attitudinal development.
TAFE relies on the collective expertise available from the University. Topic experts can be used to facilitate TAFE teachers current and relevant training. The challenge is for all university lecturers to practise adult learning principles and recognise the specific experience of each TAFE teacher as a learner. TAFE teachers, as students, will look to the university for its staff to be teacher qualified too. Effective role modelling of the relevant aspects of the National Training Reform Agenda can begin in teacher education.

Professional development provider is not the same as the employer

It is believed that a critical, constructive reflection on current practices and the discussion of alternatives can be facilitated more effectively when the training is provided by other than the employing body. Non-homogeneous groups mixing TAFE trainers with educators/instructors/facilitators from other formal or non-formal sectors can offer much reflection on modern roles of fellow professionals. The university provides an ideal accredited vehicle for achieving this aim.

Professional development structured pathway

All too often professional development appears to be a series of random unrelated training acts. A structured pathway is needed to efficiently help TAFE staff resolve their training needs so that they can in turn provide that same service to their student and industry clients. Professional development must be considered as an ongoing process of strategic importance to the employing TAFE body.

Accredited recognition of professional development qualifications

Following formal teacher education is the possibility of continuing education and postgraduate studies. A framework, on which TAFE teachers can build their professional development opportunities in a coherent, recognised and justifiable manner, needs to be developed. Life-long learning should be encouraged and promoted in a viable and meaningful way.

Universities offer unsurpassed quality control in training, however healthy debate on access, content and relevancy should be encouraged. Here universities can act as an education benchmark as long as the process remains open for negotiation and productive for all parties. It is believed that teacher education studies at university would result in a higher level of teaching/learning skills and thus lead to a more fulfilling vocation for TAFE teachers.

Combination of generality and specificity

University teacher education provides the possibility of offering students a broad background of study which will strongly support their professional practice as well as specific skills for managing their everyday teaching/learning
environment. TAFE teachers are specifically recruited for their teaching of vocational skills and knowledge. It is in the process of facilitating training that most beginning TAFE teachers require training themselves. It is believed however that the combination of general and specific reflection on teaching and learning should facilitate the development of a more professional approach to vocational education and training.

In a teacher education program which caters for a wide range of participants, such as the program offered at Murdoch University, the issue of specificity can be addressed in a number of ways. At the program level, elective units can be introduced for students to choose from according to their own personal and professional interests and needs. At the unit level, flexibility can be introduced by: developing modules which cater for targetted needs; establishing special interest groups and activities; allowing students to write assignments that incorporate their professional experience; or asking students to develop portfolios which are directly relevant to their study area.

*Collaboration between TAFE and universities*

Various types of collaboration between universities and TAFE can take place at the formal and informal levels. The following issues can be considered jointly.

*Types of programmes*

In Western Australia, approximately half of TAFE teachers are graduates, the remaining half are undergraduates. Seventy-eight % are not formally teacher trained on recruitment. Therefore, negotiation should take place with universities to examine the range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs available for the professional development of TAFE teachers (e.g. Graduate Diplomas in Education, Bachelor's degrees, Masters degrees, Professional doctorates).

*Type of units*

Negotiation would be useful to ensure that programs offered by universities incorporate some useful general professional development units (for e.g. curriculum development; teaching/learning; context-based study) as well as some relevant specific professional development units which more closely meet the needs of vocational teacher educators (for e.g. flexible units with modules and electives from students' own study areas).

*Content of specific units*

When considering unit content, thought could be given to the types of learning environments that TAFE teachers operate in, such as classrooms, workshops, laboratories, fieldwork. Each of these require the development of
specific teaching skills. In addition, the National Training Reform Agenda will require TAFE teachers to develop specific understandings and competencies that expedite Competency Based Training, Recognition of Prior Learning, alternative delivery methodology and lifelong learning. In collaboration with TAFE, University teacher education offers a timely opportunity to prepare TAFE teachers for their role.

Organisational issues

TAFE teachers operate in varying conditions so flexible delivery of teacher education courses is essential to accommodate TAFE's own flexible delivery patterns (for e.g. evening classes, summer schools, external modes of study).

Issues of accreditation and Recognition of Prior Learning

Recent guidelines from the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee encourage universities to recognise appropriate prior learning in the granting of credit in university courses. In the past the issue of credit transfer for recognition of prior study in an Australian university or TAFE has been applied, but the issues of credentialled prior learning (e.g. professional development courses such as the Teaching Learning package) and the uncredentialled prior learning have yet received little recognition. Prior learning can be recognised without compromising standards. The recognition of alternative forms of professional development needs to be articulated for the establishment of pathways.

On-going liaison between universities and TAFE regarding teacher education

On-going liaison is desirable between universities and TAFE to ensure that the needs of vocational teachers are met and that any potential discord is averted. TAFE lecturers have a responsibility to internalise and promote their own professional ability achieved through education. Any dissatisfaction about programs or courses should be discussed in a constructive way and negotiated between interested parties.

TAFE representation on the relevant university teacher education programme committee will ensure efficient communication and establish a beneficial two-way interaction process between partners. There is however an issue of current concern. With the current movement, within TAFE, towards devolution and college autonomy, the provision of a central representative body will need to be examined. It is believed that liaison with multiple partners (in this case TAFE colleges) would have an inhibitive effect on a partnership with universities.
Pathways for the professional development of TAFE lecturers

This paper has proposed a teacher education model using a partnership between TAFE and University. This collaborative approach, utilising the strengths of both organisations, provides a pathway of professional development for the staff largely responsible for the implementation of the National Training Reform Agenda. Fundamental to the pathway is the early provision of teacher education to those TAFE teachers commencing employment without formal teaching qualifications.

A key feature of this pathway is the direct transferability and applicability of new skills and knowledge into the TAFE classrooms, workshops and laboratories. These new skills and knowledge will promote the development of a range of alternative instructional strategies that will optimise the quality of students' learning outcomes. Immediate beneficiaries are the TAFE students, the industries they serve and Australia.

With TAFE overtaking Universities as the predominant post-secondary destination, the TAFE teacher education issue deserves high priority from decision makers.

It is believed that only through a University TAFE teacher education partnership will develop a professional, progressive and adaptable workforce capable of expediting the National Training Reform Agenda. Australia, to reach its social and economic potential demands no less.