



Pat Forward explains the importance of degree-level teaching qualifications to TAFE teachers...

Many K-12 teachers have family and personal connections with Technical and Further Education (TAFE). We rely daily on the technical expertise of TAFE graduates for much of the infrastructure and services we depend upon in our local communities. But TAFE does so much more than this for secondary school students, and for many others in society. We are sometimes less aware of what TAFE is really like and of who our TAFE colleagues are. Many of our students go on to become TAFE students, and this paper aims to examine the importance of TAFE teacher qualifications for TAFE teachers – and therefore for teachers in NSW public schools.

Over the past three decades, the impact of Competency Based Training (CBT) and Training Packages has had significant consequences for the TAFE teaching profession. The gradual implementation of the Certificate IV in Training and Education (CIV TAE) as the minimum, and then eventually the only, qualification requirement for teachers has undermined teachers' professional status, and significantly eroded the workforce. As well, arguments for essential teaching conditions, such as time for preparation, assessment and collaboration has been made much harder by standards which diminish the importance of teaching qualifications in TAFE.

It is increasingly important, in the current debates around the future of TAFE as anchor institutions in the sector, that we focus not just on funding and resourcing of the sector as a whole, but on the crucial importance of the TAFE teaching workforce. Support for degree-level teaching qualification for TAFE teachers, and a process of TAFE teacher registration, as defined against standards agreed with the teaching profession and the Australian Education Union (AEU) and embedded in qualifications, provide a powerful way forward for the sector.

How we got here

In the face of an aggressive and bipartisan market reform and privatisation agenda, the focus of much of the work of TAFE teachers over the past twenty years has been campaigning for increased government funding, and for the development of public policy which would elevate the significance of public education and public education institutions.

Teaching qualifications have always been critical for TAFE teachers. They prepare TAFE teachers for the challenging and complex work which they undertake every day. They allow teachers to develop and extend the skills and knowledge they have acquired in their vocation, and they establish a pathway for the future to enable continuous professional development and growth. Teaching qualifications are essential in an education institution which provides opportunities for a broad range of students across the full spectrum of Australian society – from young people at school to those seeking to re-enter the



workforce after retrenchment or redundancy. Teaching qualifications are the symbols of skills acquired and knowledge learnt, and they are the currency which any professional is entitled to use in order to improve their prospects of obtaining a stable career and a vocation. It has always been supremely ironic that a sector whose currency is qualifications has worked so hard to deny its core teaching workforce access to appropriate, high-level teaching qualifications.

Education versus training

The reforms to TAFE introduced through the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) in the late 1980s and early 1990s saw Competency Based Training and eventually Training Packages replace the much more sophisticated approach to vocational and general education which occurred in the sector following the 1974 Kangan Report.

The struggle in the sector between education and training, and between the idea of teachers and industry trainers was part of an on-going attempt to diminish the role of teachers and education, and to replace it with the much more instrumental notion of an industry-driven or industry-led system, which prepared people narrowly for a job.

Initially, TAFE recruited teachers directly from industry as well as from schools, with teacher qualifications supplementing industry qualifications and experience following initial employment. This contrasted starkly with the schools sector's robust teaching qualification as a requirement of entry to the profession, and where content expertise was enmeshed in the teaching qualification.

New TAFE teachers were often older and more experienced than new school teachers, and they came from a range of different backgrounds, including areas where there had been little or no emphasis on academic study. In some senses, TAFE teachers often have similar educational histories as their students, and this has an impact on the conception and design of qualifications.

Who is TAFE for?

TAFE has been the object of ongoing market reform since the mid to late 1980s. The effect has been to systematically place the needs of employers and the economy ahead of the educational needs of students. The broader social purposes of TAFE colleges, and the role that they have played for generations in regional, rural and remote communities have been undermined as a result of the reforms and attempts to privatise the sector.

The sector has been fragmented, with decreased government funding, increasing reliance on fee for service activity and increased student fees and charges.



The TAFE teaching workforce, at the core of the public TAFE system, has been undermined, and its professional status eroded. Teacher training and professional development have been underfunded or ignored, and employers in the sector have actively discouraged teacher education. The minimalist CIV TAE, universally rejected by teachers in the sector, but supported by governments, has undermined substantial teacher training. Universities have largely withdrawn from the delivery of TAFE and vocational education teaching degrees because there is simply no longer a market for them.

Lowering standards

The ascendancy of the CIV TAE, and the demise of degree-level teaching qualifications in TAFE has also had an effect on research into TAFE and vocational education. The funding link between research and teaching at university means that with so few TAFE teaching degrees now offered, there is almost no funding for independent research.

The main focus in the marketised vocational education sector has been on teachers needing to be responsive to customers in a market, rather than on the theory and practice of teaching and the social contexts in which teaching takes place. The CIV TAE Training Package was “industry’s” attempt to specify what it thought teachers should have. Reforms have taken place without considering the knowledge, skills and capacities teachers need to have, and indeed in many cases, already have.

The CIV TAE has now become the de facto minimum (and in many cases the only) qualification for people teaching, training and assessing in Registered Training Organisations (RTO), including all TAFE institutes in Australia. This is in part because all organisations wishing to “deliver” accredited training need to be registered, and teachers and trainers are required to hold the CIV TAE, or demonstrate equivalent competencies, or work under the direct supervision of a person who holds these competencies, regardless of whatever other teaching qualifications they hold. In some states, the CIV TAE is the only qualification requirement.

What does it take to teach at TAFE?

There is a paucity of information about the TAFE and vocational education teaching workforce. For a range of reasons, it has proved difficult to collect any reliable data about the workforce, and this compounds the problem of workforce planning into the future. The TAFE and vocational education sector have very high levels of casual employment, significantly higher than most other sections of the workforce.

The sector has struggled to establish and maintain an identity as a discrete sector. Schools have broadened their focus at the senior end into vocational education through VET in schools, and many universities have entered the vocational education market.



The practice of teaching at TAFE needs to be better understood, and studied. Independent research into the practice would better inform the needs of the teaching workforce. Throughout the last twenty years, TAFE teaching itself has been defined residually, that is not teaching at schools, and not teaching at universities.

This has diminished the work that TAFE teachers do, and the preparation and support that they need to become dual professionals, both experts in teaching and experts in their industry areas. In many ways, it is this that defines TAFE teachers above all else: their teaching and industry expertise. However, it is this also which has made them vulnerable to the undermining of the core element of their identity as teachers.

A way forward

A sustained re-investment in teaching qualifications, and a plan which draws on the experience and expertise of those in the sector and in industry, could provide education in a staged and manageable way to teachers once they have entered TAFE with their industry qualifications and experience.

Ongoing professional development, and genuine programs in industry, developed in close co-operation with industry itself, could maintain and build the specialist industry knowledge which TAFE teachers are so well known for.

Qualifications which prepare TAFE teachers must be underpinned by skills and knowledge in specific industry areas, but critically, TAFE teaching also requires teaching expertise, the capacity to develop teaching strategies, based on knowledge of individuals learning styles, on pedagogy, on what impact disadvantage has on individuals, and on how hard it is to learn if students have low levels of literacy and numeracy.

TAFE teaching is about industry skills and knowledge, but it is equally about understanding students, and providing encouragement and resources and knowledge beyond the just-in-time demands of resource-poor training.

The following principles could guide a future plan to ensure high quality, professional TAFE teaching qualification:

- Teacher education must include integrated formal off-the-job and informal on-the-job dimensions, to allow teachers time to critically reflect on their practice and theory with other teachers at a similar stage and with more experienced teachers;



- Teaching qualifications should have embedded standards (agreed with the profession) which are the aims of the qualification – the things teachers should achieve during their study and practice;
- The design of TAFE teacher education programmes should include the practice of teaching and theories of teaching, learning and assessment (including theory and practice associated with the specialist or industry area); and both of these should be approached critically and creatively;
- Recognition of prior learning needs to be transparent and widely facilitated to prevent teachers undertaking irrelevant learning;
- There needs to be a clearer recognition of high-level teaching capability in vocational education, and this must be embodied in a process of registration;
- Any strategy to improve the qualification profile and professional development of TAFE teachers needs to acknowledge the reality that, for many, initial and additional study will need to be undertaken while the teacher is employed.

TAFE is a critical part of Australia's public education system, and we must ensure public school students and their communities have a strong and high quality TAFE system. A well-qualified TAFE teaching workforce is central to this.

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