**Maintaining industry and pedagogical currency in VET: Practitioners'
voices**

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Abstract

An effective vocational education and training (VET) workforce that manages the learning of adults for the vocational demands of the 21st century requires teachers and trainers with current industry and pedagogical expertise. Research has found that approaches to maintaining industry currency and extending pedagogical expertise for VET practitioners is ad hoc and varied in effectiveness. This research focused on one large VET institutional site at which (26) VET teachers were interviewed on their perceptions of continuing professional development (CPD) and the processes and practices that were deployed to maintain their industry and pedagogical expertise. The results indicated varying perceptions on the way in which industry currency and pedagogical expertise was maintained and developed. The results illuminate CPD practice in a government VET provider, and underscore the expressed need for a consistent, grounded, and nuanced approach to CPD for VET practitioners to shore up their important role in maintaining adult, lifelong and transformative learning.

Key Words: Continuing Professional Development, CPD, VET teachers, VET trainers, industry currency.

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Introduction

If any developed nation is to build and support an effective workforce to cope with the vocational demands of the 21st century, the dual role of vocational education and training (VET) teachers/trainers as industry and pedagogical experts is a key factor. The effectiveness and impact of VET practitioners depends on them being continually well equipped to render VET students as effective workers who can contribute successfully to the stability and competitiveness of national economies. These professionals need industry currency to maintain credibility with both students and employers, and pedagogical expertise in order to teach and train in the most effective ways. The motivation required to continue updating the expertise required of a 'dual professional' therefore needs to be understood so that it can be supported and enhanced.

Approaches to maintaining industry currency and extending pedagogical expertise for VET practitioners tend to be ad hoc and vary in effectiveness (Béduwé et al., 2009; Tyler & Dymock, 2016). There have been difficulties in identifying and arranging opportunities for release to industry, as well as financial and logistical impediments. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding about the most appropriate practices and motivations in conducting continuing professional development (CPD) programs for these purposes.

The research reported here set out to further understand some of those deficiencies. It focused on one large multi-campus VET institution in Australia, where 26 VET teachers were interviewed on their perceptions of CPD and the processes and practices that were deployed to maintain their industry and pedagogical expertise, and about their motivation for engaging in CPD activities. The overall question for this research was, 'How might VET teacher/trainers best maintain both sides of the duality in industry currency and pedagogical expertise?'

The results indicate varying perceptions of the ways in which industry currency and pedagogical expertise were maintained and developed. The respondents rated the importance of CPD and their motivation to undertake it as high. How these teachers maintained industry currency ranged from utilising student engagement opportunities to being introduced to and upskilled on new practices and knowledge, to maintaining currency by remaining 'on the tools' during weekends and vacation periods. They supported the suggestion of the formation of a professional body to represent their voice and maintain professional standards through a form of registration. These results help reduce the shadow over current CPD practices in VET, and underscore the need for a consistent,

grounded, and nuanced approach to the development of VET practitioners' practice.

Professional development for 'dual professionals'

Vocational education and training teachers are often called 'dual professionals', combining industry skills and knowledge with pedagogical expertise (ACPET, 2010; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010). The challenge for the individual is to maintain industry currency in the face of workplace change and technological developments while also improving teaching and assessment capabilities (Guthrie, 2010). Cervero (2001, p. 26) proposed finding ways of better integrating professional development "into the ongoing individual and collective practice of professionals".

CPD approaches have proved elusive, with compliance still a strong motivator, rather than a genuine commitment to improved knowledge and skills (Toze & Tierney, 2010). In Europe, even in countries that have mandatory professional development in VET, practitioners are often ambivalent about the need for improvement, observance is patchy and accountability is sometimes lacking (Parsons et al., 2009). Australian research suggests that there is widespread notional support for professional development in VET for maintaining industry currency and pedagogical expertise, but that, as in Europe, the responses vary at both the individual and the organisational level (Tyler & Dymock, 2016). The challenge for the 'dual professional' in VET in Australia is discussed in the review of literature in the two sections below.

Industry Currency

The Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015 in Australia specify that trainers and assessors must have "current industry skills directly relevant to the training and assessment being provided". (ASQA, 2018, p. 1). Industry currency has been defined as 'the maintenance of a trainer's vocational technical skills and knowledge, enabling the trainer to deliver and assess vocational training relevant to current industry practices' (Toze & Tierney, 2010, 4).

On the face of it, keeping up to date in the industry relevant to their teaching seems a straightforward process for VET practitioners (i.e., teachers and trainers). However, interpretations of what is meant by 'industry currency' vary (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2010), and can be influenced by such factors as changing technology (and a concomitant decrease in the need for certain skills), the introduction of mandatory government requirements and regulations, and improvements in industry practice (WA Training and Accreditation Council, 2016). Although the term, 'industry currency', is widely used among VET practitioners, at a systems level there are variations, including 'professional competence' and 'industry relevance' (Clayton et al., 2013). The Standards for

Registered Training Organisations 2015 (ASQA, 2016) use the term 'industry engagement' instead of 'industry currency', presumably to reflect the nature of the practitioners' involvement as well as the scope of acceptable activities.

The variety in interpretations of 'industry currency' was highlighted by Toze and Tierney (2010) in their report of how Queensland VET practitioners met the requirement, including through: industry release; concurrent employment in industry and a training provider; membership of industry and professional associations; attending conferences and events organised by industry skills bodies; researching best and new practice and general research; reading industry magazines and journals; networking with industry experts; interactions with students in their classes; industry site visits; undertaking short training courses on new equipment; and meeting new industry licensing or regulatory requirements.

This variety creates its own challenges, and may result in unsystematic arrangements, confusion about the purpose of 'industry release' and inadequate monitoring of outcomes (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2010). There is also concern about logistical problems in releasing teachers to undertake industry experience. Toze and Tierney (2010), and Smith et al. (2009) were critical of what they saw as short 'unfocussed' industry placements, study tours, seminars, networking and master classes as ways of meeting industry currency requirements. There is also a view that access to industry is a more significant problem for full-time VET teachers than for casual and part-time staff who continue to work in the industry they teach about (TrainingWA, 2009, cited in Wheelahan, 2010, p. 26). Nevertheless, there is some support for the notion that industry currency should be regarded as more than 'industry release' and might encompass a range of professional development activities (Productivity Commission, 2011; Toze & Tierney, 2010).

Overall, there seems to be a general belief in the sector that maintaining industry currency is important for Australian VET practitioners, but the ways in which this requirement is met are varied, with assumptions that working in the industry is sufficient, with criteria sometimes missing, vague, quite narrow or quite broad, and with various levels of commitment from both practitioners and employer organisations.

Teaching knowledge and skill

The other side of this dual professional role is deploying pedagogical expertise. The position on what is considered to be adequate teaching expertise for VET practitioners involves discussion and division on what level of knowledge and skill is required for initial teaching, and what is required for teachers' continued development, with the latter more about profiling the capacities and required capabilities of VET teachers in meeting the "escalating rates of cultural, political, economic and technological change" (Saunders, 2012, p. 186.).

Initial VET practitioners' preparation was formerly the domain of higher education, with the offering of teacher preparation through degree programs (Robertson, 2008). With the onset of VET policy and practice reforms in the 1990s, the Australian Government reduced the status of initial VET teacher preparation through the introduction of an Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) level IV vocational certificate course (Robertson, 2008). Hence a degree-level teaching qualification became superfluous for initial teaching in VET. From this move onward, the adequacy of the certificate IV qualification for training and assessment in VET has been the subject of much debate and research.

Inadequacies were voiced in regard to this model of initial training, for example, in curriculum (Simons & Smith, 2008), the pedagogical expertise of the trainers who delivered the certificate IV (Down, De Luca and Galloway, 2009) and not meeting initial teachers' expectations in regard to understanding learners and classroom management strategies (Clayton et al., 2010). The voicing of these inadequacies and certain evaluative processes produced various revisions of the abovementioned certificate, now known as the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE).

Yet the capacity of the Certificate IV to deliver initial teacher/trainer knowledge and skill, and its role in CPD for VET practitioners in Australia continued to be questioned. The notable Productivity Commission review of the VET workforce (2011) offered guidance by supporting the continuation of the Certificate IV level teaching/training qualification, albeit with an 'enriched' curriculum. The commission also called for a national level approach in which VET practitioners' CPD could be supported by professional standards, a national workforce development plan, and a registration scheme (2011, p. 282-283), to enable "a suite of qualifications reflecting the diversity of the sector, auditing ..., intelligence on current and emerging capability needs of the workforce, and strategies to encourage PD and fill capability gaps" .

An earlier proposal by Smith et al. (2009) offered a similarly veined workforce development strategy, but only for the service industries. These authors highlighted clearly the initial challenges that presented with any new conceptualisation and action on CPD for VET practitioners: there was no consensus on the size and composition of the VET workforce, no national structure for VET practitioner CPD, no specification of teaching/training qualifications in relation to the complexity of practice, apart from the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) (for which there has been an ongoing general disregard), no avenue for VET practitioners' advocacy, and minimalist will to improve VET teaching.

Unrest with the 'system' continued. For example, not so long ago initial VET teachers were found to be lacking knowledge in how to analyse and interpret the

training package curriculum (Hodge, 2014). Yet responses aimed at developing a more workable CPD system (for example, Denning, 2016; IBSA, 2013; TAFE Development Centre, 2010) have failed to gain traction (Tyler & Dymock, 2016).

In all this to-ing and fro-ing on CPD, VET practitioners' voices on the duality and possible dual identity of their role are not strong. Establishing long-term change through understanding these teachers' "belief systems, values, intentions, and individual action theories underlying their teaching practice" is a necessary and an appropriate way forward (Seezink & Poell, 2010, p. 457). The research reported here is consequently predicated on the belief that action is required in order to develop a clear profile of VET practitioners' positions and motivations on maintaining industry currency and pedagogical expertise.

Method

Australia has a diverse range of VET providers, comprising private businesses and not-for-profit organisations, along with government funded training institutes and colleges in each state and territory. This exploratory project focused on the latter.

The context for this research was a large government VET provider in one Australian state. The organisation is located in a metropolitan area with campuses in several suburbs. The organisation is a major provider of trade and technical training, and consequently has close relationships with several leading industry sectors such as the mining and automotive industries. It conducts campus and workplace training for large and small enterprise personnel, delivering apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship and technical skills programs.

Invitations for volunteers to participate in the research were distributed by email to VET teachers on several campuses. The access pathway to volunteers for this research was through the human resource department, which then forwarded the invitation to middle managers. The middle managers forwarded the invitations to teachers. Hence, the cohort of volunteers was considered as provider-selected representatives of the overall teacher population. The volunteers identified their willingness to participate through direct email to the researchers. Interviews were then negotiated directly with the volunteers, and were arranged 'on-campus'.

26 VET teachers across four campuses volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews (Rabionet, 2011) of approximately 40 minutes in length. The interviews collected demographic data and the perceptions that these teachers held about professional practice, the importance of and practices associated with industry currency and industry release, and their position and motivation in continuing to develop their teaching and training knowledge and skills.

Table 1: VET practitioners, government registered training organisation (n=26)

	Years in Industry	Importance - Industry Currency	Importance - Teaching Skills CPD	Gender	Age	Teaching level	Teaching qualification
Respondent 19	11 - 15	0	0	Male	20 - 30	Step 1	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 26	5 - 10	8	10	Male	20 - 30	Step 3	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 25	5 - 10	10	10	Male	20 - 30	Step 1	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 27	5 - 10	9	8	Male	20 - 30	Casual	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 24	11 - 15	10	7	Male	31 - 40	Step 3	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 20	5 - 10	7	0	Male	31 - 40	Casual	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 23	5 - 10	10	10	Male	31 - 40	Step 3	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 22	5 - 10	8	8	Male	31 - 40	Casual	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 9	5 - 10	8	0	Male	31 - 40	Casual	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 14	11 - 15	10	0	Male	31 - 40	Step 3	Bachelor
Respondent 2	11 - 15	10	10	Male	31 - 40	LVT	Master Ed
Respondent 15	5 - 10	10	10	Male	41 - 50	Step 3	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 18	16 - 20	0	8	Male	41 - 50	Step 3	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 8	11 - 15	6	9	Male	51 - 60	LVT	Bachelor
Respondent 1	5 - 10	10	10	Male	51 - 60	LVT	Bachelor
Respondent 12	5 - 10	8	10	Male	51 - 60	LVT	Bachelor
Respondent 10	5 - 10	9	9	Female	51 - 60	LVT	Dip Teach
Respondent 11	11 - 15	10	10	Male	51 - 60	LVT	Bachelor
Respondent 6	16 - 20	0	8	Male	51 - 60	Step 5	Bachelor
Respondent 3	11 - 15	9	9	Male	51 - 60	LVT	Bachelor
Respondent 16	16 - 20	7	10	Male	51 - 60	Step 3	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 21	11 - 15	10	10	Male	51 - 60	Step 4	Bachelor
Respondent 13	16 - 20	10	9	Male	51 - 60	LVT	Grad Dip Ed
Respondent 4	16 - 20	10	8	Male	51 - 60	Step 4	Bachelor
Respondent 17	16 - 20	0	0	Male	61 - 70	Step 3	Cert 4 TAE
Respondent 7	16 - 20	8	10	Male	61 - 70	LVT	Bachelor

Table one summarises selected demographics associated with the respondents, in ascending order by age group. In the discussion in this paper, the respondents' voices are identified by aliases, and the location of the campus and area of trade/expertise have been omitted for reasons of anonymity.

There are several standouts worth noting. There was only one female who volunteered, most likely because respondents were from male-dominated trades. Half of the cohort (n=13) were over 50 years of age. The majority of these were leading vocational teachers (LVT)*. The LVTs held a higher education qualification in the cohort (usually a degree), and all participants held the minimum qualification - Certificate IV Training and Assessment. The youngest teachers were more likely to be casual employees. In Table 1 there are two columns that indicate the rating each respondent gave to the importance of maintaining industry currency and CPD for teaching expertise. These ratings were made on the basis of scaling questions, where a score of 1 was considered least important and a score of 10 was considered most important. There was a high proportion of 10s for both items, and the lowest score was 6. A zero indicates that the respondent gave no numerical rating, and in these cases they instead used descriptive words.

Following the interviews, recordings were anonymised for transcription, and

* LVTs are teachers who, because of their experience, qualifications and expertise, are appointed to leadership roles under the Technical and Further Education Teacher's Award. These teachers take on extra leadership responsibilities such as team leadership, mentoring, industry liaison work and programming.

pseudonyms were added for reporting purposes. These data were initially analysed to identify major themes (Gibbs, 2002) for the design of a coding scheme. NVivo Version 11 software was deployed to select instances relating to the coding scheme. These instances were then engaged with iteratively (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013) to illuminate the rich patterns and interrelationships associated with these teachers' positions on CPD.

Results

Industry currency

In order to meet the requirements of the Standards for Registered Training Organisations, the provider which employed the 26 interviewees in this research project mandated two weeks of professional development each year, but the way that the policy was implemented by management and followed by those teachers showed considerable variety.

Of the 22 who ranked the importance of industry currency for VET practitioners on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), half thought it was a 10, eight saw it as an 8/9, two listed it as a 7 and one thought it was a 6. The reasons for the generally high rankings cluster around credibility as a teacher, as expressed by Patrick: 'You've got to know what you're teaching is the right thing', and Nelson who suggested that, 'You've got to know more than what you teach.' Ken said, 'These [students] are here to get trained to get a job and if they're not being trained to how industry is now, then ... they're not really getting the benefit of having a professional in front of them training.'

Several said that their industries were wide-ranging and that they therefore needed to learn in areas beyond those they themselves had worked in. On the other hand, two suggested there had been very little change in their industries over the years, so that professional development (PD) was not as vital. For example, John said:

Generally speaking not a lot changes in our industry. If new technology comes in, like new machines, yeah well, I think it's valuable that we get trained on it. But I mean you've got a lot of the older [trade] construction ... and it's all the same stuff I learnt as an apprentice. It doesn't really change.

The intention of the PD program in this organisation was reported as two-fold: industry release (IR), whereby teachers were encouraged to spend at least a week working in industry, and another week of upskilling activities, which in the past has included orientation courses for new teachers. Most respondents identified more than one means of updating, but in terms of the main way of meeting the requirement, 13 said they worked (or had in the past) in their own or a friend's

business with a previous employer, 10 identified working in or visiting industry, 2 said they learned mainly through their teaching (including one who taught commercial clients for the organisation). Kent, a leading vocational teacher, said:

We don't just go to some small shop where we're going to physically be just doing the dirty, crappy jobs. We try to get in with a larger employer where we can work with their leading hands, so that we can actually discuss - so we participate in work, but at the same time we can be asking questions why, and how, and things like that. So we've got that I guess hands-on experience.

On the other hand, Pablo said he was too busy with both teaching and administration within the organisation to do two weeks in industry. He said his PD learning was mainly self-directed online.

Several of those who worked in their own or a friend's business or where they had worked before acknowledged that the time spent did not necessarily result in new knowledge. For example, Cecil said 'any Tom, Dick or Harry' could do the work he was doing in his week's industry release with a company where he had previously been employed, and that the rest of the PD time had been made up with 'bits and pieces' of repairs done at home. On the other hand, a cohort of younger VET teachers, the most experienced with ten years behind him, the newest entrant employed as a casual for just a few months, were still operating their own businesses in some form, and saw this as their way of maintaining currency. They undertook this work at week-ends and during vacations. For instance, Pete said:

I still constantly do jobs outside of here through the business. ... I'll always stay and do this [teaching] job, but I believe if I had just this job I would probably get a bit stale, and I wanted to keep my business constantly going, just to keep my mind ticking over with it. I always want to be able to have that still-in-industry feeling and experience so that I can then bring it here and still be going, 'No, no, this is how it is.'

The less experienced teachers also tended to be in touch with other aspects of their industry, partly as a result of still being practising tradespeople. They spoke of retailers' industry trade nights and receiving online updates on relevant legislation. Across all of the respondents, there was mention of membership of professional associations, reading technical journals, finding information (including service manuals) online, and tapping into the expertise of peers. Several also spoke of the value of attending short training courses run by manufacturers or retailers for their own service staff, but noted that these were usually fee-paying and that the educational organisation often refused attendance on financial grounds. However, two of the more recent recruits seemed unaware of any PD requirement in the organisation.

In some cases, students were also seen as sources of current industry practice, and sometimes as a means of accessing workplaces for industry visits. Particularly in industries that tended to be centred on large organisations rather than providing 'own business' opportunities, access to companies was seen as a potential barrier. This was usually because, according to the teachers interviewed, such businesses did not want 'outsiders' operating their machines. One senior teacher also observed how occupational health and safety requirements had changed over the years, so that extensive or repeated induction was often necessary (e.g., in the mining industry), minimising the amount of time available for updating. Any access that was negotiated tended to come through teachers' contacts within organisations and through building trust rather than 'cold calling'. Even then, a number of experienced teachers advocated observational visits to industry rather than having to be 'on the tools'. Fred said, 'Seeing what the companies are doing is enough', and Jack suggested that say, ten different site visits over a year was preferable to two weeks' industry release.

In the case of such release, the PD activities in this training provider are approved in advance, so it is assumed that what was proposed was completed, making signing off straightforward. Documenting other sorts of attempts to meet industry currency requirements appeared to be an art form, with teachers providing a range of evidence to show that they had met the requirements. This included receipts for work done for clients, photographs of projects completed, declarations, and evidence of professional and industry memberships. All of the hours undertaken by individual teachers to maintain currency were entered into a central recording system. The role of the coordinator of this data entry seemed to be important in ensuring PD requirements were met for audit purposes.

Pedagogical expertise

These 26 TAFE teachers commented directly on the subject of the continual development of teaching skills. On the scaling question regarding the importance of the continual development of these capabilities, these teachers rated its importance from 7 to 10 on a scale of 1-10. Eleven teachers actually rated the level of importance as 10. Three teachers did not rate importance when asked, but used words such as 'highly important', 'necessary' and 'a given' to indicate their positions. The enthusiasm with which these teachers talked about their teaching aligned with their notions of being professionals. Generally, this enthusiasm was displayed in all the interviews, evidenced by all respondents talking animatedly about their motivation to 'keep on top of the teaching game' (Luther).

Being a teacher and teaching appears as a highly influential motivator in prompting involvement in continuing development. Joe's statement is indicative of this self-identification:

I'm here to teach so if the teaching style doesn't transfer the information I need, if I'm losing students along the way, then we're not getting the most out of our trainees and then that reflects badly – when industry get those apprentices or trainees, they go, 'You didn't learn anything' and so that kind of reflects badly on me as a tradesman.

Cecil also mentioned this identity position when he talked about his motivation as not wanting to 'become like a dinosaur', referring to wanting to avoid falling behind in his teaching abilities and becoming a teacher who had less impact.

This identification as a teacher was always in connection with identification as a tradesperson. These TAFE teachers saw themselves as role models for quality trades men/women. Like Joe above, Dave was concerned about having impact in producing high levels of competence in apprentices when he stated that he wanted to 'ensure that apprentices do not become "scary tradesmen"', that is, those who lack appropriate and safe practices in the trade.

But central to most of these teachers' expressions around the importance of continuing to develop their teaching knowledge and skills was their role in enacting generativity. Luther offered the essence of this perspective when he said, 'You've got to remember you're trying to pass something on to a younger person that's going to help them on in life.'

Those who did not express this generativity theme identified other motivators – emulating the roles of important relatives who were teachers, the security of teaching as opposed to the hazardous environment of working in industry, teaching as a way to continue their trade in the face of physical injury, and continual development as a means to open the pathway to higher levels of remuneration, the 'next step up' (John).

Even though there was a valence toward a high rating on the importance of continuing development of teaching skills and knowledge, a tension between their trade capabilities and teaching capabilities was evident in some teachers. For example, Kent indicated that a need to know the content of the trade and be industry current was more important than having or learning an appropriate pedagogy. He said, 'I wouldn't put my hand up and say, "Oh, I need to go to Melbourne to do a course on teaching for two or three days." I'd be more inclined to try to spend that time or money or whatever on the industry skills'.

Nelson also mentioned this perspective, but with a slight difference that related to length of time and experience in teaching. He said, 'I think it becomes less important the longer you teach' – suggesting that after certain teaching experience, one beds down pedagogical knowledge — 'you've got your style and you know what works for you. But new technologies and changes in industry practice/currency then become a little more important.' For Nelson, teaching

knowledge and skill was slightly more important in the formative years of TAFE teaching, but over time industry currency takes precedence.

So, these teachers reported relatively high importance in obtaining and maintaining teaching knowledge and skill, their motivation appears wholehearted, and their connection with their trade capabilities and industry currency is pervasive. Yet, what of the things that are roadblocks to obtaining opportunities to effectively maintain and update their teaching? Noted by some teachers were dealing with constant change (16) and taking time away from family to undertake CPD (8). But all commented on their employer's organisational role and response in relation to this end (26).

The teachers acknowledged the organisation's provision of professional development days. 'We might go off and participate over one or two days on a staff day or staff days where we engage in different types of activities with professional people' (Kent). These staff development activities are reported as one-off events on varying topics, for example, behaviour management, teamwork or computing skills, but their utility is questioned when respondents disclose positions such as, 'I guess it is an ongoing thing, and we don't actually jot all of that down and take particular note' (Kent).

The staff development events associated with teaching per se were reported by some as being mandatory, but this position was unclear across all respondents. The teaching development opportunities that were mentioned were mostly associated with the Certificate IV TAE and the necessary upgrades for AQF compliance. The prevalence of these compliance activities appears high, but the impact is hard to determine from these interviews, particularly when a certain fatalistic tone enters these respondents' interviews, for example, 'I can't remember how many versions of that I've done over a couple of years.' Further questioning revealed an acknowledgement of the role of the Certificate IV in looking after the "nuts and bolts" of the upgrades' (Nelson) but comments like, 'Look, I've been RPL'd that many times through the new ones.... But, realistically, we don't train our own' (Fred) would suggest that there is a position of disappointment and or dissatisfaction about this aspect of CPD that needs to be further explored.

Even though particular questions in the interviews were focused on the continuing development of teaching knowledge and skill, responses included pointed dissatisfaction about the manner in which the initial development of teaching knowledge and skills was provided to new teachers. Of the nine LVT teachers, six brought instances of new teachers being inadequately prepared for teaching to the interview. Two standout comments exemplify this theme, one as an observer, the other as a participant:

In the last few years I've just seen them pulling people off the street and chucking them straight into classes and getting them to teach. Then a month later, they're [the new teacher] gone (Fred).

and,

My first day I was given a roster and told to teach a pre-voc[ational] ... class. I was given absolutely no training whatsoever. But that was my very first day..., which was a bit shocking to stand in front of a class of 28 students and talk to them about a subject, given no education, I wasn't sure of the computer, nothing. It was difficult (Luther).

On the other hand, these teachers indicated degrees of unease around organised professional development events associated with teaching. This general position was exemplified by a comment offered by Stan:

You are faced with the fact that within ... it's very difficult to get adequate training on things that you need. There's always things that you don't need. There's lots of EDL [education, development and learning] there that I think isn't worth doing. There should be things relevant to what we're doing as tradespeople.

The organised continuing development of teaching knowledge and skills for the more experienced teachers, beyond the Certificate IV TAE recognition of prior learning events, was not reported by participants in these interviews. For those who held a Certificate IV TAE only, a bachelor program in teaching and learning offered online by an Australian university was mentioned. Of the 13 teachers who held a Certificate IV TAE, only two were actively enrolled in that program. No evaluatory comments were made by the respondents in relation to this opportunity.

The responses reported above indicate that these teachers are motivated to undertake continuing development of their teaching knowledge and skill and rate it highly in terms of importance. These teachers reported that organised PD opportunities in relation to this continual development is not meeting their PD needs. So, if they are motivated, and consider themselves professional, how do they 'keep themselves sharp'?

Experienced teachers reported improving their teaching through practice, self and peer reflection, and collaboration, for example:

So even without going to some sort of structured training, every time you stand in front of a group, you're learning... So, you're sort of changing and I guess improving, manipulating, modifying your teaching strategies constantly for every group.... So, we actually communicate and we bounce different strategies and ideas off our -

between ourselves, as to how we might handle a particular group, with behaviour, or learning, or whatever it happens to be (Kent, LVT).

The less experienced teachers reported that it was only through undertaking collaboration that they built new capacities in teaching. For example:

There's another teacher I talk with about that because me and him are doing it together so we can bounce off each other a little bit (Cecil, Step 3).

and:

I ... meet with other teachers and go through that, and I got a lot out of that. I actually feel that that was making more of a better teacher, because I was getting ideas off of the others (Pete, Step 3).

To close this section, it is pertinent to report what these teachers said about their CPD needs in relation to teaching knowledge and skill. Stated explicitly were: dealing with cultural and gender sensitivities, handling the diversity of students, how to cope with more learning difficulties, understanding group dynamics, and effective behaviour management strategies. The reported inadequacy of the Certificate IV TAE as expressed above, and also in relation to knowing how to conduct the challenges posed by teaching diverse students, was a highlight. Even though basic skills are covered, beginning teachers were saying, for example, 'how the bloody hell do you handle these guys?' (Kent).

These teachers were silent on the subject of curriculum. How to unpack and interpret training packages, planning for assessment, and understanding the role of core competencies, for instance, were not identified as a need in relation to CPD. This may have been the result of their confidence in their expertise as a tradesperson, or may have been a result of the impact of the Certificate IV TAE. We shall return to this point in the discussion section.

Less experienced teachers strongly voiced their need to liaise and collaborate with more experienced teachers. These teachers could be considered as a cohort in themselves, as they were below 30 years of age and had anywhere from six months to two years' experience in the role. These teachers taught on a campus where access to more experienced teachers was limited. The learning that comes from role models, coaches and mentors was an evident expressed need. But perhaps the final word on continuing development of teaching knowledge and skill for these teachers could be left to Luther:

It would be great if they could ask teachers what type of PD would you like teaching wise, but they don't... I mean they have improved... [They] did listen to us... we started to do teamwork, where we would do

moderation with our different teams around the campuses. Which is better, that's improving.

Discussion

The 26 respondents in this study provided a varied picture of their efforts to meet industry currency requirements and maintain pedagogical skills. They were all supportive of the notion of staying up to date but showed a varying level of commitment to it, with a small number seemingly paying only lip-service. A few felt that it was a 'box-ticking' exercise, confirming Tyler and Dymock's conclusion (2016, p. 7) that CPD is often undertaken 'to fulfil obligations and meet certification requirements rather than because of its potential to impact on the quality of practice'. On the other hand, some respondents in the study took PD seriously but noted such constraints as gaining access to industry and budget considerations within the organisation, the sorts of logistical problems identified by Toze and Tierney (2010) some years ago. These respondents suggested that more flexible arrangements were needed to take account of the variety of possible PD activities and experiences. The Productivity Commission (2011) called for a broader interpretation of PD in VET, but such an approach requires a concomitant monitoring strategy to provide credible recognition. Wheelahan and Moodie (2010) found that there was inadequate monitoring, even with the more circumscribed activities which are accepted at present.

The site of the PD is also a factor, with the organisation in this study apparently accepting self-employment as an indication of currency, although some of the teachers themselves raised questions about whether such activities extended their learning. Smith et al. (2013) criticised this sort of PD as 'unfocussed'. Nevertheless, there were signs that many of the teachers interviewed saw the benefits of maintaining industry currency for the sake of their students and their own credibility as VET teachers.

These teachers reported relatively high importance in obtaining and maintaining teaching knowledge and skill, their motivation appeared wholehearted and their connection with their trade capabilities and industry currency was persuasive. Factors that affected opportunities to effectively maintain and update their teaching were: dealing with constant change, taking time away from family to undertake CPD, their employer's organisational role and response in relation to this end. On this latter theme, the interviewees' perspectives on how the organisation exercises its response to the continual development of teaching knowledge and skill appeared almost off handed, as if it was an item in a list of issues they could do little about. This perspective appears to be influenced by a perceived lack of agency, but it also seems the variety of interpretations of what is acceptable as PD (Toze & Tierney, 2010; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2010) might encourage such attitudes.

CPD for teaching knowledge and skills was reported as mainly being via recognition of prior learning (RPL) through updates of the Certificate IV TAE, the minimum qualification required for delivering training packages. On the subject of the Certificate IV, six out of the nine LVTs disclosed, unprompted, their dissatisfaction with the level of initial preparation through that qualification and the organisational support for beginning teachers. Overall, the teachers interviewed indicated degrees of unease around organised professional development events associated with teaching.

Experienced teachers reported that they improved their teaching through practice, self and peer reflection, and collaboration. The less experienced teachers reported that it was only through undertaking collaboration that they built new capacities in teaching. Beginning teachers were reported as needing greater support from their more experienced colleagues, the sort of assistance that might be expected in any job. This finding emphasises the importance of reflection in building capabilities, but for less experienced teachers, it also points to an immaturity in their development. Critical to professional performance is the ability to reflect on practice and learn from this in order to improve practice. This may well be happening with the less experienced teachers, but its explicit mention here is silent. Which begs the questions, 'Do these less experienced teachers know of the importance of critical self-reflection, and will exposure to such a tool/model be beneficial to their teaching practice?'

A more consistent PD strategy to foster mentoring and modelling, not just for this cohort but for the broader VET workforce (Smith et al., 2009, Tyler & Dymock, 2016), could address how ad hoc the current collaborations between junior and senior teachers are. Such collaborations might not necessarily be one-way, however, with some newer teachers opining that some experienced teachers were too set in their ways and/or out of touch with industry.

On the other hand, beginning teachers did not appear to use critical reflection as a means of informing or improving their capabilities, which might be seen as an indication of the limitations of the Certificate IV TAE, as identified by critics such as Simons and Smith (2008) and Down et al. (2009).

The limitations of this study include its representative sample size (n=26), and the fact that all of the respondents were from a single government agency, so generalisations across the VET sector cannot be made from the responses. As little data exists on VET practitioners' voices in relation to their perspectives of CPD, however, the qualitative findings will provide comparison with other RTOs, both public and private. More research that focuses upon VET practitioners' perceptions of CPD is warranted. To date, much of what has been reported is anecdotal. The voices of private RTO practitioners are also not represented in the literature.

Also, these teachers self-reported the data in the interviews, so bias may have been present, but the perspectives contain the grist from which to analyse these teachers' experience of the state of play in regard to the question of industry currency and pedagogical expertise.

The role of compliance in affecting the type and quality of CPD was also unclear, and would also stand as an opportunity for further research into the consequences of compliance in developing shallow responses to the intended outcomes of CPD. Collaboration between teachers across years of experience in teaching and in industry, particularly between the lesser and more experienced teachers, was illuminated as a significant factor in facilitating effective CPD. Its role in aiding and abetting CPD also requires further exploration.

In considering the main research question for this research, 'How might VET teacher/trainers best maintain both sides of the duality in industry currency and pedagogical expertise?', it is clear that maintaining industry currency and continuing to develop teaching skills and knowledge are important to these teachers, and this position is congruent with their motivations. Nevertheless, many of these teachers questioned the current practices and types of professional development, and their relevance. What consists of, and counts as, IC is variable and its effectiveness therefore lies unevaluated. It also raises questions about what is acceptable and relevant as IR and how it might be recorded.

In this research there was a strong call from the teachers interviewed for the gathering and inclusion of their voices in the type and content of CPD offered. These teachers' positive responses to the notion of PD suggest that professionalising their role through a form of association and registration could possibly be a mechanism to support their collective voice and attain a better fit between VET practitioners' CPD needs and the utility of CPD activities, although this avenue remains contentious in Australian VET circles (Tyler & Dymock, 2016).

From those findings, and within the limitations noted, some possible strategies emerge for improving the quality and accountability of CPD for VET practitioners:

1. Focus on the development of flexible arrangements for the freeing up of teachers to engage in PD activities inclusive of those for maintaining industry currency. How that will look will depend upon a balance between an organisation's teaching requirements and the need to update teachers' industry knowledge and skill.
2. Develop a coherent and shared view of what is acceptable industry release (IR). The important element here is ensuring that all IR activities are suitable for the maintenance and extension of teacher learning in relevant industry contexts.

3. Extend professional development on pedagogy knowledge and skills beyond an AQF 4 level qualification, as the variance in and demands of contemporary training require a complexity of advanced teaching skills. Further, ensure there is not an overreliance on recognition of prior learning in relation to attaining the necessary updates to the minimum qualification, to ensure teachers value the process as extending their learning.
4. Develop consistent CPD activities which focus on enhancing aspects of collaboration between teachers by providing more structured opportunities to learn from each other.
5. Provide opportunities for teachers to give regular feedback on their needs for CPD, in order to keep motivation high and ensure quality teaching engagements with an organisation's clientele.

Overall, this study revealed a strong belief in the need to maintain industry currency, and to a lesser extent pedagogical expertise, which is an indication that VET practitioners regard themselves as professionals. However, the study also revealed that there is a need for greater consistency in the way that professional development in vocational education and training is regarded by VET practitioners and their employers.

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