Ethical Dilemmas Faced by VET Teachers in Times of Rapid Change

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Abstract

Vocational education and training (VET) in Australia in recent decades has been subject to a range of major policy reforms in response to globalized pressures for it to become more effective, efficient, and competitive in its responsiveness to consumer demand. Those policy reforms have been noted to date as raising significant ethical challenges for teachers in the sector. There is, though, a dearth of research-based knowledge of how those challenges are being experienced, interpreted, explained, and responded to by the teachers themselves and how the teachers see the challenges as impacting on them.

The research project described in this thesis sought to respond to that situation. It was directed to developing an understanding of how VET teachers in Australia experienced, interpreted, explained, and responded to the ethical challenges raised by changes in the contemporary cultural context of their work and what they saw as being the impact of those challenges on them as teachers in the sector.

Correspondingly, the study was phenomenological in nature, drawing primarily on exploratory, discursive, conversational interviews with 18 VET teachers in South-East Queensland, who were selected from those responding to a call for participation in the study. Participants were selected to include a diversity of background and participatory involvement in the field and to ensure the each had some years of experience in VET teaching.

Interview questioning was focused on the ethical challenges faced by the participants in their work as teachers in VET and which they attributed to changes in the contemporary cultural context of their work. Data analysis followed the process articulated as interpretative phenomenological analysis. It focused on identifying pertinent dilemmas shared by the participants: how the dilemmas were experienced, interpreted, explained, and responded to, and their impact on the participants.

Four common dilemmas were identified: the dilemmas of (a) responding flexibly to heightened student diversity, (b) limiting educational engagement, (c) constraining teacher responsiveness, and (d) manipulating learning assessment. Each was seen as being created by tensions between what participants (intrinsically) understood that they should do in a particular situation and what they felt impelled to do by extrinsic imperatives or pressures from changed circumstances in the contemporary cultural context of VET. The extrinsic imperatives were identified from the ethical challenges attributed by the teachers to changes in that cultural context,
each dilemma being defined by a small number of such challenges particular to it, with a total of 13 challenges emerging across the four dilemmas.

The identified impacts of the dilemmas on the participants were all seen by them as being negative: disappointment, confusion, anxiety, discomfort, and distress.

Three types of response on the part of participants to their experience of the dilemmas were evident: marginalizing the extrinsic imperatives through standing by their intrinsic moral commitments, compromising those commitments to accommodate the extrinsic imperatives, and appealing for ethical training.

Three of the four categories of participant explanations for their experience of the dilemmas focused on what they saw as external realities of their teaching: changing immigration rules, changing funding requirements, and the changing culture and philosophy of their employing registered training organization. The fourth identified explanation focused on inadequacies in their teacher preparation.

The study pointed to the value of dilemmas as constructs through which to generate knowledge of ethical conflicts arising from contextual changes. It highlighted the significance of those conflicts to VET teachers involved in the study.

It also pointed to actions that may be taken to support teachers in better managing the conflicts. The negativity of the identified impacts and the disparate responses to the dilemmas suggested the need for such intervention. The challenges presented by each of the dilemmas and the participants’ explanations of the dilemmas suggested themselves as points for attention in any such intervention. Foremost among the implications of the study for such intervention are the need for effective teacher training in applied ethics and for better teacher support for their understanding and management of the challenges presented by the extrinsic imperatives.

While the extrinsic imperatives – and hence the challenges for educational action – identified in this study may be expected to vary across educational and policy contexts, the dilemmas themselves, of which they are a part, may well be more stable. Therein lies an argument for further research to examine the extent to which the findings of this study may be applied to other educational sectors and contexts where policy changes of a similar nature are being implemented.
Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not previously been submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature
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List of Acronyms

ABS - Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACPET - Australian Council for Private Education and Training
AEI - Australian Education International
AEU - Australian Education Union
ANTA - Australian National Training Authority
AQF - Australian Quality Framework
ASQA - Australian Skills Quality Authority
AVQPCA - Australian VET Quality Practitioners and Consultants' Association
CAE - Certificate in Advanced English
CBT - Competency-based Training
COAG - Council of Australian Governments
COC - Code of Conduct
CPD - Continuous Professional Development
CRICOS - Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students
DET - Department of Education and Training
DEST - Department of Education, Science, and Training
DEVET - Department of Vocational Education and Training
DEEWR - Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations
DIAC - Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DIISRTE - Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education
ESOS - Education Services for Overseas Students
ESL - English as a Second Language
FCE - First Certificate in English
HECS - Higher Education Contribution Scheme
IELTS - International English Language Testing System
IPA - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LVT - Lead Vocational Teacher
MODL - Migration Occupational Demand List
NCVER - National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NPM - New Public Management
NQC - National Quality Council
NSW - New South Wales
NV - New Vocationalism
NVETR - National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act
OECD - Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PD - Professional Development
PPP - Productivity Places Program
QA - Quality Assurance
RPL - Recognition of Prior Learning
RTO - Registered Training Organization
SOL - Skills on Demand List
TAFE - Technical and Further Education
TEQSA - The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
TOEFL - Test of English as a Foreign Language
TAA40104 - Certificate IV in Training and Assessment
VET - Vocational Education and Training
VEETAC - Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee
VFH - VET FEE-HELP
VRQA - The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The study reported in this document investigated the ethical experiences of Australian vocational education teachers in the face of changes in the context of their teaching practice. This research topic was grounded in the contemporarily increasing importance of ethics in the working expectations of vocational education teaching, which is seen as an expression of the globalized formalization of educational practice. The study was undertaken in Queensland, Australia, as a case study of these trends.

This chapter makes a case for the research topic and outlines the structure of the remainder of the thesis. It presents, first, an overview of the nature and impact of the contemporary cultural context in which educational practice is situated, before turning to the particular case of vocational education and training (VET). Important features of ethics in that contemporary cultural context are then sketched, before the material in those sections is used to outline the argument for the research topic. The chapter ends with an overview of how the study is presented.

Background to the Research Topic

The Contemporary Cultural Context

The contemporary cultural context influencing teaching practice in vocational education may be understood as being characterized by globalization in the sense that it exhibits the tendency for policy, practice, and discourse in different national jurisdictions to converge or to conform to standards established by other, more influential, lead jurisdictions (Dakopoulou, 2009; Dale, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

In education, globalization tends to lead to increased competition amongst nations (Olssen, 2002) in a more closely intertwined international economy that is increasingly responsible for attracting foreign capital in terms of international students and for the ability of local colleges to accumulate profit (Bourdieu, 2002; Carnoy, 2000). Within the wider context of globalization, education is regarded as an international commodity (Green, 2002), playing a significant mission in the global economy with investment in people, skills, and knowledge (Mundy, 2005). This leads education policy to be not solely a national affair, but a global one in which nation states are no longer closed to themselves (Robertson et al., 2007).
Central to the recent development of globalization in education has been the pervasion of educational policy and practice with neo-liberal tenets, including those of managerialism (Fitzsimons, 1999). These changes are arguably leading to a formalization of educational practice in the sense that practitioners are increasingly called upon to work within narrowing structured or formalized frameworks of expectations, articulated through frameworks of accountability, including codes of conduct (Bagnall, 2004; Marginson, 1999; Priestley, 2002). Where once educational practitioners were called upon to exercise their professional judgement, grounded in their formal professional education, including mentoring, they are now increasingly expected to conform to predetermined generic criteria and standards specified for their practice as educators (Bagnall, 2004).

The adoption of neo-liberal, free-market economic policies and the consequent deregulation of education has impacted on traditional education systems. The managerialization and formalization of education through risk minimization (of which the marketization of education is a part) are leading to the externalization of value, including moral value, through the imposition of external measures and standards of performance and accountability (Green, Little, Kamat, Oketch, & Vickers, 2007). That externalization of moral value is evidenced particularly in the replacement of teachers’ traditional professional moral authority by externally imposed codes of conduct or practice (by whatever particular name).

Traditional concepts of teacher professionalism have focused on the closely interrelated concepts of knowledge, autonomy, and responsibility (Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting, & Whitty, 2010). Furlong et al. argued that, because professionals face complex and unpredictable situations, they need a specialized body of knowledge, the application of which requires a degree of autonomy in which to make their judgements. From the 1980s, governments internationally have tended to contest the traditional professional approach to education and to restructure educational approaches and policies (Giroux, 2002).

Historically, the state has played a major role in both the financing and the delivery of services such as education, health care, housing, and social care. Thus, in many countries governments – state, central or local – have run schools or colleges, providing education at no cost or at a fee well below cost (Le Grand & Bartlett, 1993). During the 1980s and the early 1990s, there was a revolution in this kind of social policy (Le Grand, 2003). The educational policy became internationalized due to the increasing dominance of the global economy over national politics (Held & McGrew, 2000; Marginson, 1999).
education has been the contestation of traditional professionalism by neo-liberal ideology and policies (Bagnall, 2004).

As educational systems around the world have become larger and more complex, governments have been either unable or unwilling to pay for an educational expansion, and have, therefore, looked to market solutions. In several countries, where a combination of state provision and state finance had been the norm, the state, while retaining the control of finance, began to pull back from the provision of services (Finegold & Soskice, 1988). Instead of providing services through monopolistic state bureaucracies, provision became competitive, with independent providers competing for students identified as customers or clients in market or quasi-market settings (Le Grand & Bartlett, 1993). In such a quasi-market, the state encouraged the provision of educational service to be undertaken by independent providers competing with one another. It was expected that the economic agents operating in a competitive market would provide service of high quality at lower price, for, if they did not, they would lose business, and hence income and, ultimately, their livelihood. These ideological forces influenced the design of public policy (Mueller, 2003).

These forces have contributed to a universal shift from social democratic to neo-liberal orientations in thinking about educational purposes and governance, resulting in policies of corporatization, privatization, and commercialization on the one hand, and in a greater demand for accountability on the other (Lipman, 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2006). Over this period education, especially vocational education, has thus tended to become a tradeable rather than a public service (Lynch, 2008). One of the features of the contemporary globalized educational environment is the tendency under neo-liberal philosophy to redefine educational culture as economic (Takarei, 2010). Central to the hegemony of neo-liberal ideology is a particular view of education in which market-driven identities and values are both produced and legitimated (Giroux, 2004). During recent decades, these developments have been associated with the introduction of managerialism as a new mode of governance under the restructured public sectors of many Western societies. The restructuring has involved the reform of education, in which there has been a significant shift away from an emphasis on administration and policy to an emphasis on management. This form of managerialism, also known as new public management (NPM), has been used as both the legitimating basis and the instrumental means for redesigning state educational bureaucracies, educational institutions, and even the public policy process (Peters, Fitzsimons, & Marshall, 1999).
Under NPM, there has been an elaboration of explicit standards and measures of performance in quantitative terms, setting specific employee targets for personnel, with an emphasis on economic rewards and sanctions, and providing a reconstruction of accountability relationships (Peters et al., 1999). To the end of so-called productive efficiency has been the centralization of management control towards what has been referred to as the doctrine of corporate governance for assuring quality outcomes (Foley, 1991). To the end of better education, managers are expected to write mission statements, implement strategic plans, design appraisal forms, and measure efficiencies, albeit grudgingly (Peters et al., 1999). Taken together, these representations of managerialism imply the imposition of authority at the expense of teacher autonomy (Rikowski, 2006).

In managerialist discourse, education is defined as a commodity, focusing on productivity and assessment by measurable educational outcomes and institutional standards. In this new rational economic order, social decisions are defined within managerialism at the expense of policy, politics, democracy, and ethics (Senge, 1999). The result is that the governance of education is transformed.

Neo-liberalization and managerialism are leading to the formalization of educational practice, replacing professionalization with increased corporatization and economization of education (Bagnall, 2003; Borgir & Pelzer, 1999; Doherty, Graham, & Malek, 1992; Gibbins, 1989; Melody, 1997). The changes taking place in education are part of a much broader set of changes which some have characterized as symptomatic of postmodernism (Bagnall, 1999; Bauman, 1993; Koehn, 1994), relating to the crisis of confidence in the welfare state, cutbacks in public sector resources, the privatization and marketization of public services, decentralization of services and budgets, the growth of a new managerialism focusing on the economy, effectiveness, and efficiency, and a wide de-professionalization (Clemans, 2009).

Throughout much of the 20th century, professionalism served as an ideology in education and claimed to have extended the scope of professional autonomy, judgement, and decision-making about the content and process of education. Employers used the notion of professionalism to appeal to teachers’ altruism, their public service ethos, and their commitment to causing no harm to their students (Seddon, 2008). Educators had sought to professionalize teaching, hoping to dispel the idea that it could be successfully undertaken by anyone of integrity. However, over the last two decades, educators in general have stressed that teaching is complex work requiring particular and specialized kinds of knowledge and skills to be effective (Milner, 2013).

Vocational education, particularly in Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, has entered
the era of management-driven higher education, and this has gradually swept across the rest of the world. Vocational Education and Training (VET) is education and training that focuses on providing skills for work. VET provides the skills to help people to join the workforce for the first time, re-join the workforce after a break, upgrade skills in their chosen field, and move into a different career. Traditionally, VET courses are known to focus more on providing practical and work-orientated occupational skills, whereas university or higher education courses are better known for focusing on providing theory-based knowledge and professional career paths. (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2013; Marginson, 1997; National Centre for Vocational Education Research, (NCVER), 2010).

The impact of changes in economic globalization cleared the way for managerialism (Rizvi, 2010; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011). The economization of education grew significantly and represented the growing importance of economic considerations, marking a change in policy (Amaral, Meek, & Larsen, 2003). The purpose of education consequently seemed to be constrained by the narrow definition of the institution that required it to meet the needs of the global economy and to ensure the national economy’s competitiveness. This led to a universal shift in educational purposes from democracy to governance, resulting in corporatization, privatization, and commercialization, on the one hand, and greater demand for accountability on the other (Lipman, 2004). The way the old VET culture was changed by such education reform amounted to a new political economy of education (Marginson, 1993, Taylor, Rivzi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997) where client-centered tertiary policies became an aspect of the market revolution. It could be argued that managerialism led to change in VET culture where one now sees a tightly integrated regime of managerial discipline and control alongside a loss of discretion and trust (Deem, 2002). A related characteristic of managerialism is the continuous monitoring and audit of performance and quality (Black 2009a, 2009b; Maslen, 2000). Butler and Shore (2010) highlighted the result in movement towards the maintenance of standards, often brought about by a shift from self-regulation of VET teachers to a somewhat greater measure of control and conformity. Dall’Alba and Sandberg (2006) stressed the point that the performance agenda had come to dominate much of the educational policy agenda, resulting in decreased time for teachers to connect with, care for, and attend to the needs of individual students: in other words, culminating in the de-professionalization of teaching.

The Case of Vocational Education and Training

The changes outlined above concerning the globalized formalization of education since the 1980s are paralleled in the VET sector (Karmel, 2004). VET is seen here as conforming to
the above-noted more general trends in educational policy and practice. These changes in VET are, accordingly, importantly informed by values such as those of the economy, of the marketplace, and of enhancing competitiveness and profitability through heightened operational efficiency (Bagnall, 2003; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This agenda is being used by Australian educational authorities in their efforts to present Australia as an internationally respected and exemplary nation state in VET reform (Bagnall, 2003).

The Australian VET reform agenda over this period has contributed significantly to the creation of a culture that is more individualistic, sectarian, self-interested, materialistic, and economically polarized than it was before (Bagnall, 2003). Entrepreneurial cultures now permeate Australian vocational education institutions, moving away from the traditional approach of regulated VET provision through public (state) providers, towards more competitive provision through what is termed the “open training market” (Anderson, 1998; Barnett, 1998; Hawke & Cornford, 1998). Competition among providers – whether public or private – is the central informing principle in the training market (Henry, Lingard, Rivzi, & Taylor, 2001; Marginson 1993). The underpinning interests of VET provision are, therefore, very largely those of business and industry, within an increasingly globalized and competitive marketplace (Nakar, 2013).

Australian VET has developed a strongly commercialized approach with an influx of international students, together with an advanced system for the fast tracking of teacher education to prepare teachers to meet demand for increasing numbers of international students (Moodie & Curtin, 2010). The last three decades, particularly, have seen the implementation of policies directed to the systematic erosion of the traditional educational culture: economic developments have been progressively linked to education, particularly tertiary education, including VET; teacher autonomy has been gradually reduced; client service has become an integral feature of educational planning and policy; the levels and availability of professional development have been progressively eroded; and the protection of teachers’ rights has been progressively diminished in favour of employers’ demands for more flexible and cheaper labour (Bagnall, 2003; Foley, 1991).

The state of Queensland within Australia has adopted the above-mentioned national and international trends. Market-oriented education in Queensland is becoming primarily focused on structures and actions tailored to competition and deregulation (McLean, 2010). As successive Queensland governments have pursued this ideology, systems of tertiary education have consequently been faced with a series of transformations, from mandating rules and regulations for registered training organizations (RTOs) to specifying funding standards for VET colleges to
compete for funds, based on accountability and performance (Berthelsen, 2007). In concrete terms, this includes performance-based funding schemes, increased competition for resources and students, the deployment of external evaluations, rising pressures for teacher performativity and conformity to such changes, and ultimately an erosion of their moral autonomy (Karmel, 2004). Although teachers’ work varies between Technical and Further Education (TAFE) (public) and private VET sectors, and to some extent across states, similar broad trends are at work in both public and private sectors and across state jurisdictions. Teachers in the private sector are subject to many of the same policies, curriculum and assessment frameworks, and accountability requirements as those impacting on the public VET sector. Within the profession of VET “teachers and assessors,” there are VET practitioners, TAFE teaching professionals, enterprise trainers and assessors, industry experts, and other VET professionals (Australian Council for Private Education and Training, (ACPET) 2012; Productivity Commission, 2011).

VET teachers are subjected to a rigorous regime of external accountability in which the continuous monitoring and audit of performance and quality are dominant (Deem, 2002; Kirkpatrick & Lucio, 1995). The trend of reforming education by increasingly managing teachers’ work and making teachers more accountable, fits into what is known as a “discourse of performativity” (Ball, 2000, 2003; Jeffrey, 2002).

That contemporary VET teachers are more subject to managerial regulation, less autonomous and self-regulating, less involved with educational decision-making, and less well paid and satisfied confirms the assessment that teaching in VET is being formalized. Such neoliberal policies have resulted in an individualization that isolates teachers and sets them in competition with each other (Milner, 2013). Integral to this process is the privatization of benefit and responsibility, which also ensures that those who experience disadvantage are portrayed, and see themselves, as responsible for their condition and salvation. Milner has recommended that, when positive and adverse effects of these reforms are weighed together, the scales indicate that they are far more formalizing than professionalizing. This analysis demonstrates that these reforms, on the whole, lower the professional status of teaching and raise uncertainty about the quality of teaching.

**Ethical Practice in the Contemporary Cultural Context**

The political goal of transforming Australia into a knowledge economy or society and promoting education as an export industry is changing the relationship between teachers and the nation state (Codd, 2005). VET teachers must provide students with access to high-
quality vocational education that prepares them for changing workplaces and work (Boon, 2011; Colnerud, 1997; Giroux, 2004; Shapira-Lishinsky, 2009, 2011). At the same time, the teacher is beholden to the owner or manager of the enterprise in working to ensure the retention and rise in number of “consumers” (students) (Nakar, 2013).

In Queensland, as in other states of Australia, the individualized, outcome-based, audit-culture (Shortt, Hallett, Spendlove, Hardy, & Barton, 2012), “competent teacher” model, one in which teaching is governed by criteria, standards, and procedures of performance and assessment to ensure conformity of these standards, has become dominant over more diverse and collective notions of “good” teaching (Connell, 2009). Such developments, integral to inventing postmodern Australia in the renewal of its education system and the teaching profession, generate dilemmas for the teaching profession. For example, on the one hand, call for the major revisions to how VET culture is conceptualized, what constitutes teachers’ work, and what are best practices; on the other hand, the exponents of economic rationalism call for education to attend to a traditional purpose of vocational preparation (Beck, 2008; Popkewitz, 1994; Tuinamuana, 2011). The ethical concerns or dilemmas become very obvious when an individual faces conflicting ethical demands (Bagnall, 2003; Gust, 1999; Nakar, 2013). When confronted with an ethical problem, the first line of defense for professionals is their professional standards or code of conduct (Kitchener, 1984; Shapiro & Stefkovich 2001).

The contemporary globalized formalization of educational practice is seen here as involving the imposition of codes of conduct in place of traditional ethical judgement (Terhart, 1998). Codes are the ultimate source of reference in public services like teaching (Stuart, 2005). Those codes specify in different ways and to varying degrees, the minimum acceptable standards of practitioners’ actions and the measures by which ethical actions are to be understood (Bagnall, 2004). This can be seen as a form of expected adherence to a code of conduct, meaning that ethical action has externalized from individuals to codes to which individuals are supposed to conform. Internationally, codes of conduct are perceived as an important measure to prevent corruption in education (Van Nuland & Khandelwal, 2006). While codes are the application of ethical considerations to issues, characterizing specific professional work and guiding action around these matters, they are also instruments of regulation that position teachers in sanctioned roles (Forster, 2012). Some authorities have reenvisaged and reinstituted codes of ethics in the light of pressure drawn from political restructuring and government attempts to shape new models of teaching professionals (Shortt et al., 2012). VET institutions have endeavoured to develop such a framework by combining concepts from neo-institutionalism and systems theory.
Depending on the form of authority at work, these changes may be driven by professional organizations or educational bureaucracy through top-down or bottom-up consultative processes.

Scholarly research (Laufer 2003; Pattberg & Stripple, 2008) has often discussed the importance of teachers’ personal values as desirable modes of behaviour in the study of the ideal teacher, frequently referring to their role in influencing students’ and fellow colleagues’ behaviour and attitudes toward performing above and beyond the call of duty. Teachers may identify their personal values to inform the development of such a code of ethics (Kitchener, 2000; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

Ethicists have suggested that teachers follow a hierarchical sequence of ethical reasoning that builds upon their personal values (Kitchener, 1984; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). In a situation with conflicting ethical demands, an individual is most likely to work according to his or her moral behaviour pattern as the most basic ethical mandates that he or she may have obtained. There are also increasingly evident intimations of a shift in the current cultural context that has favoured an instrumental epistemology, to one that favours one more situational in nature (Bagnall & Hodge, in press). Teachers might be expected to be valued for their situational expertise – their evidenced capacity to respond sensitively, appropriately, and capably to challenging situations in their field of expertise and their work as educators. Hence, there is a common assumption that is made against any attempt to impart ethical training in college: that most people have already acquired irreversible ethical training by the time they reach college (Burant, Chubbuck, & Whipp, 2007). Teacher candidates are argued to bring with them existing moral orientations or sensibilities that fuse reason and emotion and are apparent in the way in which the teacher thinks and acts (Hansen, 2001). These moral sensibilities, drawn from and continuously shaped by a wide range of sources – from faith to family, personal relationships to pedagogy, schooling to employment, politics to passions – provide student teachers with substantial moral underpinnings and guides for their conduct.

However, Kohlberg and Candee (1984) have argued that moral development does not remain static as one matures, but rather that adults may develop new ethical qualities over time. Teachers’ moral qualities and commitments (e.g., compassion, a sense of justice, fairness, and integrity) can be nurtured in an environment that supports their emotional and moral growth. Pajares (1992) has suggested that teachers take the time to listen to their inner voices – to discover the teacher within – so that they can reclaim their identity and integrity. Knowledge of oneself as a professional educator (knowledge, beliefs, ideas, values, insights, and expectations)
impacts on teaching behaviours for the success of all learners (Ayers, 1990; Darling-Hammond & Bransford; 2005; Jung & Rhodes, 2008).

Although many decisions are made instantaneously in the course of practice, there are inherent reflections that lead the teacher to particular actions (Brookfield, 1995; Dewey, 1993). Those reflections are essential for understanding how and why a teacher acts in the classroom. Unpacking and examining those reflections becomes necessary for the teacher who wishes to develop as an effective practitioner continually, and for the novice teacher who is learning the complexities of the practice. However, research on teacher reflection has consistently concluded that reflection, although seemingly present in the act of teaching, is not easily detected and is challenging to document (Borko, Whitcomb, & Byrnes, 2008; Borko, Bellamy, & Sanders, 1992). These reflections remain with the individual teacher, unseen to an observer and rarely shared with others. The moments, as well as the reflections, are lost in the ongoing activities of classroom life (Bamberger, 1991). As a result, few researchers have been able to identify how reflection looks during actual teaching episodes. Beyond suggesting that an anomaly in practice might spur the reflective process (Copeland, Birmingham, De La Cruz, & Lewin, 1993; Schon, 1983), effectively unpacking and describing these reflections during the act of teaching continues to be a challenging task. It follows, then, that in order to recognize and document the activity of ethical dilemmas or conflicts faced by teachers and their decision-making from the perspective of teachers, it is necessary to gather descriptive accounts of how teachers come to know their knowledge of dilemmas, how they use that knowledge or theoretical frameworks within the context where they teach, and how they make sense of and reconfigure their decision-making practices.

**Argument for the Topic**

The complex nature of teaching in VET generates numerous situations in which challenges and dilemmas might arise. VET teachers are responsible for providing quality education with excellent outcomes to support students’ success and satisfaction. Therefore, it is particularly relevant to examine VET teachers’ experience of their teaching to ensure that students gain value in their education regarding the time, effort, and money they spend. Bennett and Rolheiser (2006) claim that a quality education and reputation for quality are not possible when the teacher is not considered as integral to the education delivery standard. After all, the teacher also has a significant amount at stake in educational quality, having invested a considerable amount of time, money, and personal commitment (in terms of professional development and reflection).
Correction 4:

Graham (1998) points out that we generally do not think about ethics until we encounter our own ethical crisis. VET teachers discuss nothing about situations that have never arisen for them (Nakar, 2013). Then they experience a challenge that leads them to recognize an ethical dimension in making choices and resolving conflicts. This study conceptualizes teachers’ dilemmas and illustrates not only how they arise, but also how they are played out, in ways that genuinely shape teachers’ understanding of how, why, and what they are doing in their teaching within vocational education. Articulation of these dilemmas is a powerful way of conceptualizing teaching and learning about teaching in ways that might genuinely challenge the VET mainstream, and therefore offer alternatives to the “showing, telling and guided practice” that Meyers (2002) so rightly bemoans as the Achilles heel of teachers’ practices. Rockler’s (2004) pointed out that given the complex times in which educational professionals now live and work, it is imperative to investigate and research the issue. This exploratory study aimed to investigate the ethical dilemmas faced by VET teachers in decision-making. Therefore, it responded to the following research question:

How do VET teachers address ethical dilemmas encountered in their work as teachers?

While this study focuses on the ethical impact of the changing cultural context of VET teaching, these challenges and dilemmas are seen as a basis for positive change and as a stimulus to better teaching practices. The findings from the research could assist policymakers and those who work with students to address more effectively the learning needs of students.

**Outline of the Thesis**

The remainder of this document is a presentation of the study undertaken to address the research topic outlined above.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, provides a review of relevant literature and identifies the research gap that this study addresses. It explores VET in relation to its history, the nature of VET in Australia, the VET teaching workforce, and qualifications required to teach in VET in Australia. The chapter then considers the impact of globalization on VET and trainers of VET in the global context. Understanding the ethical impact of the dilemmas faced by VET teachers and their decision-making process as the study focus, it was important to explore links within teaching, ethics in teaching, and ethical dilemmas and decision-making models covered in the
literature. The research topic and questions that emerged are detailed in the conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 describes the methods that this study adopted to address the identified gaps. It outlines the methodology used for the project, provides a rationale for the choices made in terms of analytical approach, and includes an account of factors that influenced the conduct of the study.

Chapters 4-7 describe the findings from the study. They consider dilemmas of four main types which the teachers experienced. Each chapter describes the nature of each dilemma and explains how each dilemma resulted out of conflict generated from tensions between what one intrinsically understands that one should do in a particular situation and what one feels impelled to do by extrinsic imperatives or pressures. Because the changed circumstances are fundamental to the existential experience of the dilemmas, the dilemmas were best identified – in their naming and their description – with those circumstances, as is done in the following three chapters.

Chapter 8 identifies the impacts of the dilemmas on VET teachers and their responses to those dilemmas. There are two main sections to this chapter: the first draws on the data to present the impact of dilemmas on the participants, and the second draws on the findings to identify the participants’ response to those dilemmas.

Chapter 9 draws out participants’ interpretation of influences or drivers causing dilemmas. In participants’ experience, these dilemmas drew from a unique set of drivers and circumstances as they tend to externalize the causes of their dilemmas, rather than seeing them as an integral part of living and working in a constantly changing world.

Chapter 10 highlights and discusses the similarities and differences between this research and previous research and offers key messages.

The final chapter, Chapter 11, identifies outcomes and conclusions, implications, and recommendations for moving forward. It presents recommendations which are crucial to supporting VET teachers in dealing with these dilemmas. It also discusses how the identified results may be used to provide a framework for changes to alleviate teacher dilemmas in VET.

**Summary**

Chapter one provided an overview of the contemporary cultural context of VET and its impact on the sector. Having trainers of VET as the potential study focus this chapter made a case for the research topic to explore links within changes in VET, impact of such changes on
VET teachers, dilemmas requiring decision-making by VET teachers. The chapter first presented an overview of the nature and impact of the contemporary cultural context in which educational practice is situated, before turning to the particular VET. Important features of ethics in that contemporary cultural context were then outlined, before the material in those sections was used to outline the argument for the research topic. The chapter ended by providing an outline of how the study is presented.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The review of literature presented here sought to illuminate different aspects of the research topic through (a) providing a descriptive context of the changing cultural context of vocational education teaching in Australia, (b) providing an account of the ethical dimensions of vocational education teaching, and (c) reviewing research and other scholarly writing that examines the ethical impact of the changing cultural context of the work of teachers, dilemmas faced and suggested decision-making models.

The review is presented in three sections corresponding to those purposes. It is followed by a section in which the implications are teased out of the review for the conduct of the research project.

The Changing Cultural Context of Australian Vocational Education and Teaching

Introduction

This study is set in the context of VET in Australia. It reviews policy directions pursued within the past three decades relating to VET. The study focuses on the impacts of policy changes on educators within the system in Australia.

Over the past two decades, a new global policy paradigm may be seen as emerging across the member nations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), with their governments having to work within budgets while designing policies to make VET more effective and responsive to the growing demand for it (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006). Entrepreneurial cultures now permeate vocational institutions. Rizvi (2010) noted that globalization had reconfigured the state and its authority in developing public policies such that national and local policies are now linked to globalized educational policy discourses, pressures from international organizations, and global policy networks and the effects of globalization, more generally. Bagnall (1998) pointed out that privatization of moral responsibility is a feature of such dynamics, meaning that the unfolding dynamics of globalization have impacted on the economic and political decision-making processes. A question that arises is that of how policy agendas and processes have been able to influence ethical decisions taken with reference to the VET.

Bagnall (1998) maintained that globalization might be seen as comprising of a raft of interrelated changes taking place in contemporary cultures. Those changes both impact and
express themselves in VET globally. The ways and the extent to which they are so may be articulated and evaluated from various perspectives.

In this section of the literature review, defining the move from professionalization to marketization in VET and examining the changes evidenced in the VET sector in response to that context use an ethical perspective of decision-making. The section then introduces the ethical impact of these changes in that context and sheds light on how these have influenced teachers' dilemmas about decision-making.

**VET in Australia**

VET occupies an increasingly central place in social and economic policy worldwide. It is important to individuals, employers, and governments of every political persuasion, in societies both rich and poor (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, (NCVER), 2010). This centrality is not surprising; education per se is widely seen as a necessary precondition for economic growth within the knowledge-driven economies of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2013; Marginson, 1997). To better understand the current VET sector, it is helpful to briefly review the changing nature of VET and some of the key changes that have influenced it over time in Australia. The following overview concentrates on some of the key developments since the 1960s, particularly changes directly related to VET and VET teachers in Australia.

“Vocational education and training” is the preferred term used by the World Bank and the European Union but is only one of several terms in common use. In countries such as South Africa and the United Kingdom, the phrase “further education and training” predominates, while “technical and vocational education and training” is used in the UN and UNESCO. Elsewhere, terms such as “technical education and training” or other combinations of the above terms are common. “Technical and further education,” or TAFE, is an Australian variant on vocational education and training that describes publicly funded providers of VET (Dawkins, 2013).

VET providers offer a broad range of subjects and programs including traditional trades, advanced technical training, paraprofessional and professional studies as well as basic employment and educational preparation (Dawkins, 2013). Private providers of VET can include private training organizations, business colleges, industry associations, adult and community organizations, and employers. Publicly funded VET can also be provided by higher education institutions, secondary schools and colleges, agricultural and technical colleges, and adult and community organizations (NCVER, 2007). In Australia, vocational education has become less of
an organized system of educational provision and more of an eclectic mixture of public and private RTOs (Karmel, Mlotkowski, & Awodeyi, 2009). Karmel (2011) argued that mixed-sector institutions are a conundrum in the sector as they straddle the two different but merging sectors. There are almost 5,000 RTOs with around 3,700 being private training providers of VET in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2012). For the purpose of this study, the terms RTO and provider are used interchangeably to describe TAFEs and private RTOs.

Formal VET study provides skills and nationally recognized qualifications for employment (Dawkins, 2013). Approximately 1.8 million people were reported as participating in VET programs within the public sector of VET at 16,741 locations across Australia in 2010 (NCVER, 2010). Anecdotal evidence indicates that there were approximately 2.2 million people participating in private RTOs in 2010 (ABS, 2012). Recurrent expenditure on VET by Australian, state, and territory governments totaled $4.9 billion in 2010, an increase of 4.3% (in real terms) from 2009 (Dawkins, 2013). In addition to the onshore campuses of Australian RTOs, a large number of RTOs have an offshore campus. Australian Education International (AEI) data show that in 2010, there were 58,516 students enrolled in offshore campuses of Australian public VET institutions, which is more than double the onshore international enrolments in public VET RTOs. The situation in the private VET sector is quite different. Onshore private VET sector enrolments (147, 608 in 2011) represent more than 80% of all onshore international VET student enrolments. However, Australian private VET institutions have relatively few offshore students, with only 6,771 reported in 2011 (from a survey of ACPET members) (ACPET, 2012; Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

Australia’s VET sector is based on a partnership between governments and industry. Australian governments (federal and state) provide funding, develop policies, and contribute to regulation and quality assurance of the sector. Industry and employer groups contribute to training policies and priorities, and the development of qualifications that deliver skills to the workforce. Karmel (2004) argued that VET's defining feature is not its occupation-specific training or its qualifications levels, but its different funding and regulatory arrangements, and teaching and learning styles. To a large extent, governance and funding arrangements for TAFEs reflect the objectives and priorities of their respective state and territory government. Australia's private RTO governance appears to enable them to act in response to market demand quickly while a public provider may have to get authority from a governing council and ministerial delegation or authorities (Hillier, 2012; Karmel, 2011).
VET occupies a specific place in Australian international education as it depends heavily on the enrolments of international students. International students are a significant factor in Australian tertiary education, particularly in VET, where their enrolments are rapidly growing (35.6% growth annually as compared to 12.4% in higher education) (Australian Trade Commission, 2010). In fact, the growth rate in international enrolments in VET between 2002 and 2008 has increased by 226% (Skills Australia, 2009). On 30 June 2012, there were 307,050 international student visa holders in Australia with one-quarter of these from China and around 12% from India. A large percentage of these student visas were granted for VET programs between Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level Certificate IV and Advanced Diploma level qualifications. This was a 20% increase from previous years (Department of Immigration Australia, 2012). The Queensland Vocational Education and Training Export Office sector has more than 20,000 international students and is one of the most successful in Australia, growing 67% in 2009 (Dennehy, 2009).

Students wishing to study vocational courses in Australia need to demonstrate proficiency in English as prescribed by the entry criteria for the chosen course, but at least Upper Intermediate English level. Some RTOs also offer English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, designed specially to prepare students for further study. Many English colleges also offer preparation for one or more of the international English proficiency exams such as IELTS (International English Language Testing System), FCE (First Certificate in English), CAE (Certificate in Advanced English), and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). IELTS is by far the most widely recognized English test in Australia, and some education providers will only accept an IELTS test score of 5 or 5.5 (Skills Australia, 2009).

Like other major countries that welcome international students, Australia allows student visa holders to do limited part-time work. While the purpose of a student visa is to undertake study in Australia, student visa holders are permitted to work 20 hours per week while their course is in session, and can work unlimited hours during scheduled course breaks. This concession provides students with an opportunity to interact with the local community, improve their language skills, and develop professional expertise. The work rights provided to international students in Australia are comparable to, or more generous than, work rights provided to international students in other major countries providing international education. The United Kingdom, for example, permits only 10 hours’ employment per week for students below degree level (Council of Australian Governments, (COAG), 2010).
In 2001, the Howard government allowed international students graduating from Australian colleges and universities to apply for permanent migration onshore, that is, without first returning to their home country (Neerup, Nieuwenhuysen, & Higley, 2011). This was done partly to address skills shortages and partly to give Australian colleges and universities an edge over their rivals in the competitive international education market. Aspiring migrants with qualifications and experience in the occupations on the skilled or independent migrant selection system -- the Skills on Demand List (SOL) developed by Skills Australia (replacing the Migration Occupations in Demand List [MODL]) -- would score extra points in the migration points test, and this could swing the balance their way in determining whether or not they qualified for permanent residency (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC], 2010).

However, as economic conditions vary, so do the skills and qualifications Australia seeks in skilled migrants. Migration policy always changes to meet Australia's contemporary needs best. In 2010, the Commonwealth Government announced changes to the General Skilled Migration program to ensure it operates as a demand-driven, rather than supply-driven, system that delivers the skills most needed in the economy into the future. Although not a part of VET policy, Australian immigration policy is critical for international students as it affects their post-study outcomes. Access to permanent residency in Australia after completion can be a key motivation for choosing to study in Australia and for choosing a particular course.

Australia’s VET system is based on teaching industry standards and learning outcomes, via competency-based training. VET qualifications are based on a set of competency standards, rather than being determined by a set amount of time to undertake a course of study (NCVER, 2010). Thus, students can study for differing amounts of time to complete any given qualification. A training package sets out the competencies but does not prescribe how the training should be delivered, or the time taken to deliver it (Mitchell, Clayton, Hedberg, & Paine, 2003). It is the responsibility of the RTOs to develop teaching strategies and assessment methods to meet the needs, abilities, and circumstances of the students and industry. Training packages are reviewed every 3 years to ensure they remain current. This review process involves the developer of the training package (usually the relevant industry advisory body), industry personnel, training providers, and other relevant stakeholders (NCVER, 2010).

Competency-based assessment focuses on gathering sufficient, authentic, and valid evidence to prove competence and moves away from an emphasis on specific assessment events (Clayton, Fisher, & Hughes, 2005; Gillis & Bateman 1999). A common requirement is that assessment should be carried out in the workplace or, as a poor second, a simulated workplace.
This creates many difficulties and educational dilemmas (Smith & Keating, 2003). Competency-based training has had many opponents who argue that it is a debased form of training that does not develop underpinning knowledge (Wheelahan & Carter, 2001). Recognition of prior learning is also awarded to students who may have gained prior skills through informal or formal training, experience in the workplace, voluntary work, or social or domestic activities (Skills Australia, 2009). Whole or part qualifications can be awarded to students on the basis of these skills without further study.

While the responsibility for the quality of VET primarily rests with RTOs, a key mechanism to maintain quality is restricting the power for issuing AQF qualifications to RTOs that have made a commitment to meet an agreed set of standards. These standards are then enforced by independent regulators. This broad approach has been in place since 1992 (National Framework for Recognition of Training) and forms the basis of the current regulatory arrangements which have been developed iteratively, reflecting incremental regulatory changes and retaining many enduring features. The current provider standards principally seek to maintain the integrity of qualifications by ensuring that qualifications issued by RTOs are consistent with the requirements outlined in training packages, accredited courses, and the AQF. They also aim to provide a level of consumer protection to learners who have made a contribution to the cost of their study. The current arrangements were adopted following the COAG decision in 2009 to reform the sector and establish a national regulator, as part of the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development. This led to the establishment of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) which commenced in 2011.

As the national regulator of the VET sector, ASQA works for students, employers, and governments to have confidence in the quality of education and training provided by RTOs registered on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). ASQA identifies, analyses, and evaluates key risks to assure quality in accordance with the VET Quality Framework, the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007 (the National Code), and the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS Act). ASQA is empowered by the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act (NVETR) 2011 and the ESOS Act 2000 to use a range of regulatory tools including conducting audits to gather data about the operations of applicant organizations and RTOs.
**VET Teaching Workforce**

The Australian VET workforce comprises a mix of teachers and assessors, other vocational education and training professionals, and general staff across the public, private, and non-profit sectors (International Education Taskforce, 2010; Productivity Commission, 2011). Robust estimates of the exact size, demographics, and profile of the VET workforce are not available; however, it is estimated that there are about 73,000 TAFE Institute employees and 150,000 employees involved in VET delivery at private RTOs (Productivity Commission, 2011). The Productivity Commission estimated then that approximately 65% of trainers or teachers and assessors in TAFE were employed on a casual or sessional basis, with the majority working part-time hours. The figure did, however, vary significantly across jurisdictions, which can partly be explained by differences in industrial agreements (Productivity Commission, 2011).

**Key Changes to VET Teacher-Training Requirements in Australia**

In the 1960s and 1970s, the traditional manufacturing, mining, and agricultural industries declined in economic significance and new industries, like communications and finance, emerged. More women entered or re-entered education and the workforce. The 1974 Kangan Report on Needs in Technical and Further Education (Guthrie, 2010a) defined the roles and the mission of the TAFE system. The first national review of training for TAFE trainers was in 1978, just 4 years after the Kangan report was published, when the Tertiary Education Commission funded the Fleming report on the formal preparation of TAFE teachers in Australia (Fleming, 1994). The report led to a series of recommendations, including that all beginning VET trainers should undertake a formal preparation program to give them the skills and knowledge required to be effective practicing teachers (Guthrie, 2010a).

Into the 1980s, the services industries continued to expand at the expense of the mining, manufacturing, and construction industries, TAFE's traditional territory. Networks of private training providers, largely providing training to service industries, also emerged. Many reports pointed to the need for the vocational training system to be driven by the needs of the individual and industry so the economy as a whole could prosper. A number of reviews were conducted in the mid-1980s of initial trainer training; for example, Dempsey (2013) mentioned those of Butterworth and Gonczi (1984) and Oliver and Tipper (1989) in New South Wales. In 1993, the Western Australian Department of Vocational Education and Training (DEVET) examined future options for the education of its teaching workforce. In terms of how VET trainer training...
should occur, a model was proposed that incorporated initial periods of induction and the development of basic teaching skills in a short course of up to 20 days duration before teaching. This initial training was followed by a period of concurrent formal training and teaching, or blocks alternating between teacher preparation and teaching. Opinion on the length of time required for full initial training was divided almost equally between 1-year full-time equivalent and 2 years part-time equivalent for VET teacher preparation programs (Guthrie, 2010b).

In the 1990s, the Deveson (1990), Finn (1991), and Carmichael (1992) reports looked at expanding training systems, increasing young people's participation in training, and creating a consolidated national system. The consensus developed across Australia that substantial reform and a unified national effort were required. All states, territories, and the Australian Government agreed to the establishment of an Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and a cooperative federal system of VET with strategic input by industry. Hence, units of competency were developed for workplace training and assessing (Smith, Pickersgill, Smith, & Rushbrook, 2005). The original workplace trainer units divided workplace trainers into two categories: Category 1 trainers who occasionally undertook training tasks as part of their work and Category 2 trainers who had training as their main activity. The units for Category 2 trainers were, therefore, supposed to be more rigorous and detailed than those for Category 1.

In 1992 and 1993 a two-phase project was commissioned by the Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee’s (VEETAC) Working Party on TAFE staffing issues (Dempsey, 2013). Amongst other things, it addressed trainers’ training. In 1994, the Fitzgerald Report into the implementation of the national system led to some of the current elements of today's VET system, including concepts of best practice and user choice, states and territories taking responsibility for accreditation and standards endorsement, and an industry training advisory structure. The 1990s also saw the introduction of Australian Apprenticeships, the establishment of the National Training Framework, the introduction of VET in schools, and the development of Training Packages. In the early 1990s, standards for workplace trainers and assessors were developed, and an award implemented to complement formal training available for VET teachers. This coincided with the increased focus on the workplace as a place of significant and more formalized learning. The Workplace Trainer Category 2 award was nationally endorsed in 1994 (Robertson, 2008) and was current until 1999. In 1998, the Training Package replaced the Workplace Trainer Category 2 competencies for Assessment and Workplace Training (BSZ40198, Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace). This Certificate
IV in Assessment and Workplace level qualification was adopted as the minimum requirement for VET teachers (Smith & Keating, 2003).

Simons and Smith (2008) suggested that the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training showed a lack of attention to the unique demands of learning within particular industries and to ways of embracing the diversity of learners in VET. In response to this widespread criticism, this qualification was replaced by the Training and Assessment Training Package, which was endorsed in 2004, with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104) then becoming the minimum qualification for VET trainers to meet the VET regulatory requirements for RTO registration (Clayton, 2009; Dempsey, 2013).

In 2000 and beyond, the national VET system aimed to continually respond to industry, individual, and community needs, all within a nationally consistent system. In 2005, ANTA’s functions were transferred to the Australian Government's Department of Education, Science, and Training (DEST) (DEST, 2006). During 2009 and 2010 there was a realignment of the former ministerial council for VET to the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment that signaled a shift to a new agenda in the context of the broader tertiary education sector for Australia (National Quality Council, 2009). The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104) became the de facto minimum teaching qualification for VET trainers because it or equivalent qualifications were mandated in the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). Concerns raised about the earlier Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training persisted with the next version (TAA40104), as did concerns over whether either of these qualifications had a sufficiently rigorous underpinning of good teaching and learning theory and practice (Guthrie, 2010a; Robertson, 2009). These shortcomings were raised again in 2010 in the national strategic industry audit of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment that found the quality of training and assessment was poor and often not meeting AQTF standards (Guthrie & Clayton, 2010). The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment TAE40110 replaced the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment TAA40104 qualification as the benchmark teaching qualification. There was minimal content change to the Certificate IV qualification.

A study by Billett and Hayes (1999) and one by Lowrie, Smith, and Hill (1999) state that those holding only the TAE qualification in Training and Assessment had a different approach from those holding a degree-level qualification and who understand competency-based training (CBT) (Hodge, 2011; Robertson, 2008). Schofield, McDonald, and Leary (2004a, 2004b) stated that VET trainers are confused about how to work with CBT packages, even though the packages
are the basic building blocks of the national system. They highlighted the need for more skills for trainers in the design of VET teaching strategies.

Nakar (2013) noted that there is no uniformity in their base-level qualification, particularly in comparison to qualifications required to teach in schools or universities. In practice, VET teachers’ occupational or disciplinary qualifications range from certificates to research doctorates, and while they are required to have a TAE, a growing number have teaching or education qualifications ranging from Bachelor to Master degrees (Guthrie, 2010a). Often, people become VET teachers as a career progression from their industry background; for example, a tradesperson becomes a lecturer in trade skills. This means that they have a very good grounding in their vocational skills, knowledge, and experience, but they have very little knowledge or experience in the VET system, its language, or its expectations and requirements (Nakar, 2013). Furthermore, to encourage people to enter the VET profession, alternative, fast-track routes for certifying teachers, including online programs and summer programs, have been employed by many RTOs (Aultma, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009). These alternative programs often cater to midcareer changers, college graduates who decide after graduation that they want to teach, and paraprofessionals. The midcareer changers often have very little, if any, academic training in the practice of pedagogy (Scanell & Scanell, 1995).

Moreover, in implementation, TAE became known for the variable quality of its delivery and assessment practices (Robertson 2008; Simons & Smith, 2008). Although industry-driven implementation guides identified nominal hours for the TAE qualification between 280 and 350 hours, it was, in fact, being delivered in between two and 15 days. The average was 10 days (Nakar, 2013). However, numerous RTOs provide prospective teachers with the opportunity to complete TAE in a variety of modes and in a range of time frames (Nakar, 2013; Stanislaw, 2015). For example, as per the study undertaken by Nakar (2013), some RTOs complete the TAE in five days. Other RTOs offer study weekends over a 14-week period whereas some provided the qualification online, face-to-face, and by distance and blended learning modes. An Internet search sample of 12 RTOs revealed the typical delivery timeframe to be between five to 10 days with a number of pathways offered to achieve the qualification (Stanislaw, 2015). The National Quality Council (NQC), National Strategic Industry Audit reported a low level of confidence in this award (Stanislaw, 2015).
Professional Development of VET Teachers

What happens, however, after VET teacher certification concerning professional development is equally important to the quality of the education students receive in the classroom. When teachers first start teaching, employing institutions often provide special programs to help them acclimatize to the classroom and the burden of ramping-up their curriculum (Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005; Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007; Flores & Day, 2006). These induction programs are considered an important part of helping teachers, considering that the first year is often the most challenging year that a teacher will ever experience (Hellwig, 2006). Less than half the teachers hired during the last 20 years participated in formal induction programs during their first year (Darling-Hammond, 1999; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). The deleterious effects of just one ineffective teacher may jeopardize the entire educational success of a young person, regardless of how many effective teachers he or she might subsequently have (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Cornford (1999) argued that the quality of VET teachers was neglected and diluted by increasing numbers of inadequately trained part-time and casual staff, stating that the increasing skills required by Australia could only be produced by highly skilled and qualified vocational educators.

Smith and Keating (2003) attributed this change to budgetary constraints and the increased autonomy of TAFE institutes so that decisions about teacher training became decentralized. Since 2010, there appears to have been a strong interest taken in the VET workforce in general, and in teacher training more specifically, with the debate over the quality and nature of VET teacher training a hot issue in 2010. Those bodies interested include Skills Australia (2009), the Productivity Commission (2011), the Australian College of Educators (Wheelahan, 2010; Wheelahan & Curtin, 2010; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011), the National Quality Council (Mitchell & Ward, 2010) and the Australian Education Union (Forward, 2010). The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) also appeared to have recognized the importance of the topic through its own and commissioned work (Clayton, 2009; Clayton, Meyers, Bateman, & Bluer, 2010; Guthrie, 2010a, 2010b; Guthrie, McNaughton, & Gamlin, 2011; Walker, 2010). The interest was tied to concerns over professionalism, the range and quality of available awards, and issues over what is offered to VET staff to support them professionally at the beginning of and throughout their careers (Guthrie, 2010a; Hillier, 2012).

Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman, and Roy (2006) note that many VET teachers still need skills in implementing training packages, as well as being able to support workplace learning and
take advantage of new learning technologies. The demand-driven and outcomes-oriented VET system was argued to require a new professional who was better able to meet the expectations of industry clients and individual learners. Lifelong learning has become an important strategy for meeting the challenges faced by contemporary societies and is most relevant to the VET sector (Bagnall, 1999; Cornford, Athanasou, & Pithers, 1996). A closely related challenge for policymakers and VET providers has been to improve the quality of training to meet changing and rising demands for skilled and technical workers (Guthrie 2010; Karmel, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2006; Wheelahan, 2011).

The challenges facing VET are particularly complex. The blurring of the sectoral divide between higher education, school, and VET means that VET teachers are now required to teach VET in schools at the one end, and in higher education programs at the other (Moodie, Wheelahan, Billett, & Kelly, 2009). VET teachers also teach in publically funded TAFE RTOs, private RTOs, and enterprise RTOs that may be large or small. They may teach on or off campus or both, in many different types of workplaces, in prisons, and in a range of community settings, such as neighborhood houses and refugee support centres (Guthrie, Perkins, & Mitchell, 2005).

More recent research (last two decades) suggests that the spectrum of teachers' work in VET continues to increase (Chappell, Hawke, Rhodes, & Solomon, 2003) and there appears to be a continued need for VET teachers to accommodate to change (Productivity Commission, 2013). For example, a project, Enhancing the Capability of VET Professionals Project, described a VET workforce expected to have a broader range of content and skills; it also noted that the nature of learning has changed to a focus on work-based, informal learning in groups and teams (Dickie, Eccles, Fitzgerald, & McDonald, 2004). The following range of skill and capability requirements were identified for the VET workforce: the continuous upgrade of skills and knowledge, self-management of careers and development, accommodation of identity shifts, the development of pedagogical expertise, learner focus, and industry currency knowledge and skills (Dickie et al., 2004).

Professional development provision for VET teachers undoubtedly plays an integral role in facilitating this national change agenda, but the design, implementation, and evaluation of such professional development are debatable. In the Australian VET sector, professional development activities are predominantly designed to meet priority skill needs, often linked to implementing aspects of the national training system and responding to system compliance issues (Schofield & McDonald, 2004).
There is a substantial body of research on educational change and its relationship to teachers’ professional development (Fullan, 2001; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Hall & Loucks, 1979; Hord, Rutherford, Huling, & Hall, 2004; Huberman, 1983; Huberman & Miles, 1984; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Joyce & Weil, 1996). The role of professional development as a mechanism for supporting the implementation of change is widely accepted, and a summary of research reports into professional development by the Australian National Training Authority (2004a, 2004b) identified it as a key enabler of supporting the change process in the VET sector. Although theories of change often underpin the design and implementation of models of professional development, like that of the Instructional Intelligence program, which is aimed at integrating content knowledge, assessment, instructional repertoires, and personal/professional change, as well as systemic change, often too little attention is paid to the research and to what constitutes effective professional development (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2006; Fullan, 2001).

**Globalization and Neo-liberalization: Shaping Australian VET Policy**

Globalization is a notion with multiple and often competing meanings and emphases (Bagnall, 2002). Despite its ambiguity, it is important to recognize that the idea of globalization may be utilized to legitimate particular policy initiatives as the only possible responses to apparently ubiquitous and implacable challenges to governments and business (Cerny, 1997). Cerny (1997) has pointed out that, whatever the specifics of globalization may be, one of its most important qualities in terms of public policy is as a powerful discourse that shapes domestic and international debates, a process which may change the state’s role to one of an enforcer of decisions and/or outcomes emerging from world markets (p. 258). From the neo-liberal turn in the global political economy since the 1970s, it is clear that governments in most countries, particularly the economically advanced ones of North America, Europe, Australia, and Japan, have utilized policies and economic planning to advance what Harvey (2007) has called the “naturalization” of neo-liberalism. This naturalization of neo-liberalism involves four key points, namely privatization, financialization, management and manipulation of crises, and state redistribution. Jones and Coleman (2005) stated that no education system globally could survive and stay unaffected by globalization. Indeed, policymaking in education is much affected by the phenomenon of globalization.

Within the wider context of globalization, VET has come to be regarded now as an international commodity (Green, 2002) playing a remarkable mission in the global economy with investment in people, skills, and knowledge (Mundy, 2005). VET education policy is no longer solely a national affair, but a global one in which nation states are not any more closed to
themselves. Indeed, VET education policy is internationalized due to the dominance of the global economy over national politics (Dakopoulou, 2009; Marginson, 1999).

As the world becomes more interconnected and global markets for skills and innovation continue to develop, Australian policymakers have deemed it crucial for the nation to have enough highly skilled people able to adapt to the uncertainties of a rapidly changing future (Bradley, 2008, 2010). The response has been major reforms in the VET sector. VET in Australia has exhibited educational and work behaviours in the 1990s that can be identified with the globalization process. Educational behaviours include the formal curriculum and instructional practices. VET teachers’ work includes both instruction and administration. Specifically, the argument indicates that work tends to be valued for and carried out with economic ends: to realize productivity and efficiency. These behaviours are referred to as “economizing.”

Australian VET advocated various versions of neo-liberalism to develop a “market-state” (Bobbitt, 2002; Botsman & Latham, 2001). Australian VET embraced market reform and skill formation as the means to address problems of international competitiveness (New South Wales [NSW] Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board, 2001) and developed an industry-led VET system and competitive training market with Australian VET policy priorities and implementation strategies to be both a product and tool of neo-liberal ideology, which was then used to define national objectives and control governance, funding, and accountability arrangements (Considine, Marginson, & Sheehan, 2001; Noonan, Burke, & White, 2004).

In 2012, the Commonwealth and all states and territories agreed upon a new market-driven funding model for vocational education, intended to promote opportunities for for-profit RTOs (COAG, 2012; Department of Industry, 2014). The centrepiece of this reform was a national training entitlement or a minimum guarantee that all working-age individuals could access subsidized training up to Certificate III level at a vocational education provider of their choice, provided they satisfied various eligibility criteria that vary among the states and territories. This was the primary mechanism for opening access to government funding for private providers. The Commonwealth agreed to contribute funding (up to $1.14 billion) to states and territories undertaking these structural reforms. Also, the Commonwealth agreed to relax the restrictions on VET providers accessing the income-contingent loan scheme VET FEE-HELP (VFH) (Department of Industry, 2012). It was introduced in 2008, when the Australian Government extended the scope of its higher education loan program (FEE-HELP) of income-contingent student loans – formerly the higher education contribution scheme (HECS) – to the VET sector to reduce financial barriers for Australian citizens to enrol in full-time or part-time
courses undertaken at approved VFH providers (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2014). Students may access the income-contingent VFH scheme for studies at diploma and higher levels, as well as Certificate IV studies in the priority areas of aged and disability care, youth work, accounting, and engineering. For 2014, the lifetime FEE-HELP borrowing limit is $96,000 (regardless of how state-based course fees are regulated). For the period 2014-15, compulsory repayment of the loan commences when the individual reaches the taxable income threshold of $53,345. The relaxed VFH scheme has been seen as an important part of the reform agenda (Australian Council for Private Education and Training [ACPET], 2016).

This demand-driven funding model has been the primary means of opening up contestable funding to for-profit training providers, and forcing TAFEs to compete in a competitive market (Yu & Oliver, 2015). Notwithstanding that, they have increasing access to government VET funding, with more than $1.4 billion of government funding going to private VET providers in 2013 (Forward & Scroggie, 2015). This injection of government funding may be seen as contributing to the significant recent growth of the private sector in VET, with the number of VFH-approved providers rising from 197 at the end of 2013 to 254 by the end of 2014 (ASQA, 2015a). Aggregate student indebtedness increased in parallel, with a total of $3.1 billion in VFH loans taken up by VET students to that point. Profit margins of for-profit VET providers have been reported to be in the range of 30 to 50% – well in excess of those in comparable industries (Australian Education Union [AEU], 2015). Moreover, AEU (2015) claimed that this transfer of government funding into the private sector has occurred at the expense of the public provider, against a backdrop of growing uncertainty around the capacity of the relatively immature regulatory system to control the activities of rogue providers in the sector.

In 2012, the requirement that RTOs have a credit transfer arrangement with a higher education provider was removed, opening the scheme up to for-profit providers with low-quality training (Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education [DIISRTE], 2012). Without the implicit quality control of credit transfer arrangements, however, students have been lured by the “zero upfront fees” and additional incentives such as free iPads, and misuse of the VFH scheme by employed educational agents has been conceded by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (Dodd, 2014). For this research, the study refers to an agent as someone who is contracted by an institution abroad to refer students from a local market, and who is compensated by that institution on a commission, per-head, or retainer basis.
In October 2014, the Australian Government released new standards for RTOs, to be effective from January 2015 (and from April 2015 for existing providers). The new standards aim to better focus on quality training and assessment outcomes, improve the responsiveness of RTOs to industry need, and streamline the regulatory framework, enabling regulators to adopt a risk-based approach to regulating providers.

Thus, the current VET environment is significantly influenced by two key drivers: policy change at Commonwealth and state government levels mentioned above, and industry demand for training to meet the challenges of the varying enrolments of international students (Ellis-Gulli & Carter, 2011). Changes in international student enrolment and economies of scale have led to more corporate management practices. The emphasis on new vocationalism (NV) has changed the educational landscape, creating new organizational norms, values, and modes of conduct (Chappell, 2001; Seddon, 2008). Neo-liberal, corporate, top-down decision-making by corporate executive elites became the operating framework, and social democratic forms, consensus, and involvement of TAFE lecturers are now minimal. The emphasis is on corporate visions, mission statements, key performance indicators, measurable goals, and evaluation of outcomes. Values of competitiveness and realism have tended to dominate the value of quality learning and teaching experiences. Ehrich, Kimber, Cranston, and Starr (2011, p. 51) suggested,

The commodification of higher education has resulted in a user pays system where students often pay handsomely for the privilege of a degree. Hence, educational institutions compete for students, both at home and abroad, and often engage in aggressive marketing strategies to attract students to their institutions.

Moreover, in recent years, the Australian international education market, particularly VET, has been in crisis due to the rising value of the Australian dollar, changes in rules, attacks on students, and shutting down of some colleges. The Australian Education Union (AEU, 2010) reported that, by January 2010, more than 14 colleges in the international VET sector had been shut down, with 7,000 international students affected. More than 10 colleges were noted as having closed in Victoria since July 2009, with 3,000 students affected. Offshore student visa grants declined 31% in 2009-10, and there were projections for economic losses to 2012 of $3.8 billion (International Education Taskforce, 2010). Modeling of the Australian economy over the following 5 years indicated a loss of total expenditure from international students of just over $5.88 billion and the loss of 45,583 full-time equivalent positions across the whole Australian workforce.
Correspondingly, Barry (2007) argued that VET must contribute constructively to the debate regarding globalization’s positive and negative aspects; VET must accommodate to the global context in which the world of work now operates; VET must increase its flexibility and development goals and implement strategies that fulfill its clients’ (students) needs; and VET teachers need initial and recurrent professional development to equip them to perform successfully within the global context. Recognizing the lucrative prospects of exporting higher education, the Australian Government introduced major educational and immigration reforms, in 2012, for making the country an educational hub with an anticipated influx of foreign students (Bowen, 2012). Accordingly, the VET institutions have changed their policies and missions to accommodate competition between providers for the increase in students. Also, virtual or distance learning has expanded given the vast technological advancements in recent years and is now a major medium of higher education provision in developing countries. In 2006, distance education accounted for 15% of all tertiary enrolment around the world (Perkinson, 2006). Flexible-learning enrolments have gained momentum where students can choose alternatives regarding what, when, where, and how their learning will take place. For example, students can decide whether to undertake their learning on or off the TAFE campus. This learning is predominantly derived from industry training packages which prescribe skills and knowledge required to perform effectively in a workplace. The specific details of these skills and knowledge are described in “units of competency.” Students enrolled in a flexible learning system may choose how many and in which units of competency they enroll.

Australian contemporary VET has been characterized by the changing nature of its student body as a result, and has noted the growth of international students. Moreover, while schools and universities deal with diverse student populations with diverse learning needs, this is on a different level from that which confronts VET. VET engages early school leavers and young people who are alienated and disengaged from education, school completers with aspirations to go to university, students from Indigenous backgrounds (more so than does higher education), refugees and migrants with little English, students with poor literacy and numeracy skills, adults from disadvantaged backgrounds, employed and unemployed workers, workers on the job and apprentices and trainees (on and off the job), welfare recipients, highly skilled workers seeking particular skills or higher level qualifications, those seeking qualifications for their current jobs, and those who are seeking qualifications for different jobs (Wheelahan et al., 2012a). Sometimes these categories of students overlap; sometimes in the one program and the one classroom or learning site (Wheelehan, 2010). These factors have created the need for the vocational education
sector to reposition its programs and pedagogy. Furthermore, as part of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1993, RTOs are required to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities. Teachers are required to display flexibility and sensitivity and make allowances for differences of individual learners in areas including language, literacy, cultural, physical, and the level of confidence and experience. Reasonable adjustment can be defined as a process that is designed to ensure that all people are treated equally in the assessment and learning process based on the individual candidate’s needs and abilities. Assessment methods can be modified and a range of alternative methods such as oral and written tests and quizzes are suggested, including self-evaluation, evaluation of classmates, project and performance assignments, observation forms, and pupil portfolios, which under the new approach are called “authentic assessment” (Wheelahan et al., 2012b).

These changes have had significant impacts on the profile of VET provision in Australia. Student enrolments, funding, and new providers have shifted towards the private sector, while the TAFE provider continues to dominate training provision to disadvantaged learners, and in areas of high-cost training, and specialized and in-shortage skills (Hamdhan 2013). Political leaders did not acknowledge at the time the National Partnership Agreement was signed that the changes were premised on opening up for private profit funds that had previously been earmarked to support public education and training. Hence, RTOs were subjected to a rigorous regime of external accountability in which continuous monitoring and audit of performance and quality are dominant (Deem, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Lucio, 1995; Power, 1997). The core meaning of accountability is that an institution or a person is “held responsible for performing according to agreed-upon terms” or objectives (Ornstein, 1986, p. 221). The purpose of accountability, it is claimed, is to make the work of educators more transparent through techniques such as inspection, performance management, and the announcing of student test scores. These audit processes are not directly tied to funding, but evaluate and provide public reports on the quality assurance processes by which colleges and universities exercise their responsibility to ensure academic standards and improve the quality of their teaching and learning (ASQA, 2011).

A compliance audit is conducted proactively by ASQA to assess an RTO’s ongoing compliance with the standards required for registration (ASQA, 2015a, 2015b). The AQF and the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (2015) underpin all accredited VET delivery. The regulators (ASQA, The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) implement systems and processes to monitor VET activity with a view to assessing compliance with regulatory frameworks and
forming judgements on the quality of training and assessment. Registering bodies conduct random and scheduled audits of RTOs, and audits in response to complaints. A nationally agreed risk management approach is used to determine the types of organizations to be audited and the frequency of audits. The lead auditor contacts the RTO 10-20 days before the audit date to notify the RTO of the scope of the audit – the qualifications and courses to be sampled and sites to be visited – and to request the submission of pre-audit evidence and/or information. In the case of noncompliance, the RTO is given one opportunity to provide further evidence of compliance which is considered in the formulation of a recommendation about the applicant or RTO's initial or ongoing compliance.

The current regulatory framework places a consistent regulatory burden on all RTOs, with regulation being largely application driven and the standards enforced predominantly through a process of 5-yearly audits for RTOs to renew their registration. Once registered, organizations must conduct internal audits and self-assessments. They must continuously monitor and evaluate their operations and develop and implement improvements.

**Impact of Globalized Trends on VET Teachers**

As VET institutions have responded to educational reforms and various stakeholder concerns, VET teachers have become involved in a state of ongoing compromise as they seek to negotiate the contexts in which they teach (Takerei, 2010). Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) made the point that the quality of VET teaching is shaped by a whole range of factors that include sectoral frameworks, governance and policies, institutional cultures, policies and management practices, the capability of management, employment contracts, pay and conditions, workforce design and workforce development, and appraisal, recognition, and reward schemes.

The emphasis on maximum quality education for students in VET has led to teachers being increasingly supervised and monitored, to the extent that external evaluations have come to control teachers' work (Meyer, 2002). Management structures ensure that teachers are compliant in implementing the National Training Packages and the AQTF standards. Meeting AQTF requirements had also increased the amount of documentation within VET to the point that some educators believed they were generating more documentation to meet compliance than they were to develop training strategies (Grace, 2005). Bradley (2010), in the study of TAFE teachers' perception of implementing National Training Packages, highlighted the point that teaching duties had taken second place to administration duties.
Nakar (2013) argued that VET teachers in Australia were under constant pressure as a result of “new-vocationalism” (Chappell, 2001): their work had intensified as social and organizational demands increased; teachers felt less valued in the community as dependency increased on employment contract and performance reviews; and the increase in administration within a teacher’s workload had contributed to the redefinition of teachers’ work and identity, especially in RTOs. This transformation has been described as shifting the VET teacher along a continuum from an emphasis on teaching and creating curriculum, towards entrepreneurial business activity, such as marketing courses and providing training and assessment services in client workplaces (Clayton et al., 2005; Coffield, 2008; Dickie, Eccles, Fitzgerald, & McDonald, 2004; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2003; Simons et al., 2001). Smyth (2001) argued that, with education becoming little more than a training arm to industry, the work of teachers was becoming deprofessionalized and deskilled to the role of pedagogical technicians and testers.

As Lawn (1995) argued, teacher professionalism is part of the politics. The attributes of a good teacher are socially constructed, made explicit through a contested process between ideological management imperatives and teachers' definitions of their work. Teachers in TAFE have been experiencing a loss of control and autonomy that is very difficult to resist, as the curriculum has been fragmented and nationalized and as the devolution of hierarchical relationships has personalized and localized conflicts over their work (Seddon, 1991). Also, according to Hargreaves (2003, 1993) and Young (2006), VET teachers need to link the purposes and activities of both learners and RTOs with developments in the educational society. It is well recognized that certain ethical dilemmas characterize the work of teachers (Boon, 2011; Colnerud, 1997; Shapira-Lishinsky, 2011). Further, the movement towards “professionalization” that situates the roles of teachers and mandates accountability to standards, transparent processes of accreditation, and performance management (Beck, 2008; Popkewitz, 1994; Tuinamuana, 2011) has had implications for professional ethics in teaching.

However, according to earlier empirical studies, teachers are often unaware of the ethical ramifications of their actions and overall practice (Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993; Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002). Many studies have found that teachers perceive themselves as powerless and lacking adequate tools for reaching decisions (Block, 2008; Campbell, 2006; Carr, 2005; Colnerud, 2006; Gore & Morrison 2001; Husu & Tirri 2007; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2009). Unlike in medicine or law, where ethical principles are applied to the practice of the dominant professional knowledge base (medical sciences or legal precepts and precedents, for example), in
teaching the professional knowledge base is the ethical knowledge base. It is far more challenging to disentangle the ethics of teaching from the very process, practice, and intent of teaching as “a teacher’s conduct, at all times and in all ways, is a moral matter” (Fenstermacher, 1990, p. 133). As Carr (2005, p. 265) claimed,

The knowledge and understanding which should properly inform the professional consciousness of the competent teacher is a kind of moral wisdom or judgement which is rooted in rational reflection about educational policies and practices and what is ethical, as well as instrumentally, appropriate to achieve them.

This ethical judgement (Hostetler, 1997) is called on every time a teacher strives to balance the fair treatment of an individual student with the fair treatment of the class group, or when the teacher chooses curricular materials and pedagogical strategies with care and sensitivity, or when evaluation is conducted with scrupulous honesty accompanied by a concern for the emotional well-being of students, or when kindness tempers discipline. While mastery of subject matter, proficiency in classroom management techniques, skilled understanding of pedagogy, and a comprehensive grasp of evaluation and assessment strategies are integral elements of the competent teacher’s repertoire, it is the practical moral wisdom – the ethical knowledge – that is infused into every aspect of such technical abilities and the humanity teachers bring to their practice that distinguishes them as professionals.

In teaching, in particular, it is well recognized that ethical knowledge is not separate from professional knowledge (Campbell, 2003a, 2003b; Lyons, 1994), implying that moral motivations are not exempt from pedagogical choices. Teachers regularly use what Gholami and Husu (2010) call praxial knowledge to defend their pedagogical choices and, in doing so, they appeal to moral grounds rather than simply the principles of effective teaching (Sockett, 1996). Brennan Kemmis and Green (2013), illustrating the nature of teacher decision-making that occurs as part of professional practice, suggested that teacher decision-making is made more complicated by having to negotiate mandated and prescriptive measures than if they were able to exercise their professional practice in more unbridled, but negotiated ways. It is these issues of everyday decision-making that are central to the process of enacting vocational education provisions that have been reported by vocational educators as needing to be addressed in daily practice (Brennan Kemmis & Green, 2013; Nakar, 2013).

There is now more pressure on VET teachers in organizations to do more with less and adjust quickly to changes. In response to that pressure, the VET workforce may engage in
expedient but questionable behaviour (Anderson, 1995; Kirrane, 1990; Mclean, 2010; Nakar, 2013) and it can be difficult under those circumstances to retain a strong sense of mission. New vocationalism and new economics have resulted in the situation where the VET professional is confronted with a radical reconstruction, not only in terms of the new work VET professionals are expected to perform but also in terms of the new ethos and professional modes of conduct that have emerged out of diversifying sites of professional practice (Chappell, 2001). Furthermore, it is contended that this situation has been perpetuated by the absence of empirical studies that explore the everyday decision-making of VET teachers to gain an understanding of the impact of change. Ethical decision-making enables teachers to deal effectively with the dilemmas they encounter on a daily basis and ensures that teachers make good ethical choices. The next section of the literature review focuses on what ethics and ethical dilemmas amount to and on formal approaches in dealing with ethical dilemmas.

The Ethical Dimensions of Vocational Education and Teaching

Ethics

Ethics is called the study of moral judgements and right and wrong conduct (Kant, 1785/1993). It deals with good or bad, right or wrong behaviour; it evaluates conduct against some absolute criteria and puts negative or positive values on it (Guy 1990, p. 6; Van der Waldt & Helmbold, 1995, p. 157). Since so much of the literature has used the terms “moral” and “ethical” interchangeably, for the sake of convenience and easy understanding of the reader, this study uses the words in the same manner too.

Ethical Issues, Dilemmas, and Decision-Making

Ethical or unethical behaviour and judgement usually occur in situations that raise ethical considerations or issues. An ethical issue is a problem, situation, or opportunity requiring an individual or organization to choose among several actions that must be evaluated as right or wrong, ethical or unethical (Ferrell & Fraedrich, 1991; Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 2004). Ethical issues are equivocal, meaning that they can be interpreted in more than one way, and are uncertain with regard to the future (Sonenshein, 2007). Ethical issues may be problematic, because they may be nontraditional: they may not have been encountered in the past and may not easily fit into well-used categorizations (Clegg, Kornberger, & Rhodes, 2006). Issues may also be problematic because of the feeling they evoke or because they contain a dilemma of some kind (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991).
An ethical dilemma may be said to arise when one finds oneself in a situation that necessitates choosing between competing principles or values (Bagnall, 2002). Badaracco (1992) referred to competing sets of principles as spheres of responsibility that have the potential to pull (leaders) in different directions and thus create ethical dilemmas for them. Kidder (1995) maintained that many ethical dilemmas do not centre upon right versus wrong, but can involve either right versus right, or wrong versus wrong (Hitt, 1990). Within complex contexts and circumstances, it may not be so easy to discern what the “right” and “wrong” option might be. Day, Harris, and Hadfield (1999) argued that a key part of resolving a dilemma is not only being able to deal with tensions but also having to make the tough decisions. Decision-making, according to Begley (1999), is simply the act of making choices. However, the process of making a decision is one that involves multiple levels of complexity involving human interaction. Complexity is caused by the presence of values and ethics, be they personal or driven by the professional community (Begley, 1999). Individuals assign different reasoning criteria to different issues (Fritzsche & Becker, 1983; Premeaux, 2004; Premeaux & Mondy, 1993). As described earlier, ethics is relative to individuals and situations that are ambiguous and uncertain, and which elicit a process of sense making and issue construction (Weick & Roberts, 1993) through which people frame the situation and create rational accounts that enable them to take action (Maitlis, 2005). The following two sections describe ethical relativism and situational ethics in further detail.

**Ethical Relativism**

Relativism refers to the idea that what is the case is about its context (Bagnall, 2007). Ethical relativism holds that the same decision or the same answer can be right and wrong at the same time (Bagnall, 2007). There are different versions of ethical relativism. One version, individual ethical relativism, claims that moral standards are relative to individual moral beliefs – that in effect what one believes to be right is right with respect to one's actions – and thus no sound moral argument condemning the actions of a moral agent can be offered if the conclusion of the argument is inconsistent with the moral beliefs of the agent (Ladd, 1973). Another version of ethical relativism, cultural relativism, holds that moral standards are relative to cultural, moral beliefs (Granitz & Loewly, 2007; Reidenbach & Robin, 1988, 1990). Thus, although one can justifiably condemn actions that are inconsistent with the moral beliefs of an individual culture, no condemnation of the actions of an individual can be justified if those actions are consistent with the moral beliefs of the culture (Granitz & Loewly, 2007; Robertson & Fadil, 1999; Vitell & Paolillo, 2004). According to this view, a
A moral system is dependent on, or relative to, a particular culture or group. Culture plays crucial roles in the transmission of values and principles that constitute a moral system. It is through the culture that initial beliefs, including morality, are transmitted to an individual.

**Situational Ethics**

Situational ethics most commonly identifies the idea that moral rules are neither absolute nor always binding but are instead open to subjective modification according to circumstance (Bagnall, 1998; Bauman, 1993; Benhabib, 1992; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1990; Flyvbjerg, 1991). It highlights the importance of appreciating the unique circumstances of each case and of avoiding stereotyping a case too quickly. Ethical action thus understood is characterized by a reflexive awareness of one's cultural being, location and impact; a humility with respect to the importance of one's own framework of beliefs; a tolerance of and respect for otherness; an empathic understanding of and responsiveness to the particularities of others' lived realities; the capabilities, understanding, and dispositions involved in successfully negotiating understandings with others; and the acceptance of responsibility for one's beliefs, actions, and their consequences (Bagnall, 1995, 1998).

**Ethical Theories and Ethical Reasoning and Development**

There is a growing body of scholarship that focuses on the management of ethical challenges arising in the provision of social services in the contemporary cultural context. That work is articulating, among other things, what it means to act morally in such a situation, what matters are being taken into consideration, and what might reasonably be expected of a moral agent. It includes the foundational theorization, for example, of Bauman (1995), and more educationally focused analyses, such as those of Bagnall (1999), Usher (2012), and Wain (2004). Traditional normative theories of ethics in such situations, including those of a consequentialist and deontological nature, evidently have very limited purchase in the contemporary cultural context (Bagnall, 1998), although contemporary versions of virtue ethics, such as that of MacIntyre (1981) and the notion of virtue as a learned skill (Bagnall 2007), are more persuasively a part of contemporary morality.

Ethical reasoning and judgement refer to the ways in which individuals determine whether a course of action or a stance about an ethical issue is morally right by evaluating various courses of action and taking into account ethical principles, rules, or virtues (Pettifor, Estay, & Paque, 2000; Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999). Ethical reasoning is considered an important part of moral decision-making and action (Rest, 1984, 1979; Pettifor et al., 2000).
Ethical reasoning is needed because responding to these questions calls on our value systems. We are asked to take a position in relation to dichotomous values such as right/wrong, good/bad or should/shouldn’t (Caulley, 2000; Edwards, 1996). To investigate the ethical dilemmas implicit in these questions, ethical reasoning is needed. Principles to guide ethical reasoning could be enacted as obligations: to act in ways that benefit others (beneficence), to do no harm to others (nonmaleficence), to treat others fairly and equally and to respect difference (justice), to respect the choices that others make concerning their lives and ensure information is freely given, without inducement, preference, prejudice or pressure (autonomy), to tell the truth and not deceive others (veracity), to respect individual or group space, words, and so on through anonymity (privacy), to protect individuals, groups, information and not make any disclosures without consent (confidentiality) and to keep promises (fidelity) (Caulley, 2000; Nuhfer, 2001). Implicit in these principles are questions of power (whose interests are being served, whose are not?) and an obligation to empower individuals, to break down power differentials, and to include voices from the margins.

Only a few research studies have explored the link between ethical theories and ethical reasoning (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). Studies indicate that a person's behaviour is influenced by his or her moral perception and moral judgements. However, there are limits to following the golden rule or one's conscience. Both of these rules of thumb seem like reasonable alternatives to having to construct, adopt, or defend and apply elaborate ethical theories. Pojman (2011) points out some ways that both the golden rule and following one's conscience can seriously limit deliberation. It is difficult to imagine that anyone would ever object to the spirit of the golden rule: do unto others, as you would have them do unto you. However, this rule assumes that whatever I would be willing to accept that you do unto me, you would be willing to accept that I do unto you. Hence, the golden rule, despite its value, may not be a sufficiently comprehensive guide in all moral reasoning.

Another simple rule of thumb that initially might seem plausible is the principle, follow your conscience. On the face of it, following one's conscience seems like a reasonable maxim. It is, however, a dangerous rule in which to ground one's choices for acting morally. Conscience is subjective, and thus cannot provide grounds for moral deliberation that are both rational and impartial. So it seems that we need some structure; for example, using ethical theories to guide our ethical thinking, understanding moral reasoning and development, or following the ethics of the profession. The following two sub-sections look in detail at the three different criteria used for ethical decision-making.
Aristotle contended that humans are not inherently virtuous and that ethics must be taught and practised. Furthermore, virtues are attained by first exercising them, and people become just by doing just acts (Singer, 1994a). Kant, who concurred with Aristotle, argued that ethics is not derived from human feelings. Ethics can be identified by the use of reason (Singer, 1994b).

Almost 2,500 years ago, the philosopher Socrates debated the question with his fellow Athenians. Socrates' position was clear: that ethics consists of knowing what we ought to do, and that such knowledge can be taught.

Ethics can be taught through two general means: the first one is through reasoning, which implies the use of concepts and their linking (Buganza, 2012). The second means is moral development. Understanding's non-instinctual quality means that its continued development depends fundamentally on contingently acquired new, anticipatory meanings (Bagnall, 2007). Its anticipatory nature, as possibilities, reveals understanding as something general, where the particulars of its projective possibilities require non-determined, that is, educational, development. This includes the need to refine one's improvisational handiness and to add to one's repertoire of sensorimotor intentionalities.

**Moral Development**

Cognitive moral development (as espoused, for example, by Lawrence Kohlberg) states that ethics education is possible. Just as people develop mentally, physically, and emotionally, they develop a moral cognizance. Using critical thinking tactics such as the Socratic method, people can solve their ethical dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1969, 1977).

Most models for moral development focus on children, but some also describe the changes that take place throughout adult life. Many of these models also include aspects of development that go beyond moral behaviour. For example, Eric Erickson lays out eight "psychosocial" stages (Erickson, 1963; Helminiak, 1987). Each stage resolves a certain kind of psychological tension, like trust versus mistrust, intimacy versus isolation, and social responsibility versus stagnation. The psychologist Jean Piaget, on the other hand, laid out five stages of cognitive development with names like “sensorimotor,” “concrete operational,” and “post-formal operational” (Piaget, 1963). Since thinking clearly enters into moral decision-making, such a theory speaks at least indirectly to ethics (Piaget, 1965). Some of these models, like those of Erickson (1963), and Gould (1978), assume that growth stages originate from the natural process of maturation, and depend mostly on age. Other approaches suggest that moral development can slow or stop independently of a person's age. Piaget's model, along with those
of Kohlberg (1977), Fowler (1981), and Loevinger (1977), uses this idea. Among all these models, Kohlberg's (1969) is most concerned with moral growth.

Kohlberg’s (1969) work is primarily identified with the cognitive developmental paradigm and, in fact, he carried over many of the structural assumptions and criteria that characterized Piaget's stage theory of cognitive development. Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development also postulates that moral reasoning proceeds through an invariant sequence of stages toward an increasingly adequate understanding of what is just or fair. Kohlberg was one of the first people to look seriously at whether a person's ability to deal with ethical issues can develop in later life and whether education can affect that development. He taught that there were six stages of ethical thinking, each stage being of greater maturity than the previous one. By delineating these levels, we are allowed to know and test each in our thinking. It helps us know ourselves better and challenges us to move on to a higher level of thinking. This assumes a sort of natural goodness and integrity in the individual whereby he or she will always want to do the right thing—if only they had the time to reason things out: suggesting that people suffer from a character defect if they are void of logical thinking.

Kohlberg’s (1969) moral development theory is composed of a three-level progression from an egocentric understanding of fairness based on individual need (i.e., stages one and two), to a conception of fairness anchored in the shared conventions of societal agreement (i.e., stages three and four), and finally to a principled understanding of fairness that rests on free-standing logic of equality and reciprocity (i.e., stages five and six).

Kohlberg (1969, 1977) found that a person's ability to deal with moral issues is not formed all at once. Just as there are stages of growth in physical development, the ability to think morally also develops in stages. The earliest level of moral development is that of the child, which Kohlberg called the preconventional level. The person at the preconventional level defines right and wrong in terms of what authority figures say is right or wrong or in terms of what results in rewards and punishments. Some people stay at this level all their lives, continuing to define right and wrong in terms of what authorities say or in terms of reaping the rewards or avoiding unpleasant consequences.

The second level of moral development is the level most adolescents reach. Kohlberg (1969) called this the conventional level. The adolescent at the conventional level has internalized the norms of those groups among whom he or she lives. For the adolescent, right and wrong are based on group loyalties: loyalties to one's family, loyalties to one's friends, or loyalty to one's
nation. Many people remain at this level, continuing to define right and wrong in terms of what society believes or what laws require. But if a person continues to develop morally, he or she will reach what Kohlberg (1969) labeled the postconventional level. The person at the postconventional level stops defining right and wrong in terms of group loyalties or norms. Instead, the adult at this level develops moral principles that define right and wrong from a universal point of view. The moral principles of the postconventional person are principles that would appeal to any reasonable person because they take everyone's interest into account.

According to Kohlberg (1969), a person cannot move from preconventional to conventional moral reasoning unless and until he or she can think beyond an egocentric perspective and hold multiple perspectives in mind (one's own, the other's, and the needs and rights of the group) while performing mental operations on a moral issue. The final level (postconventional stage) involves holding a complex array of perspectives and thoughts about right moral action against a universalized set of moral values and principles.

Many factors can stimulate a person's growth through the three levels of moral development. One of the most crucial factors, Kohlberg (1977, 1984) found, is education. Kohlberg and Candee (1984) discovered that when his subjects took courses in ethics and these courses challenged them to look at issues from a universal point of view, they tended to move upward through the levels. Rest (1979, 1986) has pointed out that this finding has repeatedly been supported by other researchers.

Clearly, there are differing understandings of moral development, which inevitably lead to differing views about when various aspects of ethics should be learned. Nevertheless, the fact that there exists the possibility of ongoing moral development, including even in adults, suggests that learning about ethics should continue throughout life.

**Decision-Making by VET Teachers**

As observed in the first section of the literature review, teaching is a moral endeavour (Ball & Wilson, 1996; Clark, 1990; Cutforth, 1999; Dewey, 1909; Fenstermacher, 1990; Goodman & Lesnick, 2001; Hansen, 1995, 1999, 2001; Jackson, 1968; Lampert, 1985; Sirotnik, 1990; Sizer & Sizer, 1999; Valli, 1990). School governance structures, disciplinary procedures, and the allocation of rewards and norms of teacher-student interaction, all communicate morally laden values like fairness, due process, equal opportunity, respect for differences, and equity in the distribution of scarce resources and rewards (such as teacher attention and grades).
Educational writers such as Goodlad, Soder, and Sirotnik (1990), Lyons (1990), and Sockett (1993) have acknowledged how making moral decisions is a daily activity for teachers, and that teaching is a moral exercise as it is essentially linked to being in a relationship with others. Thus, as a moral endeavour, teaching is grounded in values that lie at the heart of teachers' professional practice. Teaching is a “social good” (De Ruyter & Kole, 2010, p. 207) and teachers are expected to instruct students to think and act in ways that their societies believe are worthwhile and responsible. As a profession, teachers are expected to uphold a duty of care, acting in the best interests of their students (Mahony, 2009). As Christenbury (2008) stated, the teacher's conduct at all times and in all ways is a moral matter. For that reason alone, teaching is a profoundly moral activity.

Philosophical issues related to the ethical education of teachers are the focus of many book-length treatments (e.g., Campbell, 1997, 2003; Goodlad et al., 1990; Hansen, 2001; Sockett, 1993; Stengel & Tom, 2006; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005; Strike & Ternasky, 1993), which demonstrates, at the very least, ongoing professional interest in the moral nature of teachers' attitudes and actions. Hansen (2001) began his book with the statement that “conceptions of what teaching is, and of what it is for, make a difference in educational thought and practice” (p. 1). Touching on this point, Goodlad et al. (1990) speculated that professionally prepared teachers might not be necessary at all if their sole purpose is just to teach children to read, write, and spell. Almost anyone can teach skills, he suggests. But if the purpose of schools includes “the cultivation (with the family) of character and decency, and preparation for full participation in the human conversation – then teachers become necessary” (p. 28). “Conceptions of teaching,” wrote Hansen (2001), “have consequences” (p. 1). Taking this point one step further, Fenstermacher (1990, 1986) asked rhetorically, “How is it possible to conceive of teaching [as] disconnected from its moral underpinnings?” (p. 132). In response to his question, he argued that teaching becomes nearly incomprehensible when disconnected from its fundamental moral purposes.

Taking a moral decision requires that one goes beyond considering his or her rights, personal values, and beliefs, to take into account moral principles, the law, and the rights and the interests of others (Kallio, 2003). It is also crucial to consider the moral codes of professional conduct (Rachels & Rachels, 2007). There is a need to be aware of the difference between the right to hold an opinion on a matter of private concern and the right to use the opinion as a basis for moral decision-making (Kallio, 2003). Teachers, in particular, should be able to delineate between personal preferences and moral principles and discern a balance between facts and moral
judgements (Kallio, 2003). Traditionally, professional ethics articulates a profession's particular obligations to society in the field over which it holds a position of trust and relative autonomy and in the specialized area of knowledge and practice associated with that field (Bagnall, 1995; Bayles, 1989). Contemporarily, professions are facing new challenges conditioned particularly by globalization. Increasingly, society is demanding of its professional communities more transparent and accessible evidence of their moral accountability to those they serve (Bagnall, 2007).

Within education internationally, regulatory bodies, self-governing organizations, colleges of teachers, teaching councils, and other such professional associations are increasingly being used or created for the purpose (among other things relating to standards of professional practice) of addressing concerns about accountability, the assertion of professionalism, and the ethical premises that should underpin both. Educational institutions introduce formal ethical structures such as codes of conduct. Codes of conduct metabolize the ethics and the values in a sense that educational institutions declare that they assume responsibility with regard to different societal issues ranging from equal rights to transparency and preventing discrimination. While codes are the application of the field of ethics to issues, which characterize specific professional work and guide action around these issues, they are also instruments of regulation which position teachers in sanctioned roles (Bagnall, 2004). The construction of a code of ethics for teachers can be seen as part of a global social movement which represents a bipartisan and bilateral way for the teaching profession to reunite as a global epistemic community. Where once teachers' negotiation was with governments and the state, the era of globalization added another layer of educational stakeholders, namely supranational agencies that made significant policy recommendations addressing how nations should reform education in the light of globalized economies (Marginson, 1999). It is the responsibility of each individual to be aware of those policies and procedures that pertain to his or her work and to follow those policies and procedures (Van Nuland & Khandelwal, 2006). In Australia, employing bodies of teachers, as well as professional associations, stipulate codes of conduct regarding expected behaviour and performance (e.g., Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2006). A code of business ethics may be considered as a guideline or rule that, if applied when faced with an ethical dilemma, assists one in making an ethical decision (Zigon, 2009). A code is primarily a set of rules, whether couched as advice or direction. Some codes may take the form of advice rather than direction, but all are formulae, algorithms: making the right decision thus becomes a question of looking up and following the appropriate rule in the relevant handbook. But
sometimes the usefulness of codes is misconceived: in offering the relevant set of interpretations as “ready-made”, as a set of formulae against which practitioners may check their practice, whether or not a professional is working “ethically” all too easily becomes a matter of checking, and checking off, against a list of rules, while the rules themselves remain morally and politically unexamined (Bagnall, 1999; King & King, 2008). However, these codes demonstrate some trust in the profession to make good moral decisions in the interests of students and society, and they provide shared core values as points of reference and guidelines for consideration (Higgins, 2003).

Historically, there has not been a body to set a standard of ethics for its members to abide by, protecting the interests of the VET sector at large. In April 2014, professional peers of the VET sector launched a not-for-profit membership-based organization, the Australian VET Quality Practitioners and Consultants' Association (AVQPCA), to ensure that “quality” became synonymous with the VET industry. The Diamond Standard, the highest standard in Australian VET ethics as they assert, specifies that, in a sector as broad, diverse, and complex as VET, there are many individuals, companies, and organizations marketing their products and services to RTOs and potential RTOs throughout Australia. Until now, the VET industry has had no benchmark by which to judge the quality of these products and services or to enhance consumer protection. However, not all VET stakeholders were allowed membership of AVQPCA purely by paying annual fees. To become a member of AVQPCA’s diamond community, one has to go through a robust process developed by comprehensive industry consultation, which is the foundation of the governance and membership process of AVQPCA. Monitored by professional peers of the VET sector, The Diamond Standard is a collection of standards of practice that provides the opportunity for each member to demonstrate the depth and breadth of their experience, knowledge, skills, and commitment to the association's Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct focuses on the high level of ethical conduct, empowerment of the VET sector, transparency and, importantly, accountability. Regrettably, the company deregistered in September, 2015.

Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of ethics can be useful in gaining insights into ethical dilemmas and their complexities. It is important to note that in practice, however, ethical dilemmas faced by teachers (and those in other operational contexts) are likely to be highly complex and not only framed by a particular theoretical approach or the approach of following professional ethics or codes and developing ethical reasoning. There is no definitive right or wrong approach to applying moral theories as there is no formula, no rule, for deciding
when to take consequences into account and when not to, or whether to be guided by rules or
virtues, for example.

It is crucial that difficult dilemmas be examined impartially, and judgements supported by
evidence, as the ethically justifiable resolution is always that best supported by evidence. This
involves identifying the applicable moral principles, values, and rules, and determining whether
they are justified and whether they are being applied correctly. Impartiality demands the interests
of each are given equal weight and no special treatment accorded to any party over another
(Rachels & Rachels, 2010). This is difficult when those charged with making ethical judgements
have a vested interest in the issue. The next section of the literature review identifies the
dilemmas encountered by teachers and educational leaders from the previous research and also
the decision-making models suggested by scholars.

A Review of Research on Dilemmas and Suggested Decision-Making

Models

Previous Research Studies on Ethical Decision-Making by Teachers

The perception of teachers' dilemmas first emerged from Nussbaum's (1986) study of 46
teachers, including 29 secondary school teachers, who were asked in open-ended interviews
to talk about the conflicts of their professional lives — to say how they dealt with them and if
they found in them moral or ethical concerns (Lyons, Cutler, & Miller, 1986). The situations
reported by teachers revealed several interconnected dimensions: that responding to students
created what teachers termed a moral dilemma, specifically in determining whether a teacher
should respond. In that acknowledgment, Nussbaum illuminated a set of issues embedded in
teachers’ work and development: the intricate interactions between a teacher’s knowledge
and values, assumptions about knowing, craft, and relationships. As the teacher acts to
respond to a dilemma, to help his or her students, the teacher implied other changes as well:
changes in his or her relationship with his or her students, in his or her approach to his
discipline and, of necessity, in his or her teaching practices. Nussbaum's work highlighted the
validity and complexity of these views, that moral goodness cannot be separated from the
world of practice and that no one can be secure from the vulnerability of ethical risk (Arendt,
1968; Freire, 1970).

In a study of the dilemmas of teaching and a teacher's relationship to him or herself, their
values, and ways of knowing, teacher responses to questions about conflicts they faced in their
professional lives revealed that 70% characterized their conflict as moral or ethical and a majority
connected the dilemma either directly or indirectly to their sense of self (Lyons et al., 1986; Talanquer, Tomanek & Novodvorsky, 2007). The teacher interview data presented in this study were collected in two waves. In 1985, as part of the dilemmas of teaching project, 46 teachers (23 female; 23 male) from secondary and elementary schools were interviewed. In 1987, 20 teachers, including several previously interviewed in 1985, were interviewed. The majority of the dilemmas reported involved students, and surprisingly, only a few involved school administrators. Although Lortie (1975) reports that teacher complaints were predominantly about tasks, time use, or other adults, this research suggests the centrality of the student-teacher relationship. Teaching involves close human interactions. It is not surprising that teachers may experience their relationships with students as raising ethical issues.

Piaget (1932/1965) asserted what Lyons’s (1982, 1983, 1985, 1990) research affirmed: that apart from our relations to others there can be no moral necessity as morality resides in the relationships between people. Changing paradigms and politics in educational research have helped rediscover that education is an inescapably moral endeavour. The past several years have brought the publication regarding the ethical nature of the teaching profession (Goodlad et al., 1990; Sockett 1993), the public school curriculum (Noddings, 2007, 2012), and the classroom environment (Jackson et al., 1993), as well as growing, if inconsistent, moral rhetoric among practitioners and theorists. The complex nature of teaching, because of its boundaries of time, place, content, and tasks, invites numerous situations in which ethical dilemmas might arise (van Manen, 1995). The literature on ethics in education covers a wide range of topics and dilemmas (Campbell, 2000; Colnerud, 2006; Husu & Tirri, 2007). Teachers are moral agents in the school environment (Higgins, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1992; Tirri, 1999). They are expected to be role models and to educate their students regarding values (Noddings, 2012; Starratt, 2012), and thus classroom interaction, in particular, is inevitably moral in nature (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Orland- Barak, 2009). Many of the dilemmas centre around relational issues to do with limits to student-teacher intimacy, balancing concern for the individual with group needs, the forces of school policy on autonomous or case-based judgement, collegial loyalty, and more generally, the ethics of pedagogy (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009; Pope, Green, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2009).

Though awareness of the moral contours of teaching grows, the language of effective teaching continues to dominate frameworks of practice, supported, in part, by a decade-long drive toward professionalization in teaching. Professionalization is usually grounded in a specifiable knowledge base; that is, in the source of expertise built on the scientific and technical knowhow
that is the result of research. Moral aspects (e.g., teacher-student relationships, human learning contexts, students' self-image and self-understanding) are seen as additive rather than as core dimensions of the teaching endeavour, appearing most often in “ethics of” discussions.

Stengel and Tom (2006) have highlighted the point that recent inquiry into the ethical nature of teaching presents particular challenges. Insofar as teacher education has responded to calls for reform during the past decade, it has answered the demands of professionalization, rather than the demands of ethical obligation. Hallway discussions among schoolteachers and college instructors may have a renewed moral tone, and printed interchanges among scholars may openly acknowledge the centrality of moral concerns, but the practice and program of teacher education continue to be largely unaffected by the ethics of it all. The valued ends of teacher education could be argued for students' subject-matter competence, mastery of teaching methods, and acquisition of classroom management techniques (Stengel & Tom, 2006). While these are clearly desirable attributes of teachers, one wonders whether they are the preeminent ends of teacher education. Obvious, operational, apparently negotiable features of teacher education efforts are admission and retention of students, program structure and content, and certification requirements.

Some writers and researchers have provided illustrations of the types of ethical dilemmas that teachers confront in their daily work (Campbell, 1997; Helton & Ray, 2005; Johns, McGrath, & Mathur, 2008). Campbell provides a series of examples of where teachers have felt that administrators required them to undertake actions that breached their professional ethics. This feeling contributed to ethical dilemmas for them as their professional ethics were in conflict with the expectation that they follow the orders of their supervisors. Millwater, Ehrich, and Cranston (2004) referred to dilemmas faced by preservice teachers during their practicum. Here, preservice teachers raised issues such as the rights of the group versus the rights of individuals, and the child's right to confidentiality versus the system's requirement to report information. Johns et al. (2008) gave examples of complex dilemmas that emerged from special education contexts in which competing interests and limited resourcing made it difficult to resolve decisions. Noteworthy is Lyons's (1990) point that "many of the dilemmas of teaching are not solvable and must simply be managed rather than resolved" (p. 168). Lyons came to this conclusion based on her research with teachers, which demonstrated that dilemmas were either ongoing or likely to recur.

A 1999 Finnish study involving 33 secondary school teachers (Tirri, 1999) identified four categories of ethical dilemmas: how to deal with students, comprising issues such as
confidentiality and the unprofessional behaviour of colleagues; student behaviour issues such as cheating and the conflict between home and school; rights of minority groups, especially in relation to religion; and rules at school, especially with regard to teachers’ inconsistent enforcement. Tirri and Husu (2002) examined dilemmas faced by 26 early childhood teachers and discovered that the most significant was identifying exactly what constituted a child's “best interests”, an issue noted to be of intense debate (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007; Eyal, Berkovich, & Schwartz, 2009) Some writers have argued that it is vital for teachers to critically reflect upon their everyday dilemmas in order to develop the moral sensitivity necessary to resolve situations appropriately and fairly (Tirri, 1999). Similarly, people realize their ethical positions in the midst of a dilemma rather than "in the sanctum of self-reflection" (Tinser, 2003, p. 65).

Campbell (1992) examined the tensions between the moral consciences of teachers and principals and the ethical components of their institutions. The study involved 30 respondents: five elementary principals and 10 elementary teachers, plus five secondary school principals and 10 secondary school teachers. Respondents were a mix of genders, ethnicities, ages, and teaching experience. Campbell concluded that it was wrong to assume that the ethos contributing to the school's cultural identity would be in unison with those of the individuals working within that culture; inevitably, tension and conflict will arise. Where conflict resolution relied upon the morals and values of individuals or the ethics of a collective group, decisions were implicitly valutational.

The Mastery in Learning Project, a model for restructuring 26 American high schools (Livingston & Castle, 1992), concluded that dilemmas arose when choices were made from problematic alternatives where any decision comprised cherished values. Such decisions are complex situations that at best may only be able to be “managed”. Teachers accepted conflict and ambiguity as inevitable and developed coping strategies, emerging as valuable resources themselves in managing educational problems (Livingston & Castle, 1992).

In Helton and Ray's (2005) research, ethical dilemmas experienced by teachers in schools and universities were recognized as arising from: law and policies, the need to go beyond the law such as protecting a student from abuse in the home; administrative decisions conflicting with personal or professional ethics; student actions, ethic of care, behavioural issues, plagiarism; colleagues' actions such as discriminatory behaviour in relation to students and to staff; and tensions within professional ethics.
Tensions and dilemmas related to competing value systems have been identified in other Australian schools (Duignan, 2003; Wildy & Louden, 2000.) An analysis of policy documents on school-based management by Lingard, Hayes, and Mills (2002) demonstrated that tensions between centralized and decentralized control were increased with school-based management, as well as the tension between concepts of market efficiency and equity and social justice. The research of Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2003) on the changing roles of secondary school principals in Australia and New Zealand found a major tension between the requirements of leadership and those of management. Tensions and dilemmas faced by a principal may arise due to external pressures placed on the school by an employing authority or because of a principal's perceived role conflict between being an educational leader and being a manager of supporting services within the school. Tensions and dilemmas may also arise following concern about the quality of teaching staff and determining appropriate strategies for development and dismissal, or when requirements for change impact on the notion of stability within the school. The Queensland research by Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2006) identified some additional dilemmas for school leaders, typically about welfare, performance, and behaviours both of staff and students. Tensions and dilemmas may occur as principals relinquish some of their autonomy and control in favour of building commitment and relationships through collaboration and, similarly, when principals are required to implement or have the responsibility for implementing policy or decisions for which they have had no say in identifying the need or the formation. Boris-Schacter and Langer (2006) expressed these dilemmas as three pairs of activity categories that they identified as “principal tensions,” namely instruction and management, work and personal lives, and societal and/or community expectations and individual priorities. For example, principals reported that when they wanted to go into classrooms, they had to complete paperwork; when they wanted to stay in school they missed the evening meal at home; and when the community wanted them to respond immediately, they wanted to gather information and carefully consider options.

In summary, the background literature from 1980-2000 has identified four major types of leadership dilemmas: control and change, that is, internal/decentralized, autonomous versus external/centralized; ethic of care (participation/collaboration/equity) versus responsibility (accountability/efficiency); major imperative – professional/instructional versus personal; and major function – instructional/development/leadership versus management/maintenance.

More recent research has pointed to ethical dilemmas emerging for teachers regarding student assessment (e.g., Pope et al., 2009; Richardson & Wheeless, 2009). Attention to such
dilemmas is not surprising, given the current climate of increasing accountability, high-stakes testing, and pressure to improve student learning scores. In a study involving 103 educators in the United States who were asked to describe a difficult ethical situation relating to an assessment of students, Pope et al. (2009) found that 62% of the coded responses related to ethical dilemmas about “pollution” of grades. Pollution of grades here refers to "misrepresenting the student’s mastery of the assessed material" (Pope et al., p. 779). Such pollution can occur where teachers modify grades due to student effort or teachers assist students before or during an assessment by providing them with answers and practice opportunities. Pope et al. found almost all of the conflicts for teachers involved institutional requirements, and these were seen to be at odds with teachers' views about considerations needed for assessments.

Moreover, Nakar’s (2013) study of teacher dilemmas highlighted VET teachers’ concerns that, in their zest to achieve their well-documented strategic plans focusing on long-term organizational efforts, institutions did not always meet ethical standards. The findings also suggested that teachers experience dilemmas that may in part be affected by environmental pressures associated with fierce competition in VET for international student enrolments, greater pressures to become commercially viable, lack of consistency in training package delivery, and the government’s changing rules. It is against this complex background that VET teachers need to confront and resolve a multitude of conflicting interests as they seek to balance a variety of personal and professional values in their teaching and decision-making. These perspectives imply that ethical judgements often may need to be made by VET teachers about a given problem or situation.

Difficulties can occur when equally attractive options could be justified as right (Duignan & Collins, 2003; Kidder, 1995) and, conversely, when there are only equally unattractive options with equally undesirable consequences. Finding the right option is unlikely to be an easy feat and requires a deep sense of responsibility. Within complex contexts and circumstances, it may not be so easy to discern what the right option might be and what the wrong option might be or whether the action is legal or illegal (Ehrich et al., 2011). It is not always simple to choose the right option as opposed to the wrong one (Kidder, 1995). As Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzman (2003, p. 478) stated, there is not always a clear-cut answer and what constitutes ethical behaviour is likely to lie in a “grey zone”. It is in the grey zone that teachers' morality is tested in their everyday work. In such an environment, it would be easy to lose sight of the ethical processes that are at the heart of making decisions for providing quality education to international students.
As illustrated by the preceding discussion, teachers face ethical dilemmas in the course of their daily work. An approach that has been identified as helping professionals to reach more informed and careful decisions is the use of ethical decision-making models. The next part of the discussion reviews some of these models and then puts forward the reviewing of models from the literature.

**Models of Ethical Decision-Making**

The term ethical decision-making is often used loosely to differentiate between desirable and undesirable conduct (Bagnall, 2002). However, models of ethical decision-making identify specific approaches for resolving ethical dilemmas. These models have been discussed extensively in the counseling literature (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998; Forester-Miller & Davis, 1996; Keith-Spiegal & Koocher, 1985; Kenyon, 1999; Remley & Herlihy, 2001; Steinman, Richardson, & McEnroe, 1998; Tymchuk, 1986; Van Hoose & Kottler, 1985; Van Hoose & Paradise, 1979; Welfel, 2002). Many of these models follow the lead of Van Hoose and Paradise by drawing on Bentham's (1948) utilitarian analysis of consequences procedure. Several variations of the Van Hoose and Paradise model have been proffered, following their decision-making process through a pattern of (a) problem identification; (b) defining goals by consulting various sources, including codes of ethics and knowledgeable colleagues; (c) generating possible courses of action; (d) considering possible consequences of these actions; (e) implementation; and (f) evaluating the situation as a whole.

Welfel's (2002) textbook on ethics covers Rest's (1986) four-component model in some detail, using it to reinvigorate standard decision-making models, while Erwin (2000) assessed moral sensitivity in supervisors. Rest's four-component model of moral behaviour draws together various features of morality: interpreting moral problems, making moral judgements, preferring moral values over non-moral ones, and implementing moral actions. Relationships between these elements – excluding only the implementation skills – were examined through four studies. Some additional ingredients are also considered, namely empathy as a motivational factor in moral behaviour and integrative complexity as representing the complexity and structure of thinking used in resolving conflicts between values. One focus of this work is the association of values with the other components of morality. One interventional, one experimental, and two correlational studies were conducted. Firstly, in moral behaviour, there must be some interpretation of a particular situation. The first component, later called moral sensitivity, includes consideration of which actions are possible in the situation, who are the parties concerned, and how they would be affected by the consequences of each action. Secondly, one must be able to
make a judgement about which course of action is morally right or fair, thus choosing one possible line of action as what one ought to do in that situation. Thirdly, one ought to give priority to moral values above other personal values such that the intention to do what is morally right is formed. This component is called moral motivation in the sense that values motivate individuals to achieve goals and guide their behaviour. Finally, the fourth component – moral character – involves having the courage and implementing skills to carry out a line of action even under pressure (Rest, 1986; Rest & Narvaez, 1994). Rest (1986) stressed that the order of the components in the model is logical rather than chronological. Although it logically makes sense that, for instance, Component 1 (sensitivity to the moral issues of the situation) precedes Component 3 (motivation to behave morally), one's value priorities might affect the interpretation of situations as morally relevant and which aspects of the situation are considered important.

The decision-making model developed by Anderson and Davies (2000) suggests that leaders engage in six steps when making decisions: problem identification, data gathering, asking questions, considering alternative approaches and courses of action, evaluating the outcome of each action, and engaging in a selected action. This model highlights several core elements of an ethical decision-making process. Nevarez and Wood (2010) stated that ethical decision-making models have four primary steps in common: identification of a problem, gathering data, conceptualizing and evaluating alternative courses of action, and implementing a course of action. They noted that Step 3 (constructing, considering, and evaluating alternative courses of action) encompasses Stages 4 and 5 of the model espoused by Anderson and Davies (2000).

Models of ethical decision-making may help bring clarity to the practitioner's reasoning process (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). The desired outcomes, however, are not always realized (Welfel, 2002). According to Remley and Herlihy, these traditional models “have tended to be linear, logical, rational, dispassionate, abstract, and paternalistic” (p. 15). Corey et al. (1998) also discussed their limitations and suggested tempering the disadvantages of these models by collaborating with clients or students when moving through the steps. Remley and Herlihy encouraged adopting other more culturally suitable heuristics, where appropriate. However, Fried (1997) suggested that making ethical decisions had become more difficult and complex because the notions of right and good are embedded in cultural and community consensus about values. Moreover, many individuals are members of more than one culture, and the accepted norms about right and wrong might vary (p. 6).

Most models are written using aspirational language (Herlihy & Corey, 1996), which reflects ideal behaviours rather than the minimal level of acceptable conduct. It is important to
realize that different professionals may implement different courses of action in the same situation. There is seldom ever a right answer to a complex ethical dilemma. However, Van Hoose and Paradise (1979) claim that, if one follows a systematic model, one can be assured that one will be able to give a professional explanation for the chosen course of action.

As seen from the literature, there are a number of models providing a theoretical perspective as to how difficult dilemmas are best resolved. But whether these models are adhered to or are of practical assistance in real-world contexts is unknown. These models indicate that a so-called “value neutral” position is required on the part of those responsible for resolving the dilemma. Is this possible in a VET environment?

Unfortunately, like most ethical standards, these models only provide general guidelines for ethical decision-making. In fact, it appears that new teachers are poorly prepared to handle ethical dilemmas they might encounter (Branstetter & Handelsman, 2000; Handelsman, 1986; Keith-Spiegel, Wittig, Perkins, Balogh, & Whitley, 2001; Keith-Spiegel, Whitley, Balogh, Perkins, & Wittig, 2002). Becoming and remaining an ethical teacher is not a simple task. Teachers’ commitment to the moral, ethical, and enculturation responsibilities can prove overwhelming if they are not prepared well (Nakar, 2013). There has been little attempt to identify links between the ethical thinking or knowledge of teachers and the way in which teachers resolve difficult dilemmas. This lack of knowledge raises a number of questions around the process that teachers use in resolving complex dilemmas and the extent to which their decisions are influenced by their ethical positions, the values and ethics of their colleagues, their leaders, and the norms or codes established by the institutions within which they work and the communities within which they are located. This leads to specific research questions: How do teachers resolve difficult dilemmas? Are they prepared and supported for that?

Implications for the Research Study

From the foregoing review of the literature, it could be argued that, in order that VET teachers can make professionally defensible decisions, it is critical for them to have a good understanding of the interconnecting factors that result in an ethical decision. The study’s focus aligns with Rockler’s (2004) argument that this issue is urgent, given the complex times in which educational professionals now live and work.

This literature review has outlined the context of the study. In sum, the varieties of ethical challenges which teachers encounter and the numerous functions and roles teachers are expected to fulfill are the source of teachers’ ethical dilemmas. As revealed by this literature review,
although most VET sector institutions concentrate on increasing student satisfaction with their educational experience, increasing participation in study abroad, enrolling more students, and internationalizing the curriculum, it appears that less attention has been paid to understanding the challenges and associated dilemmas encountered by VET teachers at the onset and during their educational endeavour.

Teaching requires judgement, appropriate action, and the capacity to reflect and revise decisions based on observations and insight. The knowledge of teaching must include teachers’ perspectives and therefore must be drawn from teachers’ experiences of their classrooms. This literature review shows that there are evident gaps in knowledge relating to the nature of challenges experienced by VET teachers. While previous research has explored school teachers’ and university academics’ experiences of challenges and dilemmas inherent in their work, this aspect has been under-researched in the VET sector. Researching VET teacher challenges and dilemmas is an important way to better understand the complex world of teaching and teachers. Therefore, the study seeks to learn more about the challenges faced in classrooms from the VET teachers’ perspective to create a more hospitable environment and activities in which a student can succeed both as learner and as an active partner in the education process. As Patton (2002) suggests, perspectives, gathered from “inside” will expand the debate as to what is “the case”.

As indicated in this section, there is a considerable gap in the literature that focuses on ethics and ethical issues for teachers within the VET sector. This is extraordinary considering the plethora of educational dilemmas and subsequent decision-making and reasoning that is currently required for moral and ethical teaching. Thus, the study identified the need for further research on the ethical impact of the changing cultural context of VET teaching on the work of vocational teachers. There is a need to understand better the extent to which it is codes of profession or teachers’ knowledge of theories, or moral imperatives that inform their practices to ethical dilemmas. Understanding the ethical dilemmas may provide a fruitful perspective on understanding those experiences. Such understanding may then be used to inform improvements in the development available to teachers. Understanding of how VET teachers construct and deal with ethical dilemmas may thus be used to contribute to the development of organizational guides and incentives to aid teachers toward ethical action.

From the preceding literature review, then, the topic on which this research will focus is the exploration of the strategies used by VET teachers in addressing ethical dilemmas encountered in their work as teachers. This study set out to illuminate the factors determining how VET teachers resolve difficult dilemmas and contribute to linking theoretical approaches to
ethical decision-making that takes place within the VET environment. Uncovering the extent of the influence of the codes or teachers’ knowledge of theories, moral imperatives, or moral reasoning in informing such decision-making is a key element in this.

**Conceptual Framework**

The historical policy context of the topic may be summarized in a conceptual framework for guiding empirical research on the topic. Such a framework would, accordingly, have four primary elements: (a) the traditional, autonomous, professional approach to VET practice in education; (b) the contemporary, more formalized approach to VET practice; (c) the articulated research topic arising from that context, to be addressed in empirical research on the topic; and (d) the particular research questions stemming from that globalized formalization to be addressed in the study.

The traditional, autonomous, professional, approach to VET practice in education embraces traditional VET provision, the professionalization of practice, autonomous decision-making, the internalization of value, and moral autonomy (Nakar, 2013). The contemporary formalization of VET practice identifies the sorts of changes mentioned in the preceding background arguments including, particularly, the marketization of educational provision, the formalization of practice, heteronomous decision-making, the externalization of value, and codes of conduct.

The research topic of the study is the ethical impact of changes in the cultural context of vocational education teaching in Australia on the work of teachers and an exploration of the strategies used by VET teachers in addressing ethical dilemmas encountered in their work as teachers. The dilemmas generated by changes in the contemporary cultural context of VET teaching fall into the notion of moral dilemma out of conflict generated from tensions between what one (intrinsically) understands that one should do in a particular situation and what one feels impelled to do by extrinsic imperatives or pressures. Such dilemmas arise, then, from changed circumstances in the contemporary cultural context of VET, creating (extrinsic) pressure for action in conflict with VET teachers’ understanding of their traditional, intrinsic moral commitments or imperatives as teachers. The exploratory study aimed to investigate the ethical dilemmas faced by VET teachers in decision-making. Therefore, through the following research question:

How do VET teachers address ethical dilemmas encountered in their work as teachers?
The following five sub-questions were seen as addressing that question:

1. What sorts of ethical dilemmas do VET teachers now face in their workplaces?
2. How do they understand those dilemmas?
3. How do they address them?
4. How well equipped are they in addressing them?
5. What more might be done to assist them in doing so?

The next chapter describes the method that this study adopted to address the identified gaps. It outlines the methodology used for the project, provides a rationale for the choices made in terms of analytical approach, and includes an account of factors that influenced the conduct of the study.

Summary

In chapter two, the global context of VET is explored in light of the changes to the VET sector and possible impacts on the Australian environment. This literature review has outlined the context of the study. Over the last decade, a new consensus has emerged that teacher quality is perhaps the most significant factor in students’ achievement and educational improvement (Bagnall, 2004). As revealed by this literature review, although most VET sector institutions concentrate on increasing student satisfaction with their educational experience, increasing participation in study abroad, enrolling more students and internationalizing the curriculum, it appears that less attention has been paid to understanding the challenges and associated dilemmas encountered by VET teachers at the onset and during their educational endeavour. This literature review shows that there are evident gaps in knowledge relating to the nature of challenges and dilemmas experienced by VET teachers.

While recent studies (Black 2009a, 2009b; Marginson 2004; Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman & Roy 2006, Stearns 2009 and Takerei 2010) seem to have identified broad problem areas, VET teachers’ challenges and associated dilemmas and their wider implications are inadequately investigated or addressed. Therefore, the study sought to learn more about the challenges faced in classrooms from the VET teachers’ perspective. As Patton (2002) suggests, perspectives, gathered from ‘inside’ will expand the debate as to what is “the case”. This is not a new endeavour but it is an important step in the process of regaining VET teachers’ voice. It also
identified significant research gaps with regard to VET teachers’ experiences in teaching international students in Australia. The identified challenges provided the underlying structure for data collection, analysis and presenting the findings of the study. The next chapter describes the method that this study adopted to address the identified gaps. It outlines the methodology used for the project, provides a rationale for the choices made in terms of analytical approach, and includes an account of factors that influenced the conduct of the study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the design for the research. It provides a rationale for the choice of methodology and methods adopted for this research project.

Phenomenology was chosen as the preferred methodology for this study and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the preferred research method. Semistructured interviewing and inductive analysis were used to explore the current understanding and practices of teacher dilemmas and of teachers’ decision-making in vocational educational institutions.

This chapter provides an overview of the research approach adopted for the study. Following that, the data-collection approach is presented with qualitative semistructured interviewing as the primary data-gathering method. This section also details the sample for the study and the data-collection procedure. Then follows a section discussing how the data were analyzed and then the final section of the chapter discusses the factors considered to ensure research quality, integrity, and ethical considerations of the research.

Research Approach

This section provides an outline of the research paradigm and research method used in this study. The exploratory study aimed to investigate the ethical dilemmas faced by VET teachers in decision-making. Therefore, it responded to the following research question:

How do VET teachers address ethical dilemmas encountered in their work as teachers?

The following open-ended follow-up questions were asked to understand teacher experiences:

1. What sorts of ethical dilemmas do VET teachers now face in their workplaces?
2. How do they understand those dilemmas?
3. How do they address them?
4. How well equipped are they in addressing them?
5. What more might be done to assist them in doing so?

The research questions called for the interpretation of the lived experience of VET teachers in facing dilemmas in their moral work. The questions thus sought data that expressed the interpreted experiences of teachers, requiring a phenomenological approach to the study.
This research approach was felt to best fit the study as it involves exploring individuals’ lived experience, what van Manen (1990) regarded as tapping into the unique nature of each human situation. van Manen suggested that at its most basic level, lived experience is about our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness, unaware of itself. He further said, “lived experience is to the soul what breath is to the body” (p. 36). In this respect, van Manen argued that lived experience was the breathing of meaning into an event or experience and the meanings people place on it can only be illuminated when they go through a process of reflection. He argued that research of a phenomenological nature will have lived experience as a starting point and end point where lived expression is transformed into a textual expression of its essence through a subjective and reflective process of interpretation. Houston and Mullan-Jensen (2011) also argued that at the heart of qualitative investigation is an attempt to understand meaning but in the context of the wider social processes that shape it. These authors further argued that social experience and lived realities are multidimensional and our understandings are impoverished and may be inadequate if we view these phenomena only along a single dimension.

By taking an all-round view through IPA, which has hermeneutics and phenomenology as its base, the participants’ psychological insights could be obtained alongside an understanding of how human and social structures play their roles (Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2011). They suggested that this may be in the form of beliefs and constructs that are manifested in a participant’s narrative, or when the researcher holds that the participant’s story can itself represent a piece of the participant’s identity. They also suggested that meaning is central and that the aim is to understand the content and complexity of the meanings, not the frequency.

The study was accordingly phenomenological in nature and the research method essentially qualitative although quantitative to the extent of looking at frequency across participants. As it has an idiographic focus, IPA normally employs purposive sampling. Thus, purposive sampling was employed with homogeneous samples and semistructured interviews for data collection. This was followed by transcription of interview sessions at semantic level following the recommendations by Smith and Osborn (2003). Data were obtained by in-depth focused conversational interviews with participants. Analysis involved narrative interpretation of the experiences from the participants. A detailed view was taken of knowledge as culturally constructed and as based on interpretative experience of description of teachers’ interpretation of these experiences. Data analysis was grounded in the inductive interpretation of the narrative data to identify the answers to the research question.
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938) was a central figure in developing phenomenology as a philosophical movement (Ashworth, 2003). The core philosophical basis of Husserl’s approach was a rejection of the view that there is anything more fundamental than experience. In this way, Husserl defined experience as a system of interrelated meanings that are bound up in a totality of the “lifeworld”. Intentionality is another key notion of the phenomenological approach. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) described intentionality as the essence of consciousness, meaning that our consciousness is always directed toward some other world. In this way, intentionality does not have the same meaning as that which can be attributed to its everyday use of deliberate or goal orientated, but refers to acts of consciousness toward objects, which transcend the acts themselves. These acts of consciousness are then communicated to the world by description.

IPA was first used as a distinctive research framework in psychology in the mid-1990s as a method that drew on theoretical ideas from phenomenology (Giorgi, 1995) and hermeneutics (Palmer, 1969), and on an engagement with subjective experience and personal accounts (Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995). IPA is also influenced by symbolic interactionism (Eatough & Smith, 2008), which provides a theoretical perspective with basic assumptions that people act on the basis of the meanings that things have for them and that meanings emerge in the processes of social interaction between people (Blumer, 1969). Thus, meanings are constructed and modified through an interpretative process that is subject to change and redefinition (Blumer, 1969). In this way, “people form new meanings and new ways to respond and thus are active in shaping their own future through the process of interpreting meaning” (Benzies & Allen, 2001, p. 544).

By combining insights from phenomenology, hermeneutic philosophy, and engagement with subjective experience, IPA proposes a middle way between different qualitative methods (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005a, 2005b). In common with phenomenological psychology, it offers researchers an avenue to study subjective experiences and the meanings that people attribute to their experience. In common with discursive psychology, IPA accepts that the research process is fundamentally hermeneutic, with both researcher and participants engaging in interpretative activities that are constrained by shared social and cultural discourses. This synthesis of ideas from different perspectives has led to the development of a distinctive qualitative methodology. As Willig (2008) contended, the introduction of IPA has made phenomenological methodology accessible to those who do not have a philosophical background. Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005a, 2005b) explained that IPA focuses on the content of
consciousness and the individuals’ experience of the world. This statement indicates the importance of establishing how individuals view their world. The aim of IPA is to understand the participant’s view of the world and associated cognitions, to gain an “insider’s perspective” of the phenomena in question (McLeod, 2001; Smith, Potter, & Smith, 2010; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Smith and Osborn contend that as IPA research often concerns topics of considerable existential significance, it is likely that the participants will link the specific topic to their sense of self-identity.

**Assumptions of IPA**

Although IPA is grounded in the experiential dimension in its concern with a detailed examination of individual lived experience and how people are making sense of that experience, it “endorses social constructionism’s claim that sociocultural and historical processes are central to how we experience and understand our lives, including the stories we tell about these lives” (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 184). In this respect it can be located at a centre-ground position between experiential approaches such as descriptive phenomenology and discursive approaches such as discourse analysis. In the experiential approaches the focus is on participants’ experiences and how they make sense of their experiences. The discursive approaches are focused on language as a social action that is used to construct and create the social world (Reicher, 2000).

Different qualitative methods are grounded in different epistemological stances (Henwood & Pigeon, 1992; Willig, 2008). They vary significantly, as “they have different philosophical roots, they have different theoretical assumptions and they ask different types of questions” (Reicher, 2000, p. 4). However, there is considerable overlapping between qualitative methods (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008; Lyons, 2007; Smith et al., 2009) and the distinction between the different approaches can be conceived in terms of a continuum from the experiential to the discursive and from the empiricist to constructionist (Lyons, 2007; Willig, 2008). With its focus on content and systematic analysis of a text to identify themes and categories, IPA shares some similarities with grounded theory (Willig, 2008). Through its concern with meaning-making IPA also shares strong intellectual links with narrative analysis (Crossley, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). Eatough and Smith (2006) maintained that “IPA shares some common ground with Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), which examines how the people’s worlds are discursively constructed and how these are implicated in the experiences of the individual” (pp. 118-119). In this respect, IPA can be described as located at the “light end of the social constructionist continuum” (ibid.) in relation to discourse analysis. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that while IPA
studies provide a detailed experiential account of the person's involvement in the context, FDA offers a critical analysis of the structure of the context itself and thus touches on the resources available to the individual in making sense of their experience.

**Features of IPA**

Smith (2004) described five characteristic features of IPA: its phenomenological, interpretative, idiographic, inductive, and interrogative nature.

By phenomenological is meant that it is concerned with individuals' perceptions of objects or events, as in the case of this study, including participants’ responses to managing and dealing with dilemmas related to decision-making by VET teachers in their teaching practice. With phenomenology as its basis, IPA explores in detail how participants have made sense of their experiences by examining their accounts of their experiences, which assumes an existing inclination towards self-reflection (Shaw, 2001; Smith, 2004). In this way, IPA focuses on the exploration of participants’ experiences, understandings, perceptions, and views (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). On a methodological level, this means that an IPA study typically involves a highly intensive and detailed analysis by asking critical questions of participants’ accounts. Thus, interpretation can be descriptive and empathic, aiming to produce “rich experiential descriptions”, and also critical and questioning, “in ways which participants might be unwilling or unable to do themselves” (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 189).

IPA is interpretative in recognizing the role of the researcher in making sense of the experience of participants. Smith (2004) refers to “double hermeneutics”: while the participant is trying to make sense of their personal world, the researcher is trying to make sense of the world of the participant. In this way, IPA uses in-depth qualitative analyses and a process of explication to examine cognitive processes. The researcher’s point of access to participants’ experience is through their accounts, usually obtained through direct contact with participants. The concept of double hermeneutics refers also to the researcher’s own involvement through their own preconceptions and “prejudices” which may constitute an obstacle to interpretation (Smith, 2007), unless priority is given to the phenomenon under investigation.

IPA is idiographic in the sense that it starts with the detailed examination of one case or participant until some degree of saturation has been achieved, before the analyst moves on to a second case. This process continues until all cases in the research have been examined; only then can the researcher conduct cross-case analysis on the meaning-units and themes of each individual case for convergence and divergence.
IPA is inductive (as are many other qualitative methodologies) as it involves techniques that allow for unanticipated or unpredicted themes to emerge during analysis. Thus, IPA does not involve generating specific hypotheses based on the extant literature but rather generates broad research questions, which then lend themselves to the collection of expansive data. Smith (2004) stated that IPA can be most exciting to uncover the unexpected while engaged with the material.

IPA is interrogative, as one of its central aims is to contribute to the existing body of literature. Even though IPA involves in-depth analysis of small sample sizes, the results can be discussed in relation to the broader extant literature.

**Data Collection**

The methods adopted within qualitative research are inclined to reflect a belief that social phenomena can best be accessed through small-scale research designed to gather a deeper understanding of the issue under consideration (Silverman, 2000). Quantitative research requires statistical calculation of sample size a priori, to ensure sufficient power to confirm that the outcome can indeed be attributed to the intervention. In qualitative research, however, the sample size is not generally predetermined. The number of participants depends upon the number required to inform, as far as possible, all-important elements of the phenomenon being studied. Because the primary concern of IPA is with a detailed account of individual experience, IPA studies usually benefit from an intensive focus on a small number of participants. Sample size can vary according to the research question and the quality of data obtained.

**Sample Size and Selection**

Smith and Osborn (2003) note that sample size depends on a number of factors and that there is no “right” sample size (p. 54). Whilst IPA assumes that there is no correct sample size, as an idiographic approach this traditionally reflects a small sample size as being the norm (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The aim of small groups is to allow the researcher the opportunity to obtain an in-depth account of the perceptions of the group, instead of inferring general statements. Large sample sets are associated with the risk of potentially losing subtle reflections of meaning (Reid et al., 2005a). Scholars like Boyd (2001), Reid (2002), and Smith and Osborn (2003) regarded two to 10 participants or research subjects as sufficient to reach saturation, recommending long interviews with participants for a phenomenological study. Creswell (1998) recommended long interviews with more people rather than having multiple interviews with a small number for a phenomenological study.
A sample size of 18 teachers was selected; eight were from TAFE and 11 from private RTOs, with one teacher working in both. In this research approach, those who responded to interview questions were referred to as participants. The participants varied in age, gender, subject area, and length of work history in the organization. The study recognized that such a sample size could have resulted in manageability issues but the researcher intended to cover the depth of the dilemmas rather than assuming that a small number will achieve saturation. Hence, this study, typically conducted 18 interviews (one detailed interview with each participant and no subsequent focus group discussion).

Drawing on Psathas’ (1973) discussion of conversational analysis, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggested that an interview can be treated as a number of instances and analysed in great depth. He writes that a ‘method of instances’ takes ‘each instance of a phenomenon, for example an interview, as an occurrence which evidences the operation of a set of cultural understandings currently available for use by cultural members’. From this perspective, decisions about conducting only one interview was guided by these concerns as well as by more pragmatic questions of time and funding and availability of sampling frame. Black (2010) pointed out that a phenomenologist inspired by Merleau-Ponty (1964) would be attentive to how the speaker’s lifeworld was expressed and that if one is listening for hidden meanings and the contours of the subconscious, interview might be enough to use as a methodological tool. Baker and Edwards (2012) pointed out that a key issue is the ability to build a convincing narrative based on rich detail and complexity. Mason (2002) listed some of the strengths of qualitative interviews that are sometimes lost from sight, arguing that, “Through them we can explore: • the texture and weave of everyday life; • the understandings, experiences and imaginings of research participants; • how social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work; and • the significance of the meanings that they generate” (p. 1).

Kvale (1996) and Silverman (2000) pointed out that the purpose of the research interview is to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are believed to provide a ‘deeper’ understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires. Hence it was decided to use interviews not only to provide the depth of understanding but also to access VET teachers’ own views and meanings of their ethical dilemmas, practices and beliefs. Interviews were, therefore, the most appropriate form of data construction as little is known about the ethical impact of contemporary cultural context of VET on teachers and detailed insights are required from individual participants. This approach to the study supports the argument of
Silverman (2000) that interviews are also particularly appropriate while exploring sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about such issues in a group environment. The study also acknowledged that while focus groups are useful in generating a rich understanding of participants’ experiences and beliefs, they are used for generating information on collective views, and the meanings that lie behind those views. However, the study supports the argument of Morgan (1998) who suggested that focus groups should be avoided if the topic of interest to the researcher is not a topic the participants can or wish to discuss leaving the participants feeling uneasy with each other, and resulting in not discussing their feelings and opinions openly.

As the study intended to explore the sensitive topic of ethical dilemmas faced by teachers and its impact on them, interviews were recognised as the most appropriate method to give insight into the meanings that teachers attach to experiences, social processes, practices and events. In addition, the study supports the argument of May (1991) that interviews can be performed on a one-off basis unless change over time is of interest. Since understanding the changes in the dilemmas of VET teachers over the study period was not the scope of the study, the decision was made to use one-off interview where the fundamental purpose of the research interview was to listen attentively to what respondents had to say, in order to acquire more knowledge about the study topic.

**Locating the Research Participants**

Neumann (2000) states that researchers focus on particular methods in order to generate sample groups that are representative of their research requirements. Two broad kinds of sampling methods are available to researchers: probability sampling that entails random sampling, and non-probability sampling entailing non-random sampling. In phenomenological research the primary aim of sampling is to collect specific information in order to access a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences. It is for this reason that qualitative researchers make use of non-probability sampling. Neumann outlines several methods of non-probability sampling, including the haphazard, quota, purposeful, snowball, deviant case, sequential, and theoretical methods.

The approach to recruiting participants for an IPA study follows from the theoretical account of the epistemology of IPA. This means that participants will be selected purposively, which is considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling to identify participants. Purposive sampling refers to a method of selecting participants because they have particular features or characteristics, which will enable detailed exploration of
the phenomena being studied (Welman & Kruger, 1999). Participants are selected who can best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study. Hence, one of the most important tasks in the study design phase is to identify appropriate participants. Decisions regarding selection are based on the research questions, theoretical perspectives, and evidence informing the study. Hence, for the purpose of this study, the sample was selected purposively in order to gain an insight into the lived experiences of a diverse cohort of teachers working within a similar geographic area, to form a largely homogeneous sample (Kruger, 1988; Smith et al., 2010).

The teachers selected for the interviews were purposefully chosen in order to obtain varied perspectives (Appendix C). Accessing a range of study participants is held to enhance the researcher’s attempt to understand a phenomenon by seeking out persons or settings that represent the greatest differences in that phenomenon (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, pp. 56-57). In keeping with this notion, the criteria used for selecting the teachers comprised the location of the RTO, the period of time the teachers had worked in a RTO, their most commonly used teaching method, and the industry area of their expertise. It was also considered important in the light of the great diversity of practices that VET teachers may engage in, that there should be a cross section of teachers according to their most commonly used teaching methods. The three methods selected were face-to-face, work-based, and blended delivery. The latter concept of blended delivery includes a combination of any methodologies such as online, face to face, and work based. In addition, teachers were selected from a range of industry areas, including trade and non-trade, which further enhanced diversity in teacher perspectives. However, in the comparative analysis of the data there were no significance differences between the perceptions of teachers from RTOs located in different geographical areas or between teachers working in different industry areas, or between those using different teaching methods. Thus, the research findings discussed in this study highlight significant differences in teacher perceptions mainly based on the experience of the participants in their employing RTOs.

Participants were invited through personal invitation or email outlining the description of the research; this means of access was selected on the assumption that people are likely to be more willing to talk to the researcher if they know them, where they work, and what the project is about (Appendix A). Interviews were arranged with these participants. These interviewees were the primary unit of analysis (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000), with their informed consent (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bailey, 1996, p. 11; Street, 1998). In order to ensure ethical research, I made use of informed consent (Holloway, 1997; Kvale, 1996) (Appendix B). Bailey (1996) cautions that
deception may be counterproductive. However, not asking the leading (Kvale, 1996) central research question is not regarded as deception. Based on Bailey’s recommended items, I developed a specific informed consent agreement in order to gain informed consent from participants, covering the points, namely: that they are participating in research; the purpose of the research (without stating the central research question); the procedures of the research; the risk and benefits of the research; the voluntary nature of research participation; the subject’s (informant’s) right to stop the research at any time; and the procedures used to protect confidentiality (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000; Kvale, 1996, Street, 1998).

Bailey (1996) further observes that deception might prevent insights, whereas honesty coupled with confidentiality reduces suspicion and promotes sincere responses. To this end, the informed consent agreement form was explained to each participant at the beginning of each interview.

The Interviews

When using the phenomenological approach during interviews, the main aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences (Munhall, 2007). In phenomenological research, the research questions are not predetermined; instead, the researcher follows the cues of the participants (Ray, 1994). By bringing the presupposition that we might post leading questions into consciousness, semistructured interviews can be arranged to steer and guide the interview. A semistructured interview is a technique for generating qualitative data and is characterized by open-ended questions that are developed in advance, and by prepared probes (Morse & Richards, 2002). In a semistructured interview, the interviewer has a set of questions on an interview schedule, but the interview will be guided by the schedule rather than dictated by it; the interviewer is free to probe interesting areas that arise from participants’ interests or concerns (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

IPA requires a data-collection method which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of experiences. Semistructured, one-to-one interviews have been used most often, as they are particularly useful for in-depth idiographic studies exploring how participants are making sense of experiences. Such interviews enable the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue, modify questions, and follow interesting aspects that come up during the interview (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). It is helpful to envisage the interaction during
interviews as a conversation which, although guided by the researcher’s pre-prepared questions, opens up a space for participants to provide detailed accounts of experiences guided by their own concerns. During the interview, it may be more fruitful to follow unexpected turns initiated by the participant’s accounts, rather than adhering to the specific questions in the original sequence. As Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) contend,

“Unexpected turns are often the most valuable aspects of interviewing: on the one hand they tell us something we did not even anticipate needing to know; on the other, because they arise unprompted, they may well be of particular importance to the participant.” (p. 58)

To this end, in-depth, semistructured, non-directed interviews were designed (a) to gain access to the phenomenon of being placed in a situation creating ethical dilemmas requiring decision-making, (b) to “give voice to” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006) the intimate experiential understanding and elaboration of this experience of VET teachers through words and bodily gestures, and (c) through phenomenological interpretation, to understand the subjective processes and meaning-making of this experience, a feature that is underdeveloped in the literature (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Larkin et al., 2006) and that is rarely discussed in the context of ethics (with a few notable exceptions: Greenfield & Jensen 2010; Guenther, 2011, 2013; Haggman-Laitila, 1999; Murray & Holmes, 2013; Usher & Holmes, 1997).

Semistructured, one-to-one interviews consisted of a range of open-ended questions, including prompts that allowed further elaboration of the topic under discussion. The interviews started with a broad question, “Can you please tell me the ethical dilemmas faced by you in your workplace?” and were followed by more specific topics: the cause of dilemmas, the effect on one’s life, the process of decision-making, and suggestions that one would give to improve the situation.

Open-ended questions were asked so that the participants could best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings (Creswell, 2008). Only after the first question was fully answered, at least as far as the interviewee described or expressed and after needed follow-up questions were answered, the second question was posed. The subsequent questions were asked by making links to what the participant had just been discussing to avoid making it sound like a split conversation. In my approach to interviewing, I chose to deliberately withdraw the authority of my experience as a
“teller” and to create an environment of trust that encouraged participants to construct their own, personally meaningful experiences about teaching dilemmas and strategies.

Usefully, however, and in contrast to largely quantitative approaches such as surveys and structured questionnaires, semistructured interviews provided the researcher with the flexibility to allow the interview to evolve and develop in interesting and perhaps previously unconsidered ways, encouraging participants to expand upon their answers (Coolican, 2004). This level of informality was very important, particularly in conducting research in complex contexts where there are often no simple explanations regarding human thought and action. I furthermore reminded the interviewees that there was no right or wrong answer and that I was primarily interested in their experiences and the dilemmas they face. It offered opportunities for detailed exploration of complex issues as participants gave information within a conversational framework. It also provided a flexible approach to eliciting and exploring information from VET teachers since the interviewer could pursue a particular response with an individual, ask for elaboration or redefinition, or probe and pursue factors or feelings that arose during the exchange. Interviews with teachers provided illuminating experiences into their dilemmas, challenges, and strategies used by them. Open discussions were useful as they provided an insight into how participants felt about their job and dilemmas. Furthermore, they provided the study with an overview of the types of issues underlying and influencing the central research question. To ensure accuracy, the entire interview was audio recorded. The duration of the interviews was between 40 and 90 minutes, with an average interview lasting 50 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Pilot Study

Dowling and Brown (2010) stressed that it is vital to carry out a pilot study with a sample which matches the profile of the sample for the main study. As the study involved choosing interviewees who were knowledgeable about the research problem, a pilot study was conducted to test the quality of the interview protocol, the equipment being used, and the analytical approach. It is also important that interview questions are clear and unambiguous (Creswell, 2008) and free from possible bias (Dowling & Brown, 2010).

As the study intended to interview 18 teachers as research participants, two participants were interviewed for the pilot study and became the part of the wider study of 18 participants. The participants were asked open-ended questions related to the phenomenon of dilemmas, their experience of dilemmas in decision-making in their teaching activities, and the outcomes of the
same in their worlds. Both the interviews were conducted on the same pattern to test methods and
terminology, and to see how readily interviewees expand upon the answers. After each interview,
the recording was transcribed with meticulous accuracy, often including, for example, indications
of pauses, mis-hearings, apparent mistakes, and even speech dynamics where these were in any
way remarkable. The pilot study indicated that the interview questions were adequate to solicit
answers about teacher experiences; hence, no changes were made to the interview questions or
approach.
**Data Storage**

Each interview was tape-recorded with the consent of the participants in order that a verbatim account of the interview could be gained for data analysis. “Memoing” (Huberman & Miles, 1984, p. 69) is another important data source in qualitative research, and one that I used in this study. It is the researcher’s field notes recording what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the process. Thus, hand notes were taken to note particular non-verbal behaviours or topics to return to later in the interview. Data were collected and the results are reported in an honest, respectful, and informed manner that maintains the privacy and the confidentiality of the individual (Creswell, 2008; Griffith University, 2014). Data storage included audio recordings, field notes, and filing of hard copy documentation. The interview transcriptions and field notes were also stored electronically on multiple hard drives. The data analysis, or rather explication of the data, is explained next.

**Data Analysis**

IPA provides a flexible framework of processes and strategies for analysis. Analysis in IPA is an iterative, complex, and creative process which requires the researcher’s reflective engagement in a dialogue with a participant’s narrative and meanings. Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 9) regard analysis as the “systematic procedures to identify essential features and relationships”. It is a way of transforming the data through interpretation.

Although in practice the analysis is fluid, iterative, and multidirectional, for the purpose of illustrating the process here it is useful to describe distinct stages. This data-analysis process has five “steps” or phases, which are:

1. bracketing and phenomenological reduction;
2. delineating units of meaning;
3. clustering units of meaning to form themes;
4. summarizing each interview and validating it; and
5. extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary (Hycner, 1999).

These steps are now discussed in turn.
Bracketing and Phenomenological Reduction

Zinker (1978) explains that the term phenomenological implies a process, which emphasizes the unique experiences of research participants. The here-and-now dimensions of those personal experiences give phenomena existential immediacy, meaning that it is likely that the participants will link the research topic to their sense of self or identity.

Phenomenological reduction to pure subjectivity (Lauer, 1958) is a deliberate and purposeful opening by the researcher to the phenomenon in its own right with its own meaning (Fouche, 1993; Hycner, 1999). It further points to a suspension of or “bracketing out” (or epoche) – in a sense that in its regard no position is taken either for or against it (Lauer, 1958) – the researcher’s own presuppositions and avoiding the researcher’s meanings and interpretations or theoretical concepts to enter the unique world of the participant (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Sadala & Adorno, 2001). This is a different conception of the term bracketing used when interviewing, to bracket the phenomenon researched for the interviewee. Here it refers to the bracketing of the researcher’s personal views or preconceptions (Miller & Crabtree, 1992). To achieve that, Holloway (1997) and Hycner (1999) recommend that the researcher listens repeatedly to the audio recording of each interview to become familiar with the words of the interviewee informant in order to develop a holistic sense.

To achieve that, the initial stage of analysis consisted of reading the whole transcript a number of times to become thoroughly familiar with the data. Observations and reflections about the interview experience as well as any other thoughts and comments of potential significance were recorded in a separate reflexive notebook. This was accompanied by a detailed textual analysis that started with writing notes and comments on the transcript. The process of engaging with the transcript in close analysis involved focusing on content and use of language, context, and interpretative comments arising from the engagement with the material. Other notes included initial interpretative comments and reflections.

The goals of the analysis were to reflect the complexity of human interaction by portraying it in the words of the interviewees and through actual events and to make that complexity understandable to others. I drew upon direct quotes from the interviewees and included them alongside each category of description to demonstrate that the categories were an accurate reflection of the views expressed by the interviewees. Thus, a second-order approach was achieved and researcher bias, while acknowledged, was minimized.
Delineating Units of Meaning

Delineating units of meaning is a critical phase of explicating the data, in that those statements that are seen to illuminate the researched phenomenon are extracted or “isolated” (Creswell, 1998; Holloway, 1997; Hycner, 1999). The researcher is required to make a substantial number of judgement calls while consciously bracketing her or his own presuppositions in order to avoid inappropriate subjective judgements. The list of units of relevant meaning extracted from each interview is carefully scrutinized and the clearly redundant units eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). To do this, the researcher considers the literal content, the number (the significance) of times a meaning was mentioned, and also how (non-verbal or paralinguistic cues) it was stated.

Since I sought to understand the dilemmas teachers face and how they deal with them, I identified data that answered such questions as: Are some dilemmas handled in ways that are ethical or unethical? Do people react differently to dilemmas? Do individuals handle dilemmas differently? Do new teachers and experienced teachers handle dilemmas differently? Does educational background affect how people respond? Are dilemmas handled differently in private and public VET institutions? What are the implications of the dilemmas on personal life? Through this analysis I aimed to accurately represent the range of perspectives expressed by participants.

Clustering of Units of Meaning to Form Themes

With the list of non-redundant units of meaning in hand, the researcher must again bracket her or his presuppositions in order to remain true to the phenomenon. By rigorously examining the list of units of meaning the researcher tries to elicit the essence of meaning of units within the holistic context. Hycner (1999) remarked that this calls for even more judgement and skill on the part of the researcher.

Clusters of themes are typically formed by grouping units of meaning together (Creswell, 1998; King, 1994; Moustakas, 1994) and then the researcher identifies significant topics, also called units of significance (Sadala & Adorno, 2001). Both Holloway (1997) and Hycner (1999) emphasized the importance of the researcher going back to the recorded interview (the gestalt) and forth to the list of non-redundant units of meaning to derive clusters of appropriate meaning. Often there is overlap in the clusters, which can be expected, considering the nature of human phenomena. By interrogating the meaning of the various clusters, central themes are determined, “which expresses the essence of these clusters” (Hycner, 1999, p. 153).
To achieve this, the next stage involved returning to the transcript to transform the initial notes into emerging themes. The main task involved an attempt to formulate concise phrases that contain enough particularity to remain grounded in the text and enough abstraction to offer a conceptual understanding.

The next stage consisted of examining the emerging themes and clustering them together according to conceptual similarities. The task at this stage was to look for patterns in the emerging themes and produce a structure which was helpful in highlighting converging ideas. The clusters were given a descriptive label which conveyed the conceptual nature of the themes in each cluster. To aid the analysis and to identify dilemmas and recurring themes, I coded and checked and revised the coding several times to make sure that no important dilemma was left out. The approach provided by Creswell (2008) was used as a basis. Thus, I divided it into text segments, labelled the segments with codes, examined codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapsed these codes into broad themes (Creswell, 2008, p. 237).

**Summarizing Each Interview and Validating**

A summary that incorporates all the themes elicited from the data gives a holistic context (Hycner, 1999). Ellenberger captures it as follows: Whatever the method used for a phenomenological analysis, the aim of the investigator is the reconstruction of the inner world of experience of the subject. Each individual has his or her own way of experiencing temporality, spatiality, and materiality, but each of these coordinates must be understood in relation to the others and to the total inner “world” (as cited in Hycner, 1999, pp. 153-154). At this point the researcher conducts a “validity check” by returning to the informant to determine whether the essence of the interview has been correctly “captured” (Hycner, 1999, p. 154). Any modification necessary is done as a result of this validity check.

To achieve this, the next step involving more than one participant consisted of moving to the next case and repeating the process for each participant. Inevitably the analysis of the first case influenced further analysis. However, in keeping with IPA’s idiographic commitment, it was important to consider each case on its own terms, trying to bracket the ideas and concepts which emerged from the first case. In following the steps rigorously for each case separately, it was important to keep an open mind to allow new themes to emerge from each case. As the analysis of subsequent transcripts continued, earlier transcripts were reviewed and instances from earlier transcripts added and included in the ongoing analysis. Once all transcripts had been analyzed and a table of themes had been constructed for each, a final table of themes was constructed for
the study as a whole. In the process of constructing the final table, the tables of themes for each participant were reviewed and, if necessary, amended and checked again with the transcript. The process was iterative and required repeated return to the data to check meanings.

**Extracting General and Unique Themes for the Interviews and Composite Summary**

Once the process outlined in points one through four has been done for all the interviews, the researcher looks “for the themes common to most or all of the interviews as well as the individual variations” (Hycner, 1999, p. 154). With its idiographic approach, IPA focuses in particular on establishing levels of analysis that enable the researcher to see any patterns emerging across the cases, but which also allow the researcher to note the particular intricacies of individual cases. Care must be taken not to cluster common themes if significant differences exist.

To achieve this, the themes were analyzed for interconnections such as layered and interrelated themes. I compared concepts and themes across the interviews or combined separate events to formulate a description of the setting. In doing so, I endeavoured to answer research question in ways that allowed drawing broader theoretical conclusions. Finally, the core themes were considered in light of current literature concerning teachers’ perceptions, providing further confidence in the generation of the themes. Since the present study is exploratory in nature, the interview data was analyzed inductively using thematic analysis. Themes were identified, examples of each were collected and the relation to one another was learnt. In this way, clues among the data were observed that helped understand what teachers mean by dilemmas and how they face them. Gradually the concepts were weaved together into themes, that is, longer explanatory phrases or statements.

After interviewing was done, I examined all the interviews together to pull out coherent and consistent descriptions, themes, and theories that speak to research question. The data was analysed in accordance with data driven qualitative approaches, applying qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006; Patton 2002). The study focused on teachers’ individual perceptions and experiences. However, in the analysis, I looked for patterns and common elements that recurred across different interviews and produced general characterizations from the interview data. In carrying out the data analysis, I prepared transcripts, found, refined and elaborated concepts, themes, and events; and then coded the interviews to be able to retrieve what the interviewees had said about the identified concepts, themes and events. Following Rubin and Rubin (2005), I looked to the end of the research, in the analysis and theory
building. By anticipating what I planned to do with the data early on, I ensured that I had obtained the needed information. Since I sought to understand the dilemmas teachers face and how they deal with them, I identified data that answered such questions as: Are some dilemmas handled in ways that are ethical or unethical? Do people react differently to dilemmas? Do individuals handle dilemmas differently? Do fresh graduates and experienced teachers handle dilemmas differently? Does educational background affect how people respond? Are dilemmas handled differently in private and public VET institutions? What are the implications of the dilemmas on the personal life?

Through this analysis I aimed to accurately represent the range of perspectives expressed by participants. The interview approach enabled the participants to freely share their knowledge, experiences and perceptions of teaching international students. Therefore, in analyzing the data I was alert to possible personal biases of my opinions being a VET teacher myself and controversial opinions among the participants and I therefore discovered various sides to the topic. To aid the analysis and to identify dilemmas and recurring themes, I coded and checked and revised the coding several times to make sure that no important dilemma was left out. The approach provided by Creswell (2008) was used as a basis. Thus, I divided it into text segments, labelled the segments with codes, examined codes for overlap and redundancy and collapsed these codes into broad themes (Creswell, 2008 p. 237). The themes were analyzed for interconnections such as layered and interrelated themes. I compared concepts and themes across the interviews or combined separate events to formulate a description of the setting. In doing so, I endeavoured to answer research question in ways that allow drawing broader theoretical conclusions. Finally, the core themes were considered in light of current literature concerning teachers’ perceptions, providing further confidence in the generation of the themes. An example of coding and categorization is included in Appendix D. It shows some of the themes of a dilemma that were identified by the analysis.

The table of themes (Appendix D) provided the basis for writing up a narrative account of the findings. The narrative account consisted of the interplay between the participants’ account and the interpretative findings. The superordinate themes were taken one by one and written up in that order. The writing style reflected the IPA approach to analysis, beginning with a close reading grounded in participants’ accounts before moving towards a more interpretative level. The narrative account aimed to mix extracts from participants’ own words with interpretative comments. In this way, it was possible to retain some of the “voice” of the participant and at the same time to enable the reader to assess the pertinence of the interpretations.
Research Ethics and Integrity

All aspects of the study were conducted according to Griffith University’s Research Ethics requirements, with ethical clearance gained from Griffith University’s Ethics Clearance Unit. In accordance with the university policies and procedure (Griffith University, 2014), the data collection commenced after an ethical clearance had been granted by the university’s Human Resource Ethics Committee and was undertaken in accordance with Griffith University’s principles of Human Resource Ethics (Griffith University, 2014) and the Education Queensland research requirement (Education Queensland, 2007).

According to Wassenaar (2006), research ethics should serve to protect the rights and welfare of the participants at all times. Specific principles must be adhered to in order to ensure that the research is carried out according to ethical guidelines. To achieve that, prior informed and voluntary consent (Bailey, 1996; Holloway, 1997; Kvale, 1996) was gained from individuals taking part in the study. The nature of the study was made clear and participants were made aware that they would be given the opportunity to receive feedback and provide additional input and validation. The participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, and they were free to withdraw at any time for any reason. Anonymity and the procedures used to protect confidentiality (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Kvale, 1996; Street, 1998) is an important ethical consideration; thus, pseudonyms were used to protect participants’ identity.

Validity is the extent to which the research is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and defensible. Reliability is the extent to which the results of a study are dependable and repeatable in different circumstances (such as with a different researcher or at a different time). Issues surrounding validity and reliability are central to IPA (Smith et al., 2010) and the measures outlined above were adhered to within the approach. Within any interpretive study there are concerns regarding the double hermeneutic, that is, the researcher’s seeking to interpret the participants’ interpretation of a given phenomenon. This can leave scope for misinterpretation and it introduces a level of uncertainty with regard to the validity of any given qualitative study. IPA acknowledges that data interpretation can be highly subjective and that interpretations need to be well evidenced and grounded in raw data.

As a VET teacher teaching for nearly eight years in private RTOs in Queensland, I also had to consider my subjectivity regarding my relationships with research participants. Furthermore, my knowledge of the profession was helpful in asking better questions and in interpreting data. Having the same professional background as the participants, allowed for our
time to be spent on rich detail of their experiences rather than superficial discussion of the profession. Developing awareness of subjectivity and monitoring when it is engaged is a productive undertaking. Critical subjectivity involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing (Reason 1994, p. 327). Such self-reflection helped me conduct interviews with a neutral and open mind, ready to expect unanticipated responses. This approach minimized research bias, by allowing questions to spring ‘naturally’ from the discussion and/or by encouraging open discussion through the disruption of normal power relations between me and participants.

It was imperative that the way in which I conducted interviews did not cloud the respondents’ descriptions or communications with my own belief, judgements or pre-conceptions, and theories. As with any research project, as I moved through the research process, I continually thought about issues pertaining to limitations of the study. At one point during the process, I began writing about limitations in the context of my positionality as a VET teacher studying ethical dilemmas and their impacts on teachers and in collecting data from them. But now reflecting on the research process in the context of positionality, I realize that my positionality is not a limitation. My positionality meets the positionality of participants, and they do not rest in juxtaposition to each other. The research in which I engage is shaped by who I am, and as long as I remain reflective throughout the process, I will be shaped by it, and by those with whom I interact.

Transparency of positionality and my intents as a researcher were central to my research efforts. I was mindful to address my positionality with all participants of qualitative studies. Second, as I interviewed, I was clear (with myself and participants) about my motivations for collecting the data. Addressing questions of motivation with participants has the potential to foster greater openness between participants and myself. “There’s no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all” (Hall, 1990, p. 18). Positionality represents a space in which objectivism and subjectivism meet. As Freire suggests, the two exist is a “dialectic relationship” (Freire, 2000, p. 50). To achieve a pure objectivism is a naïve quest, and we can never truly divorce ourselves of subjectivity. We can strive to remain objective, but must be ever mindful of our subjectivities. Such is positionality. We have to acknowledge who we are as individuals, and as members of groups, and as resting in and moving within social positions.
Freire (2000), suggested the researcher to be careful and not attempt to speak for research participants. As evidenced by the wealth of data that was borne out of the interviews with VET teachers, it was apparent that these participants had no shortage of experiences to draw upon in our conversations. Throughout my preparations to conduct this research, from the formulation of the initial research questions to the drafting of the interview protocol, my positionality as a VET teacher studying ethical issues remained at the forefront of my mind. This act of examining the research process in the context of my positionality could be described, at least in part, as reflexivity. Reflexivity involves a self-scrutiny on the part of the researcher; a self-conscious awareness of the relationship between the researcher and an “other” (Chiseri-Stater, 1996; Pillow, 2003). Hence the methodological approaches that I undertook in collecting and analyzing data could be described as reflexivity as Callaway (1992, p. 33) defines that reflexivity is “a continuing mode of self-analysis.

To enable the interviewer to obtain the subjective data objectively, I bracketed my own presuppositions and preconceptions, as discussed previously. This allowed me to separate the meanings of my own personal experience from those revealed by the respondents. Therefore, in the design and implementation of this study I constantly monitored my personal involvement in the context and the process being investigated. I addressed researcher bias by continuously exploring my own subjectivity. By writing reflectively both before and after interviews and textual analysis, I addressed preconceived opinions and reflected upon my subjectivity. Subjectivity, once recognized, can be monitored for more trustworthy research and subjectivity, in itself, can contribute to research outcomes (Glesne, 2006). Developing awareness of subjectivity and monitoring when it is engaged is a productive undertaking. Critical subjectivity involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing (Reason, 1994, p. 327). Such self-reflection helped me to conduct interviews with a neutral and open mind, ready to expect unanticipated responses. This approach minimized researcher bias, by allowing questions to spring “naturally” from the discussion and/or by encouraging open discussion through the disruption of normal power relations between me and participants.

I attempted to ensure reliability and validity through largely standardized data-collection procedures, through thorough documenting and transcription and interpretation, and by establishing inter-rater reliability to ensure the transparency and coherence of the study (Smith et al., 2010). Descriptive validity (Coolican, 2004) was achieved by use of raw data including word-for-word transcripts and the co-checking of data and interpretations.
Reliability was achieved by ensuring technical accuracy in recording and transcribing intensive engagement with the data and frequently moving between data and interpretation. Ratcliff (1995) reported that multiple listening to audio recordings to ensure that transcription is accurate and to develop a closer relationship with the data could strengthen reliability within qualitative research.

A clear research process, with examples of raw data was conducted to further strengthen reliability (Golafshani, 2003). Smith et al. (2010) also identified the commitment and rigour of the researcher as a central factor in ensuring the validity and reliability of a study, that is, the level of effort committed to data collection and analysis, attention to detail with sampling, the interview process, and the depth of analysis.

One of the advantages of IPA is its ability to unveil phenomena that might not be expected (Shaw, 2001). IPA allows the researcher to be more open minded in addition to enabling the participants to tell their stories in their own way without being biased by any preconceived ideas by the research itself. An appropriate choice of interviewees helped make my findings credible, but I also took steps to achieve thoroughness in the study by investigating new paths as they cropped up, redesigning the study as often as necessary to pursue these new directions. Adaptability and willingness on my part to hear what was said and change direction to catch a wisp of insight or track down a new theme made the interviews work. As the new data were unveiled, they were added to preexisting theories to extend them further or used as the basis of a new theory, which may be highly beneficial, given its grounding in experiencing the phenomena.

Awareness of subjective bias and intense listening instead of normal conversation, respect and curiosity about what people say, willingness to acknowledge what is not understood, ability to ask about what is not yet known, and readiness to accept unanticipated results made the resulting report fresh and credible. Thus, transparency was demonstrated in the current study by assessing the thoroughness of the design of the work as well as conscientiousness, sensitivity, and avoidance of subject bias (Lidstone, 2002). Using “low inference descriptors” such as participants’ verbatim quotations or stories would help the reader to judge the credibility of the analyses made.

As a researcher, I maintained an ongoing reflection within the study on my own learning within the process and how this may have influenced the analysis and interpretation of data. I see IPA as double edged: to get a firsthand account of an individual’s lived experience so as to enrich
the practices’ knowledge base, and to bring about learning for both participant and researcher. Freire (1977) pointed out that when active participation accompanies learning, it brings about critical reflection of the personal experience. I believe this is true especially when people are put into a context to look back and to reflect. It is here that I believe my choice of an IPA study is very apt.

In the next four chapters, the findings from the study are described. They consider dilemmas of four main types which the teachers experienced. Each chapter describes the nature of each dilemma and explains how each dilemma resulted out of conflict generated from tensions between what one intrinsically understands that one should do in a particular situation and what one feels impelled to do by extrinsic imperatives or pressures.

**Summary**

This chapter has outlined the stages of research, its design, data gathering, and analysis, all of which are intimately linked. Rather than stripping away context, needlessly reducing people’s experiences to numbers, I employed a qualitative approach that involves interviewing in relaxed environment exploring related and contradictory themes and concepts and pointing out the missing and the subtle, as well as the explicit and the obvious findings. Semi-structured interviewing has allowed the research to shed new light on old problems – the dilemmas that teachers of international students face when teaching international students. Detailed justification is included of the chosen methodology. This chapter also outlined in detail the research process, data collection and analysis procedures.
Chapter 4: The Dilemma of Responding Flexibly to Heightened Student Diversity

Introduction

The four dilemmas identified in the study are those of responding flexibly to heightened student diversity, limiting educational engagement, constraining teacher responsiveness, and manipulating learning assessment. They are presented in this and the following three chapters. Each of the dilemmas is first introduced, with some illustrative narrative to explain the nature of the dilemma. It is then looked at in detail by focusing on the extrinsic imperatives that were identified as being important in a dilemma. Each of these extrinsic imperatives is explained progressively by identifying and explaining different aspects of it, in each case noting the number of participants identifying with the aspect and using the narrative or constructed vignettes from the interviews to illustrate the variations in the data contributing to that aspect of the extrinsic imperative. The subsequent chapter presents findings on the impact of the dilemma and the response of the participants to those impacts. The final findings chapter then talks about the participants’ interpretation of their experiences of the dilemma.

The dilemma of responding flexibly to heightened student diversity was that of how to accommodate the increased diversity of students in one class, while still responding in the teaching to the students’ needs. It came from an existential conflict arising from tensions between the extrinsic imperative for RTOs to enroll an increasing diversity of students in one class to remain financially viable, and the intrinsic moral imperative to teach that increased student diversity. The dilemma was identified by 15 of the 18 participants across both TAFE (five) and private providers (11) (one of the respondents being involved with both):

[The problem is] different students with different abilities, the combination. Sometimes you felt like it was just a matter of keeping people happy and crowd control, as opposed to teaching them something purposeful. Putting them into a normal class … you would lose them. So trying to gather a group together that you could then teach … is probably challenging. (Ruby)

The key dilemma that I am contemplating is constantly balancing that business environment and how that impacts individual learners: … giving them an opportunity to succeed but also doing economically and meeting those corporate business values. (Gina)
The dilemma was seen by participants as being driven by the enrollment of such an unmanageable diversity of students with differing skills that it compromised or threatened their moral commitments as teachers. All identifying participants also pointed out that diverse students brought different sets of expectations with them. Many were seeking an education because they had employers willing to pay the tuition fees; others had joined to gain entry into the workforce; others because the course was promoted as being free; others because of their seeking entry to Australia. Such diverse needs also interfered with the smooth functioning of the class.

All 15 identifying participants also noted that, to seek enrolments of such an expanded population of students with different expectations, RTOs were being faced with new demands: to offer flexible attendance, to alter student intake dates to allow students to enroll at any time during the course, and to offer courses to students who lacked basic literacy and prerequisite skills. The identifying participants pointed out that, while it was important for RTOs to achieve the necessary enrolment to maintain their financial viability, such an increased diversity of students in one class had negative implications for their success in doing so. Loyalty to their RTO as an institution weighed heavily on the participants in their accounts of this dilemma.

Extrinsic imperatives of the dilemma, shared, variously, by a majority or all of the participants, fell into major categories of (a) increasing student diversity, and (b) offering organizational flexibility. The nature of both of those categories is here briefly explained and evidenced in narrative and stories from the participants, as follows.

**Increasing Student Diversity**

The participants reported different types of individual learners in one class, including equity groups such as those with a disability, young students enrolling in pre-employment courses, mature-aged workers and trainees, international students, migrants and students from non-English speaking backgrounds, international students, and students returning to work after long leave. Thirteen participants asserted that, since the government reforms saw funding tied to enrollment numbers, RTOs were focused on generating their commercial profits by enrolling more students in each class:

*We would [previously] cap at a certain number [28] in the best interests of the students. But now because it was more looked at as a business, we could take that many [again] so that, when half of them leave early, we are left with that number [28].* (Annabelle)

*I got 80 people but 20 chairs. The number of students grew.* (Jim)
All the identifying participants pointed out that, from a financial perspective, it was perceived important that RTOs achieved higher enrollments to operate at capacity, and for that purpose, RTOs diversified the students in their courses to reach and manipulate international students looking to get permanent residency and work and domestic students in government-funded courses. In doing so, as highlighted by Annabelle, RTOs looked on student enrolments as business, and due diligence was not given to students' interests after the enrolment. Mark narrated this challenge as:

*I was in a meeting, 60 - 80 people there, and one of the directors said that... we are not worried about the students, we are worried about the money. Well, that's not really good.* (Mark)

Ten identifying participants reported their concerns about such aggressive marketing tactics targeting international students, who saw such an opportunity as a pathway to residency and had no aptitude or ability to complete VET courses:

*They fish for students primarily internationally and [then] nationally.* (Daniel)

He pointed out that international students were lured with selling pitches like *come to Australia, we will give you the qualification.* Such students were given assistance by the brokers to create the portfolios, which included providing fictitious qualifications and resumes.

*So on a day- to-day basis, a place like [the RTO], where I used to work in, they were basically like a visa factory and the more people like pushed through in and out the door, the more money they make, and more people come to their course. You could probably say that 90% of their students gone through that particular college had not got a clue what they were there for.* (Frank)

Six of the identifying participants reported that many students came to Australia without the required financial resources or support, in the hope of earning enough through part-time work to either pay their fees or send money back home. They commented that to find the source of income to pay fees, many students were forced to take low-paying jobs and to work more than the permitted 20 hours per week:

*The only job that they can get is cleaning jobs or servant-type jobs ... and then the students who are supposed to work only 20 hours a week are working 40 to 60 hours a week because the system lets them do it even if they are publicly only saying 20 hours a week. This is all because the education system is linked to immigration.* (Frank)
Many hospitality outlets and cleaning businesses appoint international students as they are cheap labour and will work for less. (Natalie)

Two of the identifying participants also pointed out that educational brokers also targeted students whose main intention was to work and holiday in Australia. Natalie, for example, working in a private RTO, noted how she had many students in a course not to study or learn something but to work and earn some money. James, working in a private RTO, noted how students kept enrolling in one course after the other to maintain their student visa, which permitted them to work:

I had students who have studied Tourism and Events, then done a Diploma in Business, got a bridging visa and worked and then done a degree in Accounting. (Daniel)

There's a market for providing visas or for people who are working full-time. You can only say that you are working on student visas. I do not know about other teachers, but that basically describes my student body. This was regular in TAFE. (Jim)

Adding to the uncertainty in some cases, the number of international students was seen as fluctuating in response to a wider range of external factors, including visa and immigration policies. Daniel, for example, highlighted how students in their desperation to stay in Australia enrolled in courses lower than their capability. And:

As their [students’] last efforts, they would be submitting portfolios for vocational courses, be that Building, Plumbing, Engineering, Hospitality, in the hopes of staying in Australia. (Daniel)

So a lot of the students we have at [a] particularly lower level ... entry. So, they are entering at Certificate II English, which is quite basic and they can do Certificate III easily. (James)

All 15 identifying participants pointed out that their RTOs were driven by the continued rollout of VET entitlement funding through the extension of the VET-FEE HELP (VFH) scheme, targeting domestic students from different streams of the market. Eleven of the identifying participants noted that their RTOs were using the services and assistance of educational brokers to target potential domestic students, under the VFH scheme and Centrelink benefits from the government, enrolling students who lacked the capacity to commit wittingly. They saw such students as being treated as a means to access government funding, and since the funding in the VFH scheme was provided on the basis of the number of students taught, the ability to attract and
enrol students in a course under VFH funding and not their completion of the course or job placement was a prime determinant of funding for the institutions:

_The Government, when they may set up programs that may have one purpose in mind. It often becomes the loophole that people will [use] ... for another purpose._

(James)

All 15 identifying participants also noted that such practices included providing misinformation about the VFH scheme that focused on implications or suggestions that student course costs would be largely covered by the Commonwealth Government through the scheme. The unstated reality, though, was that such assistance was, in fact, an income-contingent loan to the student, who incurred the repayment liability at the point of taking up the enrolment, once his or her income reached the threshold. Josephine, for example, working for a private provider, voiced her concerns about the misleading selling technique of _study now and pay later_, provided to a student. Frank related his experience of working for a private provider running misleading advertising to the effect that students could gain two diplomas for the price of one through the VFH scheme, which he knew to be false.

Daniel, working for a private provider, related his experience of the provider misleading students about their course fee liabilities, by charging students just $40 for an online program, leading them to understand that that figure was the total of their program fee commitment. Without the students' knowledge, the provider would then incur the additional VFH liability (of $1,600 in this case) through taking out the VFH loan on their behalf. Daniel suggested that such information was not _being freely given to the students._

The identifying participants pointed out that such government-funded income-contingent student VFH loans were marketed by RTOs to older, low-income, and minority students because of the guaranteed federal financial aid revenue these students generated. Daniel, for example, highlighted how a group of senior citizens was talked into enrolling in a management and human resource course. They were persuaded to _use their free time on their hands_ and told that _based on the skills they would get by doing the management or human resources course, they would be able to assist our young people, or our teenage grandchildren and teach them and educate them and move them forward in the right direction._

James recounted his experience of dealing with disadvantaged domestic students, targeted outside Centrelink offices, who were talked into enrolling in a course that would not have helped them in getting any job. He noted that the program was not well suited to the clients, many of
whom were elderly and were subject to so much education, quite long hours and it was just overwhelming them.

Renee noted that students with intellectual impairment were targeted to enroll in a course for becoming a teacher aide. She pointed out that she found it unethical to teach them knowing that they were never likely to be employed, as they were not working at a standard high enough for a school to interview them. Josephine was concerned that disadvantaged and vulnerable domestic students were being signed up to VFH programs without their suitability to the program being verified. She explained that such vulnerable students were then often enrolled concurrently in more than one diploma – one being an English language program through which they were to develop the literacy facility needed for them to undertake the other – incurring multiple VFH debts. She also pointed out the unethical practices adopted by providers in creating barriers to student withdrawal from programs to prevent them withdrawing before the census date.

Offering Organizational Flexibility
Ten participants highlighted a tendency for RTOs to attract more students by providing a multitude of flexible options, like varied entry requirements in terms of prerequisite literacy skills, flexible attendance, and offering multiple intakes as ways of increasing their funding base and profits. They pointed out that some students used this strategy to their advantage by approaching different RTOs to gain a competitively better deal and exposure to the flexibility offered. All 10 identifying participants were concerned about this practice. Notionally provided as a study aid, these strategies to enhance flexibility were seen as featuring heavily in some RTOs’ advertising and were seen as having been the deciding factor for some students in choosing to enroll in a particular course or with a particular provider. Jim, for example, working in a private RTO, expressed concern with the progress-based learning followed by his RTO, in which students were told that they would not be required to attend class as long as they are passing the assessment, which they are doing at home.

Also, the attendance is very, very low ... and some students never attend. The attendance for international students is not compulsory. I do not know generally, but in our RTO, no. So they are attracted to this type of course because attendance is not mandatory. They are just there to get their visa. That is the only reason. (Jim)

Similar concerns were raised by another two participants when they realized that attendance for international students was not compulsory at their RTO:
He [a student] has never, ever been in class, so ... he comes in class in the first week, gets his assessment, sends it back to me or drops in there [at the reception], gets his second assessment and comes back in a week later. Because attendance has been removed from being compulsory. You don't have to attend it now to pass. (Natalie)

You just have people coming in at random times. I walk in on Monday at nine o'clock, starting time. There’s probably one student. At ten past nine somebody else would come. Throughout the course of the morning more people would come, and by ten o'clock I might have seven people, and then one or more people would come. (James)

Two of the identifying participants highlighted the point that flexible student intake meant that they could have a student starting the course from mid-semester:

The ethical issue is, they [the RTO] don't have an educational focus, they have a business focus and so they have accepted new students every week, even though it is not the idea to educate people, it is the best way to run a business. (James)

As a trainer, you need to be prepared for every lesson, because you have different students each time. (Josephine)

Jim also highlighted his RTO offering flexibility for students for assessments at their convenience to continue getting more business:

Deals like reassessments. [Students say] I cannot come in now, but I can just come in the first hour on Monday and take assessment. (Jim)

The majority of these 10 participants warned that an increasing number of students were being enrolled despite lacking the intellectual attributes or language and literacy skills needed for the courses. They pointed out that minimum course entry levels were lowered to attract more students, including returning adults, involving particularly private, but also TAFE providers, in admitting students to programs for which they fell seriously short of meeting the prerequisite learning skills or educational attainments. Mary, for example, spoke of the lack of concern on the part of her community-based provider to check for prerequisites before signing students into a course. Josephine raised her concerns about the student learning capability in such enrolments. She suggested that students should not be enrolled quickly without checking their suitability just because the RTO wanted to avail itself of the funding from the government. Frank recounted how the non-English speaking students were admitted in his Diploma class:
Most of them couldn't speak English and English was third and sometimes the fourth language. IELTS is nonexistent. (Frank)

We got the students that really were low on numeracy and literacy skills, and they were mature students without prior qualifications who were looking for a second chance in life, it was claimed. (Annabelle)

Anybody can enroll in the Cert. [Certificate] IV in Teacher Aide now. So these are people who have not had any experience at all, and now they are attempting to do a Cert. IV without the Cert. III prior knowledge. But to me, that is an ethical dilemma, allowing them to do the Cert. IV when they are not as capable as students who've enrolled and paying to do the Cert. III. So Cert. III students will come out appearing to be less qualified. We should be able to say no to the students who do not have the experience to do the Cert. IV. (Renee)

The majority of these 10 participants also highlighted the point that managing such increased student diversity in one class led to the challenges of dealing not only with the inadequate English or other prerequisite skills, but also with accommodating different customs, styles of interaction, and attitudes of students, while preparing them for jobs. Ruby, for example, spoke of the challenges faced by having students with widely differing skill and literacy levels in one class. She found herself in conflicting situations, trying to cope with students of very low literacy, students from refugee backgrounds, and other students with very good literacy levels in the same class and sometimes in different levels of qualification. Renee and Gina spoke of challenges they experienced when students showed limitations in these core competencies:

So last week I got them [the students] in class, I took them through the rudiments of creating folders, deleting folders, renaming them, copying to USB, that type of thing. Whereas I had expected that they would be able to go through and do all of that themselves, just with some basic assistance from me. (Renee)

It is difficult I think for the older students who come along, because they may not have had any computer training or they have got pretty low IT literacy, and they find that quite stressful, also people who went to school in their seventies or even early eighties. Their reactions [to the course and the assessment] are to get really stressed. People cry. So you have got all these different people reacting differently to this one week. (Gina)

Seven of the identifying participants raised their concerns that students were investing both time and money into courses with the expectation of a particular financial and perhaps
professional return, which in reality they were unlikely to achieve. Such a practice was seen as leading not only to disappointment for the students but also to financial hardship, both because of the debt they incurred and because they may require more training to meet their professional goals:

*I think, if someone has not been in study for years and years, and they are coming back, you want to set them [up] for success, not for failure. Whatever our reason, we are setting these students up to fail. We are wasting their time and their money. We are actually seeing not many people completing because they are just stressing out, they do not have the skills that they need to. It is more money-oriented than what the cohort really needs.* (Annabelle)

*It can put them in a really bad place if they do not complete.* (Sandra)

Seven of the 10 identifying participants pointed out that the principles of efficiency and profit often conflicted with participants' valued education goals of equity and quality of learning outcomes. They noted that diverse students require different adjustments according to their individual learning needs, interests, and strengths and that not all learners will have the skills to learn at the same pace. Providing equal educational opportunities was seen as crucial by participants, both for promoting social justice and for enhancing economic, social, and individual development:

*We need to make sure that, depending on their learning levels, if there are any learning difficulties, that we are catering for every student’s needs. Everyone deserves the same chance at learning and the same access for it to be equal for all.* (Karen)

*I understand that we have different learners, and I understand that some people can find it easy and some people can find it extremely difficult, and some people can have underlying conditions, such as anxiety. So I am thinking, why? It may be somebody’s goal in life to achieve something and then if we do not provide that extra support for them, then, it is going to stop them from achieving that goal.* (Sandra)

The majority of the 10 identifying participants also recognized that such diversity made it very difficult for skilled students whose learning was seen to be hindered or slowed down by other vulnerable students. The participants were concerned about the fairness for those students whose intentions were to acquire salient job-related skills and knowledge that would potentially assist them in the labour market:
It makes it difficult because you have some students who can barely speak in class and then you have others whose English is really good. We had some genuine students who were there for the purpose of the study. (James)

How do you give those people who have got a lower starting point ... the same opportunity as someone who’s had a higher starting point? (Gina)

I do not believe that students that have no understanding of what they are learning should be progressing through a program at the same rate. (Mark)

For four of the 10 participants, however, the issue of accountability posed greater challenges than the issue of equity. They pointed out that they were often judged on the results of their students. Sandra, for example, reported her experience of being held accountable for student success as:

There is always that famous sentence; this is our learning. We all have to take responsibility for it. (Sandra)

Three of the identifying participants reported that they relied on a variety of supports from the management for teaching diverse students. However, they indicated that they were not provided with sufficient support to address the students’ needs, leading to unequal outcomes for all the students:

You have student rules, but what is in practice is a different story. On paper, it says, all our students can have access anytime for learning support. But, is anybody actually identifying that the students need learning support and encouraging them? Not really. Are we referring them to learning support only to tick off that box? (Sandra)

I think in an ideal world, every learner would be given as much time as they need to reach a level of competency, they would be given one-on-one support. But the reality is [that] not many businesses could afford that so they are left to flounder a little bit by themselves. (Gina)

Sandra further reported her increasing concern about churning out inexperienced nurses, against the social and economically optimal goal:

We should be giving the people the opportunity to succeed. Certainly [I] do not think that we should be disadvantaging people. For example ...six months down [in] their employment... [they may face] some pretty intense performance management which could possibly result in termination of their jobs – because
we have not given them skills to succeed or support that they needed to succeed initially. (Sandra)

**Conclusion**

The major finding identified from this chapter is the significance of the dilemma of responding flexibly to heightened student diversity. Within that dilemma, there emerged two challenges: the challenge of heightened student diversity and the challenge of demands for teaching flexibly.

The dilemma of responding flexibly to heightened student diversity amounts to a dilemma of accommodating the increased diversity of students in one class, while still responding in the teaching to the students’ needs.

The challenge of heightened student diversity is that the difficulties faced by the participants in managing the increasing diversity of the students enrolled in a class and the particular attention being given to the underperforming vulnerable group of students led to conflicts related to issues of educational equity for the participants. On the one hand, they recognized a professional obligation to provide the best possible education to all students, irrespective of their background. On the other hand, they found themselves needing to compromise their standards on that intrinsic imperative due to practicalities of their struggling RTO. Working with mixed-ability and multi-age classes presented the participants with numerous problems related to the choice of overall goals, curriculum content, teaching strategies, and classroom management. In particular, participants faced equity issues for the weaker and more capable students alike. Developing appropriate teaching approaches for the wide range of student abilities in their classes was seen as a priority by a majority of the participants, which demanded skillful teaching, in conflict with pressure for greater accountability in improving the academic outcomes for students and ensuring that they achieved the skills required by the industry. Participants indicated that they struggled to pay attention to all students, particularly those whom they saw as being vulnerable. They drew attention to the, often unrealized, importance of students having adequate literacy and foundation skills as prerequisites to their undertaking training, and to meet the needs of employers. Participants expressed particular concern that many students were completing courses while lacking sufficient basic skills.

The challenge of demands for teaching flexibly is that of the difficulties of lack of control over the composition of the student group in their classes. It meant that the privileging of a customer perspective offered by their RTO required participants to be compliant and accountable
for meeting student desires of more flexibility concerning their enrollment, attendance, and assessment. The participants recognized that what was of greatest concern to the RTO was not the inherent goodness of the product or service but rather the satisfying of the expectations of customers – irrespective of whether such expectations could otherwise be legitimated as appropriate. RTOs that accepted the corporate value of client culture adopted greater flexibility in satisfying market demands to secure funding, while the research participants considered that the flexibility made good teaching too challenging. Participants contended that satisfying student expectations was having a detrimental effect on their capacity to teach well.
Chapter 5: The Dilemma of Limiting Educational Engagement

Introduction

The dilemma of limiting educational engagement was the dilemma faced by the participants in covering course content in limited time. It came about from an existential conflict arising from, on the one hand, the expectations that participants would cover course content and ensure that training delivery produced skilled graduates and, on the other, the intrinsic moral imperative of providing quality education in the time available. The dilemma was seen by participants as being driven by the loss of funding and student numbers that had led to reductions by RTOs in all courses, reducing contact hours and offering recognition of prior learning, and offering flexible modes of delivery including online, thus severely limiting educational engagement with teachers:

Now there is a whole range of different ways of doing education and we should start accepting these ways and there is the chance that we need to challenge ourselves to say, is this an acceptable way of doing it? For example, doing it in short duration, doing it not in the classroom, but doing it through the use of technology. (Thomas)

The dilemma was identified by 15 of the 18 participants across both TAFE (six) and private (10) providers (one of the respondents being involved with both). The identifying participants were challenged to accept such limiting educational engagement as an acceptable way of teaching. Such practices were seen as placing the participants in the conflict between meeting their moral commitments as teachers and the expectations of their employing RTO. The identifying participants described how such practices resulted in restricting the time for students to get enough practical skills, hence lowering student achievement markedly and affecting their work performance. Ruby, for example, argued that it encouraged temporary knowledge retention as she experienced that students who passed the test at a point did not have the knowledge a week later.

Extrinsic imperatives of the dilemma, shared, variously, by a majority or all of the participants fell into the categories of (a) condensed courses, (b) recognition of prior learning (RPL), and (c) online teaching. The nature of each of those imperatives is here briefly explained and evidenced in narratives and stories from the participants, as follows.
Condensed Courses

Fifteen participants reported that their RTOs were once offering longer duration and more expensive courses but found themselves struggling to sustain their products in the competitive marketplace. The participants further pointed out that since CBT fosters greater variation of course length as it is about outcomes rather than process, the RTOs were seen as redesigning courses that had unrealistically short time frames or that fell short of learning requirements, but which saved costs in terms of teaching time and resources. All the identifying participants reported facing reduced time available to complete a program and its limiting of educational engagement. This aspect of the dilemma was seen by them as presenting a conflict between two competing values: doing the program quickly or doing it well:

*I’m not happy with the duration of the course. More for me ethically is, do I just go on, and put it under the carpet that dilemma: are they understanding or not, how much? Because you know you have to deliver, a certain amount of content in a certain amount of time, and you’re not able to go over and you’re not able to do before and after kind of stuff. It can be overwhelming for students; they are just in a rush to complete all the required competencies.* (Sandra)

*There is a pressure on trainers to get people through courses quickly. We were told to get students through each component of Diploma courses within hours in some cases. This is totally wrong and unethical.* (Frank)

Three identifying participants questioned the knowledge retention of students, and Mark’s comment is typical:

*The person who has done the training once forgets it all. You can bet your bottom dollar that, in the next week when they are asked to perform that task, it’s often not a great memory of what actually happened because it’s like a wham bam thank you ma’am.* (Mark)

Five of the identifying participants reported the risk of loss of time for essential practical skills needed for some courses:

*We do one module every 4 weeks. They get eight sessions per module or unit of competency, two lectures a week. At session five and session eight they have to hand in their assessment pieces. So, for their core units, they are getting only*
eight sessions. I do not think they (students) get enough at all. These are only 3-hour sessions. (Natalie)

When I did my Diploma, it was 2 years’ full-time. Now it is 6 months full-time. Who knows what the next 5 years will be for a diploma, might be 3 months full-time, and might be 3 weeks, full-time. We do not know. But they are the challenges ahead of us. (Thomas)

The most potent criticism of offering such condensed courses was the decline in academic quality. Two of the identifying participants related their experience of refusing essential teaching time to students:

I don't have time for them to do their activities. [Smirks] That's probably the ethics side of it [explaining that this is not ethical way of teaching]. (Natalie)

Earlier I was seeing them two times for 2 hours 15 minutes. Now in the new life, I started seeing them three times for 4 hours, 3 hours 15-minute lectures. So by the time they finished, I was tired. If they were asking me a question a week behind, I would tell them that, you need to go and read up, and if you can't catch up that, then I don't think that you are going to pass. Which I think is a bad thing for the teacher to say, because we are meant to be their mentors and they don't have a lot of tutoring support. And if one of them really was seriously sick for one week, I think that was it. They lost the money. (Annabelle)

Thomas reported his concern that the condensed courses were a result of cost-cutting practices of the RTO and pointed out his uncertainties of the condensed courses in providing a good educational outcome for the students:

That was a huge dilemma for me because I knew that the student was actually getting a reduced educational outcome. And in receiving the reduced educational outcome, I knew that they were getting, probably a less product than what they predecessor, example, their older brothers, or older sisters, or cousins or nephews, or family and friends. So 12-month Diplomas became 6-month Diplomas. Twenty hours a week engagement became 10 hours' engagement. But I had to then struggle, with the fact that, I felt that they were possibly not receiving a good educational product to what they should deserve, if the organization had actually address[ed] their issue of not being too overburdened with all the extra costs that they have got. (Thomas)
Recognition of Prior Learning

Ten participants reported that offering of transfer credit by recognizing prior student learning was seen as the extrinsic imperative of the dilemma of limiting educational engagement. For example, Frank pointed out that by recognizing existing student skills, RTO can save cost in terms of teaching time and resources.

All the identifying participants challenged students’ knowledge of specific elements of units of competencies. They raised their concern that such recognition of prior learning (RPL) practices were not necessarily subjected to appropriate quality assurance and that RTOs were resorting to unethical practices in extending recognition. Daniel narrated his experience of working with two RTOs that were more focused on the number rather than on quality of paperwork needed to grant RPL and suggested that the RTOs were trying to make money as quickly as possible and with the highest possible margins by cutting corners and decreased quality by accepting very little evidence. He suggested that:

Some organizations try to provide as little evidence as possible. What can be perceived as just enough. But I mean, how much profit [do] you need to make, for heaven's sake? I think people lose sight of the fact that this is education. (Daniel)

Frank reported that RPL processes had not been consistently or fairly applied in his RTO. He reported his experience of working with a desperate RTO that was offering substantial academic credit based on life experience enabling students to receive credit for an entire program without entering a class or taking an assessment. Frank further pointed out that RPL was not suited to all types of programs and expressed his concern about the quality of graduates availing themselves of such RPL benefits in terms of their lack of basic skills such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills.

Three of the identifying participants pointed to practices in their employing RTOs where RTOs encouraged the participants to grant the RPL on humanitarian grounds, thus ignoring the evidence of previous experience. The participants pointed to their providing RPL on such humanitarian grounds as:

I do a lot of candidates, on RPL in the Middle East. They have got a little opportunity of actually immigrating or migrating overseas. It's good to be able to give them an English language based qualification on Western Cookery. Because with that, they're able to travel to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, the UK, England, Ireland, Scotland, the US. (Natalie)
That is why RPLing was so attractive, because you can RPL someone and you don’t have to rip off a student in terms of fees, you do not have to expose the students to an innumerable number of problems that international students face in Australia. So by going to the students’ home town and their environment and assessing them within their environment, then that’s doing them a favour. (Frank)

A person who has had 20 years’ experience, has had a wealth of knowledge, and they may not be able to clearly write a thousand words about a very specific topic. But the knowledge that they have gleaned over 20 years could easily be mirrored through other forms of documents and other forms of outcomes. It is better for us to find existing documents, rather than forcing a mature age student to do extra work, which I know at the end of the day, quite often gets thrown in the rubbish bin. (Thomas)

**Online Teaching**

Another imperative informing the dilemma was the provision of distance and online courses; it was reported by nine participants.

*It is a big college with lots of classrooms, and the classrooms are getting emptier, emptier, emptier and online enrolments are sky-roocketing.* (Claire)

Nine participants suggested that online courses were considered by RTOs as an important source of cost saving with reduced teaching costs through larger class sizes and limited face-to-face interaction:

*The computer virtually marks it. Yeah, so there's no -- well, except for the actual manufacturing of the module and putting it online, there's no human intervention.* (Natalie)

Five of the identifying participants reported that the online training was reasoned to be important by their RTO because of the benefits including reduced costs, and its potential to increase and diversify the student body:

*I'm finding in our industry that we need to bring the training more so to the learner, rather than expect them to come out of their environment to attend it.* (Karen)

*The markets (for online teaching). The hugest market is India. India this year, will get 30 million mobile phones. That's a market for 30 million people. They*
basically speak English, or a good 400, 500 million of them speak English, and
the online product is so cheap, that your market there is just phenomenal, and
you don’t need to be spending a huge amount on education, because once you
podcast stuff, once you write articles, once you do multimedia, you can create a
course that teaches these people skills for a fraction of the cost, and yet you make
a fortune, because you're dealing with such a huge volume of market. And they
get Australian qualification. (Robin)

Two of the identifying participants reported that they were asked by the management to
encourage students to take up online courses. Renee reported her experience of approaching the
students to take up online courses but her students’ reluctance to do so:

Our team leader said, ‘do you want me to come into the classroom and talk to
them about the online course that they could do instead?’ I did talk to the
students about switching to flexible delivery, for those who didn’t want to sit in
the computer room with the rest of the class, if they felt more capable. But the
majority of them said, we paid for a face-to-face class, we want to come face-to-
face. Some of them, I’ve said, ‘Well, you can fast track through. I can see how
capable you are. Just quickly show me your skills and then you can go and do it
at home’. (Renee)

Seven of the identifying participants pointed out that they did not value an online course
as highly, especially when they were in fields where practical skills were considered essential:

The biggest change for us has been for a lot more online delivery. I'm not a lover
of online delivery, but I am in a business and so henceforth I have to follow that
avenue. Some programs suit themselves well towards online delivery, i.e. the
softer subjects, as I would call them, such as Management, Human Resources,
Project Management, Business. (Daniel)

Renee related that online teaching lacked a personal touch as students were identified by
their student number:

Whereas with the flexible delivery, I think they tend to treat them more as cattle
type thing. They are not that bad, but it’s more that type of thinking, just sort of
get them through, let’s just get them through. (Renee)

Karen reported that some students may not have been suitable or sufficiently prepared for
online learning:
There are a lot of organizations going to online learning, moving completely away from face-to-face, so I think, in those situations, fully online, I don't think it's the best way to go for the learner. Because everyone learns differently. You're not catering for everyone's learning needs, and also there's no hands-on learning. It's really important, especially in certain areas, that people get to practise it, and you don't get to do that with online. (Karen)

Natalie reported her concerns about the quality and credibility of an online course that she herself studied to understand the requirements of online courses and assessment:

I paid $19 for the First Aid one and $29 dollars for the Responsible Service of Alcohol. I have worked in restaurants, so I knew most of the answers, but you couldn't progress unless you did get the right answers. So you could go back, and keep on going back until you got the right answer. In a Responsible Service of Alcohol, nothing hands-on, never seen what a nip of drink, looks like, they pass. It is obviously legal. And they get an Australian qualification. The same, that anyone[who] goes to the class and do it. But they're doing it online for a fraction of the price because obviously the teaching hours aren't involved. (Natalie)

Five of the identifying participants also pointed out that the quality of online learning depended on the quality of resources put together by them. They described some RTOs as using commercially available resources for online teaching, whereas others expected teachers to develop the course content. In doing so, Natalie cited a lack of appropriate resources to help structure these experiences. Karen narrated her experience of being pressured to adjust course content requirements to suit the design and delivery of online education programs, matching learning objectives and appropriate technology support:

We're moving to online learning modules, but they aren't always done well because they're expecting people just to do that very quickly. If you know technology, you can put together an online module and no, it doesn't work like that. There are rapid learning modules that are being put together. These are modules that are 15, 20 minutes in duration. Just quick, short shots of learning. I call it rapid learning. There needs to be a quality development. So I guess that's an area that I'm seeing – lots of online modules, probably not being developed at the best standard as what they could be. (Karen)
In the absence of standardization of online modules across RTOs, Claire claimed that the self-directed learning in students’ own time had an important educational drawback in that it left users no guaranteed compatibility with other courses offered online. She pointed out that the consistency of compatibility differed due to lack of standardization and the sharing of experiences with other users, but this was necessary to accept the consequences of the choices made by the teacher who developed the resources:

*The teachers are supposed to scour the Internet for interesting reading and video material and we give [a] maximum of 30 minutes. That’s all we can afford. Students start complaining, well this other teacher is posting all this interesting stuff, how come my teacher didn't do that?* (Claire)

Five of the identifying participants were apprehensive that the quality of education could be compromised as they felt *ill-prepared to teach online in absence of any training* (Karen). Claire, for example, narrated her experience of difficulties in *uploading a video or remote SMS (messaging)* students and the bulk SMS as:

*I can see the dilemmas evolving, and that has to do with the shift from face-to-face to online. Teaching online and teaching face-to-face is quite different. And I really wonder if teachers are actually getting prepared for that. I see it all the time, conversations. I hear it, and I see it on forums that teachers like to provide really good online training, but they also need to get the training and support to be able to use current technology because many teachers are older generations like my generation, or older even, and for them to upload a video, it would be challenging. I would say a good majority is just limping behind.* (Claire)

Karen and Thomas asserted that the participants who were teaching the online modules were not required to complete the TAE:

*I'm putting online modules together at the moment without one [TAE] because it's seen as an Instructional Designer role.* (Karen)

*With the rapid change of technology, it is allowing education to come out from institutes, come out from organizations and start to evolve in a new sphere, where anyone can be a teacher, and any organization can now be an educational organization. And that is challenging everything going forward.* (Thomas)
Conclusion

The major finding identified from this chapter is that of the importance of the dilemma of limiting educational engagement. This dilemma was faced by the participants in covering course content in limited time. Thus, participants faced the dilemma of choosing between a focus on completion of course versus a focus on understanding. A performance focus could assist covering the material quickly, while a shift towards understanding involved more time. Within that dilemma, there emerged three challenges: the challenge of reduced course time, the challenge of the recognition of prior learning, and the challenge of online delivery.

The challenge of reduced course time is that of the difficulties faced by the participants in covering the course content satisfactorily within a shortened duration. Teaching in a condensed duration for the identifying participants meant that they experienced a tension between teaching for understanding and teaching to demonstrate sufficient understanding to be qualified as a competent workforce. It was an ongoing feature of their concern. They saw it as their duty to provide time to teach course content as well as to provide practical skills in a way that the students would remember the content successfully, and they felt a pressure to cover the course content in a condensed period. They commented that the duration of a course was important and argued that a course delivered in a shortened timeframe could not deliver the rigor or depth of training and the competency required by industry or the client group. The participants pointed out that the fast-paced delivery would result in inappropriate training that may affect the realization of student outcomes. They questioned the training delivery and assessment of a Certificate- or Diploma-level qualification course delivered over a week or even a weekend when it would normally take a year. They were convinced that the repetition of practical tasks was necessary for students to become competent and work ready. The practical assessment criteria were therefore considered vital to ensuring that students reach competency.

The challenge of RPL is that of the difficulties faced by the participants in recognizing prior learning of students with very little evidence and also of their experience that such recognition often gave credit in cases where it was not warranted. The participants reported that RPL was too generously offered and argued that there should be more rigorous verification processes to demonstrate students’ skills in the RPL. They pointed out their challenges in adhering to their RTO’s competitive strategy of providing transfer-credit costs by RPL, and that RPL might not be suited to all types of training. However, they experienced a greater push for its implementation in their RTOs. They also pointed out that RPL processes had not been consistently or fairly applied across the sector. Moreover, participants pointed out that a new
approach of online RPL for international students in their home countries required the gathering of evidence online in the form of e-portfolios. However, they stated the tensions they faced around their knowledge of determining successful recognition with limited evidence.

The third challenge faced by the participants was the expanded use of online learning. It meant that the volume of training and mode of online delivery were perceived by the participants to be inadequate to achieve expected student competency and outcomes. In the absence of face-to-face interaction with the students, the participants found it difficult to preserve the quality of teaching while adjusting their pedagogical strategies to web-based packages and programs. The participants pointed out that, although online courses helped reach a wider student cohort, the online product was ultimately damaging the reputation of their employing RTO by providing such cheap online courses, treating the students as customers. They asserted that the influence of competition in attracting international students online had resulted in awarding the students with their qualifications at financial risk for students and reputational risks for the RTOs. The identifying participants thus pointed out that online teaching particularly resulted in limiting educational engagement, requiring participants to act as supervisors only when contacted by students.

The participants thus remained unconvinced of the benefits of the condensed and online courses and offering RPL to students as it led to sacrificing their teaching time and questionable knowledge retention for students.
Chapter 6: The Dilemma of Constraining Teacher Responsiveness

Introduction

The dilemma of constraining teacher responsiveness was that of the existential conflict between the intrinsic moral imperative to provide learning opportunities to diverse students and extrinsic imperatives constraining teachers’ capacity to respond constructively to the intrinsic imperative. The constraining external imperatives involved the over prescription of administration work, limited resources, teacher casualization, and out-of-field teaching:

*It's like everything’s batten down. There was no real – everything was so prescriptive that there's very little room to make professional choices and things like that.* (Ruby)

*TAFE was losing money. So, having to cut back, it cut back on everything it could think of, resources, even down to whiteboard pens, or casual teachers.* (Ruby)

The dilemma was seen by the participants as being driven by the efforts of RTOs to place more emphasis on compliance than on teaching, through overprescribing administrative requirements on them, taking away their autonomy:

*Our compliance requirements increased, they kept on increasing. So that meant that, as a trainer I had to allocate more and more time to compliance, which is admin [administrative] work. At the same time, I was teaching [the] same amount of students, and I had to prepare my lessons, and I had to respond as well. I had to take the time from somewhere, so – one question that was ... maybe a daily question for me, so, how to accommodate all the compliance? Should I just go slack on the compliance, but, I keep giving the same attention to my students, or do I ...* (Claire)

The dilemma was identified by 16 of the 18 participants across both TAFE (seven) and private (10) providers (one of the respondents being involved with both). Extrinsic imperatives of the dilemma, shared, variously, by a majority or all of the participants, fell into major categories of (a) overprescription of administration work, (b) limited resources, (c) teacher casualization, and (d) out-of-field teaching. The nature of each of those categories of extrinsic imperatives is here briefly explained and evidenced in narratives and stories from the participants, as follows.
Overprescription of Administrative Work

The challenge of over prescription of administration work was seen by 16 participants as a result of the pressures faced by RTOs from the government for greater accountability in providing high-quality outcomes to students. Accountability measures such as performance indicators and benchmarking were increasingly being used to measure student outcomes and as a marketing tool to promote the productivity of the range of programs offered. Participants reported that these processes, however, resulted in the development of an extensive audit culture to enhance transparency and accountability, the burden of which ultimately fell on the participants:

We were always told compliance was the most important thing. Everything else is secondary. This is, in itself ... in a way actually unethical. When I say compliance, I mean, we had to do certain admin. tasks which were needed for audits. That’s what I mean. (Claire)

Of all, the college is interested in showing the documentary evidence to show the auditor. (Frank)

All the identifying participants highlighted that the imperative to address audit requirements resulted in an increased workload for them. Frank described the level of reporting expected of them as astronomical, completely unnecessary, and Daniel described it as extremely time-consuming and incredibly difficult. James said they found themselves in a continuous struggle of whether to adhere to their RTO’s pressure to put in paperwork or to focus more on teaching (at the displeasure of management):

Now I have about 100 students. Because they split the classes over 2 days. I have Certificate II for 2 days and there are at least 70 students on that role and then I have Certificate III on 2 days, there are about 30 students. I am dealing with paperwork of 100 students. I think the other teachers have similar numbers. (James)

All the identifying participants referred to experiences of their intense focus on compliance compromising their time for preparing lessons. They found themselves doing administrative work most of the time with a consequent reduction in their training delivery. They reported that overemphasis on paperwork resulted in lack of attention to the quality of core teaching and learning tasks:
You could tie 50% of your time up in compliance, if you made that your life, and some teachers do. So, I guess that's an ethical dilemma. (Robin)

Three of the identifying participants working in TAFE reported that, due to strict compliance with rules there, the need for and use of external accountability was combined with internal quality assurance regimes, which created over regulatory burden (Daniel). Ruby pointed out that she found herself continuously working towards her RTO’s focus on compliance for internal as well as external audit, as opposed to providing continuous improvement for student outcomes.

Annabelle added:

So, it's a lot of paperwork. It’s about everything being documented, everything being signed off, everything being done to keep the administrative wheels rolling. And we had two lots of QA [Quality Assurance] to do. (Annabelle)

Three of the identifying participants working in private RTOs highlighted the point that some small RTOs could not justify employing personnel full-time for internal audit activities. The task was then often spread amongst the participants and their colleagues, who had to squeeze auditing into the available time, and then auditing was rushed through or delayed as less time was devoted to planning and conducting the audit thoroughly:

Compliance requirements fell on teachers, you need to adapt to them immediately, which means you may not have time for students ... for the other aspects of training. (Frank)

Daniel argued that, since all RTOs had profit-maximization as their main goal, and because employing a full-time person to undertake internal audit activities proved costly, some small penny pinching RTOs complied with regulatory requirements only when it was time to get audited:

If TAFE knows that a national auditor [could] turn up on their doorstep unannounced, they will always be ok. But that doesn’t seem to happen with smaller RTOs, [where] it is once a year audit. I find that most RTOs bumble along until 2 weeks before audit, and give it scant regard. And there is more work for teachers. (Daniel)

Six of the identifying participants stated that, for some RTOs, the main purpose was to comply with federal and state compliance requirements, quality being identified with conformity
to specifications and fitness for purpose. The standards of education were thus given scant regard and students were consequently ill-prepared for their future employment:

> They are looking for corporate compliance; all they're looking for is a tick in the box. From a quality perspective, it is certainly not ethical. From a compliance perspective, I'd say at best, it's straddling the line. There needs to be quality there. It's not ethical in those senses, and it's not ethical to that poor person [student] that you’re training. (Drake)

> Form filling does not go to show that you are a good RTO in the delivery of the product, which you are asked to provide by the government and to the student. (Daniel)

> Teaching students or helping them in any way to learn. The basis of payment is very much around producing pieces of paper; it is not about in any way ... encouraging students to be informed to question society or to generally learn. (John)

Four of the identifying participants stressed that the difficulties of the requirements of their administrative role reduced the creative art of teaching, resulting in a loss of spontaneity and informality in curriculum planning:

> You really don’t have that extra time to spend with your students and try to have these conversations, and encourage them to have these conversations, to see their understanding, because of that time constraint. And probably, trying to identify, I’m also trying to give the opportunity to study, to see if I can enhance my knowledge to be able to communicate better, and assess. What level of understanding they have and where they are at, but I just don’t get the time, time constraint, I don’t have time for it. (Sandra)

Ruby reported having a prescriptive approach in her RTO, from the teaching and assessment material to routine field trip requirements. She asserted that the mandatory paperwork requirements grew over time with the increase in number of students, at the expense of learning activities:

> Some things would just seem so prescriptive. Say, for example, taking students out. Instead of being able to say, 'let's organize a trip for next week or this week and if we take them out they'll be able to do this, this and this'. Suddenly, our managers want us to comply by giving a whole list of wherever we might be
taking them over the whole term. And that sort of thing, again, takes away from your feeling of independence as a worker, being able to make those decisions as they come up. Because you're being [held] accountable all the time. (Ruby)

Ten of the identifying participants reported their concern that the purpose of the publication of audit compliance assessments should be to allow students to make better informed decisions about where to undertake their training, thus encouraging improvement in the quality of education. However, they pointed out that auditors did not consider those improvement policies, but looked into paperwork only. Participants pointed out that the whole purpose of paperwork was defeated if the quality was not looked into:

Quality would never be questioned. It would not be. It’s kind of like the quality depended totally on the teacher and it was kind of never looked at. (Claire)

This was regular in TAFE. I was surprised at TAFE, with the auditing they never observed any one class, never. Never observed the teacher. I believe that this place [private RTO] is similar in paperwork. So if paperwork is in order and the wording or instructions is bureaucratic enough, everything’s okay. (James)

It seems absurd that you can pass an audit here, based on just paperwork. I think they physically need to go into the institutes, not sit in a room being shown portfolios, but they need to go to into the classes. (Daniel)

Two of the identifying participants reported their concerns about the process of auditing done for online courses, which differed from RTO to RTO:

I think they should do a lot more compliance [of online teaching]. Because you can go there and you can see, Google, any qualification you want, and the quality and standard of it is vastly different. (Drake)

Those 10 participants supported a quality check approach that focused on teaching practices to managing compliance. Jim voiced his concern that if something is recorded, it is presumed to have happened and in the proper way. He stressed that there was no provision to check that the things were actioned as reported in the paperwork submitted for compliance. John reported that although the quality of teaching differed from class to class, it would never be questioned:

There is no quality control in terms of what actually happens. There is quality control in terms of the pieces of paper. So if you sit here and write out a beautiful
lesson plan for me and tell me that you are going to do lot of beautiful things and I go and file that in an appropriate folder and never look at it and I never acknowledge that it’s been written and then go the classroom and talk about a totally different subjects, and abuse the students and talk about all sorts of different things, the behavior is almost irrelevant. (John)

Moreover, three of those participants commented that auditors came at a specified date which gave enough time for the RTO to prepare for their audit. Thomas reported that the purpose of the audit was to find administrative errors rather than to look at improvement plans. Natalie further reported that RTOs were given time to address weaknesses identified in audits which created more paperwork for teachers to complete in an identified time, further constraining their teaching hours:

The auditors notify the RTOs, it's the same with the Health Inspectors, when they're going to go into a restaurant. Unless it's in a really terrible state that can't be fixed up in the week before they turn up. Even for classroom, same ethical situation. They tell you when they're coming. Everything is done. I'm sure the best teachers and stuff is put up the top, and that's who they choose, or whatever like that. And then if there is something wrong, they give you opportunities to make it right. Because at the end of the day, they are not going to put people out of business. And that's why there is so many RTOs that are not particularly good, operating in Australia now, because it has become this big market. (Natalie)

**Limited Resources**

Sixteen participants reported working with limited resources as an imperative informing the dilemma. The imperative was to limit the resources to levels below those to which participants were accustomed and expected. Participants complained that they were faced with more restrictive and prescriptive budgets and were monitored for utilizing scarce resources in budget constraints:

Budget constraints! So losing resources, ever-trapped resources, that is what is the main problem. (Sandra)

You had to go into her [the CEO’s] office to get your stationery. And if you went in there to want a white pen, or black pen, or something, she'd say, ‘Well, what was the one you got last week?’ I used it. I write a lot on the board. So you
actually had to go in there, and it was awful. And that was a real atmosphere of fear. (Natalie)

Two of the identifying participants also complained about the extensive, time-consuming processes for approving and scrutinizing planned expenditure in TAFE. An example of restricting budget on resources was outlined by Annabelle, who said that she had to wait for a whole year to receive the official approval from the management in TAFE.

Another participant said:

*The problem is, you report it to your line manager, and you know they are between the rock and a hard place because you know, we report to them, they report to higher management and higher management talks about budget and finance and issues. And then pass it back on to middle management and then middle management comes down to if we don’t have enough resource to extend the support. And this is what they have.* (Sandra)

In the absence of enough support, Frank and Sandra found themselves paying for basic resources after their requests were denied by managers.

Ten of the identifying participants highlighted that, with the increased enrolment of students in RTOs (more than the physical facilities and resources could optimally accommodate) the opportunity for students was further limited:

*Friday, I have a class of 30 students in a classroom with only 20 computers. So I have them sharing computers. So to give them what they are paying for, we really need two computer classes with a second teacher, but I know that TAFE hasn't costed that in, so that’s not going to happen.* (Renee)

In such situations, Gina pointed out that she struggled to provide quality instruction:

*Technology is something that we let them down on. For example, when they first start, there’s a series of online learning that they need to do and some of that is really meaty, quite regulatory stuff, in the finance sector but the computers that we give them keep dropping out. That’s a lot of conflict between the resourcing and expectation.* (Gina)

Those 10 participants also noted that, while the challenge of providing high-quality learning opportunities affected most students, those RTOs serving adult, vulnerable students may have faced additional challenges. Mark argued that, in the absence of the required resources, it
was unrealistic to expect that they could adequately meet the needs of students with varying abilities in one class. Renee was also concerned about the equity of learning experiences for students in the absence of suitable resources, especially where competence varied greatly among the students in a class:

Some students have never used computers before and others were extremely capable, and then I had the majority who were so-so. So to me trying to teach on my own, 30 people how to use computers, with less than 20 computers, that to me feels like the students certainly are not getting what they are paying for. (Renee)

Drake further described a situation where students used obsolete and outdated equipment:

We ask people to take [a] screen shot so that when the computer drops off, they can send us the screen shot and we can go. I suppose the only shortfall is they don’t know [how] to take [a] screen shot. So I have to say I am really sorry; takes me 2 hours and can you do it again? I hate that as we have let them down. (Drake)

Two of the identifying participants highlighted how they received complaints from students for not updating old equipment and facilities, sometimes resorting to practices which conflicted with their values. Drake, for example, recounted his experience of student complaints when they were provided with three-and-a-half inch floppy drives for Certificate III in Education Support. Renee reported allowing students to bring their own technical devices to class when students started complaining:

A couple of students brought in laptops at my suggestion. (Renee)

She also recited her experience of using students by encouraging buddy teaching in the absence of other resources:

I will continue to push that idea, and use my students as teacher aides, which is what they are learning to be and I guess that’s where [it] makes it easy, because they’re learning to be teacher aides. (Renee)

Four of the identifying participants also reported that the quality of available learning materials was very low, providing insufficient information on the subject matter, or not matching the requirements of the performance criteria of the program:
I've found some of the TAFE’s material terrible. When you look at some the performance criteria, you just go, ‘it's very basic, or it's outdated’, and that’s where the governing bodies have got a responsibility. (Drake)

Drake also recited how he was caught between student and organization and found himself in a conflicting situation: whether to tell the student that the lack of resources was a measure of the cost-cutting strategy adopted by the RTO or to defend the RTO from its bad name:

Students are now not getting the paper copies. They're only getting electronic copies. They said to me, ‘why can’t we keep these paper copies? We know people who’ve done the course before and they got to keep all the booklets’. And I just say, ‘well I am just trying be sustainable and save the environment, and if you need to print it, you can print it’. But really, it's because I’ve been told I have to save costs. So they're aware that they pay more now, because TAFE isn’t getting government assistance, and getting less, and that’s what they are saying to me. So, I tried to argue and not say that TAFE’s cutting costs. I just say that it’s from a sustainability point of view, but it does make me feel, they’re right. (Drake)

Teacher Casualization

Ten participants reported their RTOs as further constraining their responsiveness by replacing continuing with casual teachers. They suggested that the structural adjustments undertaken by their RTOs assumed that educational reforms served to save funds by reducing their salaries and by replacing continuing, full-time, more expensive teachers with part-time, casual teachers at a cheaper rate:

I was almost in the top [salary] bracket. I went as far as I could go and a lot of the RTOs are marginal operations. So they get rid of the teachers with more experience. So they can pay other teachers less. So I kind of got squeezed out of ESL [English as a second language]. (James)

All of the identifying participants reported that the struggling institutions used part-time staff to replace full-time staff:

I think that's [a] big thing with TAFE now. Permanent staff say they're no better, but we [are] just constantly on 6-month contract. (Annabelle)
Ruby voiced her concern about the suitability of assessment practices adopted by her employing RTO to get rid of people they did not want. She narrated how she and her colleagues were asked to do a psychometric test that told the management whether a teacher was suitable to work in the same place they had been working for the last 15 years:

*It's a way of peeling off more expensive people, your permanent staff and casualizing of staff. Tutors were basically about half the price of teachers.* (Ruby)

Mark reported that, in terminating tenure-based teachers, RTOs hired an increasing proportion of teaching staff at generally lower salaries than permanent staff, with the intention of indirectly reducing or eliminating programs such as teacher education and professional development:

*If you employ a casual teacher, you are only gonna [going to] pay them the hours that they directly stand in front of the class room.* (Mark)

However, five of the identifying participants pointed out that the casual staff may not have the necessary experience needed:

*The other thing is loss of the experience and knowledge. So you get all these new teachers coming along and trying to find their footing in the place. And it can be difficult.* (Sandra)

Karen described her experience of being pressured to work from home while designing courses or instructional materials:

*It's seen as more cost-effective for the business. That means less room that they need to make available for an organization. So less room, less money for rent, or basics. Really, it lowers their costs as well, because if you're working from home, I have to use my own Internet and my own phone. I don't get reimbursed for those sorts of things.* (Karen)

**Out-of-Field Teaching**

Seven participants reported that it had become a common expectation of teachers in both private and TAFE RTOs that they teach subjects outside their area of expertise. They reported finding themselves in a conflicting situation of whether to agree to teach subjects outside their expertise or to refuse to do so, risking loss of paid teaching hours. Renee, for example, pointed out that although it might seem obvious that teachers should be asked to teach only what they know, large numbers of teachers were routinely assigned to teach
outside their area of expertise and field of license. She narrated an incident where a colleague in such a situation was unprepared to teach the subject, and was then reported to have given false information to the students:

We needed teachers, and she [colleague] is the permanent teacher, so they transferred her out. She is a qualified teacher, but hasn’t taught for years. And really, she is floundering a lot and she brings in guest speakers a lot to cover the knowledge she doesn’t have. So that is another ethical conflict that I have, that the people that are teaching the teacher aides, have not ever worked with teacher aides, haven’t got the understanding coming from a teacher aide's point of view. (Renee)

Two of the identifying participants pointed out that sometimes out-of-field teaching also involved sending teachers overseas, with the notion that teachers will be able to teach international students in their home countries as they have experience of teaching in Australia. However, these participants pointed out that it gave them a cultural shock of working in a different environment with different values. They found their values in conflict with a cross-cultural context of academic standards, student services, professional relationships, and assessment irregularities:

Because there is virtually no ethics up there, I struggled in China. They [the students] don't turn up at all and they get 20%? So, I wasn't allowed to give them nil. But anyway, I think that really brought it to my attention, the other side of the coin as well, that [it] was a culture where that it was very acceptable. (Natalie)

I went to PNG a few weeks ago, just before Christmas, I was training their emergency team, and there were locals and Aussies there. And the locals [had] very poor levels of English again. They talk Pidgin. Different to when I've trained Diploma Level Business Management. Much different. That's sometimes what we have got to do. (Drake)

All of the identifying participants further pointed out that out-of-field placements presented obvious difficulties for both students and teachers. Natalie reported that being a good teacher in one subject area did not necessarily mean that they can teach another subject outside their expertise equally well and might not deliver their best in the absence of a thorough understanding of the subject. The participants reported that attending the class of a teacher who is not competent in a subject inevitably limited what students learnt.
Conclusion

The major finding identified from this chapter is the importance of the dilemma of constraining teacher responsiveness for the participants, regardless of the RTO in which they worked. The dilemma was that of the existential conflict between the intrinsic moral imperative to provide learning opportunities to diverse students and extrinsic imperatives constraining teachers’ capacity to respond constructively to the intrinsic imperative. Within that dilemma, there were four challenges: the challenge of overprescription of administrative work, the challenge of limited resources, the challenge of teacher casualization, and the challenge of out-of-field teaching. These comprise the other major findings from this chapter. They may be summarised as follows.

The challenge of over-prescription of administrative work is the difficulties the participants experienced as a result of the pressures faced by RTOs from the government for greater accountability in providing high-quality outcomes to students. The participants pointed out their difficulties in attending to administrative work for compliance and accountability requirements, thus giving less time to students. An extensive emphasis on documenting the evidence of meeting competencies for compliance created a consequent increase in workload for the participants. Such workload also changed the nature and role of their work as it created barriers for them to being responsive to the challenging needs of a classroom. Participants found themselves in constant conflict of whether to complete their administrative tasks or pay attention to student needs. Some participants were concerned that regulatory burden, red tape, and student administration were excessive. The participants voiced that the RTOs’ audit-compliance regime was predominantly focused on funding assurance rather than a sustainable improvement-led approach that engaged participants and students to improve educational quality. They reported that to meet the increased accountability of external audit agencies, some RTOs, particularly TAFE, had appointed their own internal auditors to keep the audit requirements updated. They found themselves continuously working towards RTOs’ shift of focus on compliance for internal as well as external audit as opposed to providing continuous improvement for student outcomes. A common complaint about regulation was the flow-on effects to students. The increased focus on compliance requirements limited innovation in learning and teaching and affected teacher time to respond to students’ needs. Participants also reported that the purpose of the audit was limited to addressing early non-compliant behaviour and providing support designed to return the organization to a situation of compliance. As the compliance did not reflect on the quality of their teaching, the integrity of their work, or the qualitative outcomes of their work with students,
many participants remained unconvinced by the bureaucratic demands of performance documentation, while being discouraged from channeling their energies into the administration work they believed would not help achieve the desired outcomes for students.

The challenge of limited resources is the difficulties the participants faced with more restrictive and prescriptive budgets. They reported the difficulties faced in attending to students’ need in the absence of resources. The participants reported concerns regarding financial constraints with resources, including teaching and learning materials, and equipment and facilities. Participants particularly expressed the disadvantage of centralized control systems in TAFE in that they rely on the extensive, time-consuming processes of approving and vetting planned expenditure in RTOs. There were also operational and resourcing issues around using outdated resources. A related issue was equity, as some computers were outdated or of limited use. To manage this problem, some of the participants, as they reported, were left with seeking help from students by bringing in their own device. Participants expressed that lack of resources created adverse effects on students.

The challenge of teacher casualization is further constraining the participants’ responsiveness by replacing continuing with casual teachers. The participants reported the difficulties they faced in massive down-sizing of the permanent workforce. They reported that a combination of funding cuts necessitated cost savings which meant that casualization of staff was the common phenomenon across the TAFE and private RTOs. Participants claimed that contemporary workplaces were characterized as featuring the growing use of temporary workers employed on an as-needed basis. Being a teacher in such a constrained environment meant that there was no job security for them and they had to generate enough income through marketing of the courses to students and meeting targets to secure their salary.

Another challenge faced by the participants is finding themselves in a conflicting situation of whether to agree to teach subjects outside their expertise or to refuse to do so, risking loss of paid teaching hours. The participants reported that they are routinely assigned to teach outside their area of expertise, sometimes requiring them to teach overseas. The assumption behind sending teachers overseas is that participants who have trained international students in Australia can successfully teach non-native speakers anywhere, even though these teachers may not be trained for teaching English as a foreign language. However, teaching out-of-field conflicted with the best interest of the students’ philosophy of participants.
Chapter 7: The Dilemma of Manipulating Learning Assessment

Introduction

The dilemma of manipulating learning assessment was that of the conflict felt by participants in being pressured, against their professional judgement, to pass students whom they felt were not competent. It was identified by 13 of the 18 participants, across both TAFE (four) and private (10) providers (one of the respondents being involved with both). The extrinsic imperatives involved issues of evidence, authenticity, plagiarism, and helping students to be deemed competent.

The dilemma was seen therein by the participants as involving poor assessment practices, which undermined the integrity of the student outcome.

*I find that the dilemma I face every day is, how much to focus on them just passing, and how much to focus on them actually learning the subject.* (Jim)

The identifying participants pointed out that they were compelled to pass the students as their RTOs relied on student enrolments to sustain their income, which depended heavily on their academic results. Jim reported his concerns about the use of assessment within systems of accountability as part of a global marketization of education policy where *overall academic results of their RTO and their place in the competition played an important role in attracting students.*

Other participants said:

*It is all about the assessment and they [the RTO] have a certain percentage to pass. If your students are not passing, it is going to be up to you, you are a teacher.* (Sandra)

*I have had pressure before to pass. So, the pressure is on, it is always hard to fail.* (Karen)

Extrinsic imperatives of the dilemma, shared variously by a majority or all of the participants, fell into major categories of (a) the issue of evidence, (b) the issue of authenticity, (c) the issue of plagiarism, and (d) the issue of helping students to be deemed competent. The nature of each of these imperatives is briefly explained here and evidenced in narratives and stories from the participants, as follows.
The Issue of Evidence

Eleven participants indicated that the importance of collecting evidence according to certain rules in Australian CBT created a perceived cultural change in their employing RTOs. They highlighted that they faced pressure from their respective RTO to collect the evidence necessary for it to pass an audit. Student competency, employability, and transferability skills were thus discounted if the paperwork mentioned that a student was competent. In such situations, participants found themselves in a conflict of passing a student knowing that they were not actually ready to be deemed as competent. Participants reported the pressures on them to find ways to pass such struggling students in order to preserve funding and reputation:

*Do I mark [an] assessment paper as satisfactory when I know that the student has not ... performed his work satisfactorily? But there is a fair bit of pressure to beat them out of the road [pressure to pass the incompetent assessment]. (John)*

The majority of the identifying participants reported their concern that some RTOs got away with providing as little evidence as possible. Daniel, for example, reported that the evidence that was once required to evidence the assessment as meeting clients' needs, confirming competency, was replaced with *providing little evidence that can be perceived as just enough* for compliance with ASQA.

Gina narrated her experience of being asked to pass a student who could not submit her assignment due to a technical problem faced by the student. In the absence of any evidence, Gina was asked to question the student orally and to mark her as competent:

*Our business units, to benchmark, is we ask people to take a screen shot so that when the computer drops off, they can send us the screen shot and we can go, you have done it, I will update it manually in our system to reflect that. I have been asked to pass in some situation when students mentioned they could not update but have done the assessment. But in that situation I will ask so tell me some of that content that you have learnt and ask a few questions to sort of gauge whether or not they got the key learning outcomes and then I will update but I suppose it is about risk because if this was to go down to the wire, I would need to say I saw some, that they understood those legal [subject] performances. (Gina)*
Renee mentioned her experience of being asked to mark the assessment in a way that *her* employing **RTO** *could get the funding*. She described how, after chasing the student repeatedly over the phone, she received all the assignment with only half of the content in each section and *was asked by the management to grade as AW* (student participated in the course, but not handed in all of their assessments) *instead of M* (student handed all the assessments in but they were not competent in all of them) *as they would get funding from marking AW but not M*.

Two participants who insisted on gathering the evidence of competence that units of competency seek to describe, spoke of how they were categorized as over assessing the students. Drake reported being asked to collect less evidence so that the students could pass easily, failing which, he and other colleagues in his RTO were asked to *leave politely*.

Seven of the identifying participants were persuaded by the RTO that the students who demonstrated very little evidence of understanding, would learn on the job. But most participants stated that they hoped that they would have observed the students demonstrating evidence before they issued certificates to the students. Drake pointed out the challenges he faced when persuaded by his manager with an analogy of the course as a learning license and work experience as a full license:

> [The RTO] Manager used the analogy, that this is only learners’ permit to go out and practice more now. This is only the starting point. Students need to go and develop their skills further. But again, you [the teacher] look at the performance criteria and the module, and ... there is a conflict internally. (Drake)

However, in the absence of evidence to make judgements about whether students had met the competency standards as specified in the relevant training package, the participants reported the risk that qualifications were being awarded to learners who had not strictly met all the required competency standards. Six participants pointed out that such manipulation of assessments might prove costly to students in the long run:

> I think [the] dilemma comes if the student [is] going to be on [a] par with someone who has done the Cert IV or Grade 12 in mainstream doing Chemistry. They are both made to sit in the University class in [the] first bench next to each other. Do they know the same thing? And I think that is where the thing comes from. (Annabelle)

In the absence of proper understanding of the content by students, three participants were concerned that the students could not transfer core ideas, knowledge, and skills to challenging
tasks in a variety of contexts. They pointed out that, without such knowledge and skills, the students were more likely to suffer in their employment. Gina, for example, reported her concern that inability to perform can be a major disadvantage for students and that can have a big impact on the longer term of employment prospects.

Karen added:

The employer picks that up [the student's inability to transfer skills], along the way so he [the student] did really struggle and he did not last very long [at the employment]. (Karen)

Sandra further described her concerns that an incompetent graduate who has been deemed competent could have a negative impact on employers and the workplace, or seriously affect public safety, including through endangering individuals or the community:

Basically, if they get a piece of paper, it does not necessarily mean that they have the knowledge or skills. So, in nursing, obviously, it is very important to have knowledge and skills. [The student] came to the placement in a hospital. Failed badly. Absolutely badly, because, could not connect the dots. Jeopardize patients' safety, not knowing the basic stuff, so, what kind of assessments do we have then? What I want to feel is that, if I have gotten a little sick and I go to the hospital, they gain employment in that hospital and if they are my nurse, I want to feel safe, when I see this person. (Sandra)

All of the identifying participants emphasized not only that such situations isolated students and affected their confidence, but also that such flawed qualifications may have a broader impact on public confidence in training and the reputation of VET sector.

The Issue of Authenticity

Six participants raised their concern over authenticity in traditional as well as online assessments. While they affirmed that online assessment could be convenient for learners and that it supported flexibility and distance learning, they acknowledged that it raised concerns relating to cheating and security of the assessment instruments. They found themselves in a conflicting situation over whether or not to pass the assessments that might not be students’ work.
Four of the identifying participants spoke of their scepticism about the removal of compulsory attendance from competency-based assessments, and questioned whether or not the submitted assignments were students’ work:

*As long as they are passing the assessments, which they are doing at home, they pass. So, anyone could be doing the assessment, who knows what is going on?* (Jim)

*There are a lot of students that hand in assignments written for them by a third party. I know that goes on.* (Mark)

*In many cases, it is not so much saying that I know that student is not competent. It is not generally that field, it is more of, I am not sure for example, that it is student’s own work.* (John)

Three of the identifying participants pointed out that such risks were heightened with online assessments, where they were not sure of ways to identify the authenticity of the students’ online submissions:

*That's another ethical issue too we have now. People submitting stuff online. How do we know it is their work?* (Renee)

Natalie highlighted her suspicions of marking assessments when she received well-written, well-drafted assignments from students with low literacy and language proficiency:

*We were allowing more and more of our students, except for Advanced Diploma, to upload their assessments and send them to us. So who is doing the work? I mean, if I have them in class, I know their English standard by just talking to them, getting them to read, conversations with me and things like that. So I have a fairly good understanding of where they are at. And then I get these [online] assessments that are perfect.* (Natalie)

She further indicated that examples of academic dishonesty included students providing papers or assignments from former students, and receiving or copying answers from others. She explained that the details of procedures to validate the content and structure of new or revised assessments meant that participants had limited incentive or capacity to develop new or revised assessments for the following year. In such cases, she found it challenging to mark the copied assessments as competent:
There had been a case or two of students that have been through, students that have done the Diploma, now doing the Advanced Diploma and they have got friends coming up and doing the Diploma. But the assessment does not change. We don’t have rolling assessment pieces, which is naughty. (Natalie)

She also narrated another incident where she was confronted with the same answers for online assessments as those in the answer sheet prepared by her:

When they send [assessment] online, those assessment pieces are floating around, and I know for a fact, two of my students, last term, they were identical answers to my answer book. Somehow, somewhere, they had either hacked in or got hold of an appendum, because we get them as a separate appendum for us with all the answers and everything, all the expected answers in it. (Natalie)

Four of the identifying participants pointed out that the motivation of students in enrolment played a very important part in their assessment. Jim, for example, reported that sometimes students may have enrolled in these courses to meet visa obligations, but their real intentions were to work in Australia. Such students may then have experienced difficulties passing the course and may have outsourced their assignment, getting it done by someone else:

They think they are here to work and have a holiday, so they ... leave study ‘til the very last minute, or give it as little time as possible. And some of them obviously get around it. ... They are working full-time and they can afford to get somebody else to do it for them. (Jim)

Natalie reported that, when she approached a senior colleague in management about a student paying to get the assignment done, she was asked to prove academic misconduct:

I spoke to one of the teachers about it, the one who has been there longest. I said, Alberto is never in class, and he has really good assessments. I guarantee he is farming them out, paying to get them done because he is working full-time. He said, ‘how strongly do you feel about it?’ And I said ‘Well, I can’t prove it. Because I cannot prove it’. So I was just told to be quiet. (Natalie)

The majority of the identifying participants highlighted the point that the combination of two forces – their inability to prove cheating and the over-reliance on passing student numbers to gain further enrolment – made it difficult for them to take any action.

The Issue of Plagiarism
Nine participants spoke of plagiarism as being one of the most common issues concerning student assessment. They stated that they were not provided with software that identifies plagiarized work and that they wasted lot of their time checking the extent of plagiarism manually. In the absence of such technology, they experienced what they saw as great waste of their time in identifying plagiarized content:

There is no capacity for most colleges to actually challenge a plagiarized document, not like in universities where you can run essay through computer programs and like you can have the experience of the university teacher who knows what is out there in the academic world. In vocational training, there is no such thing as that. (Frank)

The identifying participants were mindful that plagiarism was a form of academic misconduct that may lead to a student gaining a qualification for which they were not qualified, creating conflict in their minds as to whether or not to assess the commonly created plagiarized assessments as competent or not. They all noted that plagiarism was deep rooted in VET:

I have seen examples of the copied words straight from the Internet, and this is copy-and-pasted and then the dilemma there is that, if you pass it or if you fail it? (Jim)

In addition, all the identifying participants felt that they were not supported when they approached management about plagiarized assessments. They were in fact questioned whether they were sure that it was a plagiarized work and were asked to prove that it was:

You can do all of those plagiarism checks but at the end of it, there is no simple way to confirm that and solve that as an issue. (John)

In the absence of evidence, they reported their difficulties in providing academic penalty to students. John narrated his experience of the problem he faced when he confronted a student about the possibility of plagiarism in the absence of verifiable evidence, asking him to confess:

What do I understand happened in that case? They lodged a complaint against me and they went to different college, got the paper, the qualification and it goes on, and life continues on. It certainly meant that the college lost income from that student and probably things got grounded that more stricter colleges will get less students. (John)
Five of the identifying participants indicated that failing students could result in loss of income for the RTO. To reduce student dropout, participants were pressured to pass the students or allow multiple resubmissions of assignments. Participants reported that they were required to make provision for additional assessments to be given to students to ensure that they could resubmit assessments multiple times:

_I was not allowed to give them nil. I was asked to give students I never saw 20%, just so they can come back again if they wanted to and re-sit the exam._ (Natalie)

However, three of the identifying participants also were aware that some students plagiarized by accident, which could be avoided if students were made aware that it amounted to academic misconduct. Jim indicated that most of the international students, particularly Asian students who attempted to cheat, did so for several reasons, including poor mastery of English, misunderstanding the standards for referencing or plagiarism, a general lack of awareness concerning the research and writing practices, and an acceptance of copied work in their culture:

_Their [international students’] English is not that good and a lot of them might not even know, they are cheating or that it is not allowed. It depends on where you are coming from. If you are coming from China or something, where this might be acceptable, they might not even know it is wrong until they get a warning. And they cannot even go and read the code of ethics, because their English is limited._ (Jim)

Natalie further highlighted that, although plagiarism was more commonly seen amongst international students studying in Australia, it was also prominent on overseas campuses of the employing RTOs. She reported significant risks of corruption within campuses abroad and voiced profound concerns over the financial and reputational risk involving plagiarism in transnational education. She also mentioned that, although there were some cases when students had been assessed as not competent, students were supported to pass:

_I would say a third of my 800 students just handed me something they took from the Internet. I was not allowed to give them nil. I think that really brought it to my attention, but also it brought the other side of the coin as well. That was a culture where that was very acceptable to plagiarize. They had to pass. Nobody fails up there. I do not think it is right, but it is one of those things. What can you do about it? And, to make it worse, they did not come back to me, those that had been plagiarized. And they actually pay the teachers up there to pass them._
People get second bites at the cherry and get through anyway, and they know they are going to get through, because that reputation goes through. (Natalie)

Natalie further suggested that those students are taught from primary and secondary school that copying is a means to survive: cheating becomes an acceptable practice for students and it may continue to work, and become part of life. Qualifications thus gained should therefore be seen as an inaccurate impression of their abilities. She further indicated that this could lead to serious negative consequences for educational standards for Australia.

The Issue of Helping Students to be Deemed Competent

Five participants raised their concern over the increasing use of employing staff to help students with their assessments. They described their experience of such recruitments as one aspect of academic cheating to help students to be deemed competent. They pointed out that students’ passing and not learning has taken priority, as the ability to demonstrate student graduation was considered essential by their RTOs to maintaining student enrolments. Hence, the financial viability of the RTO had become a by-product of its ability to produce successful student results which could help students in comparative analyses of student achievement data. Two of the five participants worked in private RTOs with CEOs from multicultural backgrounds and three of them worked in private RTOs with CEOs from an Australian background.

Daniel and Josephine reported their concern about academic cheating done by the CEO of some RTOs, particularly CEOs from multicultural backgrounds and perceived it to be the cultural habit:

I am finding that some of the RTOs being run by people from India and around the Indian subcontinent, where it is a cultural thing. It is. Some of what they do is scandalous. They almost have a bank of people working on assignments to get candidates through. They have enrolled candidates on some of the government-funded programs, which is a Certificate III, guarantee. They have notoriously low achievement rates, and what they are then doing is, they are completing the candidate’s portfolios for them, even though they have been absent for some considerable period of time. It is all about pulling down the funding. (Daniel)

Josephine highlighted the activities of brokers, pressuring CEOs from the same multicultural background to enroll students and pass them in their RTOs. She explained that it was
difficult for her to comprehend such confirmation of academic cheating made by CEO of the RTO:

*During assessment, he [the CEO] said to me, ‘can you give the answer to that student?’ to help him pass. I felt like ‘no’. My boss asked me to pass [a] student he got from his education agent who was his friend. A lot of time, I must say that, this a culture thing, because the partner [agent] who finds students think they are doing a favour, especially [when] the student agent is a friend with boss and you put a pressure that, can you do that?* (Josephine)

On the other hand, three of the identifying participants reported unethical practices of helping students to pass the assessments adopted by management of domestic RTOs. Frank related his experience of his employing RTO, where help was employed to write assessments for international students with low English proficiency:

*There was a cohort of students, international students that basically had not got English level of a primary school. Most of the assessments are done for them.* (Frank)

Natalie pointed out that providing assistance to such students meant that RTOs were *dumbing down education:*

*I'm not just saying it's Asians – probably Indian as well, but predominantly Asian and Indian are the heavy-populated cultures that are coming in with this expectation that they're going to pass. And people are passing them. And I just think that it's brought the whole of our standards – I was really proud of Australian education standards. Our standards are appalling, and dropping considerably. At least I think they are.* (Natalie)

The majority of the identifying participants highlighted that, when the course fees were paid for by the employing organization, the successful completion of the course was very important for their managers. Gina reported that, in apparent cases where students were not competent, some managers or superiors resorted to helping students to pass a course or unit:

*I think that there is a majority out there who go when it gets to assessment time, as your superior, I am going to stand here and do it for you and tick that box so that we can say you had done it and then move on. So we lose that, they are not learning, they are ticking the box as though they have done it but they are actually not getting any learning out of it.* (Gina)
Drake and Jim also pointed out that in their effort to pass the student assessments, sometimes their colleagues resorted to practices like giving away answers to examination questions in the revision sheets. Drake further claimed that, by concentrating on tested information, some participants overlooked other important areas of learning:

*Some of these guys, particularly these construction workers, they have barely got Year 9 level education. In their PowerPoint slides, they [the colleagues] tell you, any time there is a red word, write that down in your book. It is the answer, and stuff like that, and you are going – what sort of standard of anything is that?*
(Drake)

*We have got students that are passing Diploma of Business, but they still do not know simple business terminology. They are usually getting assistance, either from other trainers or from friends or someone and just submitting their assessment and passing.* (Jim)

Drake also described his resistance to the use of an interpreter in an exam for which a student receives an Australian qualification:

*At the end of the day, if you are coming to a course, you are getting an Australian qualification, and when I give that piece of paper, I am saying that you met that standard. So, yeah, not really sure. I understand now that when you get issued your Statement of Attainment, it does actually say that it was with an interpreter. That was a recent change, so that makes me feel a little bit easier.* (Drake)

Drake and Jim stressed that such practices did more harm than good to students in the long run.

**Conclusion**

The major finding identified from this chapter is the dilemma of manipulating learning assessment. The dilemma is caused by the conflict felt by participants in being pressured to pass students whom they felt were not competent, against their professional judgement. Within that dilemma, there emerged four challenges: the issue of evidence, the issue of authenticity, the issue of plagiarism, and the issue of helping students to be deemed competent.

The issue of evidence, the issue of authenticity, and the issue of plagiarism are the difficulties faced by the participants in passing the unauthenticated, plagiarized work of students
with very little evidence. The participants reported being under constant pressure to mark, as competent, assessments that had issues of evidence, authenticity, and plagiarism, and to pass students who were not competent. The identifying participants recognized that they were criticized when results were interpreted as unsatisfactorily. The participants also raised their concern over increasing use of employing staff to help students with their assessments. Such practices are seen to encourage an environment in which the number of students graduating, not the student outcome data, is of importance to an RTO. They expressed particular concern that many students are completing courses while lacking evidence of sufficient basic skills. They reported that the absence of dimensions of competency, employability skills, and transferability could lead to serious negative consequences for employers, customers, and society in general. Poor assessment practices adopted by some RTOs were also perceived as undermining the integrity of the qualification.
Chapter 8: Impact and Response

Introduction

The preceding four chapters defined the four dilemmas faced by the participants. Such dilemmas were seen as being generated through tensions between what participants (intrinsically) understood that they should do in a particular situation and what they felt impelled to do by extrinsic imperatives or pressures from changed circumstances in the contemporary cultural context of VET: creating (extrinsic) pressure for action in conflict with VET teachers’ understanding of their traditional, intrinsic moral commitments or imperatives as teachers. This chapter discusses the impacts of and responses to those dilemmas. Firstly, it discusses the reported impacts of the dilemmas on the participants. The responses to such dilemmas in the actions reported as being taken by the participants is discussed in the second half of the chapter.

Impact of the Dilemmas

The four dilemmas and their associated challenges had varied impacts on the participants. Ebb and flow existed between the dilemmas such that they might all exist, but particular dilemmas were more dominant than others at times. The dilemmas rose to the surface in different ways at different times depending on the situation and the way they might be played out. These aspects had a significant impact on the participants’ normal routines and practices, yet they were generally beyond the participants’ control. The notion of impact here was thus taken as the effects that participants experienced the dilemmas as having on their emotional well-being and on the way they went about their work, their workplace culture, and its management.

The changes in the cultural context of vocational education teaching in Australia on the work of teachers operating within the system, from regulatory to operational perspectives, impacted on the work of participating teachers, what they do, for whom, and how. The participants articulated five significantly different, but not mutually exclusive, impacts of the four dilemmas: (a) disappointment, (b) confusion, (c) anxiety, (f) discomfort, and (e) distress. The nature of each of those categories is here briefly explained and evidenced in narratives and stories from the participants, as follows.
Disappointment

Disappointment refers generally to participant experiences of being sad, unhappy, or displeased: because students were treated as a means for surviving in the competitive economy, because students’ diverse needs were not being catered for, because standards of quality were not met, or because the participants were not afforded support in providing quality education to diverse students. Disappointment as a result of the foregoing dilemmas was reported by all 18 participants. They spoke of feeling let down by their RTOs for opening up the field to commercial greed in place of high-quality teaching and learning, and of discontent at seeing students struggle in the absence of adequate support. They spoke of feeling let down by the changing philosophy of education to profit maximization where the language of business like profits, selling a product to a consumer or customer and achieving compliance dominated most of their meetings with management.

All of the identifying participants reported that an increasingly competitive environment, driven by declining affordability and educational alternatives, was intensified by the need for obtaining a sufficient level of enrolment to remain financially viable for most RTOs. They reported that students were treated as a means of generating income and that the tactics associated with recruiting students to enroll in courses were unethical:

*I felt it [the employing RTO] wasn’t a particularly ethical organization.*  (James)

*There's no standard.... There's corruption throughout everything.*  (Natalie)

*I can generally say is that the industry has changed, and it has become more commercialized and privatized. Focusses more on money than on the learning outcomes for students.*  (Karen)

*Ethics actually comes from doing no harm. If you look at people’s action in the vocational sector and apply the rule of thumb that is it doing harm to anyone. And if it is doing harm, then it is unethical.*  (Frank)

Sixteen of the 18 identifying participants who worked with students enrolled in flexible learning reported concerns that the enrolment system was focused on maximizing revenue rather than ensuring students were enrolled in realistic learning programs. For example, Jim provided examples of his RTO enrolling students in a course with a higher funding rate, when the training that the student needs is in a different qualification, which attracts a lower funding rate.
The identifying participants expressed their frustration and resentment against RTOs and brokers admitting unqualified students with a promise of high-paying careers that never materialize. Frank pointed out that such practices created adverse effects on students in the long run:

*If the behaviour does harm to someone, it is unethical and sometimes the harm is not readily visible straightaway.*

Daniel said:

*I would like to see it almost, almost illegal to have student recruitment companies, which is what they are. Study Net, BS Education Services, ESPMGT management, IET, a whole plethora of names that they go by, because they’re basically supplying you with sub-standard students, charging you [RTO] 30% of the gross figure and it's all about maintaining those numbers. It’s a hard one. Ethically and morally, I think the right people need to be running RTOs. Sadly, there’s a lot out there failing to do that.*

Daniel reported the unethical practices of targeting domestic students to enrol in VFH as *inhumane*. Moreover, participants reported their disappointment in targeting international students with the intention of staying in Australia. For example, Frank reported that many students attended classes for visa purposes and improved opportunities in Australia but, because their communication abilities were poor, they did not get employment in their area of study and most of these students had to take menial jobs.

All of the identifying participants raised questions about RTOs accepting full-fee-paying students, domestic and international, who did not have the prerequisite skills and also were not adequately equipped to deal with the assessments required by their courses:

*That's very challenging for my own personal view. Because these are deeply held values, social justice and these equity values that are being really challenged at this juncture. (Ruby)*

Fourteen of the 18 participants reported that the often-low standard of written and spoken English created challenges for most RTOs, but they helped students by employing others to help students with their assignments. In addition to that, the identifying participants reported their discontent with the relatively low number of support services available to participants to help students, which severely limited the quality of services to students. Anabelle, for example,
reported that large class sizes of diverse students with limited resources was a continuous source of disappointment and dissatisfaction:

*The fact that TAFE [had] to take 30 students rather than 20, which is what I can cope with in the classroom. I have had up to 25 before, and often I can shoo a few out to the tech [technology] centre, where they can go off and work themselves, but with this many students with different ability ... I quickly check their skills and they were knowledgeable enough.* (Annabelle)

*I’ve got so many [students]. I tried to partner them up. I arranged for the lowest skilled ones to sit together, but because they are sharing computers, it means that one does the work and the other just watches. To me that’s, they are not getting what they paid for. So, to me, that is an ethical conflict.* (Renee)

It was repeatedly asserted that the quality of courses was being compromised and that participants feared for the outcomes of their students. Josephine, for example, highlighted her disappointment in observing unqualified students working hard to pass and her discomfort in having to let them know that they were not competent. Karen highlighted her difficulty in confronting her feelings of distress when students continued to struggle, in spite of her having done all she could to support them. Frank emphasized that such students were subjected to failure by their RTO, as only a few students who start then graduate with the skills and are job ready.

Five of the identifying participants feared that not having acquired the knowledge and proficiencies to compete in the global economy would leave students in huge financial debt:

*I think in our context, we need more structure around what support are we giving to people, what learning support, what framework is given to people before we start performance manage them because I’ve seen people lose their job because they are not performing. And we actually have not given skills to perform. It’s not that they didn’t want to it’s just that we haven’t given them the support they needed.* (Natalie)

Confusion

Confusion refers generally to participant experiences of noticing that their students were not enrolled in the course that suited them and that enrolments increased in the courses offered in the SOL list. Ten participants reported confusion over enrolment of students in some courses. All the identifying participants also reported their confusion with their students’ attitudes with condensed courses, cheaper courses, or flexible online courses.
The identifying participants were confused about student intentions, especially when they encountered students with higher qualifications from their home countries enrolling for Certificate courses, and students with very poor English and literacy enrolling in Diploma courses:

*It’s the dilemma in working for in bogus situations like us. It’s like working in a situation, in that a lot of students are too good for the class. They have to come to come along to get their ticks and to keep their visa? We do have some students who are not good enough for the class and they just come along.* (James)

The identifying participants were confused about students enrolling in such high-fee-paying courses with exclusive reference to more transient values of acquiring credentials. Their discussion of the student intentions of being in a particular course in VET and its salient impacts on participants tended to be foregrounded by reference to the more intrinsic benefits for more working hours for domestic students and extrinsic benefits for visa purposes for international students. James, for example, reported his concerns over the extrinsic driver of visas for international students as:

*International students. All of them are on student visas here. So they have to be involved in some study. At least 90% of them don’t have much intention to study. I think from their point of view, they wouldn't come at all, because they don’t have to and just the immigration department forced them to come to a school [RTO]. And they have to hand over the money.*

Three of the identifying participants indicated their amazement at the changing demand of domestic students who generally opt for short and cheap courses. Thomas highlighted that such *Mickey Mouse qualifications* were appreciated well by the students and accommodated the schedules of part-time students and adult students who juggle continued education with other work and family responsibilities:

*The students were quite happy to only do 6 months of study instead of 12 months of study. So that really then challenged my ethical decision-making in regards to a whole range of things in that, sometimes when you think that you are doing a disservice, it would be a benefit for the other party. So here I was thinking that I was providing a lesser service to the student, when in fact the students were very happy to receive that lesser service. Because that could mean that they could do*
more part-time work during the week, and it can also mean that they could get out into the workforce, 6 months earlier than previously it was. (Thomas)

That's a win, win for the RTOs and students. Just because I think it's not right, but it works for both sides. They have to do the least amount of hours, and obviously, the RTO likes that as well, so it's the win, win. (Natalie)

All 10 identifying participants reported that what it meant for them as a teacher was that their teaching in such classes was not valued:

What that means to me as a teacher, any skills that I have as a teacher, but for the job I am doing is ?? [acted as a question mark]. (James)

They reported that they were very confused about the approach they should take in teaching those students because of their diverse characteristics, decreased motivation and respect for education, lower skill levels, and declining respect for participants.

Anxiety

Anxiety refers generally to participant experiences of being worried, nervous, or uneasy about their job security. Fifteen participants reported that the culture of revenue maximization also stimulated new employment strategies of hiring short-term contracts which led to job insecurity for all VET participants. The identifying participants indicated that to achieve economies, there had been redundancies of permanent staff and an increase in the employment of part-time staff.

Natalie, working in a private RTO, reported her experience of being sacked over the phone as:

I got sacked. That was funny. I think it was by text. And I rang up the ... Head of Operations, and said, are you telling me you don't want me to come in? It wasn't like; you've got sacked. It was like, we don't need your hours anymore or something like that. It's not really an ethical thing. (Natalie)

Frank reported that a participant’s job is only as secure as your last semester’s teaching. In the absence of any confirmation about his contract being renewed for teaching in the summer break, he had to take odd casual job over Christmas:

TAFE teachers are not offered tenure and only few teachers in a private RTO has tenure. So in school holidays you cannot wait for next teaching period. You have to have a job, so I worked as a casual. Most people are casuals at TAFE now.
Ruby expressed her anxiety over job insecurity as:

*I'm only engaged as a casual, I'm only employed by the hour, and that hour can finish tomorrow.* (Ruby)

At the same time, four participants were anxious that their jobs might be on the line if the link between student recruitment, retention, and achievement was not maintained. Claire, for example, pointed out that *RTOs face struggle for survival* and hence participants were expected to make sure that all the enrolled students pass. Daniel related his experience of a condition put by his manager while appointing him as:

*My boss says, I am giving you a contract for 6 months, at 35, 40 dollars an hour, but then these 10 groups of students, your opinion is that one of them is capable of passing. Well, that one student is only worth $3,000. If you don't sign them off, I'll find someone that will.* (Daniel)

*They know they can just find another one [teacher]. They will get rid of you and find another one, and that's their attitude. That was the attitude with xxx when I was working there. I think she [CEO] said it to me once. She said you [I] need to watch yourself. I could get another teacher to replace you, no trouble. This is the CEO of xxx.* (Natalie)

Jim reported his experiences of feeling anxious when the jobs of participants in his RTO depended on student feedback:

*Once you depend on student feedback, you can lose your job. Students might be pissed off and say that my trainer was bad and once when a student gives me feedback that I am a bad trainer, I could lose my job. They [the students] are just judging you on, what they felt in the classroom, for their personal gain. If they pass, you are funny; you are a good teacher. But they do not necessarily know what is good teaching practice, and if they are giving you feedback on that, there are a lot of issues. I now focus on my maintaining my integrity, rather than what I believe is a good education and I think that’s where all, all RTOs as they are going private, student feedback is very important for the teacher's advancement as in promotion or retaining their jobs is affected. And that’s kind of deteriorating education.* (Jim)

All the four identifying participants reported that anxieties over job insecurity created confrontations that reduced the pleasantness of the teaching experience. In these situations, the
conflict faced by participants was how to maintain their integrity in such a volatile and insecure job market. Annabelle, for example, highlighted how such job insecurity affected the morale of the place:

*It was like a sinking ship. Everyone you knew was either getting transferred, or made redundant or changing jobs with all this restructuring, and I think people like doing the thing that they know. If someone is leaving, then they have this, even though they don’t say it, that it’s really not my problem anymore, kind of attitude. When there’s that much restructuring, I feel the managers, who so ever is at the top, really need to know what they’re doing. Otherwise, it’s a bit of a mess in between.*

**Discomfort**

Discomfort was caused when the participants experienced a feeling of unease in talking to management thus creating a disturbing environment in which to work. Discomfort as a result of the foregoing dilemmas was reported by all 18 participants. They spoke of feeling let down by management for treating the participants as one of the resources in the RTO and creating an environment of fear where it was difficult for them to confront management about issues that they faced.

*Everybody knows this [unethical practice of recruiting students] but they cannot talk it out because it is not officially happening.* (Jim)

All of the identifying participants reported that confronting management and whistle blowing was not considered as a desirable practice even though, as conscientious employees, they perceived it as the only ethical choice. They reported that RTOs promoted guidelines for practising ethical behaviour for the benefit of students, industry clients, and society. However, they expressed fear that participants who reported on wrongdoing often suffered damaging reprisals. The identifying participants expressed that although the vocational sector has unions and policies, there were major discrepancies between policy and practice, including in the actions of the union. Hence, before confronting management or the union, they needed to consider the implications of their action, in this case the possibility of losing their job. The playing out of this notion of fear in the workplace was observed in the acceptance of unethical conduct because employees were reluctant to divulge their RTO’s wrongdoings:

*People are hesitant to deal with issues of plagiarism. Because who is going to be the bad guy?* (Jim)
I tend to carry a lot of guilt. I've become defensive because I'm defending TAFE, who I work for, they're my employer. But I don't agree with them, so I guess it does make me feel conflicted, but I feel - well, the students are right, but I can't actually say that. (Renee)

Three identifying participants reported secretly feeling happy when the media exposed the unethical behaviour of some of the RTOs, tightening the regulations for the employment of educational brokers.

Different participants reported different reasons for not confronting management. Older participants were apprehensive about their whistle blowing near the end of their career while the young new participants were not confident to speak to management. Others did not confront management as they saw their colleagues keeping quiet and in such situation, their intentions might be mistaken for whistle-blowing for promotion, whereas some participants were protective of their jobs.

Daniel, working in a private RTO, narrated his reason of not confronting management due to his family responsibilities:

If I [RTO] was going to ask you to come and teach for me, $40 an hour for the next 6 months, I can give you 30 hours a week, as an individual, with a mortgage and a young family, you don’t want to rock the boat too much. It's just a sad indictment of the times, ultimately. (Daniel)

Gina, a causal teacher at a private RTO, narrated her apprehension about confronting the management as a culture of the organization where no one confronts:

I get a feel some of my colleagues were quite, probably gentle in their approach to things and they have some frustrations, but maybe they are less confident in pushing their buttons as they are pretty young, 20, 21, or 22, dealing with management they do not have the confidence to speak into. (Gina)

Natalie, a causal teacher nearing her retirement, gave her reason for not confronting management as:

In the real world, you're surviving. In the ideal world, you'd be able to put your hand up, 'cause often, at the end of the day, it should improve everything, for everybody. But that's not going to happen. I just want peace now. I don’t want to create waves, and I think that has a lot to do with my age as well, now. I'm kind
of cruising to the last stretch, and I don't want it to be too bumpy. So, I leave it to the younger ones to change things. (Natalie)

Sandra, provided the following reasons for not confronting management:

If you start talking about it [ethical values], then, you become like a stirrer like somebody who looks for trouble or somebody who looks demanding something or somebody who wants to get the attention or, it’s for all wrong reasons. So, people don’t want to stir. You want to keep our jobs specially if you are on contract, just want to. I’m just going to do my work, hope for the best, do my best as I can, that’s it and have a contract for another year. (Sandra)

Mark, a casual teacher working in a private RTO, described his experience of confronting his students in the absence of any support from management, which created uncertainties in the minds of the students:

'I’ve been in the TAFE sector. When we were going through rapid change, just recently [before he left TAFE] there was very poor communication from senior management which resulted in a lot of confusion, a lot of fear a lot of angst, amongst the teaching staff. So, a lot of teachers would voice their concerns to the students, and therefore the students would go what’s going on with this organization? Why the teachers are unhappy, what’s wrong? ...It irks me, and it irks a lot of the teachers that were working in the public sector because they believe that you know, they wanted to do the best for the students really. 

Distress

Distress refers generally to participant experiences of being troubled by observing and experiencing the changing VET teachers’ identity. Distress as a result of the foregoing dilemmas was reported by all 18 identifying participants. The business-education paradigm affected participants’ professionalism from a value perspective rooted in an inherent conflict of interest between them and RTO, particularly the notion of treating students as consumers and cash cows. The professional status of teaching was thus weakened through this shift in focus, and loss of professionalism was a distress felt deeply by all participants:

It sounds like I’m putting a pretty dim view on VET education, but there are a lot of people such as myself, and I know other companies as well, we are a little bit hamstrung by those with less morals and ethics. (Daniel)
It is more about the revenue and not about the quality of delivering. Well, it frustrates me to see the changing purpose [of education]. (Mark)

Such perceived cultural change of the RTO and changing the philosophy of education combined with unethical practices adopted by RTOs clearly contributed to the dilemma arising out of the potential conflicts between personal and professional values resulting in competing business values for participants. Participants expressed fear as to whether the profit motive was at odds with the values of education, and the risk that their employing RTOs were unable to deliver quality provision to students.

Furthermore, all identifying participants reported that a dramatic expansion in student numbers with a reduction in teaching engagement and resources, modifications of course content and structure to allow for more flexibility, the imposition of quality control and compliance culture, and changing securities of work redefined the identity of VET participants.

A lot of teachers find it depressing. Heavy workloads, short time frames in which to get the students through, and the achievements are everything. (Daniel)

Natalie pointed out how the role of teachers in VET has been modified in the sense that rather than directly providing information, they are expected to facilitate, guide, and supervise students’ learning processes. She reported that one of the cost efficiency measures adopted by their RTO resulted in fewer teaching hours and more paperwork. Such changes created more distress for participants:

They’re obviously doing it to make money, save on our hours. Our guys [students] do two subjects online, as well. So there are no teaching hours involved.

Focusing more on paperwork than student outcomes was cited by all participants as a major reason for distress. They believed that the new accountability measures were a source of stress and interference rather than a strategy to develop their professionalism. Jim, for example, related that since TAFE funding was outcome based, participants were loaded with paperwork to show evidence that learning had commenced for the funding to be secured. Such experiences were shared by Claire:

I sometimes say to people that ask what’s your job, I said I am not a trainer anymore, I’m an admini-trainer/I couldn’t believe that it was true, what was actually happening. Why this whole situation? (Claire)
Ruby narrated that paperwork impacted on her job satisfaction and commitment to the profession:

_The deeply held thoughts were being questioned at its most basic. I think it was more like challenges in terms of maintaining morale because you are just getting paperwork done, or you are just trying to comply with whatever. Stephen Black and Reich called it the elephant in the room. I didn’t actually want to stay around for that. I just thought this isn’t going to be a very good place to teach because they’re taking the heart out of public education by doing this._ (Ruby)

The identifying participants agreed with the general concept of accountability, but many participants reported unethical practices adopted by the RTOs resulting from mandates and accountability measures. The perceived unethical practices resulted from the government’s funding model to improve education through mandates, and accountability mechanisms were implicit in the voices of participants. They encountered ethical conflicts which were related to their experienced tensions between mandatory external educational policy expectations and their beliefs about what is best for their learners.

All the identifying participants reported that low morale and lack of autonomy resulted in a lack of professional satisfaction, and they felt poorly valued by their employing RTOs and students. Tightening control and limiting professional discretion as a broad theme was expressed as:

_Most teachers don’t need a lot of … micro management, but you still got to know that the organization has faith and trust in you and wants to assist you when you need their help. It’s very hard._ (Mark)

_You really felt deprofessionalised._ (Ruby)

_I don’t think there is enough emphasis and that’s another thing I would change. Enough emphasis on telling the staff how valuable they are._ (Josephine)

_I’ve seen people come and lost their way, saying this is not worth it. Having a headache, nightmares, it’s stress. This is so stressful that I can’t. Because for students they have expectations. If you’re not well equipped they could cut you to pieces, and that’s, I mean they pay for it, they have all rights to do so._ (Sandra)

In the absence of feeling valued, five of the identifying participants reported their conflict of giving more time to students. Gina, for example, reported that the choice to give more time
towards family or students was often hard because in choosing one value to gain a bit of satisfaction, she ended up sacrificing something on another value:

*I think more than anything it impacts me in terms of time. I feel that I shouldn't give up my time. And I want to give up my time to support people to learn and sometime that is a bit taxing because I don't have a lot of time either. I have just got kids already, I've got a husband, I've got friends, you know all and hassles and household responsibilities, you know I feel sometime I suffer because I do stay at work for extra hours.* (Gina)

*The ethical dilemma is, am I too passionate. Am I giving too much but I'm not getting back? That's where it comes to when you start weighing up if it is worth really.* (Sandra)

*Your sense of purpose and your rewards, your intrinsic rewards, from relationships you have with your students and how well you can teach them.* (Ruby)

Six of the 18 participants pointed out the difficulties faced by them with their colleagues as they chose to provide more time and support to students. Four reported the lack of collegiality in sharing resources in their RTOs which further created an unpleasant working environment. The participants reported of their colleagues behaving disrespectfully towards other participants, taking advantage of their authority and offending participants who are subordinate to them.

Daniel reported difficulties with colleagues arising out of intellectual property rights about ownership and control of education materials:

*Teachers are very protective of their own resources, when ultimately, the intellectual property belongs to the organization. But because teachers modify it and use it to suit their own styles, then most teachers are not very giving of these tools.*

Robin narrated his experience of not being willing to share his personal resources with his colleagues or the RTO. He was not ready to share resources made exclusively by him in his unpaid hours for the benefit of students as he was not provided with the resources by his RTO:

*That's – an ethical dilemma is this split between what's mine and what's theirs, and that's a very fine split, because a lot of my learning I didn't get from here, and when I'm being paid I'm just being paid to – I'm not really being paid for my*
content development, I'm being paid for my delivery. That's what I'm supposed to do. So really, the content development, to a large extent, is my 30 years of painful experience, and I don't see why an organization can come along and say, we own that as well. (Robin)

Claire explained her experience of being stereotyped as conservative and averse to change by colleagues because she supplemented the curriculum with more information:

I was kind of taunted, you and your ideals about quality! I was taunted by other colleagues, by supervisors, managers actually bit criticized. A kind of like Australian way, you know the Aussies’ way of taking the piss out of you. In a meeting, he [the colleague] said, I do not listen to her, she is into quality. And in Australia this is supposed to be funny, so you are supposed to… on the face of it, you may smile, but of course, I had learned by that point that in an Australian work climate, you will have to laugh. We’re always in conflict because we have different values. (Claire)

Natalie reported that tensions existed between the need to report colleagues’ misconduct to management and perceptions of being loyal towards colleagues, because it may result in her colleague losing a job:

I think also the Australian culture is very much; you don't create waves. You're not the insider. You don't tell on other people or stuff like that, and I think that could be culture all over the world, but I know it's certainly alive and well here. So you just keep your head down. Do your job. (Natalie)

This dissatisfaction with working conditions caused four identifying participants to desire to leave the profession, which they could not do due to personal commitments. Claire, for example, talked about the stress she felt as a consequence of the scheme. She described how reporting requirements and expectations from government offices, her employing RTO, her manager, and students made it very hard for her to continue in the position. She suggested that she was now so fed up that she was willing to resign:

It was a bit like; I wanted to get out of that situation because it was, sometimes it was very painful. I couldn't sleep at night, it wasn't – I am not – I am also a sensitive soul and I had a time when it got escalated, couldn't sleep at night anymore and nightmares. (Claire)
Participants’ Responses to the Dilemmas

The requirements derived from the changes in the contemporary cultural context in VET, consequently, had an impact on the participants, who had to find the means to respond to the changes and new challenges of the teaching profession. The notion of response here was thus taken as the way in which the participants came to think and responded in practice, and were increasingly associated with how they made sense of or decided to act in those circumstances which were often shaped by their experiences.

While responding to such dilemmas, the participants found it challenging to make a choice between serving the interests of the RTO or the students, as serving one would seem to conflict with the interest of the other. For example, Frank pointed out that he felt the pressure to serve both the RTO and the students, which created conflicting interests. Conflicts of loyalty towards the RTO meant adapting to the rules decided on by management from which the teacher might have moral reasons for wanting to exempt certain students. Conflicts of loyalty towards student interest meant opposing the rules decided by the management which might result in job insecurity:

Like I deal with it [ethical dilemmas] by leaving colleges, I just don't work in an environment that allow that type of thing to happen. Others will, but they know that they are working in the non-ethical environment. And they can do nothing about that because that is paying for their living. They know what’s right or wrong. They can choose, they can make a choice. But in making the correct ethical choice would then defeat the purpose of them going to work as they need the money. If they make the right ethical choice, they would probably lose their job. (Frank)

The participants responded in three distinctively discrepant ways: the first was standing by their moral commitments, the second was compromising their moral commitment, and the third was their appeal for ethical training where they questioned their ethical action. The nature of each of those categories is here briefly explained and evidenced in narratives and stories from the participants.

Standing by One’s Moral Commitments

Standing by one’s moral commitments as a way of responding meant that the participants focused on giving the best possible education or support needed by students even if it meant them working against the philosophy of their employing RTOs. The decisions were made on
what was most fair for the students and were based on traditional values of the profession of
the best interest of the students, even if it meant quitting the job. However, the findings
suggest two separate contradictory dimensions of this response, namely, (a) working
overtime, and (b) providing reasonable adjustments. The following two sections describe
these responses in further detail.

Working Overtime

Eight participants who responded by working overtime found it obligatory to apply the
overarching umbrella of social equity to provide support to vulnerable students by teaching
them in addition to their class time. The identifying participants reported working overtime to
meet the scale and size of the curriculum and the challenge of meeting students’ individual
needs, particularly in diverse classes. Those participants indicated that their values of
teaching were not aligned with their employing RTOs and that there was no shared vision
that underpinned what it meant to have a high-quality educational outcome for students. The
institutional demands on participants required them to focus more on covering course content
in condensed time, on passing the students, and on putting more time into administration and
less on interaction with students. In such situations, the participants reported responding by
selecting students over RTOs and working overtime:

As a teacher, you have got to decide which side are you going to be on, and it's a
hard one because you've got to be prepared to get sacked by going with the
student outcome as your primary thing. You put yourself on the line every
semester. Which is what I do to make sure that students get good outcomes in
learning, that's my only motivator. (Robin)

For me as a teacher, it is the student, and I am actually teaching the student and
helping the student to acquire skills and knowledge. That is the priority for me,
and for me as a trainer, from my ethics, that would be the highest priority. I listen
to my heart. Really that's what I do, and for me, I tend to put students first, and I
just kept doing that. (Claire)

I just love the quality, that's all. And I care for students. (Sandra)

Eleven of the 18 participants indicated their sense of responsibility for the students’
outcome which they thought was enhanced by involving themselves in extra work with their
students:
I stay back and give students extra tutoring. So, you’re giving them that extra time, whatever they need, hands-on, but you work with them. (Karen)

I help as much as I possibly can. Like today, I didn’t start until half past nine, but I was in there at eight, and I had two students waiting for me because they were really confused about the assessment. So I started teaching an hour and a half earlier than I needed to. To help them. To get them through. And that’s unpaid hours of course. (Natalie)

Four of the identifying participants indicated that to provide such extra time, they sometimes had to crop a class time to focus just on those most in need.

I would provide more assistance than I would for another student. (James)

I would dismiss the class early and work with the last few, so the four that never touched computers before, I went through step by step, which is Lockstep teaching, which is often what I do. (Renee)

For my 4-hour classes I would try to finish whatever I had to teach in three and a half, and then just hang around for the last half an hour, and say to those who were lagging behind or not clear to stay behind, and I’ll work with you.

(Annabelle)

Another two of the identifying participants reported that they paid more attention to their teaching and student outcomes than to requirements of an audit, at the expense of losing their job:

But it [compliance] is always my secondary concern. I am always getting into trouble for not having done some paperwork because it’s not my primary concern. I have been here long enough now to know that when I do that form, it goes somewhere in a box and gets thrown out. (Robin)

My favorite expression [question] is, ‘is it compliance for audit or compliance for competency?’ And I will always go for the competency, and I will make it fit audit. (Daniel)

Reasonable Adjustment

Participants (eight) responding by providing reasonable adjustment found it obligatory to apply the overarching umbrella of reasonable adjustments to help pass the vulnerable students who would not have passed otherwise. Reasonable adjustments included modifying course material, assessment, and differentiated teaching strategies to suit individual learner
needs. The identifying participants reported that students’ language, literacy, numeracy, and other prerequisite skills were not assessed at the start of the course and many students did not have the level of English and literacy skills needed to pass the assessments successfully. In such situations, the participants stated that they tried different adjustments and strategies to teach the class, sometimes by labeling students as “disabled” to be able to give them more support or by modifying learning and assessment activities:

Because I felt that the organizational structure, or its policies and procedures, were not actually helping that particular student, in that particular environment, and so I would actually override the organization [flicked fingers in the air] and in fact, what I was doing, is I was going against the policies and procedures. And if I was to be held accountable, I could be seen to be doing, the wrong thing by the organization. (Thomas)

One of the students didn’t pass. There was no way she could pass; her work was much below the technical ability I needed. She was saying I can’t do this, I can’t do that, and I said, look, what can I do help you? And then suddenly, inspiration struck. I said, do you have a learning disability? Because I thought, I can get support for her. I’m going to treat it as a learning disability. (Renee)

Four other participants pointed out that even though they did not necessarily agree with such flexibility, they were aware of the consequence of failing such students. They reported responding in such a way on humanitarian grounds:

So then you have a dilemma as well, do I just pass the students and they stay in the country or could I be the one leading them to be kicked out of Australia so, it is a bit of a dilemma for me because I feel sorry for them. (Jim)

If you fail someone, their future might be over. (John)

To make sure that students get good outcomes in learning, that's my only motivator. (Robin)

Four of the identifying participants reported that they had to prioritize the intended learning outcomes, remove some essential parts of learning modules, and update intended learning outcomes in line with changes in the competencies required for accreditation:

We culled the chunks out that -- you know, probably were essential as syllabus, but impossible to teach in 6 months. (Annabelle)
I had to modify his learning, which you sometimes have to do, people learn differently. I had to modify things to suit. (Karen)

I had a whole cohort of Indian students. You couldn't approach them the same way as you approached a group of Australian students, and you had to, whether it bent the rules or you had to do things differently, in order to get that cohort, the learning that they required, and I'm prepared to do that and take the risk on it. (Drake)

Six of the identifying participants reported paying increased attention to specific topics covered in performance criteria of assessment, giving indirect hints of the importance of some questions. Natalie, for example, admitted to adjusting her instruction to teach towards the assessment and to emphasize what was tested and skip what was not tested:

I virtually said, like Question 21, it's really important on these revision questions, and Question 24 is really important on page 26. (Natalie)

So basically we get them [students with differing skills enrolled in VFH courses] ready to study and also at the time of actual [assessment], if you want to get them to pass it, [she says to students] this is what I am going to assess you. At least keep them a bit of things about, what the test requirement will be. (Josephine)

I really go through the assessments, with my students trying to make sure that they understand the questions. (Sandra)

Three of the identifying participants admitted to modifying the assessment by employing a range of alternative methods such as oral quizzes, evaluations, allowing students to present the assignment in their native language, and recontextualizing the assessments in simple language. Mary, for example, indicated that she always responded to the students’ needs in helping them, so long as she was not breaking any law.

Gina reported her use of web conferencing and online chats to better support learners with low levels of computer literacy while still accepting their hand-written work. She also reported to changing the language of the assessments to make it simpler. It is time-consuming but I think, this gives them that opportunity to succeed.

Renee admitted to her experience of setting flexible assessment options to cover the only basic performance-based assessment strategies necessary for evidence:
Because it is not specific in the performance criteria. It just says that they need computer knowledge, that they need to create title pages for a workplace folio or I get them to create an assessment table. It does not specifically say that in Microsoft Word, they need to be able to create a table to show this. So they will create a simple table rather than a time table for their assessment information. I think because I set the assessments, I can adjust them as I want to. (Renee)

Because performance criteria are broad. They aren’t related to a syllabus. So my performance criteria would be that he can plan an experiment. And execute it. So it doesn’t say that he should plan 15 or 10 or 11. So I could still fit in that. (Annabelle)

I do everything I can, to sort of bend the rules as much as I can, rather than say no, you cannot do this. To make them feel better about themselves, and to make reasonable adjustments to help them through, to be able to reach, their goals. (Frank)

Five of the identifying participants also indicated that using the English language as the only measure of testing students’ knowledge was unfair to the students who were not provided with learning support. To support such students with low levels of English proficiency, Frank reported allowing students to present their assessments in a language other than English, in students’ native tongue. Frank then marked the assessment, by observing the student and evaluating the response of the classmates.

Natalie claimed that when students did not meet the required English standard in their assessments, she often asked the students to fix the missing things rather than asking them to completely re-do the assignment:

If I see that they have attempted, and maybe they were struggling, especially with English, their second language, I will be fairly generous on the marking. Or I might go back and say, see this section here, you missed out this whole bit. Put that in; then we can get you through. And I think that most teachers that are human would do that too because what is the point of frustrating students as well? (Natalie)

Drake narrated his experience on supporting international students with low English proficiency when having to share classrooms with domestic students.
I went to PNG a few weeks ago, I was training their emergency team, and there were locals and Aussies [Australians] there. And the locals had very poor levels of English again. They talk Pidgin. They had really only started ramping up their English since they have had these jobs. For them, again, there is some written stuff, that I did not really worry too much about. We got through it, we [he and other Australian students] sort of, really guided them through some of it. (Drake)

Robin reported his awareness of the different standards of English expression used by different people and the difficulties associated with learning a language like English, and related his experience of supporting students against the management as follows:

You bend the rules to accommodate difference for the multicultural background. I might say I've talked with them. They've shown me some [evidence]. I am confident that they [students] know what they are talking about. The fact they could not express it in perfect Harvard English is something for me to overlook, and assess competency on a different basis ... but I would not be failing them.

Jim narrated his experience of helping students with low English skills who copy and paste from the Internet as their desperate measure to pass the unit:

I tell them all the time; it does not have to be academic writing. If I can understand your answer, if you can answer it in simple English, it does not matter if there are spelling mistakes. That is fine. It is better than copying something that does not prove to me that you have understood the question. (Jim)

However, two of the identifying participants reported that they faced conflict over whether, in providing reasonable adjustments with the best intentions of student welfare, they were actually harming students in the long run:

I have my colleague asking me should I pass this student in the first place as this student trying so hard, how I address it? I again remind them, that more than just the matter that we prescribe to you to assess student, you need to be flexible enough to use different way to assess students. I just do not want to tell the student that you are not competent, sort of feel sorry for the student and somehow, assess student according to what they should be. But we are not doing them a favour. (Josephine)

Four of the identifying participants who responded either by working overtime or by providing reasonable adjustments reported going as far as leaving their work in an RTO if they
found its practices morally unacceptable. Their argument was that many students needed more support from the management and more time with participants; if they did not this, the students would not gain enough skills. According to the participants, most students needed more structured support. Thus, if the participants felt it was necessary, they resigned when asked to manipulate the standardized procedure: Frank, for example, stressed that he dealt with ethical dilemmas by refusing to work in an environment that allowed unethical practices, leaving any college that was not supportive of what he saw as proper educational practice. Similarly, Josephine reported that, when she was told to do something contrary to the RTO’s code of conduct, she had responded by resigning:

*If you’re told to do something against the ethical belief, or even just outside a code of conduct, you know, that, that part of your employment agency but they’ll not really be following you, there is no point or you to walk with the office.*

(Josephine)

*I think someone that’s committed as I am to good student outcomes, will always be at war with the compliance people, so, do I work for TAFE anymore? I wanted to really do the best for the students. So I left the job then.* (Thomas)

**Compromising One’s Moral Commitments**

Compromising one’s moral commitments as a way of responding meant that the participants focused on working with the philosophy of their employing RTOs even if it meant their working against giving the best possible education or support needed by students.

Compromising their moral commitment involved making decisions that exercised rational judgement by considering the anticipated and real consequences of participants’ decision-making on their jobs and welfare. The decisions were based on what was most appropriate for the RTO with the intention of their job retention and were based on the changed values and ethics due to the culture change of the organization. The participants reported conforming to the prescribed culture of profit maximization and carried out their actions that compromised their moral commitment to the students but protected their jobs. This approach of responding was reportedly taken by 10 participants. Middle-aged and established participants with a sense of job insecurity tended to be positive than older participants and participants working as a casual who tended to accept and adapt to the market situation more readily than their colleagues.
Ten participants reported that under a competency-based system, participants were held accountable for the assessment decisions they made. All the identifying participants were concerned that their future employment prospects depended on the students graduating, as funding was aligned with student outcomes and the ability to demonstrate student graduations was essential to maintaining student enrolments. They thus found themselves compromising their moral commitments as they passed students whom they deemed not competent, under the pressure of management and risk of losing their job. Daniel, for example, made the point that *good intentions did not pay the mortgage*, so he and other participants sometimes had to give in to the contextual pressures to protect their job when they felt that it was under threat. Frank related how he had to maintain a balance professionally, by doing the right thing, but also ensuring that he did what his employing RTO wanted, as he needed the income to pay his bills:

*Is it ethical for us or ethical for the student? You know, it’s sometimes the parano-- does not come together. You’re [VET teachers] kind of being flexible with your own ethical standards.* (Daniel)

*I am clearly a new, radical … have a different focus. For most trainers, training is their profession but for me, training is just a source of income, and I do it, and I cope it with try to do it best I can from there.* (John)

*My ethics have dropped considerably. I had very high standards. With that sort of pressures now, time pressures, resource pressures for the RTOs, it is just getting harder and harder. I mean, I do know of teachers that just have marked students 50% pass, even if they haven’t even handed in their assessment. Teachers are concerned about themselves. You can’t be as ethical as you want, and you can’t make changes. Because ultimate, at the end of the day, it’s all about money.* (Natalie)

Other identifying participants reported that they ignored the unethical behaviour of themselves and other participants as they were concerned about the effects on their workload and job of their decision-making in marking assessment as not competent. Frank, for example, related his experience of himself and his colleagues making the wrong choice:

*I work with peers, colleagues and it’s a loosely formed informal system of people watching on everyone else’s back because we need to be able to work well to make money So it dissolves any ethical responsibilities or ethical stands that a trainer might have.* (Frank)
VET teachers in the current environment go in with the best of intentions, but good intentions don't pay their mortgage, so the young ones or the new ones, particularly ... Ethics and morals is one thing, but ethics and morals doesn't pay your mortgage and with the advent of ... with TAFE having collapsed. There are twenties, thirties and forties and fifties of teachers out there. So, if you won't do it, there's someone else that will. (Daniel)

The identifying participants reported that the administrative hassles associated with failing an assessment were very time consuming and therefore they sometimes changed the mark to a pass. Sandra argued that the reporting and assessment procedures were far more time consuming, particularly providing feedback on the non-competent assessment. Participants reported being paid certain hours for marking assessments, and if they did not finish marking in allotted hours, they had to mark in their unpaid hours.

The teachers do not get paid if there is no pass for the students that are re-sitting. (Natalie)

The identifying participants reported that expectation to assess continuously for courses of shortened duration meant that they had less time to mark assessments. As Anabelle expressed, at best they only could gain a glimpse of the assessment. John complained that with the increased ratio of students to teachers, it took them longer to read, mark, and provide feedback on many more assignments than before, leaving no time to take any action on plagiarized assessments.

Jim narrated his difficulties in ignoring plagiarized work:

You can see that it is plagiarized. It is not their own work. And that's it. You don't even have the time or anything to follow up. Nobody's got the time. So we just kind of skim through. That's it. Because we can't. Because if we have, 20-page assessment to go through, and if you have 27 students in a classroom, and that is only first assessment, and you need to mark it within 7 days, you tell me?

Plagiarized work does create a dilemma, but it is a dilemma that is balanced by your need for paying rent, pay for food or basically paying your bills. (Frank)

Some participants highlighted that the demands upon their time possibly encouraged their decisions to ignore the plagiarism of assessment and e-assessment, thus compromising rigour for quick completions.
It is just too much of an ordeal. It is easier just to say they participated. (Renee)
It is lots less work for me to say yes, its lot easier to say yes [pass]. Yes, it is
easier, you close your eyes and [acts like ticking in the box]. Cover it up in such
cases. (Frank)

All of the identifying participants emphasized that factors like pressures from the
management to pass the plagiarized work, lack of time to mark re-submitted assessments, or
concern about the students’ prospects led them to overlook plagiarized work.

**Appealing for Ethical Training**

All of the identifying participants appealed for pertinent *ethical training and education*, all
commenting on the inadequacy of the ethical training they had received to equip them to
handle such dilemmas with confidence. There was agreement that ethics education could
facilitate the development of moral understanding and ethical sensitivity among participants.

The training engaged in by the teacher participants ranged from TAE, (done by all of the
participants) to Advanced Diploma of Management (one participant), Masters in Science (one
participant), and Masters in Vocational Engagement (three participants). Karen, for example,
noted that TAE, which qualified her for the teaching position, did not provide *any* such guidance
or knowledge. Ruby pointed out that not only was TAE of no importance but it was considered a
hoop that participants had to jump through every two to three years because they were expected
to update themselves with upgraded versions of the Certificate. Frank called for professional
training to help participants do things ethically as they did not learn about ethics or decision-
making from their training. John called for help as he felt completely ill-prepared to make ethical
decisions:

*I don’t know what ethics is and if someone would like to explain to me what ethics
is, that would probably be a start point. I have a perception of feeling or belief as
to what ethics is. But ethics isn’t a well-defined or clearly understood concept. It’s
something to do being good for the sake of being good rather than because you
see an immediate benefit.* (John)

*The teachers are not prepared to address all these ethical dilemmas because you
don’t, you never get trained in ethics really. Not as a teacher. People [teachers]
are not being prepared. It’s more kind of like, swim or sink.* (Claire)
Within this wide-ranging emphasis on cultural change, three participants realized that they learned most aspects of ethical decision-making by themselves or from practices of colleagues:

*I thought the colleagues were the best place to look for support because they were in the same boat as mine. I was trying these strategies; they were trying those.* (Annabelle)

All the participants, however, expressed major concerns, primarily about the agenda of such professional development activities which focused on administrative requirements and were not optimal from ethical decision-making perspectives. Similarly, when it came to identifying how code and conduct and RTOs’ policy influenced their decisions, participants either indicated that there were no policies in place, or that the RTO policies were often silent for their dilemmas.

The identifying participants recognized as the main domain of dilemmas their own teaching and personal efforts to create a stimulating learning environment as well as to motivate their students, while at the same time establishing a need to support teaching through ethical decision-making mentorship:

*In rapid change, look, I know I’ve been in the TAFE sector. You should be really attuned to making change happen well. They fail miserably.* (Mark)

*If we’re a little bit clear with people about what, what is a grey area, and what is a black and white area, so for example an ethical dilemma I believe that everyone should be given equal starting point that is my personal value system but then that’s not probably realistic in our business context so letting people know that, that’s something we need to balance the personal values out with business values, but then letting people know what’s in black and white know that’s an ethical dilemma but actually really problem and it needs to be flagged.* (Gina)
Conclusion

The major findings identified from this chapter are the impact of dilemmas on the participants and their ways of responding to those dilemmas. The data provide insights into the impact of the changing nature of VET on the participants. The findings indicated that the participants felt professionally compromised, intimidated, and stressed by the conflicts between personal and organizational values. The five identified impacts on the participants were disappointment, confusion, anxiety, discomfort, and distress.

The participants spoke of their disappointment at the economic focus of their employing RTOs, treating students as customers. They were let down by their lack of support by their employing RTOs in attending to diverse students’ needs. The participants expressed that the regulatory requirements that were imposed upon them by their employing RTO had resulted in a prescriptive approach to teaching and thus participants did not have time to attend to student needs. There were strong links between increasing enrolment of a diverse student cohort in a classroom per teacher thus increasing the probability of accountability pressures to pass such students at the expense of participants’ professional judgement.

Moreover, participants reported that their work was especially confusing and challenging because of changes they saw in students with decreased motivation, intentions for enrolling in a course, and declining respect for RTOs and participants. Participants reported that wanting value for money by students was an inevitable by-product of a market-driven system that actively positions students as consumers where they hunt for a good bargain for an educational product. According to participants, such unprepared students, when going to the workplace, created a lot of stress and anxiety as they would be severely unsuitable for the needs of the sector. Such tendencies also created an unfavourable environment for genuine students. The approach was seen to have led to a diminution of respect for education across the entire VET sector rather than opening more genuine opportunities and choices for potential students, and this further conflicted with their moral values of social responsibility.

Worries and anxiety were immediate responses of the participants to an uncertain future in a casualized culture. The participants found that they had limited choice as responding to students’ needs may lead to creating resentment with management and losing their job. Furthermore, job insecurities promoted individualism and undermined cooperation among participants, often exacerbated by the lack of resources. Such practices affected some participants’ morale deeply. With job uncertainty woven into the realities of financial constraints of RTOs,
accompanied by disconnection with the management, many participants experienced serious isolation and distress and showed the desire of resignation and retirement.

The participants spoke of their discomfort in talking to management about the unsupportive working environment of the RTOs. Changing trust relations with management were found to be shaping the social relations within their employing RTO and impacting negatively on teachers’ physical and emotional well-being and their collegial professional relations. Most participants reported that they were burnt out by their heavy workload and did not get guidance or counseling because management did not support them. The feeling of not being heard was commonly felt by the participants.

The participants suffered distress with an array of challenges but were powerless to do anything about them, which made them frustrated and stressed and hence impacted on their personal well-being. The excerpts revealed that VET teacher professional identity was continuously mediated through their way of being a teacher and their way of seeing the environment in which their professional practice was embedded. Participants often felt overwhelmed with all the requirements placed upon them, playing multiple roles of teacher, administrator, and mentor to students. The changed priority of participants’ work was the most evident example of a devaluation of their professional values. A majority of the participants reported that due to increased expectations to assume tasks over and above their primary professional duties, their ability to focus on their primary responsibilities to students was depleted. Participants in the study drew on students’ welfare as the core of their professional identity, but they mediated their professional identity through different dimensions of students and their welfare. The market demands had contributed to a profound change in teachers’ positions, from relatively autonomous professionals to service-oriented workers in a quasi-business environment. Participants generally were experiencing a high rate of emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction, primarily related to inadequate student support and outcomes.

The comments on curricular and instructional control, lack of resources and support, but especially on an overemphasis on compliance over quality and overlooking the audit of teaching methods, indicated a tremendous diminution in their authority and autonomy. Participants reported taking on increasing workloads in a climate in which RTOs had to make up for decreasing amounts of funding. There was a unanimous call of exhaustion with the increase in such workloads. Such situations challenged teacher professionalism and duty of care towards students as they found themselves unable to respond to students’ needs. Participants chose their
profession expecting to realize the intrinsic rewards that come with watching their students learn, grow, and succeed. However, the teachers felt demoralized at the loss of professionalism.

Such ethical dilemmas for the participants often emerged when there was conflict between institutional requirements and their personal and/or professional values. Whatever decisions each participant made, those decisions were likely to create repercussions for them personally, for their colleagues, for the students, and for the industry more broadly. In such situations, participants found themselves in a conflicting situation of whether to respond to the expectations of management or to respond to students’ needs. Some participants responded by defending their values based on the social equity angle, which to a large extent has underpinned the traditional professional culture, while others responded by adopting the values of neo-liberal policy. Participants responded to such challenges in three different ways: standing by their moral commitments, compromising their moral commitments, or appealing for ethical training.

Thus, the participants who stood by their moral commitments saw the idea of revenue maximization for RTOs as selling out to marketization and privatization. Such participants invested their time outside of contact hours with students at the cost of their work-life balance, and focused on individual needs of the students and provided reasonable adjustments to maximize their learning. However, two participants raised their concern that flexibility and reasonable adjustments might impact negatively upon quality. Flexible adjustment beyond that which can be considered reasonable adjustment ultimately impacted upon the validity of some assessment processes and outcomes. For others who compromised their moral commitments as teachers, income generation through enrolment and assessment was seen as a core activity threatening their autonomy and job security. They viewed the focus on job security as the prevailing factor in the decision-making process. Middle-aged and established participants with a sense of job insecurity tended to be positive than older participants and casuals who tended to accept and adapt to the market situation more readily than their colleagues.

Participants asserted that there was a lack of genuine understanding of ethics education. A group of participants were ambiguous about what constitutes ethics and values. Participants valued a greater range of professional interactions with fellow participants or administrators, including talk about instruction, structured observation, and shared ethical training. All such participants grappled, sometimes on a regular basis, with moral and ethical dilemmas that stung the conscience, compromised principles, undermined moral sensibilities, and jeopardized their feeling of professional autonomy.
Chapter 9: Teachers’ Interpretations of the Driver of the Dilemmas

Introduction

The dilemmas, the impacts of the dilemmas on the participants’ emotional well-being, and participants’ responses in dealing with those dilemmas articulated in the preceding chapters suggest that participants saw their work as being more complex, challenging, and difficult under the influence of changes impacting on it. The dilemmas drew from a unique set of drivers and circumstances as the participants tended to externalize the causes of their dilemmas, rather than seeing them as an integral part of living and working in a constantly changing world. This chapter draws out participants’ interpretations of those influences. It discusses the stories that participants told to explain their experience of the dilemmas. Analysis of the participants’ interview narratives on this topic suggested that they saw four categories of such influence, or drivers of the identified dilemmas: (a) changing immigration rules, (b) changing funding requirements, (c) changing culture and philosophy of RTOs, and (d) inadequate teacher preparation. The four influences impacted across the four dilemmas. Accordingly, they are here presented in diminishing order of their importance.

Changing Immigration Rules

The explanation of the first influence or driver as told by the participants to explain their experiences of the dilemmas focuses on the nature of changes in immigration rules by the federal government which had a profound impact on the vocational sector through student enrolments and RTOs’ regulatory decisions. All of the 18 participants suggested that, although not a part of VET policy, Australian immigration policy played an important role in the enrolment of the international students in VET and hence played a role in creating the dilemmas that they experienced. Access to permanent residency in Australia after completion was suggested to be the biggest motivator for students choosing to study in Australia and to study a particular course. Participants pointed out that changes to immigration policy affected demand for training by affecting the size of the student population as well as the size of the RTO. Linking of training to immigration was considered by Frank as the crux of all the ethical dilemmas that were created. He explained that:
The immigration department and the way that they change the rules, sometimes overnight without telling anyone and international students respond to that in the best way they know how to, as do RTOs who are only there for the money. The ethics that we [VET sector] had early on are different than ethics we have now because they have all been melted down by the system, by the immigration department, by the RTOs, by the people who are making money. So, the ability to make money is more important than the trainer's ethical stance. (Frank)

All of the identifying participants reported that, while listing a qualification in the Skilled Occupation List (SOL) had the potential to assist in meeting Australia’s skills needs, they were concerned that RTOs and educational brokers had put migration outcomes before a quality education for students.

As we have become more competitive, I am finding that there has been a huge increase in the number of, I do not know what to call them … There's BS Education Services, ESBAT Management Services; there is Study Net, there's Study Group, there is IET. All these companies that are not RTOs, but they actually fish for students. (Daniel)

The identifying participants pointed out that changes in immigration policy had provided significant incentives for RTOs to develop courses and recruit students in areas that maximized their profits and growth and to exclude those which did not attract a large number of students. Jim, for example, reported that when a course was removed from the SOL of the immigration departments, RTOs had a tendency to cut back on those courses too and to focus on courses that were listed on the SOL. Natalie suggested that one of the strategies that RTOs utilized to sustain financial viability was that of adding and eliminating, their academic program offerings, particularly from the SOL list to fill the gap. Frank suggested that RTOs are making a choice based on immigration rules and their perception of what [course] raises better than the others. Frank and Jim pointed out that the constant changing of courses from the demand list for immigration purposes, even if there was an apparent shortage of such skills in the industry, upset students who were genuinely interested in the course.

The identifying participants further suggested that immigration policy also affected students’ post-study outcomes as they enrolled in courses in the hope of obtaining employer sponsorship. Frank pointed out that most of his students [who] were working as kitchen hands and wanted their qualification to be used to show for their immigration purposes perceived the
unfair attitude of the government to remove the course from the SOL list, thus limiting their chances of gaining permanent residency. Gina and Peter found themselves in the dilemma of whether to tell the students to drop the course [removed from SOL list] or then continue without an intention of getting a job at the end of their study period. Frank further suggested that graduates from such courses find it difficult to get jobs. He blamed the Australian government policy as unethical as it is doing harm to people.

Three of the 18 participants pointed out that students’ confidence was further affected when courses removed from the SOL list were added back to the list to cover for lost enrolments. For example, Frank expressed his concern about the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) action of removing occupations like cookery and hospitality from SOL list, and then adding those courses back again as they deem fit. Natalie suggested that the Government recognizes that international students bring an enormous amount of money, and one has to fit their needs. Those participants reported that due to the desire to live and work in Australia, international students were seen as reacting to such reforms by undertaking such vocational courses. Frank voiced his resentment at such action:

You could see that the students had identified how they could get through the system the immigration department in Australia is encouraging students or candidates to be unethical.

For that, I don't blame the individual. I do blame these organizations, which now means we have an undercurrent of some RTOs that are just not doing the right thing. (Daniel)

James suggested that such practices also affected the price list of the courses offered by the RTOs, the more demand for the course resulting in increased course price by the RTOs with the intention of increasing their profits:

People need bits of paper to continue doing what they are doing, and other people are profiting from that fact. You got to pay 2,000 for a course that you need badly to do the job, but somebody is profiting from that account I feel that this is a big thing with the industry. (James)

How can you have such disparity? Well, it’s simple, it’s a free market. If someone’s prepared to pay 23,000, you charge them 23,000. (Daniel)

I feel that the prices are dictated by the industry. It's like housing, isn't it? When - as prices go up, everyone else puts their prices up. (Karen)
Frank also pointed out that RTOs responded to uncertainties in enrolments by adjusting business strategies and delivery practices, for example, by changing course duration and offering flexible payment options to students to combat the negative effects of changes in rules and policies. Such changes created further uncertainties in the minds of students regarding the sincerity or quality of the Australian RTOs:

*It is sometimes embarrassing to be seen as Australian because of ... what goes on. It is incredible.* (Frank)

**Changing Funding Requirements**

The explanation of the second influence or driver as told by the participants to explain their experiences of dilemmas focuses on the nature of changes in the funding by the government, which had a profound impact on the marketing of educational products by the RTOs. Fifteen of the 18 participants alleged the move towards the market-based allocation of VET funding was one of the major drivers of the dilemma. Participants pointed out that although the shift towards a more competitive and commercialized training market had been growing gradually, the trend gained further momentum under the impetus of recent government policies, particularly the contestable funding environment which, although expected to improve the productivity of the publicly-funded VET sector, proved overly burdensome and created greater uncertainty within the sector and RTOs.

The identifying participants were critical of repeated and erratic funding changes by the government, and the disrupting effect this has had on the stringent accountability factor resulting in a compliance culture. The expectation of audit-compliant procedures was that honest RTOs would flourish and expand, while poor RTOs would face penalties:

*It is so difficult, because of the compliance requests, they come from the government, and the Department of Education. They sometimes seem to be out of touch with what is actually happening for trainers, and the RTO needs to continue to function, so they are under pressure. There is such an obsession about all these like admin has kind of become like this big mushroom that overshadows everything. It is a big dilemma, and it includes not only the trainers, but also the RTO because they want to survive the business.* (Claire)

However, the identifying participants pointed out that such compliance was provided at the expense of quality. The burden of paperwork was passed on to the participants and resulted in a lack of attention to the quality of core teaching and learning tasks. The participants encountered
ethical conflicts which were related to their experienced tensions between mandatory external educational policy expectations resulting in more time spent on paperwork and less on teaching, and their beliefs about what is best for their learners:

We are sometimes faced with situations where decisions are based not on education, but decisions that are based on financial return, on numbers, on audits, on quality assurance, on meeting our funding masters, as opposed to what is actually a part of the relationship between the teacher and the student, which is not the best outcome for the student. And that is not necessarily the shortest, cheapest, most logical fit, in terms of QA [quality assurance] that is required. (Ruby)

The identifying participants reported that reduction in funding benefits paralleled with decreasing student cohorts meant that RTOs had to struggle to ensure their survival. Participants alleged that the perceived unethical practices of passing more students to access more funding resulted from the government’s funding model:

Nobody could fail, everybody has got to pass. A lot of the fund is connected to the passing of international students, which is a real ethical situation for the RTOs. That was a massive explosion for me. (Natalie)

Profit and the student outcome are both are interlinked and the educational lefties, understand that the business righties have to make money; otherwise, we [RTOs] are out of the game. As one previous CEO said, we cannot do education without money, and we cannot make money without education. He basically said that yin and yang means it is internally interwoven and connected. So for those of us, who have got a strong ethic about education, that is great, but you've [one has to] got to have a full understanding that unless we make money, it is not going to enable us to go forward. (Thomas)

Changing Culture and Philosophy of RTOs

The explanation of the third influence or driver as told by the participants to explain their experiences of the dilemmas focuses on the nature of provider competition which had a profound impact on changing the culture and philosophy of the organization to revenue maximization through cost-cutting measures and competition between RTOs. All 18 participants reported that changes in immigration rules and funding benefits created a struggle for survival for RTOs and resulted in changing the culture of the RTO with a strong
emphasis on profit maximization by competing with other RTOs for student enrolments. Participants also pointed out that the increasing profit-maximization culture resulted in creating cost-cutting strategies and providing increasingly alternative flexible study options.

The identifying participants found that high ideals of student service which had existed in companies at times when they were successful were replaced by the profit motive as management focused on more cost-effective alternatives to traditional models of higher education. Such cost-cutting strategies included shortening the length of time required to complete a program, offering online learning to reach more students without incurring the added costs of facilities and faculty, restructuring staffing models, reducing staffing levels, and approaching a targeted clientele for government-funded VFH courses. In taking such actions, participants claimed that RTOs had become increasingly privatized as they directed their efforts to paying attention to the business of education rather than focusing on best practices in education. This had led to fundamental ethical questions being raised for participants about the adopted strategies by RTOs:

*I think anytime money is or profit is put on any industry, as the driving factor, it's open to corruption. So when things are state owned, whether its electricity, education, or anything, it is not profit driven. Once it becomes a profit - privatized, the owner is out to make money.* (James)

The identifying participants reported that such competition created a tendency for institutions to attempt to steal each other’s students by offering a multitude of programs in an unethical way as a means for increasing their revenue. The participants indicated that such unethical practices created a challenging working environment for them. The participants confronted their challenges with the changing culture of their RTOs thus:

*Ideally, a sort of an ethical standard does come from the top. Your head, your leader, your leaders set the ethical standard, and they live the ethical standard, and it becomes the culture of the place.* (Robin)

*The ethics within the organization comes from the top and has the greatest impact from the top. If it is not observed at the top, then, there can be different levels of fluctuations of ethical engagement through all of the different staff members. But if it is very evident at the top, and it’s not ethics by the rule of law, its ethics by doing the right thing, by human beings which as I said sometimes does overrule, some bad policies and procedures in it.* (Thomas)
First of all, it should come from the top. I think if it were an ethical place they attendance would be compulsory and it would be part of the assessment like if you don’t attend you don’t pass. And they wouldn't do deals with students. (Jim)

The majority of the identifying participants pointed out that such changes in the culture had made it practically impossible for RTOs to achieve a balance between academic and commercial objectives as RTOs have had to grapple with ways of pursuing more revenue from students, making education a business, while at the same time endeavouring to pursue the goals of education: to create knowledge through quality learning and teaching. Participants reported that it was not possible for these two agendas to co-exist:

*Do you know the word ethics and business? You know, they don’t really sit comfortably together, which is true. It’s all about making money in VET. They’ve got restrictions in the ideal world.* (Natalie)

*We need to ... have a very clear picture of what is the number one outcome, in what the organization is trying to achieve. And that then governs a number of decision makings, and those decision makings may sometime be in contrast to the ethics, to the policies and procedures that were written, when the glory days of making the profit were in place. So we all to have to make decisions whether or not, we are here as number one to make money to continue the business, or are we here to make educational outcome for a student body going forward?* (Thomas)

Eight participants reported that such market-driven funding with greater competition between public and private RTOs encouraged providing education at the expense of quality and changed the culture of the RTOs. They were concerned that RTOs were required to operate as businesses rather than providing education services:

*We have gone from being a PPP¹ [Productivity Places Program] to being reabsorbed back into TAFE Queensland, and from there, it is supposed to become a leaner, meaner business model that competes on a fully contestable funding model [competing with the private RTOs].* (Ruby)

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¹ Productivity Places Program is the federal government’s major funding source for VET to boost VET qualifications for national priority skill shortages.
I don't understand the economics behind it at all. It suddenly became more about business than people. (Annabelle)

Those participants further pointed out that it was a general assumption in VET that private organizations more than public and not-for-profit ones focused on targeting students to enroll and market their products. However, participants pointed out that to ensure financial sustainability, TAFE college were also responding by experimenting with changes to their business models:

An ethical dilemma for me, now that TAFE has become autonomous, they’re pushing for more numbers to make us profitable because, before TAFE didn’t have to be as profitable. It was a community-based educational system, whereas now it’s all for profit. But I just feel that they [students] are not getting their money’s worth. (Renee)

There is pressure to divide by students in a particular way, so that TAFE will continue getting the funding. (James)

Jim stressed that due to repetitive funding cuts, TAFE has gradually declined or eliminated once worthwhile programs like arts and craft, or learning Italian or cultural subjects as they have been identified as high cost, having low market demand and being less central to RTO’s mission:

Anything which is not profitable now, it does not exist for support, so that is the way capitalism is driving education today, which to me is bit sad.

Two participants from private RTOs also raised the same concerns:

It is like any business. At the end of the day, if you are not making money, you don’t cover business, and therefore that becomes your driving factor. (Gina)

Ultimately we are in the business of education. (Daniel)

Thirteen of 18 participants pointed out that the current VFH funding model by the government to subsidize vocational education to disadvantaged groups brought changes to the cultures and mindsets of private RTOs and students across different systems and sectors. It had created a provider-led market leading to a rise in the unethical practices of charging zero or low fees, and offering free iPads or laptops. Such practices have impacted the market, negatively affecting students, employers, VET RTOs, and the reputation of VET sector. Claire reported that RTOs, mainly private, focus on getting student money at any cost:
RTOs. They face a struggle for survival and, which means, you'll [RTO] have to train that many students for them to be financially viable, so their marketing strategies alter as per the target of enrolments. (Claire)

The identifying participants raised their concerns that such visibly unethical practices of RTOs had led to a change in the attitude of students as well, where they now look for a wider bargain from different RTOs. The quality of the education was measured by student satisfaction, and hence the value for money was determined by the student on the basis of the flexibility offered by RTOs. The participants highlighted claims that, to compete for students, many RTOs had adopted an inappropriate model of organizational flexibility. Instead of measuring themselves in terms of the competence of their graduates, they measured themselves in terms of institutional flexibility to become more competitive:

*I think largely; it has got to do with the changing philosophy of education and its purpose. So, I think I grew up more in an era where you learned for the sake of not only getting a job, but for personal development and learning for the sake of learning, as a humanistic approach. And it seems to have boiled more and more down to the people giving -- of the purpose of education is for work, and secondly, the purpose of education is for businesses to make money. (Ruby)*

*Everything is getting privatized, and it is all becoming, school, education is becoming money focused for the RTOs, the students are treated more as customers, rather than students. (Jim)*

Two participants also reported that to attract more students, their organization offered much lower prices for a course than their competitors:

*They could be part of a marketing tool for this particular College. Like you see online, the Diplomas for $39. There is a free market out there, and it is not good in a long term for the for everyone that's involved in the vocational education sector and that starts with the student. Because the student is what we're here for. (Mark)*

Frank reported that such practices by competitors placed pressure on other providers, including TAFE institutes, to significantly drop their fees. Such an environment had resulted in creating imperfect competition in which everybody is a price maker.

*People seem to think the more money you pay, the better quality learning you get. But it's not just that. I've been dealing with this talent program I'm putting
together at the moment. I've been talking to a lot of external consultants. They charge a lot of money for their services. I feel that the prices are dictated by the industry. (Karen)

Although the identifying participants pointed out that not all RTOs were run by competitive values and some RTOs were committed to the educational mission that invested in their students and even though they offered programs in high-demand fields, they still did not engage in unethical practices to achieve the levels of profitability and growth that keep them competitive with less scrupulous players. They claimed that the VET sector was, however, burdened by imperfect competition between these RTOs and profit-seeking RTOs whose business models have scant regard for educational standards:

*The emphasis on education now is more about the revenue and not about the quality of delivering. It’s bums on seats, you know, money coming in rather than let’s do a really good job.* (Mark)

Six participants also considered that they were responsible not only for ensuring that educational outcomes are achieved but also for actively profiling and promoting the courses offered by the RTO. Frank, for example, reported that he was expected to encourage his graduating Certificate II students to take up Certificate III. He further reported that it created conflict as he knew that some students if pushed to take up such course would fail miserably.

**Inadequate Teacher Preparation**

The explanation of the fourth influence or driver as told by the participants to explain their experiences of the dilemmas focused inadequacy in teacher preparation programs which had a profound impact on participants through difficulties in managing the changes in VET while promoting common good to students and loyalty to their RTOs. The features of inadequate teacher preparation, examined in the following sub-sections, are (a) teacher preparation, (b) lack of induction, (c) professional development, (d) lack of union support, and (e) codes of conduct. All of the 18 participants observed that while there has been a trend towards increased privatization and marketization of vocational education, teaching preparation and support practices have remained comparatively constant. Participants indicated that they were being ethically challenged in making difficult decisions while coping with pressures from their RTOs, students, and the industry along with stringent accountability legislation. They reported a prescriptive approach adopted for their preparation, as well as a lack of induction or professional development opportunities. The participants pointed out that lack of support
from the union, in addition to the lack of thorough understanding of the standards or codes of conduct, resulted in them feeling further ill-prepared to take decisions.

**Teacher Preparation**

All of the 18 participating participants reported they were not prepared well in their teacher preparation courses for VET. While participants acknowledged that TAE required as a minimum qualification for teaching in VET provided the essential foundations on which further skills and knowledge could be built, through on-the-job experience, further learning, or both, the qualification did not provide all the knowledge and skills which many practitioners needed:

*I don't think we're training people well enough to deliver training in that environment because we're relying a lot on them knowing the content as adult trainers. All we expect when people train others is they have that Cert. Four Training and Assessment, and content knowledge, of course, so that's interesting.*  
(Karen)

Sandra reported that as students with a broad range of abilities and skills were granted access in classrooms, participants often found that they did not have the skills they needed to teach all of their diverse students:

*I said I teach international students, and domestic students as well. But I don't think I'm very well equipped to assess appropriately, how much of content they are understanding or taking in, but only when you do, you have this impression that, you know, they are not in their heads, in contributing anything. If you're not well equipped, they [the students] could cut you to pieces.*  
(Sandra)

The absence of practicum supervised training delivery in a real classroom as a requirement of TAE was described by the participants as one of the most important driving factors of all dilemmas:

*The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment [TAE] might give you a lot of theory behind understanding the student and the research and the developing teaching materials ... but does it really give you that experience and face-to-face understanding the students?*  
(Mark)

*The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment [TAE] is being set as an absolute minimum. It needs to be a little more rigorous. Not once was I taught how to deal*
with an unruly, aggressive or a violent candidate. I was always quoted a good book I could read, and that was it. Not once did we ever participate in a role play. I think there should be a lot more role play. Less of the sort of didactic chalk, talk, and we talk about the Warnock Report of 1979. Who cares? They must focus much more on the dilemmas being faced in teaching. (Daniel)

Furthermore, the identifying participants reported that the TAE courses did not prepare them to make sound decisions when faced with ethical conflicts:

*I certainly did not learn about ethics, not one that I remember doing in Cert IV [TAE], whatever stage if I ever did.* (John)

*Certificate IV [TAE] is all process driven, but there is nothing like ethics in that. Not that I can recall.* (Frank)

Moreover, two participants reported that not all VET trainers and assessors possessed the TAE. Many were appointed to their jobs due to their industry expertise, without having done any formal study in training and assessment:

*I don’t I think that there are people who are in roles who may have been good at their jobs and I think they’ve just been given a job to teach that they are good at and I don’t necessarily think that it equips them very well to be a facilitator. They have done Cert. IV, still.* (Gina)

Mark reported his concerns about participants with different qualifications from TAE to Masters in Education, teaching different units for the same course:

*This is very hard in that they would be no extra recognition for teachers that have a degree in education. So that the highest level of teacher can attain much lower than what they currently attain because it’s a money thing. There’s a lot of people in those that don’t have private qualifications, they only have the vocational qualification for teaching.* (Mark)

Four participants reported that they and their colleagues, who got their TAE qualification within inappropriately short timeframes or through inappropriate RPL processes, had a lack of understanding of what it means to be a teacher in a diverse classroom. Five participants reported that they had to keep themselves updated on the different versions of the certificate, which was time consuming and did not necessarily give them any new knowledge:
The Certificate Four was just a hoop that we jumped through every two, three years because we had to. Not because it was taken seriously in any way, shape or form. (Ruby)

I didn't get a lot out of Certificate IV [TAE] when I did it, because the gentleman I did with it, spent a lot of time talking about he has been [his experience] in emergency services in the past. Do I find that valuable? So it is 10 days in total I actually had to wrap it up and spend learning in 3 days. (Gina)

Moreover, two participants said that different RTOs were offering different competitive rates for TAE course. They pointed out that such discounted TAE courses gave anyone without real inclination for teaching, an opportunity to get a qualification to teach in a classroom full of diverse students, which further diminished the value of the course:

TAE for fifteen hundred dollars online, have to teach one group of students for eight, ten hours, and all of a sudden, you're a teacher? Or a trainer? Absolutely shocking. TAE. It is a piece of paper. (Daniel)

You could go and Google now -- I was only looking last week to do the Diploma in TAE. I just want to do it, just to get it out of the way, and you go and Google that now, and, the dual Dip., and it can range anything from $2,000 to $5,000 dollars. You can do it anything from one to two weeks to 2 years. It's just all over the shop. (Drake)

Lack of Induction

All 18 participants reported that newly employed trainers did not receive any pre-service induction training covering an introduction to teaching materials, resources, and assessment strategies:

I've never been inducted. I got to teaching 3 years ago, and I had an interview, the position was being offered to me as a part-time teacher. And I was supposed to teach 2 days. So the interview was Wednesday, and I started teaching next week Thursday, and I'm told subjects, I'm doing. That's it. No resources, no, nothing. (Sandra)

I had to find my classroom; there was no manual. I didn't even know the practical assessment. (Frank)
You pretty much are on you own. Like classroom is your battlefield. You figure it out. (Annabelle)

Seven participants reported that those new graduates or industry professionals who had not had previous opportunities to work as a teacher found it very difficult to address institution-specific teaching and assessing expectations, keep records of the assessments and lesson plans, and address local policies and processes:

I didn’t have any, no support whatsoever, no information, no induction, no orientation and no teacher handbook, staff handbook, we still don’t have it. The standard of professional is ... you Google find it. (Sandra)

So you get all these new teachers coming along and trying to find their footing in the place. And it can be difficult because we don't have, orientation or anything. You just fend for yourself. (Natalie)

But those industry experts, who just jump into teaching, it is 100% difficult for them. Because I’ve seen people come and lost their way, saying this is not worth it. (Daniel)

The identifying participants reported that, although new staff from other RTOs would be familiar with teaching strategies, they needed an introduction to institution-specific expectations of assessment and policies which were not provided for by their new employing RTO. The majority of the participants reported that new teachers were often hired when on fire, to fill an urgent need so that the initial period of job induction was never provided to them. Teaching was made more difficult when they had no collegial collaboration for resources and learning materials in their subject area, when participants faced large classes with large numbers of diverse students, and particularly when new participants had a range of paperwork to cater for:

It is, we need someone to fill in the class, we drag some guy off the street, who is breathing and put them in class and go for it. The actual induction and introduction to teaching, that’s something that never seems to happen. Because it’s always an immediate reaction. We need a casual teacher. Let’s bring them in. Let’s get them started. (Mark)

Professional Development

Five participants reported that, in response to economic developments, changing legislation, privatization, and concerns of an unethical environment, the professional development
available to them was inadequate; they narrated their experience of difficulties in decision-making in the absence of professional development:

You never get a professional development of teaching or training you how to deal with such conflicts? You are left to yourself to sorting that out. (Robin)

During all these years, while I worked as a vocational trainer, there wasn’t a single time … when we would discuss, like teaching and pedagogical issues. It just wasn’t discussed. (Claire)

The identifying participants reported that provisions for professional development varied significantly between organizations, and were almost non-existent for casual and sessional staff. The area of concern identified by participants was continuing professional development that helps ensure that new entrants to the VET sector have a firm foundation upon which to build.

Two casual participants reported that they were not encouraged to develop their professional skills through training unless they paid for it and did it in their own time:

If you employ a casual teacher, there’s no allowance for professional development or mentoring or anything like that. When you are paying a casual teacher, the money is always tight. So they don’t or are going to want to invest in PD. They just want the job done. Teachers should be supported financially to get professional development. (Mark)

Five participants reported that professional development was done to ensure that compliance for protocols of offering professional development had been followed, so RTOs could show auditors:

We tick all the boxes for the audit. We’re going to do that professional development because we need to pass the audit. But it’s not about, how you feel as a teacher, what kind of support you need. (Sandra)

The identifying participants also noted that professional development covered the same content every year, and that they were eager to personally develop the professional and technological capabilities needed for online teaching and marking. Renee, for example, reported that rather than a professional development session on how to mark the roll, she would like computer training:

We are given a lot of it - Professional development. But a lot of it to us appears to be a waste of time. So we have just had a whole week of professional
development, where we had to attend compulsory, mandatory training. But some of the training is either stuff that we know back to front, so that was a waste of hours doing workplace health and safety training. I know that people need to know that, but we teach Workplace Health and Safety. So, surely we could be exempted from things like that. So the PD [Professional Development] they were giving us, is not what as teachers we needed. (Renee)

Two participants reported that professional development mainly focused on new accountability requirements of participants, explaining the paperwork required to pass the audit.

*PD was more about having paperwork in work. You can't use a black pen or blue pen. The topics were bureaucratic details, acronyms about this program and that program. So a lot of discussions was spent talking in pure procedures as to what you can do, can't do.* (Jim)

**Lack of Union Support**

Seven participants reported that there were not enough opportunities for them to be mentored by seniors in the field.

*I suppose, there is not enough mentoring done with potential teachers.* (Mark)

They also reported that unions had ceased to intervene in important decision-making arenas and had instead become more compliant to power raised by the system. In such situations, they felt betrayed by the union.

*I have been involved with having a requirement for union support at the end of a long and worn out process, and basically, they didn't deliver.* (Claire)

*I belonged to the union. The whole time I worked in TAFE, I asked them for some advice one time, and they basically told me that they could not help me. So I wouldn't say that the union would protect you.* (Mark)

**Codes of Conduct**

Ten participants reported that they could not get enough guidance from the policy and procedures of their RTO. They pointed out that, in VET, each RTO had its code of practice that encouraged high standards of behaviour and professionalism. Their professionalism was being constantly reconstructed and redefined by various standards established by governments to avoid the ill-effects of the competition caused by the introduction of quasi-markets.
The participants felt that the codes were working poorly for the following reasons: some of them felt that codes were poorly designed, some felt there was a lack of reference to renewed reforms and development, some felt the frameworks were not understood by participants, and some blamed a lack of training and assistance.

Two participants pointed out that, while it was not possible to cover all the case scenarios in the codes for ethical decision-making, most of the points covered in codes talked about gifts from students and dress codes and did not cover deeper areas of conflict:

One case when the colleagues referred to policy, that he found himself within severe circumstances and he checked the policies and policies were silent in the dilemma that he was facing. (Daniel)

When I first started in vocational education, I relied heavily upon policies and procedures, to actually guide me in making some of these decisions. But the common code of ethics gets to a level that it, is very, what could I say, very black and white. The codes are silent for the gray areas. (John)

Three participants reported that the code in their RTO was just copied from other RTOs’ codes to serve the audit purpose and the participants had no regard for it:

No, I do not refer to the code of ethics of the organization because most of the codes are all exactly the same they are all plagiarized of everyone else. Very rarely are they actually written by anyone in the new organization. They have just copied off people’s websites and whacked in there because they only have to survive the audit in the immediate time frame. (Frank)

I think the purpose of the code of conduct is to give the appearance of being ethical while you are not being ethical. (James)

Just because it’s a written policy and a written procedure hidden on your internet, ready for your audit, doesn’t mean to say you’re actually adhering to it. It’s just a piece of paper. (Josephine)

Three participants reported that the code in their RTO needed an update and the existing codes did not support students and staff well:

COC [Code of Conduct] is the ideology, even if you are talking about associations or whatever, and it all sounds good, but the reality is very different,
and a lot of those points they can't -- you can't apply it in the workplace if you want to keep your job. (Natalie)

I discovered, that sometimes in making those decisions according to the policies and procedures, I was actually, for a better word, I was actually hurting the student, who was already hurting in the situation, and I thought that that was not a good outcome, at the end of the day. (Drake)

Conclusion

The participants explained their experiences of influence or drivers of the dilemmas that created the tensions between the different responses in the commercialized context of VET sector competition and the requirements of broader responsibilities and accountabilities associated with more traditional educational roles. They narrated that in their experiences in the VET sector, with their employing RTOs, four drivers attributed to those dilemmas: changing immigration rules, changing funding requirements, changing culture and philosophy of RTOs, and inadequate teacher preparation.

The participants, while narrating their experiences of the impact of the changing immigration rules and funding requirements, highlighted that the emerging forces of globalization in which governments enacted immigration policies and decreased funding steered RTOs into the marketplace. An essential dimension for survival in a changing immigration environment was how they performed relative to rival providers in offering courses provided in the SOL, and how able they were to communicate their better relative performance through persuasive market information. Students’ loyalty to an organization varied by the flexibility and the courses offered by the RTOs. Participants stressed that the government policy which enabled approved RTOs to offer VET courses supported by government-funded, income-contingent student VFH loans led to a corollary development of unethical means of marketing courses by RTOs to older, low-income, and minority students, in part because of the guaranteed federal financial aid revenue these students generated.

While narrating their experience of the impact of the changing culture and philosophy of RTOs, the participants emphasized that declining affordability, increased competition, enrollment challenges, and reduced government funding generated pressures on RTOs and created a radical shift in the role and mission of the institutions. They pointed out that the ethical values of the RTOs varied strongly in terms of competition, student enrolments, and retention. They also highlighted the impact of the shifting culture on the complexity of participants’ work, noting the
influences of concepts like *a business, profits, delivering results* and *selling a product* to vulnerable students. The contemporary market, characterized by numerous and dynamic changes, was seen as requiring that all RTOs develop capacities for quick and flexible reactions to survive and improve their competitive capabilities in the market they serve. Marketing of courses had become a highly prioritized task for RTOs, and the need to adapt to students’ desires had increased accordingly, but the participants were uncertain about unethical recruitment strategies adopted by some RTOs. In the process of realizing RTOs’ ambitious business expectations, participants encountered ethical dilemmas that were related to their experienced tensions between changing the philosophy of education, the culture of the organization, and their beliefs about what was best for their students. The participants stressed that the quality of VET education perceived by them as an important aspect of traditional educational standards had been compromised by expansion motivated by a profit motive. Overlooking of such quality-driven traditional educational standards was seen by the participants as being driven by practices arising from the contemporary business model of education, through which an RTO’s profitability was given priority over the quality of teaching and student learning.

Those dilemmas were further exacerbated by the inadequate preparation of the participants to deal with the same. They highlight the need for more skills for trainers in the design of VET teaching strategies. To ensure that students receive training, assessment, and support services which meet their individual needs, participants asked for sufficient expertise and resources from management. They also identified gaps in the TAE qualification about learner diversity, effective classroom management strategies, competency-based assessment, the tailoring of programs to meet diverse student needs, and handling of such dilemmas on which codes were silent. Some participants were concerned about unions not protecting students and not supporting participants from being exploited by unscrupulous RTOs and aggressive marketing activities.
Chapter 10: Discussion

Introduction

The previous six chapters presented findings of dilemmas and inherent challenges that the participants experienced, the impacts of these dilemmas on them, and the manner in which they responded to such dilemmatic situations. The study suggested that the pressures and complexities inherent in the current VET environment were creating the conditions for ethical dilemmas. The findings of this present study both confirm previous research and provide new insights.

This discussion chapter revisits the previous research and compares the findings of this study with the same. The study provides new insights into the experiences of VET teachers and the challenges and dilemmas they face. The chapter is divided into eight parts. The first five parts each discuss one of the four identified dilemmas and their contributing imperatives. The fifth part discusses the impacts of the dilemmas on the participants. The sixth part discusses the participants’ responses to the dilemmas. The seventh part discusses the stories that participants told to explain their experience of the dilemmas. The last part discusses the use of dilemmas as an approach to illuminating the moral dimensions of the participants’ experience of the changing cultural context in their work.

Dilemmas

The major findings of four dilemmas identified in the study were those of the dilemmas of responding flexibly to heightened student diversity, limiting educational engagement, constraining teacher responsiveness, and manipulating learning assessment. Within each dilemma, challenges emerged as the participants sought to balance the students’ needs with the RTOs’ commercial objectives. Such dilemmas and challenges emerging within have been compared with those identified in the previous research in the following sections.

Dilemma 1: The Dilemma of Responding Flexibly to Heightened Student Diversity

The dilemma of responding flexibly to heightened student diversity was seen by the participants as driven by the enrollment of an unmanageable diversity of students with differing skills conflicting with their moral commitments as teachers. The participants reported that to compete for enrolments of such an expanded population of students with different expectations, RTOs were being pushed to respond to demands varying from offering flexible attendance, altering student intake dates to allow students to enroll at any time during
the course, and offering courses to students without basic literacy and prerequisite skills. Within that dilemma, there emerged two challenges: the challenge of heightened student diversity and the challenge of demands for teaching flexibly.

The challenge of heightened student diversity was the difficulty in managing the increasing diversity of students enrolled in a class with particular attention being given to the underperforming vulnerable group of students. The study of participants’ experiences of teaching diverse students differs markedly from those described in the research to date. Previous research identified that teachers’ professional challenges with diverse students were often associated with relational issues to do with limits to student–teacher intimacy, balancing concern for the individual with group needs, the forces of school policy on autonomous or case-based judgement, collegial loyalty, and more generally, the ethics of pedagogy (Aultman et al., 2009; Pope et al., 2009).

But the present study has suggested that participants’ challenges with diverse students were often associated with RTOs competing for students, domestic and international, and often engaging in aggressive, sometimes unethical marketing strategies to attract student enrolments. The challenge thus remained of providing good education to diverse students enrolled in a course they should not have been in in the first place.

The participants found that VET was increasingly being treated as a commercial product governed essentially by market forces, which supports the argument of Ehrich et al., (2011) in their studies on higher education. Ehrich et al. pointed out that these dilemmas remained with the individual VET teacher, unseen to an observer and rarely shared with others, and the reflections were often lost in the ongoing activities of classroom life. However, the present study extended understanding about the experiences of VET teachers when teaching diverse students, thus contributing to understanding the complex world of VET teachers. In particular, the present study provided an overview of the conflict between competing paradigms of commercial imperatives and social responsibilities of VET teachers.

The present study has suggested that from fees discounting to offering free iPads, RTOs competed with one another for students. The participants reported that students were lured into those courses with the promise of different outcomes such as suitable employment, permanent residency, or no repayment of fees. The present study pointed to some RTOs providing courses that focused on specific occupations and, in some cases, migration outcomes. While the government made changes to Australia's Skilled Migration program seeking to override markets
to stabilize, to promote growth, and to limit detrimental side effects (DIAC, 2010), in an already competitive VET sector political interferences like changes in immigration rules compounded those failures. These descriptions were similar to those made by the AEU (2010, 2015), which claimed that vocational education had been corrupted by dubious private operators using the lure of permanent residency to pursue profits. Such operators have been allowed to prey on those who sought skills and a better life in Australia.

The present study found that in a competitive VET economy, unethical enrolment practices also extended to domestic students. The study found that domestic students were unfortunately targeted by RTOs and educational brokers as the source of the income from the VFH scheme, with no due consideration of the actual and significant contribution of these students to the economy. The most common unethical practice reported by the participants included improper use of recruiting techniques, misusing the existing recognition of the federal government to educate more and more of the population; the funding was based on enrolments and not completion. The participants pointed out that because not many students completed a course, RTOs enrolled an enormous number of students each term -- or week in some cases -- to meet their expectations of enrollment growth. The findings of the present study that the students were used a means to get VFH funding support the argument of DET (2014) and ACPET (2016) which stated that students have simply been the vehicles by which RTOs access government funding, driven by the VFH scheme which was intended to reduce financial barriers for Australian citizens. Public commentary to date on the VFH scheme has focused largely on its systemic failings, its disadvantaging of students, its wasting of public funds, its destruction of the public provider system of VET provision, and the way in which it has fueled self-interest among private RTOs of VET. It could be argued that, although the proposals set out in the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill (Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research, & Minister for Small Business 2015) are a laudable response to the publically aired concerns at the time, they overlook the importance of the VET teacher’s voice. The impacts of the scheme on the work of VET teachers have been largely overlooked. The present study has opened a window to those impacts. Importantly, the research here reported exposes the nature and depth of the impact of the VFH scheme on the work of the participants, who identified it as a driver of dilemmas arising in their workplace. Since the VFH reforms were seen to be driving their employers to expect of them as teachers that they prioritize non-educational, marketplace, and commercial values over educational ones, their very identities as teachers were being challenged. The participants were experiencing the impact of the VFH scheme – as a part of that
contemporary cultural context – as putting them into a state of internal conflict, unable to resolve the demands of imperatives generated by the implementation of the VFH scheme with those of their traditional moral values.

The challenge of demands for teaching flexibly was the difficulties in the lack of control over the composition of the student groups in their classes. The participants pointed out that it was challenging to teach in the absence of any knowledge of the flexibility offered to their students, and in the face of students acting in a flexible way. Previous research has highlighted the importance of accommodating to the global VET context by increasing its flexibility and development goals and implementing strategies that fulfill its clients’ (students) needs (Barry, 2007), where students, as customers, can choose what is perceived to be the best quality (Campbell, 2008; Forward & Scroggie, 2015). However, the present study pointed to a culture of customer service in a market-driven approach was instilled in RTOs with the intention of excessive profit motivation. Regardless of whether these organizations provided quality education and services, they recognized that satisfied customers were the key to their success. A quite common consequence was price wars and marketing campaigns aimed at attracting students already enrolled in competing institutions by offering low fees, easy admissions, flexible attendance, rolling enrolment, and deals of re-assessments. The participants reported a tendency for RTOs to accept those who can afford to pay while compromising entrance requirements. The participants argued that the provision of such services diverted RTOs who were traditionally grounded in providing quality services to a contemporary philosophy of competition by occupying a new base in the value stream centred on profit maximization and customer-focused promotion.

The participants reported that these strategies, although helping the RTO in attracting more students, would help only those students who got free education or needed a degree to stay in Australia and worked for more than the legally allowed 20 hours a week. However, such practices could backfire if the students do not complete the course, resulting in poor employment outcomes for such students. It created a challenge for the participants as they perceived that providing quality education was concerned with balancing the delivery of knowledge (quality teaching) and providing conditions for students’ growth (quality learning). The present study reported that while the trend is towards the rhetoric of demand focused on individual customers, the participants were simultaneously seeing student needs to be subsumed by and within RTOs’ needs.
The participants found teaching the uniform curriculum to such diverse students very challenging; for example, the challenge of students enrolled with such flexibility and attending to the many and varied needs not only of individual students but also of the generational groups within the classrooms with different skills. The participants had to modify their teaching styles to make sure that they were adequately educating the students in their classrooms as they did not believe in a one-size-fit-all approach of the curriculum.

**Dilemma 2: The Dilemma of Limiting Educational Engagement**

The dilemma of limiting educational engagement was the dilemma faced by the participants in covering the course content with the diverse students in limited time. This dilemma was caused by an existential conflict arising from the expectations of participants to cover the course content and ensure that training delivery produced skilled graduates and the intrinsic moral imperative of providing quality education in the limited time available. Such practices placed them in a conflict between meeting their moral commitments as teachers and the expectations of their employing RTO. Within that dilemma emerged three challenges: the challenge of reduced course time, the challenge of the recognition of prior learning, and the challenge of online delivery.

The participants experienced the challenge of reduced course time while choosing between teaching for understanding and teaching to demonstrate enough understanding to be qualified as a competent student. It was an ongoing feature of their concern. They saw it as their duty to provide time to teach course content as well as to provide practical skills in a way that the students would remember, and they felt a pressure to cover the course content in a condensed period. The time and financial constraints also limited their ability to be innovative.

The previous research identified that the qualifications based on a set of competency standards allow students to study for differing amounts of time to complete any given qualification, rather than being determined by a set amount of time to undertake a course of study (NCVER, 2010). The present study found that such flexibility offered in CBT with differing amounts of time was used by the RTOs to develop and promote condensed courses. Very few participants recognized the benefits of these cuts in duration. Some participants directly justified the condensed period of training and certification arguing that this was what students wanted and that individualized students’ needs were met through negotiated curricula in a condensed duration. However, the majority of participants believed that the training was severely inadequate to prepare students for jobs, and as the duration of the training was too short, the quality was low.
as it was too theoretical and lacked practical guidance. The participants were highly critical of the condensed training. The findings of the present study, that the participants were concerned about the knowledge retention of the students in CBT, support the argument of Schofield et al. (2004a, 2004b), and Wheelahan and Carter (2001), who concluded that CBT is a debased form of training that does not develop underpinning knowledge. Moreover, participants also reported that as fiscal constraints continued, more RTOs were intentionally reducing, consolidating, or eliminating specific programs that have been identified as academically weak, high cost, duplicative, having low market demand, or less central to the need of the industry.

The participants also reported the challenge of enrolling more students by recognizing their prior learning and providing RPL without enough evidence. Skills Australia (2009) argued the need for RPL as a contemporary development in education and training. However, the present study found that the rise in global markets, the shift from intense classroom teaching to flexible services and new educational products, rapid developments and diversification in information technology, and massive organizational restructuring processes had given rise to RPL. The participants in the study pointed out that they experienced a greater push for implementation of RPL in their RTO and very little evidence was provided by students. The participants worked their way through a range of difficulties and obligations when they were making RPL judgements with little evidence. The present study found that RPL was easily offered and participants argued that there should be more rigorous verification processes to demonstrate students’ skills for RPL. The participants also indicated that RPL was not suited to all types of training, particularly not where the need to demonstrate practical training was essential.

The present study found that online learning through limited teacher engagement allowed for RTOs to lower the cost and have more return on economies of scale. The above analysis was consistent with the findings of Perkinson (2006) who reported that online learning enrollments provided an alternative to students in undertaking their learning on or off the campus. However, the present study pointed to several challenges faced by the participants in the expanded use of online learning, as the volume of training and mode of online delivery were perceived to be inadequate to achieve expected student competency and outcomes. The participants reported serious quality issues in online delivery as the resources were dependent on the choice of a teacher teaching the unit at the time. In the absence of face-to-face interaction with the students, the participants found it difficult to preserve the quality of teaching while adjusting their pedagogical strategies to web-based packages and programs. Some participants also raised questions about quality and consistency of provision of online training across RTOs. The
participants reported that students, while being highly digitally literate, could also benefit from some attendance and the students who were encouraged to change to online learning wanted to attend as they saw the benefit of discussing their work with other students or as value for money. Thus, it created challenges for the participants about how to support online learning in ways that were useful to students and their employing RTO.

Moreover, Perkinson (2006) had reported the benefits of distance education where community colleges were widely adopting this approach by their missions to expand their geographic reach and to make education more convenient for individual students. This contrasted with the present study where the participants reported that online learning was one of the media used by RTOs with the intention of attracting more students to their courses and not necessarily with student welfare in mind. The participants maintained that to compensate for their financial problems, RTOs increased the offer of places and courses in search of economies of scale, and expanded their market to potential international students without actually offering a better product or service.

**Dilemma 3: The Dilemma of Constraining Teacher Responsiveness**

The dilemma of constraining teacher responsiveness was the dilemma faced by the participants due to prescriptive conditions laid down by their RTO relating to administration work, use of resources, and out-of-field teaching units, thus constraining their responsiveness to students’ needs. The dilemma was caused by an existential conflict arising from tensions between the extrinsic imperative of administration work required to be compliant for funding taking away their time, lack of availability of resources to teach in the limited time, and the intrinsic moral imperatives of providing learning opportunities to diverse students. The participants felt their ability to meet students’ needs were further dampened by RTOs’ action to employ casual teachers thus sacrificing the expertise of permanent staff. Within that dilemma, four challenges emerged: the challenge of accountability requirements, the challenge of limited resources, the challenge of teacher casualization, and the challenge of out-of-field teaching. The challenge of accountability requirements was the excessive focus on compliance requirements thus limiting teachers in attending to the needs of diverse students.

The participants reported that the goal of providing quality education to students conflicted with the need to comply with economic and administrative demands of the business of education. COAG (2009) reported the need for RTOs to confirm to the agreed set of standards to
maintain quality to retain their AQF qualifications. A compliance audit is conducted proactively by ASQA to assess an RTO’s ongoing compliance with the standards required for registration (ASQA, 2015). RTOs were subjected to a rigorous regime of external accountability in which continuous monitoring and audit of performance and quality were dominant. The purpose of accountability, it was claimed, was to make the work of RTOs more transparent through techniques such as inspection, performance management, and the announcing of student test scores (Deem, 1998, Kirkpatrick & Lucio, 1995; Power, 1997). However, the findings of the present study -- that the participants found themselves overburdened with paperwork -- support the argument of Grace’s (2005) study with coping with AQTF requirements and Black’s (2009a, 2009b) and Maslen’s (2000) findings on an excess of documentation for audit.

The participants in the present study identified that the purpose of compliance was defeated as the regulatory system focuses on ensuring that RTOs meet the requirements of the training packages and provider standards prospectively, rather than on the quality of student outcomes attained or the student experience retrospectively. The RTOs’ main focus for compliance was to meet the regulatory requirements to renew their registration or to get the funding released, rather than compliance for competency for students. The participants identified that the cornerstone of the audit should be the quality assurance to attain two main goals: a public accountability function and a quality improvement function. Moreover, gathering of quantitative data yearly or every 5 years, although essential for public accountability, was, according to some participants, unfit to understand the complexity of the institutions or the quality of service provided to students, staff, and support systems.

The participants suggested that such an objective approach to auditing induces disguise that the quality is achieved. The present study suggested that such evaluation methods bring a threat to the institutions by being linked to reputation or financial sanctions. These audit processes are not directly tied to funding (ASQA, 2011) but are expected to evaluate and provide public reports on the quality assurance processes by which RTOs exercise their responsibility to ensure academic standards and improve the quality of their teaching and learning. The experience of some participants suggested that an ASQA compliance audit was a quick tick-in-a-box approach buried with excessive paperwork and documentation rather than a sustainable improvement-led approach that engaged them and their colleagues to prove and improve educational quality.

The present study also suggested that achieving full compliance did not necessarily mean that the RTOs were providing quality education and services to students. Moreover, the present
study also found that most of the audited RTOs had compliance issues but were given 20 days to fix with enhanced advice, and action was taken only in the case of non-compliance after the allowed period. According to the participants, implicitly, it was sending the message to all RTOs that it is acceptable if an RTO is deemed not fully compliant at audit, as long as they fix the issues in 20 working days. They pointed out that the penny-pinching RTOs seemed to not fix any deficiencies and waited till they were audited and then used the grace period to cover over the cracks.

The use of such an approach on quality assurance frameworks raised questions about the effectiveness of the framework for enhancing the quality of student outcomes. It also raised questions about the extent to which participants were required to focus excessively on documentation and paperwork related to policies and processes to meet compliance requirements rather than focusing on pedagogical innovation, academic rigour, and outcomes.

The participants rather suggested assessing the teaching quality and performance as a significant criterion for achieving compliance. They preferred using their time on students who are at-risk for academic failure and need opportunities to become successful in their educational pursuits. The increased focus on compliance requirements limited innovation in learning and teaching and it may also have a risk-averse effect on genuine RTOs, who heavily invested in compliance, training, and governance as they face a significant competitive disadvantage.

The challenge of limited resources was how to provide education with limited or outdated resources to the students. Clemans (2009) found that elements like funding and resources created competition between public and private VET institutes. However, the present study suggested no difference in dilemmas regarding the lack of resources for participants working in TAFE or private RTOs. Lack of resources was equally experienced by participants working in both the organizations. Rather, the present study suggested that in terms of competition for student enrolments and operating as businesses rather than government services, TAFE colleges were equally focused on earning revenue rather than achieving quality outcomes for students. The participants from both the RTOs, private and TAFE reported their strongest concerns regarding the lack of teaching and learning materials. The present study suggested that the extent to which regulated resources were noticed by the participants was where students were denied paper-based learning materials to save costs. The participants also reported concerns regarding a lack of modern equipment and facilities in their RTOs. They described a situation where students used obsolete and outdated equipment and were asked to share such equipment or encouraged to bring in their own devices, raising doubts about the notions of quality for their RTOs. As participants
saw it, in addition to having an appropriate curriculum, RTOs should have the resources needed to implement the curriculum and to support good teaching, especially the basics such as learning materials and technological resources for each student. The participants saw it as the responsibility and moral obligation of RTOs to allocate sufficient resources to education to provide all students with the adequate opportunity to participate in the classroom fully. The participants asserted that if they were to teach a diverse classroom with differing skills, they needed a steady supply of resources. A major concern was to ensure that diverse students received the highest return on their investment in education and training and that lack of resources in skills training or skill shortages of teachers do not constrain education in the VET sector. The participants cited the inherent tension between student satisfaction and budgetary control. They saw these costs as justified with a corresponding increase in their profits with student enrolments.

The challenge of teacher casualization was characterized as featuring the growing use of temporary workers employed on an as-needed basis to perform specific jobs for the duration in their RTOs. The report by the Productivity Commission (2011) pointed out that approximately 65% of trainers or teachers and assessors in TAFE were employed on a casual or sessional basis, with the majority working part-time hours. The present study pointed to the reported massive downsizing of the permanent workforce, and the replacement of permanent workers by casual teachers which has resulted from cost-saving measures. Such characteristics were presented as significant trends that were transforming existing conceptions and practices of paid work that participants encountered in their working life. The participants reported that the key drivers underpinning this scenario were a combination of funding cuts necessitating cost savings and the fact that casualization of staff was now a common phenomenon in the VET sector. Being a teacher in such a constrained environment meant that there was no job security for the participants and they had to generate enough income through marketing of the courses to students and meeting targets to secure their salary. The participants reported that such casual teachers supplement their income by working part-time at different RTOs and by doing other casual jobs. Rather than becoming collegiate and working as whole institutions to enhance student outcomes, colleagues had become internally competitive by restricting sharing of resources to get the upper hand on their colleagues. The participants reported general unease in the work environment.

The challenge of out-of-field teaching was the difficulties faced by the participants in teaching subjects outside their expertise which sometimes included overseas teaching. Chappell et al. (2003) had argued that the spectrum of teachers’ work in VET continues to increase, and
there appears to be a continued need for VET teachers to accommodate to change, including teaching across borders and transnational education in which RTOs from one country educate those of another through setting up off-shore campuses. The present study reported that although it might seem obvious that teachers should be asked to teach only what they know, large numbers of participants were routinely assigned to teach outside their area of expertise. The assumption was that the participants with experience would be able to teach any subject if they needed a job. Sending teacher overseas was also done on the premise that such experienced participants would fare reasonably amongst the non-native speakers even though they may not be trained for teaching overseas. The participants reported their conflict over accepting or rejecting the only job available at the time. It was a matter of considerable concern for them to teach students without having sufficient knowledge. The participants who were assigned out of their field experience considered such teaching experience as stressful.

**Dilemma 4: The Dilemma of Manipulating Learning Assessment**

The dilemma of manipulating learning assessment was the dilemma faced by the participants who were pressured to pass students whom they felt were not competent. Within the dilemma, four challenges emerged: the challenge of evidencing learning, the challenge of authentic learning assessment, the challenge of plagiarism, and the challenge of learner support in assessment. The present study found that the participants experienced a variety of pressures associated with assessment.

Previous research had reported the emphasis on testing, the standardization of curriculum, and the drive to increase achievement scores that have produced major changes in education during the last two decades. The trend of reforming education by increasingly managing teachers’ work and making teachers more accountable fits into what is known as a “discourse of performativity” (Ball, 2000; Jeffrey, 2002). The findings of the present study concerning pressures on the participants to pass students support the argument of Taylor et al. (1997) who argued that unhealthy competition between RTOs, teaching to the test, increased stress levels for students and teachers, and huge costs to students and society were some of the reactions to testing that is high stakes. Besides, the present study suggested that the participants were aware of the accountability context within which they worked and struggled with the assessment practices that were mediated by RTO structures about what they are supposed to assess and how that is to be recorded and reported. The assessment and record-keeping requirements of the RTO were a major focus of the concerns for the participants because of the conflicting demands they made upon them to pass students. In such a context, an important emergent issue for the participants
was to maintain a sense of responsibility in passing plagiarized or non-authentic assessments. The present study also found that participants’ job security relied heavily on student evaluations and feedback. If a participant consistently failed a significant number of students or insisted on conformity to specified standards, then they were often not reappointed.

The challenge of evidencing learning was the challenge faced by the participants in passing assessment without adequate evidence. The present study suggested that alternative approaches were encouraged by RTOs to demonstrate competent assessments that placed less emphasis on evidence; the participants experienced that the gathering and judging of evidence to decide whether a student has achieved a standard of competence were not followed by the required standards. The present study suggested that many RTOs set up guidelines aimed at promoting transparent, ethical behaviour in assessment for the benefit of students, but not everyone follows these guidelines to ensure if standards are met. Alternative approaches were promoted to demonstrate accountability that places less emphasis on learning and more on competent results. Moreover, the participants pointed out that the cost benefits of using assessment without enough evidence were not always economical or successful. As a result, they found themselves conflicted for grading disagreements. It was also common for participants to be forced to resubmit grades.

The challenge of plagiarism was the difficulties faced when the participants were asked to prove plagiarized assessment, in the absence of which proof they were asked to pass the students. They described how pressures to prove plagiarism led them sometimes to sidestep giving priority to detecting it, as this amounted to a loss of their time for the administrative procedures that needed to be taken, even though the disapproved acts of plagiarism. Moreover, the excessive paperwork attached to reporting the plagiarized work meant that they could not allow sufficient time for providing feedback to students. Some of the participants stated that they were pressured to pass students with the fear of getting fired or getting in trouble for not passing them. Finally, the participants reported that the relationship between them and a student was mortally wounded by the management when they reported plagiarism, although no action was taken.

The participants identified that academic honesty should be the major focus of attention in instilling students with integrity and ethical sensitivity. The findings of this present study that plagiarism practices were overlooked to encourage favourable student outcomes support the argument of Pope et al. (2009) which suggested that if cheating becomes standard practice for young students, it may continue to higher education and work and become part of life. It must, therefore, be seen as a serious concern. This present study pointed to the difficulties for
participants to understand how to handle academic cheating among students from different cultures and backgrounds.

The challenge of authentic learning assessment was the difficulties faced by the participants in passing unauthenticated work, particularly for online assessments. The participants reported that there were no means to check the reliability and validity of any student assessment. Often, they were forced to allow resubmissions after the students had been caught cheating. Many participants believed that their students’ attitudes and needs were different as they focused only on working or getting their residency. Those students did not take their learning seriously, and that assessments were most often outsourced. The rolling assessments also raised serious concerns. The participants had assessed students in previous years with the same assessments, which made them perceive performing the same rolling assessment tasks as less authentic. Answers from vulnerable students suggested that they had knowledge of questions used for assessments tasks. However, students who passed the assessments in such fashion were not considered well suited for embedding employability. As noted by the participants, the VET sector has not put enough thought into guidelines for online delivery and assessment. Currently, those working in the industry are confused: They are trying to make their processes appear to fit guidelines that were grounded in paper-based approaches to assessment. Some participants talked about the need for a separate handbook or resource in the form of a collection of examples that address all assessment forms and include instances in both traditional and online assessment modes.

The challenge of learner support in assessment was the challenge faced by the participants in overlooking the support provided to students in passing the assessment. The participants reported that in their zest to pass assessments, their employing RTOs sometimes employed a specialist to help students in writing their assessment. Although this support could be valuable, help was misused in the sense that the assignments were indirectly outsourced to such specialists. This grave concern was coupled with the view of the majority of participants that such assessment of educational attainments of students was educationally unsound. Previous research reported that VET assessment is primarily designed to determine student competence concerning work-related skills (Hillier, 2012; Karmel, 2011). However, the present study suggested that the assessment practices involving ongoing tasks were often reportedly completed with the help of the work manager. The participants questioned the knowledge retention of such students and suggested that the role of RTOs should not be to prepare the student for examination but to ensure that the student is competent in the appropriate range of skills contained in a qualification.
Impact of the Dilemmas

The dilemmas, as mentioned earlier, were grounded in and highlight the dissonance between the expectations of the traditional moral commitments of the participants as teachers and the demands of their contemporary workplace culture. On the one hand, the participants were trying to be true to themselves as professionals, caring for the learning and well-being of their students, responsible for their actions, and mindful of the influence of their decisions and actions on the standing of their profession and the welfare of their colleagues. On the other hand, they were faced with demands of the contemporary cultural context that run counter to those values, calling on them to make decisions and act in ways that undermine their traditional moral commitments as teachers.

The studies by Brennan Kemmis, and Green (2013) and Dall’Alba and Sandberg (2006) both identify that the kind of processes and institutional culture being adopted in schools can restrict teachers’ discretion and professionalism and lead to tensions between what schools intend and what teachers want to provide. However, no previous studies have identified the impact of the external pressures and culture of RTOs on teachers in VET. The participants in the present study reported their understandings about the competitive forces in which RTOs in VET were directed at, how they were funded and controlled and who they served in specific directions of economization. Many aspects of the participants’ dilemmas would seem to relate to issues of educational equity. On the one hand, they recognized a professional obligation to provide the best quality education to all students, irrespective of background. On the contrary, they found themselves needing to compromise their standards due to expediencies of a hard-pressed VET sector. This was evident in the participants’ professional concerns about inconsistency in educational provision and limited support for diverse students. Their concerns regarding educational inequity extended to the inconsistencies in the duration of the course, curriculum, and assessment standards followed in different RTOs.

The participants reported that RTOs were driven primarily by missions and mandates defined by governments, federal or state, or the demands of the marketplace. They pointed out that although their missions were about delivering services, their success often was not measured by quality. Missions and mandates were not aligned with students’ needs, goals, and demand for services. For RTOs, accountability to government took priority over student satisfaction. The participants reported a growing lack of congruence between the values embedded in the culture of the RTO and those held by them. This caused professional anxiety and stress particularly with
the decisions being made on financial grounds, and the prominence given to compliance requirements.

There were strong links, in previous research, between higher job burnout and job dissatisfaction and workload (Kitchener, 1984; Laufer 2003; Pattberg & Stripple, 2008; Shortt et al., 2012; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). In contrast, in the present study workload itself was not the problem. It was the nature of the other work that participants attended to, the complexity of the work, the role conflict or role ambiguity which it brought with it, that accounted for much of the dissatisfaction and attrition within the profession. The participants expressed frustration that their energy was not being channeled into what is perceived as professionally based duties and functions, such as formal mentoring and coaching, curriculum, and resource development. They emphasized the commitment they had to students and were opposed to the short-term financial outcomes pursued by the management in their institutes, and they experienced an ethical dilemma when one took precedence over the other. The participants reported that their motivation was driven by the prospect of seeing their students learn and succeed and they were often distressed when their RTOs focused excessively on compliance and sanctions. One participant saw compliance as irrelevant to high-quality teaching and described it as the “elephant in the room” as labeled by Black and Reich (2010), which meant time consuming. This focus reflected a devaluation of quality service as teaching quality was considered irrelevant and was superseded by the quality performance measures of auditing. Furthermore, the participants reported that such compliance measures did not take into account the stress and tiredness with which they often struggled, the emotions involved in missing the teaching in the process, and moments of frustration with the continuous reforms and policy changes to which they were subjected.

Bamberger (1991) and Nakar (2013) argued that teachers often work in isolation in their classrooms with little collaboration or sharing of ideas or strategies with other teachers or administrators. They keep to themselves and are shielded in privacy in their classrooms as they do not communicate, collaborate, or share their expertise with their colleagues. In contrast, the participants in the present study reported that they valued good relationships with their colleagues and they looked forward to the support services offered by the management, time to discuss ethical challenges with their colleagues, the opportunity to participate in policy decisions, and an environment that recognized the value of their work. The participants continued to regard informal exchanges with their peers as their most significant source of support and professional learning. This finding reinforces the intuitive and highly relational nature of peer learning and the complex interplay between the cognitive and affective dimensions of workplace learning. Not
experiencing these aspects dampened the participants’ enthusiasm and diminished their effectiveness and satisfaction. However, it was the participants with permanent tenure made casual, in combination with near-retiring participants, who might have been highly effective in ordinary circumstances frequently finding such trying work settings overwhelming. Two of them, too often, change their RTO or teaching in disappointment and disgust.

The findings of the present study, that extrinsic imperatives or pressures constitute redefined, including reformed, ways of being and doing, support the argument of Borko et al. (2008) and Carr (2005) who claimed morale is often influenced by outside factors rather than internal, but more strongly agree with Bagnall (2004); Campbell (2003a, 2003b) and Gholami and Husu (2010) who identified both internal and external factors as influencing morale. Bagnall (2004) also argued that individuals can take steps to maintain their professional satisfaction and morale; however, they must also be nurtured, supported, and valued by the broader school community. The present study found that it was important for the participants to have an organizational culture that recognized their importance from the top down.

The present study found that participants were disadvantaged regarding both their work and well-being. The participants’ lack of control or perceived lack of support when confronting dilemmas seemed to be the most challenging. However, at the same time, the participants were not making any efforts to confront management due to the fear of teacher redundancies and an insecure working environment in the VET industry. The participants were concerned about the emotional and financial reprisals for making their disclosures. Such fears prevented them from revealing their true thoughts and feelings due to pressures regarding uncertainty about their continuing employment. Hence, the management was not aware of their dilemmas, and the situation continued without resolution. Consequently, some participants resorted to adopting a “deaf ears and blind eyes” to what was happening outside their class, whereas others experienced feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty about how to proceed in their role of teaching.

The present study suggested that some dilemmas affected participants’ well-being. The increasingly complex role of the VET teachers required them to wear a variety of hats, including that of facilitator, leader, operational manager, mentor, peer-buddy, student counselor, career guide, and analyst. The expectation on them to play several roles without sufficient support from managers appeared to be stressful for many participants. During interviews, there was much talk of stress and frustration in the absence of professional guidance. The participants indicated the deregulation of teachers’ training and certification.
The participants faced overwhelming difficulties in providing for students without appropriate assistance with regards to extra time, student support, or academic help. However, they were beholden for student achievement. Previous research reported that VET teachers must provide students with access to high-quality vocational education that prepares them for changing workplaces and work (Boon, 2011; Colnerud, 1997; Giroux, 2004; Shapira-Lishinsky, 2011). In Queensland, as in other states of Australia, the individualized, outcome-based, audit-culture (Shortt et al., 2012), “competent teacher” model, one in which teaching is governed by criteria, standards, and procedures of performance and assessment to ensure conformity of these criteria, has become dominant over more diverse and collective notions of “good” teaching (Connell, 2009). However, participants in the present study reported that the rigid top-down RTO culture which placed unrealistic demands on them prevented them from providing for student welfare and education. The participants identified that the paradigm clash between teacher professional values and the profit motive of the RTO was at the core of their tensions. The shift in focus to economic outcomes emphasized what was felt to be a widening gap between teaching staff and management. The participants reported that the core value of education systems should be to satisfy student interests and needs; however, when the participants moved among and between RTOs in this uncertain market, they noticed that moral demands varied from RTO to RTO. They found themselves in a moral conflict because of dissonance within or among systems but also because of conflicting personal and professional interests. They found themselves making decisions not for being loyal to a system and committed to its aims or to other members, but for fear of losing a wage. The findings of the present study, that the participants faced conflicts between balancing their personal and professional values, support the argument of Nakar (2013) and Shapira-Lishinsky (2011) that the interplay between the personal and professional lives of teachers was a key factor in their sense of identity and job satisfaction and, by inference, in their capacity to maintain effectiveness as teachers. Graham’s (1998) claim of pressures put on teachers to “be a loyal member of the team” or “to please the customer at all costs” were similar to the pressures passed by management on to the participants to pass all students. With uncertainty woven into the everyday practices of flexible capitalism, the confirmation of the RTO and student over their professional identities was accompanied by functional disconnection that participants experienced as a deep disquiet. In such conditions, their sense of disquiet can become a focus for articulating what is happening in the interests of self-survival. Such focus was confronted by the participants as they succumbed to a feeling of being unethical in the classroom, by confessing to considering teaching as their work, a means to an end with very little being done.
to revive their passion. The participants spoke out of an inner need for ways of re-anchoring their teaching identity, and their sense of self and other.

**Responses to the Dilemmas**

The present study suggested that the participants experienced dilemmas associated with difficult decision-making between their interests and those of their students and the employing VET organization. In some organizations, the possible loss of job security caused the participants to question whether to speak up or accept challenging working conditions. Day et al. (1999) argued that a key part of resolving a dilemma was not only being able to deal with tensions but also having to make the tough decisions. Underpinning much of the respondents’ discomfort at their inability to deal with dilemmas was a traditional formalist belief that a dilemma must have a solution. Contemporary ethics, though, is grounded in an acceptance of the general irresolvability of such dilemmas, emphasizing instead the importance of situationally responsive actions in the face of the dilemmas (Bagnall 1998). Respondents were evidently unaware of the understandings of challenges in their work, although they were acutely aware of their ignorance of, and lack of skill in dealing with, the dilemmas.

As seen from previous research, there were a number of models providing a theoretical perspective as to how difficult dilemmas are best resolved, such as Corey et al. (1998), Forester-Miller and Davis (1996), Keith-Spiegel and Koocher (1985), Remley and Herlihy (2001), Rest (1986, 1994), Steinman et al., (1998), Tymchuk, 1986, Van Hoose and Kottler (1985), Van Hoose and Paradise (1979), and Welfel (2002). However, whether these models were adhered to or are of practical assistance in real-world contexts is unknown. Unfortunately, like most ethical standards, these models only provide general guidelines for ethical decision-making.

In making decisions, the presence of these codes is intended to foster moral judgements based on the values they contain and may provide worthwhile inspiration to teachers by their very existence (Bradley, 1998; Campbell, 2000; Van Nuland & Khandelwal, 2006). However, they have not been regarded as an effective vehicle to enhance ethical practice or deepen the profession’s appreciation of the moral nuances of the role, but are considered to be mere declarations of intent(s) (Campbell, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1992; Strike et al., 1986).

From the participants’ narratives, it is clear that ethical codes set forth by their RTOs tend to be limited in their responsiveness in that they are somewhat removed from the day-to-day personal and professional dilemmas participants faced. Some participants acknowledged that
while the developed codes were more detailed for teaching staff to offer guidelines in response to ethical and legal issues around the management of learning, especially student misconduct; they critiqued the codes as being too vague to be useful in decision-making or problem-solving as they do not give enough specific guidance for anything other than basic problems. Consequently, they felt apprehensive about the decision-making around other sensitive issues on which the codes were silent. The analysis points to the single failure of any of the governing codes of conduct to provide any meaningful assistance. As highlighted by the identifying participants, many codes served as window dressing to protect the RTOs from public interference and auditors and were enforced to their advantage against the students’ advantage.

For participants, these codes were taking on a new significance as concerns about money, audits, and budgets come to the fore under a harsher funding and policy regime. Whereas the issues of accountability and responsibility played a major role for most participants, none of the participants seemed to be guided by ethical codes in their strategies. These problems with codes of ethics are not new, and they are not limited to the field of education but also extend to scholarly research as Bradley (2008), Campbell (2000, 2001), Sergiovanni (1992), Sackett (1996), and Strike and Ternasky (1993), where the professionals spoke of the tensions created by the pull between demands of the profession on the one hand and accountability on the other. The findings of the present study, that the participants took the decisions based on the principle of minimal harm, support the argument of Connell (2009) that professional decisions construed in such a regulatory way then tend to define right action as a matter of executing principles to minimize harm rather than to aspire to higher ideals. In such an event the responsible teachers were obligated to undo or mitigate the negative consequences as much as possible.

The finding of the present study, that the participants found themselves morally conflicted while choosing between encouraging the interests of the students or the RTO, support the arguments of John Dewey (1909), who concluded that in a general sense, teachers had always been held to the highest moral standards prevailing through the sociocultural norms of their societies, especially because of their assumed influence as moral models for children. However, the previous research did not, for the most part, investigate the decision-making process adopted by VET teachers to achieve moral conclusions. Decision-making, according to Begley (1999), is simply the act of making choices. However, the process of making a decision is one that involves multiple levels of complexity involving human interaction. Complexity is caused by the presence of values and ethics, be they personal or driven by the professional community (Begley, 1999).
The extent to which different and competing claims are reconcilable depends on specific circumstances, and only the teachers concerned are in a position to make local decisions.

The findings of the present study that the participants found themselves conflicted while making decisions supports the arguments of Kidder (1995), that it is not always simple to choose the “right” option as opposed to the “wrong” one. As Kakabadse et al. (2003, p. 478) stated, there is not always a clear-cut answer and what constitutes ethical behaviour is likely to lie in a “grey zone”. The present study suggested that it was in the grey area that participants’ morality was tested in their everyday work. It found that the moral conflicts in the participants arose because of discord within or among systems and personal attitudes and practices (benevolence or hostility), that is, that honouring of the RTOs’ intents was superficial, because of the moral and professional concerns of educators. It follows then that how participants came to think and act in practice was increasingly associated with how they made sense of or decided to act in those circumstances which were often shaped by their experiences. In such an environment, it would be easy to lose sight of the ethical processes that are at the heart of making decisions for providing quality education to diverse students. The participants might be expected to be valued for their situational expertise – their evidenced capacity to respond sensitively, appropriately, and capably to challenging situations in their field of expertise and their work as educators.

The findings of the present study that the participants were conflicted in adopting strategies for resolving dilemmas supports the argument of Boon (2011) that there has been little attempt to identify links between the ethical thinking or knowledge of teachers and the way in which teachers resolve difficult dilemmas. The present study has made a significant contribution through the way it has added to the research relating to how the participants perceived and coped with ethical dilemmas in their work, and the extent to which, whether it is codes of profession or participants’ knowledge of theories or moral imperatives that inform their practices to ethical dilemmas. Such understanding may then be used to inform improvements in the development available to teachers. Understanding of how VET teachers construct and deal with ethical dilemmas may thus be used to contribute to the development of organizational guides and incentives to aid teachers toward ethical action.

The present study found that the participants were caught in a highly complex milieu of forces. The analysis of the data collected revealed three mutually exclusive and conceptually different ways of responding: standing by their moral commitments, compromising their moral commitment, or their appeal for ethical training where they questioned their ethical action.
Standing by One's Moral Commitments

The participants who stood by their moral commitments responded by defending their values based on the social equity angle, which to a large extent has underpinned the traditional professional culture. The findings of the present study that the participants had different reasons for making decisions support the argument of Fritzsche and Becker (1983), Premeaux (2004), Premeaux and Mondy (1993), Maitlis (2005), and Weick and Robert (1993) who concluded that individuals assign different reasoning criteria for various issues. Ethics is about people and situations that are ambiguous and uncertain, and which elicit a process of sense making and issue construction through which people frame the situation and create rational accounts that enable them to take action. The participants who responded this way explained morality through referring to concepts of empathy (Erwin, 2000), respect and responsibility (Rest, 1986; Rest & Narvaez, 1994), and justice-oriented reasoning (Kohlberg & Candee, 1984). The data pointed to two dimensions of this response: working overtime to help vulnerable students and providing reasonable adjustments to help pass vulnerable students. The following two sections describe working overtime and providing reasonable adjustments in further detail.

The participants pointed out that the standardized curriculum was a mismatch for diverse students. The implications for most of the participants was that in attempting to develop a clear teaching ideology, tensions existed between what the curriculum demands and what they believe was right for students. So participants offered extra support in their unpaid hours. The participants felt morally obligated to provide this extra support as otherwise the students might struggle to understand the concepts and might not get the best out of the course.

A key reason for participants’ responses to reasonable adjustment was a renewed commitment to students and action to address a core concern with social justice, which was in contrast to neo-liberal policy. The participants responding this way found it obligatory to offer greater flexibility in training. The participants were also faced with the dilemma of providing flexibility in assessment which was either to comply with the mandated approach which primarily sought to satisfy student expectations, or alternatively sometimes to fail to satisfy students in a Socratic or Nietzschean sense, which is to sting students for their own good in an effort to encourage them to work harder than they may otherwise. However, the participants worried about the impact on students’ results in them being labeled as failures. There was substantial evidence that participants were teaching to the test when they sympathized with
students who had struggled already in life and had come to Australia for a better life. Those participants did not want to be the reason for sending students back to their home country if they failed persistently. However, such a response was condemned by two of the participants as it questioned the extent to which reasonable adjustment practices should be followed.

The present study supports the argument made by the previous research of Boon (2011) and Ehrich et al. (2011), who suggested that there are important ethical questions to consider in flexible assessment change efforts. All of these issues come down to the degree to which it is possible and reasonable for the participants to exercise discretion in their practice. The social impact of changes to education systems is not something to be taken lightly. Evaluating achievement requires evidence of performance and social distance in treating all students the same, applying criteria even to a student with a troubled past. Emotion should not be allowed to sway a teacher’s judgement of students’ academic performance. Hence, the flexibility cannot be allowed to impact negatively upon quality. Too much adjustment, beyond that which can be considered reasonable, ultimately impacts upon the validity of some assessment processes and outcomes. Well-intended actions, including those that accomplish assigned duties, may lead to harm unexpectedly depending on the consequences of a certain act. One way to avoid unintentional harm is to consider potential impacts carefully on all those affected by decisions, the students and society in the long run.

**Compromising One's Moral Commitments**

Compromising their moral commitment, as a response, was embraced by the participants who had adopted the values of neo-liberal policy. The competitive and individualistic values which are identified as underpinning the current global financial situations were similar to those surrounding VET but which are now coming to be questioned in the present study. Fiscal constraints compelled RTOs to act in ways that were not considered ethical by the participants who pointed out that the survival imperative made it necessary for RTOs to adopt new business strategies. However, findings suggest that regardless of their attitude to marketization and competition, most participants were influenced by their RTOs’ attempts to stay competitive. Increasingly frequently their employment was directly dependent on the success of recruitment and assessment. The participants who were initially committed to student outcomes shifted their commitment to their RTO because of fears of losing a wage. Many participants reported that it was personally hazardous to fail students. Being aware of this, students have been quick to lodge complaints against staff knowing that they would be
supported by top management and the management would then pressure the participants who had no real options of finding employment elsewhere in this uncertain environment.

This changed priority was the most obvious example of the devaluation of professional values that many participants described. Consequently, traditional core professional values of grading students as impartially and objectively as possible and achieving broad educational goals, for example, the development of young people as citizens and people, were threatened. The findings of the present study that the participants recognized that their ethical reasoning changed with time and situations support the argument of Kohlberg (1984) who has maintained that moral development does not remain static as one matures, but rather that adults may develop new ethical qualities over time. Teachers’ moral qualities and commitments (e.g., compassion, a sense of justice, fairness, and integrity) can be nurtured in an environment that supports their emotional and moral growth, and altered in an environment that concentrates only on profit making. Many factors may affect an individual’s ethical sensitivity, and these factors relate to the environment in which a person lives and works and may include the profession and industry in which one is in employment, and personal traits exhibited by the individual (Welfells, 2002). The basis of such ethical practice is an understanding that human beings are essentially interrelated and that the ability to act with moral integrity (both personally and professionally) is, therefore, relational in nature. In his book Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence, Michael Eraut (1994) emphasizes that professionals learn how to make professional judgements on the job. As an individual’s professional experience grows, so does their ability to make increasingly complex judgements. The process of being (where we have been) and becoming (where we are going) has been regarded as fundamental to professional identity development (Erwin, 2000). This view recognizes what Dickie et al., (2004) refer to as how teacher professional identity is shaped and reshaped through their experiences and the kinds of teacher they are becoming. Teacher professional identity is interwoven with a process of “becoming” because it is based on individual teachers’ evolving perspectives and philosophies that are continually reconstructed through teaching experience and the interaction with the broader world (Forward, 2010; Giroux, 2012). The present study suggests that the ethical climate of an organization was the dominant factor in compromising participants’ commitment and values. The present study pointed to material conditions that constrained their capacity to act with academic integrity, particularly in the context of the prescribed economized culture of the RTO, and of the VET industry in general.

To those participants, being ethical was not a matter of an option; rather, making decisions was a matter of social discourses grounded in financial struggles and the
competitiveness of RTOs and the demands of their daily living that, although refusing to accept
needless student exploitation, declined to accept their job insecurity too. The pervasive loss of
faith in the grand narratives has seen the radical individualization and contextualization of moral
responsibility and action. This has been perceived as contributing to an immoral neo-tribalism
(Bauman, 1995), in which morality is drawn from the shifting pattern of identity and interest
groups with which one is associated. Moral responsibility thus shifts from educated adherence to
traditional constraining norms and frameworks of belief to individuals responding to peer
pressure and to the particular moral challenges of each situation in which they find themselves in
their day-to-day activities – of teaching in the present case. The capacity of individuals to respond
to situated moral challenges – their capacity for moral reasoning and action – and their individual
character as centres of moral action thus come to the fore.

The participants thus adopted a very different approach to ethics, one that is situational
(Bagnall & Hodge, 2017). The first and most comprehensive account of such an ethic has been
attributed by Van Meijl (2000) to Alasdair MacIntyre in his work After Virtue (MacIntyre, 1981),
where he argues that teleology is an inclusive one of doing good. That good may be expected to
include attention to the welfare and well-being of others, but it also and more importantly
embraces the welfare and well-being of the moral agent him- or herself: more importantly,
because, existentially, we are closest to ourselves and we must be our primary responsibility. No
one else has the right or the responsibility to override the moral force of that proximity. The
present study found the malicious threats under which the participants, through intimidation, felt
they were deprived of job security, and events such as do-no-harm principles, were compromised
by the need for job security for catering to their family. The present study pointed to ways that
work culture could cause the participants to overlook professional conduct, leading to what
Bathmaker (2001) identifies as Devils' syndrome where role expectations are not formal but
informal, often based on the general tone of management. Such expectations, however, do not
justify ethical misdemeanours that can in part provide an excuse for unethical decisions and
actions. The preceding analysis seeks to provide an explanation of that failure regarding
competing epistemologies, the nature of the contemporary cultural context, and the nature of
morality itself in any cultural context.

Appealing for Ethical Training

Previous research reported that teacher education programs have a significant role in
developing teachers who are well equipped with the essential tools to undertake issues of
morality and moral education in their professional lives (Goodlad et al., 1990; Sockett, 1993).
However, the question of whether the teacher candidates perceived themselves as competent and adequately prepared is the important issue, one not researched before. Findings from the present study have suggested that although the participants reported that moral education was an important component in their profession, nevertheless, they did not feel well equipped to handle this element in their prospective classrooms.

The participants reported that they experienced dilemmas while deciding the best course of action when the rights of students conflicted with the rights of the employing RTOs. Some of the participants were ambiguous about what constituted ethical practice in the contemporary work environment. To act with integrity, a teacher had to consider how possible options for action aligned with their existing beliefs and values and previous decisions. The findings of the present study that the participants found themselves ill prepared to make ethical decisions support the argument of Tirri and Husu (2002) that teacher commitment to the moral, ethical, and enculturation responsibilities prove overwhelming as they are not prepared well. In the absence of such guidance, the participants reported that they were then left to find solutions to ethical dilemmas so that they could do their best at minimal harm to students, RTOs and themselves. In light of their experiences and expectations and perceptions of right and wrong, they made decisions based on holding moral principles of fairness and not harming others. They sometimes took consideration of concepts of happiness for the greatest number of students and whom their actions might hurt. However, well-intended actions in the best interest of students with least risk of harm may lead to harm unexpectedly, depending on the consequences of a certain act.

Individual participants were finding themselves held responsible for the actions they took in response to morally challenging situations in their work, but for which their teacher education had failed to equip them. Middle-aged and established participants with a sense of job insecurity tended to have a positive overview of teaching in VET than older participants and casuals, who tended to accept and adapt to the market situation more readily than their colleagues. Older participants still considered themselves in a better position compared to new teachers, considering the limited time they had left in the profession. So, the present study has suggested that the participants need some structure, for example, using ethical theories to guide their ethical thinking, understanding moral reasoning and development, or following the professional ethics of the profession.

What the analysis also revealed is that a statement of values in a code of ethics or conduct, while intending to clarify points of reference so as to act as a guide to ethical decision-making, overlooks a variety of perennial ethical tensions highlighted above. Possibly, the
participants expected from professional ethics or codes, official statements of ethical standards generated by teachers’ associations and unions, governmental departments, accreditation bodies, and other institutionalized extensions of the profession that may seek to inspire and guide them in their daily practice. The participants pointed out that the desired outcomes from such expected codes of conduct are that they should be able to understand the parameters and frameworks utilized in the ethical reasoning of professional issues. Such codes would thus help to increase knowledge, professional skills, and a sense of true professionalism. Like Higgings (2003), the present study has suggested that these codes can then demonstrate some trust in the profession to make good moral decisions in the interests of students and society and they provide shared core values as points of reference and guidelines for consideration. However, the present study is in full agreement that formal codes are in no way the defining measure of the teacher’s ethical role. The moral and ethical responsibilities and realities of teaching far exceed what may be inscribed in any code, and to restrict one’s view of ethics in teaching to the concept of codes, laws, and standards is severely limiting. The code and guidelines cannot, of course, cover every situation where teachers are required to make a decision. In practice, deciding on the right course of action will often involve weighing up competing priorities and responsibilities. Most significantly here, it is not just the importance of the codes of conduct in contributing to the problem-solving of the dilemmas created by the changing contemporary cultural context of VET teachers’ work, but the fact that the identifying participants all felt completely ill prepared to deal with such dilemmas.

Storying the Dilemmas

Analysis of the stories participants told to explain their experience of the dilemmas suggested that they saw four categories of such explanations: (a) changing immigration rules, (b) changing funding requirements, (c) changing the culture and philosophy of RTOs, and (d) inadequate teacher preparation. The four influences impacted across the four dilemmas. The present study pointed to the effects of this combination of neo-liberal, neo-conservative and managerial tendencies on participants by giving a voice to them. All too often, analyses of globalization and the complex combination of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism remain on a meta-theoretical level, disconnected from the actual lived realities of a real teaching institution and the teachers. Many of the studies on contextual factors treat the context as a backdrop to the research by isolating influencing factors from actual teaching (Bradley, 2008, 2010; Dakopoulou, 2009; Jones & Coleman, 2005). The present study has provided insights into how these contextual factors influenced participants’ practice. In other words, the way these contextual factors affected their beliefs and practices was explored empirically in the
experiences of teaching staff. At the heart of many participants’ frustration was a sense of withdrawal, summed up expressively by one striking excerpt: *I do not want to be in this environment, ethics and business (education) do not go well together.* Such intensity of scholarly debate and demonstration among teachers and the general public rarely features in our national context, but these participants’ responses to teacher dilemmas in VET have some reflections of them summarized in the present study. In this respect, their professional narratives have made the reader aware of the social-economic changes that have been taking place in VET in Australia, which have led to a critical discourse of changes in social values and thus the need for educational reform.

**Changing Immigration Rules**

The federal government allows international students graduating from Australian colleges and universities to apply for permanent migration onshore, that is, without first returning to their home country (Neerup et al, 2011). This is done partly to address skills shortages and partly to give Australian colleges and universities an edge over their rivals in the competitive international education market (DIAC, 2010). However, the participants reported that the frequent and erratic changes in the immigration rules removing most needed skills from the SOL creates a panic environment where many RTOs respond in an agile manner to market change by offering discounts on course fees and the option of flexible duration, and educational courses are marketed like a product. Thus, students were treated as consumers. The participants also suggested that RTOs’ strategies, such as reducing the length of a course and slashing fees to combat the adverse effects of the removal of a course from the SOL, serve a dual purpose. According to a majority of the participants of the present study, with the immigration visa requirements constantly changing, students have been encouraged to see studies more as a form of visa generation and less as a career option. The changes in the immigration rules and policies give opportunities to those students looking out for a cheaper course as a means to stay in Australia and to the colleges seeking sufficient student numbers. While the purpose of a student visa is to undertake study in Australia, such changes are seen by students wanting to work in Australia as an opportunity. Thus they keep enrolling in the courses which are discounted and work for unlimited hours.

The participants also reported that the migration policy changes meant they took on the challenge of catering for the vocational and learning needs of international students who are unlikely to remain permanently in Australia or participate in the Australian labour market, but are supposed to return and apply what they have learnt from their VET courses in their home
country’s industries. Therefore, what counts as relevant vocational education to international students and as meaningful learning experiences with the presence of international students needs to be revisited.

**Changing Funding Requirements**

Karmel (2004, 2011) argued that VET’s defining feature was not its occupation-specific training or its qualification levels, but its different funding and regulatory arrangements and teaching and learning styles. The rollout of contestable funding has assumed that a competitive market will deliver better quality and better value outcomes by fostering more provider competition, lower fees, and more innovative course design and delivery.

Berthelsen (2007) and Forward and Scroggie (2015) argued that tertiary education sector has faced with a series of transformations, from mandating rules and regulations for registered training organizations (RTOs) to specifying funding standards for VET colleges to compete for funds, based on accountability and performance. The participants in the study reported that with competition for funding in the market, most RTOs inevitably chased money from government funding, exploiting gaps in the rules. For example, the participants reported that there was no parallel federal obligation that the RTOs achieve high rates of student success, such as completion or job placement. In response, governments change the rules and funding rates to limit exploitation and manage the budget. The entire sector then has to adjust to the changes, so the system becomes driven by the business philosophy of the RTOs. The participants reported, however, that this instability which flows from the design of the system comes at a cost. RTOs worry that rules and funding levels may change on short notice and RTOs then try to maximize the profit they can while the system works in their favour. This lack of certainty also discourages working with integrity and commitment to a high-quality provision that would be of long-term benefit to students and the industry.

To keep RTOs accountable, government applies pressure by demanding compliance (Grace, 2005). However, the participants expressed the view that external inspections appeared to be more focused on having paperwork in order than on student learning or teacher performance, whereas the participants tended to focus more on internal accountability, and policymakers focused more on external accountability. Such a compliance culture established a working culture that allowed RTOs to attune themselves in and against the audit culture, resulting in the fabrication of activities designed to meet targets with which participants do not readily identify,
or involving rule breaking and contestation among penny-pinching RTOs negotiating contradictions where they complied with audit cultures only when accounted.

**Changing Culture and Philosophy of RTOs**

Hamdhan (2013) argued about the growing controversy about the difference in educational purpose between TAFE and private RTOs. The controversy identified that TAFE was established to provide services to address public need hence TAFE determines the purpose of education, while in the private RTOs, having no requirement to meet public need, are free to offer any programs that will enhance profitability, hence the purpose of education is determined by customer demand. The implication is that traditional institutions aim for quality, while the for-profits aim for profit. However, the participants reported that due to the rollout of the contestable funding arrangements and frequent cutbacks in public funding for RTOs, financial responsibility and accountability were transferred to individual RTOs and the competition that arose from the establishment of quasi-markets encouraged RTOs to differentiate themselves from one another. RTOs, whether private and TAFE have turned to business tendencies that have an imperative to maximize financial returns. In particular, TAFE and private RTOs both compete in the full-fee paying student market, for both domestic and international students.

Lipman (2004) and Rizvi and Lingard (2006) pointed out that the market forces have contributed to a universal shift from social democratic to neo-liberal orientations in thinking about educational purposes and governance, resulting in policies of corporatization, privatization, and commercialization on the one hand, and in a greater demand for accountability on the other. The participants of this study argued that the provision of economized services diverted RTOs who were traditionally grounded in providing quality services to a contemporary philosophy of competition by occupying a new base in the value stream centered on profit-maximization and customer-focused promotion, thus creating a dilemma of competing paradigms. The dilemma of competing paradigms of education and business was seen by the participants as being driven by the process of revenue maximization as an adaptive survival response to a decline in traditional revenue sources; they referred to strategies and processes employed by VET providers to generate revenues from other sources and cost-cutting measures.

The trend towards greater competition and private provision has had implications for the workforce, which has had to adjust to this new, more competitive environment (Yu & Oliver, 2015). Such practices placed the participants in the conflict between meeting their moral
commitments as teachers and the expectations of their employing RTOs. The participants argued that the values underpinning the business paradigm were in contrast with the traditional understanding of education as a public good which focused on fostering equality, fairness, and service. They believed that holding on to a competitive edge by an RTO meant the students were more often seen merely as clients. Out of financial necessity, RTOs were compelled to reduce costs and maintain facilities and essential instructional programs, while remaining accountable for student outcomes. To survive the dwindling resources, RTOs often downsized, resulting in casualization of staff and the elimination of educational programs.

The participants reported that the language of business and competition had taken over quality education and services. However, the random application of principles of business in education has raised fundamental ethical and moral questions about the long-term impacts of such services to the students, RTOs, the VET industry, and society. The question of the appropriateness of competitive strategies arises because competition displayed unethical features that were radically different from those encountered in traditional sectors of the economy. The participants maintained that this emphasis on short-term gain all too often neglected the long-term well-being of employees, the community, society, and the environment. The participants reported the reciprocal relationship between job satisfaction and the RTO climate. They concluded that the RTOs who forgo the fundamental basics on core ethical values sacrificed organizational productivity under the influence of immoral competitiveness, thus affecting teacher morale.

The participants felt the need for considering the ethical implications of the commercialization of education in VET to be addressed and debated so that planning processes could take account of them. The present study found that vocational education meant more than a business to the participants. Although increasingly, VET education shares the concerns of business to compete to gain a market proportion of international students, it must still be accountable for fair, just, and socially responsible practices. The participants indicated that VET institutes, in return for the ability to conduct business, owe society a duty to demonstrate social responsibility in their actions.

**Inadequate Teacher Preparation**

Considering the huge expectations placed on VET practitioners, the participants felt challenged that they were qualified at a relatively low level – predominantly TAE. There was a feeling among many respondents (but not all) that higher level teaching qualifications were
desirable; there was also a general dismissal of the TAE qualification as being in itself poorly delivered. The present study suggested that overall this qualification does not provide a platform for the development of a teacher who could be positioned to meet the challenges of the VET reform agenda, engage VET communities, and promote quality and collaborative learning environments for diverse students. The finding is similar to previous research (Mitchell et al., 2006; Robertson, 2009; Simons & Smith, 2008; Smith & Keating, 2003) which suggested that the TAE showed a lack of attention to the unique demands of learning within particular industries and to ways of embracing the diversity of learners in VET.

Also, the participants reported that they never participated in formal induction programs during their first year. The participants in the present study experienced high levels of stress and uncertainty without induction practices to ease the challenges of teaching in VET. They considered induction programs as an important part of helping teachers, as other researchers had found (Day et al., 2005; Day et al., 2007; Flores & Day, 2006; Hellwig, 2006). No induction before teaching, and employment contingent on having the TAE – which did not prepare the participants to teach or to face the challenges of the contemporary work environment of the RTO – appeared to have created tension in their teaching experiences. Ongoing professional development for VET educators is of particular importance given the range of pre-service and in-service knowledge, teaching experience, diversity of qualifications, and sometimes, the insufficient training given to new VET teachers. Also, the present study suggested that the opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD) were unintentionally hampered by those with organizational influence (management) who did not always seem to support participants in helping them find solutions to their problems.

Another important issue identified by the present study was the lack of teacher awareness about unions where participants could confront their problems and seek support. The participants pointed to the absence of a separate union for VET teachers in separate faculties, all of whom came under the umbrella of the Australian Education Union. They further pointed out that competitive pressures had caused a breakdown in traditional forms of collective bargaining, a decline in union power, and the adoption of new practices and policies to manage labour. This lack of confidence in participants’ voice became a constraint on how much attention was given to their development and support, particularly in light of the workload of the participants who were typically responsible for multiple roles besides teaching.

The Use of Dilemmas as an Approach to Illuminating Moral Experience
The present study has demonstrated the value of using dilemmas as an interpretative tool in the understanding of the ethical dimensions of teacher experiences. The present study focused on interpreting perceived challenges and concerns of VET teachers through the dilemma framework, even though that was not specifically used in cueing the participants. Hence, the present study makes an important contribution to the knowledge in this field by assembling descriptive accounts of: (1) how the participants came to know their knowledge of dilemmas, (2) how they used that knowledge or theoretical frameworks within the contexts where they teach, and (3) how they made sense of and reconfigured their decision-making practices. It examines the processes that they use in resolving complex dilemmas and the extent to which their decisions are influenced by their ethical positions, the values and ethics of their colleagues, their RTOs, and the norms or codes established by the institutions within which they work and the VET industry within which they are located. The information gathered in this way is of central value for teacher preparation as it can be used to assess the professional development of teachers and to design learning opportunities to support and foster teacher understanding of dilemmas.

Researchers have approached the concept of dilemmas faced by school teachers and leaders and university teachers from many different perspectives. A majority of those studies have explained dilemmas as challenging situations requiring decisions. For example, Nussbaum's (1986) study of conflicts in the professional lives of 46 secondary school teachers revealed several interconnected dimensions: that responding to students created what teachers termed a moral dilemma, specifically in determining whether a teacher should respond (Lyons et al., 1986). The Mastery in Learning Project, a model for restructuring 26 American high schools (Livingston & Castle, 1992), concluded that dilemmas arose when choices were made from problematic alternatives where any decision comprised cherished values. Tirri and Husu (2002) examined dilemmas faced by 26 early childhood teachers and discovered that the most significant was identifying exactly what constituted a child's “best interests, an issue noted to be of intense debate (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007; Eyal et al., 2009). Millwater et al., (2004) referred to dilemmas faced by pre-service teachers during their practicum as the issue between rights of the group versus the rights of individuals, and the child's right to confidentiality versus the system's requirement to report information. In Helton and Ray's (2005) study of ethical dilemmas experienced by teachers in schools and universities, the ethical dilemma was recognized as arising from law and policies, and tensions within professional ethics.
Cranston et al. (2006) defined ethical dilemmas as decisions “that require a choice among competing sets of principles, often in complex and value-laden contexts” (p. 137). Talanquer et al.’s (2007) study on teaching dilemmas conceptualized dilemmas as problem spaces created in the minds of teachers as they engage in the practice of teaching (p. 401). Ehrich et al., (2011) study of dilemmas on school leaders interpreted ethical dilemmas as confronting public sector managers as they endeavour to choose options amongst competing sets of principles, values, and beliefs.

While previous research has explored school teachers’ and university academics’ experiences of challenges and dilemmas inherent in their work, this aspect has been under-researched in the VET sector. Hence the present study makes an important contribution to the knowledge in this field. This research extends understanding about the experiences of VET teachers when teaching diverse students in the contemporary cultural context of VET.

Also, while a majority of the previous studies have interpreted the notion of a dilemma as one requiring solutions, only a few studies have defined what constitutes a dilemma for teachers. The conceptualization developed for the present study has addressed that concern and drawn a clear conception of a dilemma. In the present study, the notion of a moral dilemma was that of an existential conflict arising from either disparate intrinsic moral imperatives or tensions between intrinsic moral imperatives and extrinsic imperatives or pressures. Intrinsic moral imperatives constitute learned, including traditional, ways of being and doing: identifying the relative value both of states-of-affairs, including the desired ends of one’s actions (learning goals and outcomes in the present case), and of the means for attaining those valued ends (through teaching activities in the present case). Extrinsic imperatives or pressures constitute redefined, including reformed, ways of being and doing: identifying the revenue maximization value of the states-of-affairs, including the desired ends of one’s actions (enrolling and passing of students in the present case), and the means for attaining those valued ends (through a prescriptive approach imposed on the participants in the present case). Such dilemmas were generated by changes in the contemporary cultural context of VET teaching: that of conflict generated from tensions between what one (intrinsically) understands that one should do in a particular situation and what one feels impelled to do by extrinsic imperatives or pressures from changed circumstances in the contemporary cultural context of VET, creating (extrinsic) pressure for action in conflict with participants’ understanding of their traditional, intrinsic moral commitments or imperatives as teachers. The present study has closely examined how features of participants’ personal characteristics, pre-service teacher preparation, or length of teaching experience interact with the context of the RTO.
The present study, therefore, contributes by exploring what current dilemmas underpin VET teachers’ practice, then by examining how their intrinsic beliefs and extrinsic pressures influenced their practice and, finally, by illuminating how the participants construct their beliefs and practice within decision-making. Having clarified the notion of a dilemma in this way, this research analysis drove a major in-depth engagement, teasing out the extrinsic imperatives that form the dilemmas.
Chapter 11: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This study has investigated the ethical impact of changes in the cultural context of vocational education teaching in Australia on the work of teachers. The study is divided into 11 chapters. The first chapter reviewed the background of the study. The second chapter reviewed the literature about teaching and learning in a culturally diverse context, and identified research gaps relating to teachers’ conceptions and perceptions of teaching dilemmas. The chapter also explored the strategies used by VET teachers in addressing ethical dilemmas encountered in their work as teachers. The third chapter described the research methods used to gather and analyze data. The fourth through ninth chapters presented the findings of the study: the four identified dilemmas, their impacts on the participants, and the participants’ responses to them. The 10th chapter discussed those findings in relation to the pertinent literature. This final chapter is set out in five parts. The first part outlines the outcomes of the study. The second part offers recommendations for VET policy and practice arising from the study. The contributions of the study to knowledge in the field are then summarized. Limitations of the study are then noted. The last part of the chapter discusses the implications of the study for further research.

Outcomes of the Study

The findings of teachers’ experiences of teaching diverse students in contemporary VET differ markedly from those described in the VET literature to date. While previous research has explored school teachers and university academics’ experiences of challenges and dilemmas inherent in their work, teacher dilemmas have been under-researched in the VET sector. VET in Australia in recent decades has been subject to a range of major policy reforms in response to globalized pressures for it to become more effective, efficient, and competitive in its responsiveness to consumer demand. Those policy reforms have been noted to date as raising significant ethical challenges for teachers in the sector. There is, though, a dearth of research-based knowledge of how those challenges are being experienced, interpreted, explained, and responded to by the teachers themselves and how the teachers see the challenges as impacting on them. The present study attended to this missing lens, as it explored VET teacher participants’ perspectives of the ethical dilemmas experienced in their daily work, by identifying the tensions between competing values.
The study has developed an understanding of how VET teachers in Australia experienced, interpreted, explained, and responded to the ethical challenges raised by changes in the contemporary cultural context of their work and what they saw as being the impact of those challenges on them as teachers in the sector. To understand the dilemmas faced by VET teachers, this qualitative exploratory study responded to the research question: How do VET teachers address ethical dilemmas encountered in their work as teachers? The study used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate the experiences of 18 VET teachers, six from TAFE and 11 from private VET RTOs, one working in both. The participants varied in age, gender, subject area, and length of work history in the organization.
Figure 11.1. Conceptualization of dilemmas.
The key findings of the study as depicted in Figure 11.1 were the identified importance of four common dilemmas, those of responding flexibly to heightened student diversity, limiting educational engagement, constraining teacher responsiveness, and manipulating learning assessment. Each was seen as being created by tensions between what participants (intrinsically) understood that they should do in a particular situation and what they felt impelled to do by extrinsic imperatives or pressures from changed circumstances in the contemporary cultural context of VET. The extrinsic imperatives were identified from the ethical challenges attributed by the teachers to changes in that cultural context, each dilemma being defined by a small number of such challenges particular to it, with a total of 13 challenges emerging across the four dilemmas. The dilemmas drew from a unique set of drivers and circumstances as the participants tended to externalize the causes of their dilemmas, rather than seeing them as an integral part of living and working in a constantly changing world. Analysis of the stories that participants’ told to explain their experience of the dilemmas suggested that they saw four categories of such explanations: changing immigration rules, changing funding requirements, changing culture and philosophy of RTOs, and inadequate teacher preparation. The four influences impacted across the four dilemmas.

The dilemma of responding flexibly to heightened student diversity was seen by the participants as being driven by the enrollment of an unmanageable diversity of students with differing skills which conflicted with their moral commitments as teachers. The participants reported that to compete for enrolments of such an expanded population of students with different expectations, RTOs were being pushed to respond to the demands varying from offering flexible attendance and altering student intake dates to allowing students to enroll at any time during the course and offering courses to students without basic literacy and prerequisite skills. Within that dilemma, there emerged two challenges: the challenge of heightened student diversity and the challenge of demands for teaching flexibly. The challenge of heightened student diversity was the difficulties in managing the increasing diversity of students enrolled in a class and a particular attention being given to the group of underperforming vulnerable students. The challenge of demands for teaching flexibly was the difficulties over the lack of control of the composition of the student group in their class. The participants pointed out that it was challenging to teach in the absence of any knowledge of the flexibility offered to their students and with students acting in a flexible way.
The dilemma of limiting educational engagement was the dilemma faced by the participants in covering the course content with the diverse students in limited time. This dilemma was caused by an existential conflict arising from the expectations of participants of covering the course content and ensuring that training delivery produced skilled graduates and the intrinsic moral imperative of providing quality education in a limited time. Within that dilemma emerged three challenges: the challenge of reduced course time, the challenge of the recognition of prior learning, and the challenge of online delivery. The participants experienced the challenge of reduced course delivery time while choosing between teaching for understanding and teaching to demonstrate enough understanding to be qualified as a competent student. The participants also reported the challenge of enrolling more students in recognizing their prior learning and providing RPL without enough evidence. The study pointed to several challenges faced by the participants in the expanded use of online learning as the volume of training and mode of online delivery was perceived to be inadequate to achieve expected student competency and outcomes.

The dilemma of constraining teacher responsiveness was the dilemma faced by the participants due to prescriptive conditions laid down by their RTO relating to administration work, use of resources, and out-of-field teaching units, thus constraining their responsiveness to students’ needs. The dilemma was caused by an existential conflict arising from tensions between the extrinsic imperative of administration work required to be compliant for funding taking away their time, the lack of resources to teach in the limited time, and the intrinsic moral imperatives of providing learning opportunities to diverse students. Within that dilemma, four challenges emerged: the challenge of accountability requirements, the challenge of limited resources, the challenge of teacher casualization, and the challenge of out-of-field teaching. The challenge of accountability requirements was the excessive focus on compliance requirements thus limiting teachers in attending to the needs of diverse students. The challenge of limited resources was how to provide education with limited or outdated resources to the students. The challenge of teacher casualization was characterized as featuring the growing use of temporary workers employed on an as-needed basis to perform specific jobs in their RTOs. The challenge of out-of-field teaching was the difficulties faced by the participants in teaching subjects outside their expertise which sometimes included overseas teaching.
The dilemma of manipulating learning assessment was the dilemma faced by the participants who were pressured to pass students whom they felt were not competent. Within this dilemma, four challenges emerged: the challenge of evidencing learning, the challenge of authentic learning assessment, the challenge of plagiarism, and the challenge of learner support in assessment. The study found that the participants experienced a variety of pressures associated with assessment. The assessment and record-keeping requirements of the RTO were a major focus of the concerns for the participants because of the conflicting demands they made upon them to pass all students. In such a context, an important emergent issue for the participants was to maintain a sense of responsibility in passing plagiarized or non-authentic assessments. The study also found that participants’ job security relied heavily on student evaluations and feedback. If a participant consistently failed a significant number of students or insisted on conformity to specified standards, then they were often not reappointed. The challenge of evidencing learning was the challenge faced by the participants in passing assessment without adequate evidence. The challenge of plagiarism was the difficulties faced when the participants were asked to prove plagiarized assessment, in the absence of which proof they were asked to pass the students. The challenge of authentic learning assessment was the difficulties faced by the participants in passing unauthenticated work, particularly for online assessments. The challenge of learner support in the assessment was the challenge faced by the participants in overlooking the support provided to students in passing the assessment. The participants reported that in their zest to pass assessments, their employing RTOs sometimes employed a specialist to help students in writing their assessment. While this support could be valuable, help was sometimes misused in the sense that the assignments were indirectly outsourced to such specialists.

The identified impacts of the dilemmas on the participants were all seen by them as being negative: disappointment, confusion, anxiety, discomfort, and distress. The participants spoke of their disappointment at the economic focus of their employing RTOs, treating students as customers. They were let down by their lack of support by their employing RTOs in attending to diverse students’ needs. The participants reported that their work was especially confusing and challenging because of changes they saw in students with decreased motivation, misguided intentions for enrolling in a course, and declining respect for RTOs and participants. Participants reported that wanting value for money by students was an inevitable by-product of a market-driven system that actively
positions students as consumers where they hunt for a good bargain for an educational product. Worries and anxiety were immediate responses of the participants to an uncertain future in a casualized work culture. The participants found that they had limited choice as responding to students’ needs could lead to creating resentment with management and losing their job. The participants spoke of their discomfort in talking to management about the unsupportive working environment of the RTOs. Changing trust relations with management were found to be shaping the social relations within their employing RTO and impacting negatively on teachers’ physical and emotional well-being and their collegial professional relations. The participants suffered distress with an array of challenges but were powerless to do anything about them, which made them frustrated and stressed and hence impacted on their personal well-being. The excerpts from interviews revealed that VET teacher professional identity was continuously mediated through their way of being a teacher and their way of seeing the environment in which their professional practice was embedded.

Three types of response on the part of participants to their experience of the dilemmas were evident: marginalizing the extrinsic imperatives through standing by their intrinsic moral commitments, compromising those commitments to accommodate the extrinsic imperatives, and appealing for ethical training. The participants who stood by their moral commitments responded by defending their values based on the social equity angle, which to a large extent has underpinned the traditional professional culture. The study revealed that the participants had different reasons for making decisions. The interview data pointed to two dimensions of this response: working overtime to help vulnerable students and providing reasonable adjustments to help pass vulnerable students. The participants felt morally obligated to provide extra support to a student as otherwise the students might struggle to understand the concepts and might not get the best out of the course. A key reason for participants’ responses to reasonable adjustment was a renewed commitment to students and action to address a core concern with social justice, which was in contrast to neo-liberal policy. The participants responding this way found it obligatory to offer greater flexibility in training. Compromising their moral commitment, as a response, was embraced by the participants who had adopted the values of neo-liberal policy. The participants pointed out that the survival imperative made it necessary for RTOs to adopt new business strategies. However, findings suggested that regardless of their attitude to marketization and competition, most
participants were influenced by their RTOs’ attempts to stay competitive. Increasingly frequently, their employment was directly dependent on the success of recruitment and assessment. The participants who were initially committed to student outcomes shifted their commitment to the RTO out of fear of losing a wage. The participants reported that they experienced dilemmas while deciding the best course of action when the rights of students conflicted with the rights of the employing RTOs. Some of the participants were ambiguous about what constituted ethical practice in the contemporary work environment.

**Recommendations for VET Policy and Practice**

The findings of the study suggest a number of tentative recommendations for VET policy and practice in Australia, especially regarding ethics training, induction and mentoring, professional development, stronger guidelines on change management by government, and better change management by RTOs. These five recommendations are as follows.

1. **Ethics Training**

The negativity of the identified impacts and the disparate responses to the dilemmas suggest the need for supporting teachers in better managing ethical conflicts. The challenges presented by each of the dilemmas and the participants’ explanations of the dilemmas suggest themselves as points for attention in any such intervention. Foremost among the implications of the study for such intervention is the need for effective teacher training in applied ethics and for better teacher support in their understanding and management of the challenges presented by extrinsic imperatives. The instruction on ethical practice needs to be grounded in the realities of VET teachers’ life where case studies and other scenarios from research studies can be used to build understandings and ethical insights. This should be followed by teachers’ conversations about competing perspectives, group and individual reflections, and the collective and personal reconsiderations of value positions, depending on situations associated with the teaching profession and ending up with a justified decision based on a code of professional ethics or ethical theories or a combination of these two. This type of training is more likely to help teachers define fundamental judgements for analyzing their actions within ethical situations and would assist in refining their role as faculty of high moral character. Using a Kohlbergian framework of moral
development, the study suggests that ethics education can make a difference, particularly with respect to measures of moral reasoning. Such ethics education can include components of moral dilemma discussion, case studies, personal reflection, or analytic journals in professional training programs that can provide the support needed to facilitate moral stage development. Advancing the scholarship of teaching in ethics education has as its first goal to develop real professionals, and as its second goal to develop good professionals who work collectively to advance the public good.

2. Induction and Mentoring

The participants in the study reported that they were not confident that they could provide quality education with all the complexities of the job. Thus, a recommendation arising from this study is that increased support for VET teachers by their employing institutions, and improved extensive induction programs which could include one-to-one mentoring, would appear to provide better support. Programs that are more comprehensive are also more efficient in retaining teachers. While the focus on promoting well-being in RTOs is often directed to students, it is also important to consider the morale and well-being of staff who have a significant impact on student well-being. The study revealed teacher isolation in the absence of ongoing interaction among teachers of all experience levels, suggesting the positive correlation between teachers’ satisfaction and continuous interaction amongst colleagues. Strong and effective professional communities among teachers enable them to respond to the diverse needs of today’s students while upholding high standards for their performance. Rather than leaving teachers alone to cope with demands they cannot meet, such interactions and mentoring should be encouraged.

3. Professional Development

The findings suggest the need for teachers to continually update themselves to adapt to and respond to the challenges of contemporary VET. The study recommends a process of continual professional development of teachers at all fronts: intellectually, socially, and morally. There is an evident need for teachers to voice concerns with management to develop their knowledge and practice of suitable pedagogies for teaching diverse student groups. Professional development should involve teachers in the identification of what they need to learn and in the development of the learning experiences in which they will be involved. Once RTOs realize the professional
developmental needs of teachers, more programs and initiatives can be put into place to boost teacher morale and, in turn, raise student achievement. Advancing the development of the individual is critical not only to the professional’s one-on-one relationship with students but perhaps more importantly to the very survival of the profession.

4. **Stronger Guidelines on Change Management by Government**

The challenges of competition and strategies to maximize student enrolments have taken dominance in shaping the ideology, behaviours and culture of RTOs. The study reported that the approach of treating the student as a customer presumed by the business model of vocational education remains antithetical to student learning. The VET sector needs to ensure a more settled and equitable environment for learning and teaching. This can be achieved by lessening policy change and balancing institutional and commercial imperatives. The State and Australian Governments should encourage funding based on proved performance, where funding is linked to the numbers of students completing and graduating successfully, rather than the numbers being taught. Such funding would lead to constructive competition which in turn would contribute to quality service provisions. It is essential for governments to find ways of evaluating the quality of the increased activity of RTOs crossing borders physically and virtually. Further policy development seeking greater transparency and accurate, objective and up-to-date information for transnational education providers which corresponds to the needs of learners as well as other stakeholders should be obtained, enabling and empowering students and teachers to make informed choices at all stages from entry to employment, including for mobility purposes. Auditors should be adequately trained to understand the quality assessment processes and also should have discipline-specific expertise. Such an approach might lessen some of the troublesome and exclusionary consequences of a neo-liberal market culture. Poorly governed and administered RTOs deliver low-quality training outcomes that damage the industry’s reputation. There is, therefore, the need for a holistic rebranding of education. The frequent changes to the policies connecting education and immigration cause turbulence and conflict that increase the costs of any significant change. The educational system needs to be divorced from the politicization of the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection. The findings also recommend that frequent changes to the policies be avoided. The study also
recommends the importance of policy reforms taking into account the experiences and informed views of teachers. The impact of the dilemmas here identified on the quality of teaching and student learning (and hence also employment outcomes) is surely an impact that should be considered if policy reform is to produce the sort of learning, employment, and productivity results that are driving it.

5. Better Change Management by RTOs

The findings of this study suggest that the focus of the RTOs has shifted from meeting the needs of students and industry and fulfilling the moral purpose of education for the public good, to one focused on income generation and the mass production of graduates. The participants’ experiences suggest that the current standards have not led to the delivery of quality, job-ready graduates with the necessary skills required by industry. RTOs should develop a strategy capable of daily transforming and reacting to change, at the same time remaining true to their main mission, as well as being professionally and socially responsible. Student outcome is a fundamental responsibility of RTOs and must not be left to the interplay of market forces. Striving to satisfy student desires is valuable for corporate interests in a capitalist market, but it is not valuable for education, which seeks instead to challenge and cultivate the desires of students through critical thinking and to give consideration to the public good.

The factor that greatly enhanced the participants’ experience of dilemmas in the study was institutional culture and practicing values that affected the value set of teachers. Thrupp and Hursh (2006) pointed out that organizational culture can sometimes become quite dominant, influencing decisions and actions taken to deal with ethical dilemmas. A strongly autocratic, hierarchical organization can cause project managers and team members to circumvent controls, resulting in ethical transgressions that can in part provide an excuse for unethical decisions and actions.

The finding of the study that the market-orientated ideology created a much more complex culture support the argument of Bernstein (2004) that social justice and a competitive ethos do not normally work towards the same goals. As pointed by Ehrich, Kimber, Cranston, and Starr (2011), the competitive and individualistic values that are underpinning higher education are similar to those embedded in VET RTOs but are now coming to be questioned. However, fiscal and monetary constraints are likely to exert
familiar restrictions on any redistributive initiatives. In other words, when finance gets
tighter, people are likely to fight more strongly for their own corner.

The participants indicated that VET meant more than a business to them. The
findings suggested that although increasingly VET education shares the concerns of
business to compete, to gain market share of international students, it must still be
accountable for fair, just and socially responsible practices.

The participants indicated that VET institutes, in return for the ability to conduct
business, owe society a duty to demonstrate social responsibility in their actions. The
management of the RTO should be able to make a judgment about which course of action
is morally right or fair, thus choosing what Hester (2003) and Rest (1986, 1994) suggest
as giving priority to moral values above other personal values such that the intention to do
what is morally right is formed. Thus, the ethical culture of the RTO in return can create
what Preston, Samford, and Connors (2007) and Rest (1986) called moral motivation in
the sense that ethical values of the organization will motivate teachers to achieve goals
and guide their behavior. Recognizing the potential to do harm, knowing what is at stake
in a decision, Mahony (2009) believes, “might help teachers to feel more confident, less
confused, more focused in how they articulate their dilemmas” (p. 988).

Therefore, it is recommended that RTOs review their grounding statements from
time to time to determine whether their strategies remain consistent with the principles
and whether the guiding principles are encouraging effective strategy. The culture
followed and driven from the top down by the management is necessary to create an
environment to avoid ethical lapses. Management in the RTOs must create value systems
and lead by example, rewarding ethical behaviour and making commitments to all of
their stakeholders. Such work culture would promote greater accountability and a positive
work climate where students and teachers are more likely to be successful.

The above-mentioned recommendations may be used to provide a framework for
changes to alleviate teacher dilemmas faced in other VET jurisdictions responding to
similar globalizing imperatives. The recommendations are intended to have a positive
impact on the overall focus, effectiveness, and coherence of the VET system. Moreover,
these recommendations may also act as a catalyst for others to reflect on and pursue ways
of better articulating their knowledge of practice, thereby further contributing to shared
understandings of the pedagogy of teacher dilemmas.
The Contributions of the Study to Knowledge in the Field

This study makes both a theoretical and a pedagogical contribution to the subject of decision-making involving moral dilemmas by differentiating between the responses described here (refer to Figure 11.1), and by making it possible for teachers to re-examine their dilemmas and strategies.

This model extends beyond the ethical dilemmas VET teachers experience to more complex impacts and their response arising from dilemmas in particular circumstances. It outlines the nature of these dilemmas and their particular nature. It describes the conceptualization of dilemmas caused by the move from traditional to globalized formulation of the educational practice in VET. This is because the study found that ethics formed the basis of all dilemmas for the VET teacher participants. The figure emphasizes that the dilemmas, their impacts and implications on teachers are often inter-related.

In particular, the findings in this study provide an overview of the interrelationships of the ethics, values, and social responsibility of VET educators. Thus, these experiences can provide valuable insight for teachers in developing or accommodating their strategy. These discussions point out the complexity and the significance of making ethical decisions and particularly offer practical and insightful principles and suggestions to a wider population of VET teachers, providing them with further understanding of ethical impact on decision-making. The findings of this study that dilemmas can become helpful as a tool support the argument of Ehrich et al. (2011) that dilemmas for teachers can help in articulating their practice (since dilemmas represent core tensions), scrutinizing and examining held beliefs (since dilemmas provide a bridging between cognitions and actions), and making teaching perspectives explicit (since dilemmas denote orientations toward teaching practice). In this way, the understanding of dilemmas helps build a pedagogy of teacher education.

The enhanced understanding of teacher dilemmas and strategies provided by this research can be used in providing quality education as a catalyst for unleashing a plethora of lost ideas, missed opportunities, and an abundance of frustrations and unsolved problems in the VET workplace. The findings report that the paradigm of the social good of education has gradually been subjugated by profit and ambitious aims in VET. Finally, the findings raise the question of what constitutes ethical action when teachers face
challenges. At its core is a humbling appreciation of the moral complexities of teachers’ work, a fascination with both the good and bad experiences and actions of teachers, and for many, a commitment to the concept of teacher professionalism as defined by both a collective and individual sense of ethical responsibility. Hence, gaining a greater understanding of the multiple teacher challenges and dilemmas identified in the study may provide a basis for promoting more effective practices across VET.

This research has given VET teachers a voice. While exploring the different perspectives of VET teachers, the study discovered unreported dilemmas of teachers in vocational education. This thesis has engaged with vocational educators, their classroom experiences with students and the practices in which they engage in the institutions in which they teach. In this way, it has addressed the gap between theory and practice in the debate around providing quality vocational education. It has challenged the status quo of professionalism and reported the inconsistencies of the current work culture within which teachers are expected to provide student outcomes. Though in disguise, it awakens us to unstated values and makes us realize how frequently morals may have been modified and possibly even corrupted over time. Not only does this study on teacher experiences force us to rethink important concepts such as autonomy, but they also ask us to redefine and reframe other concepts such as social justice, equity, and quality education.

The findings of this study support several recommendations which are intended to have a positive impact on the overall focus, effectiveness, and coherence of the VET system. It is anticipated that this research into teacher dilemmas will help VET organizations contribute to the advancement of vocational education in Australia as both a service and an edu-business. Thus, enhanced understanding about VET teachers’ experiences will further the sustainability of VET institutions and the well-being of students and VET teachers.

Limitations of the Study

In interpreting and responding to the findings of this study, it must be recognized that it relies on a small and selective sample of VET teachers. The in-depth exploration of participant experiences that characterizes all phenomenological research unavoidably sacrifices the opportunity to draw on samples that would allow for generalizability from them to the population as a whole with any measure of statistical probability. The strength of studies such as this one lies, rather, in the way in which it reveals the
experiences of individual participants, sensitizing those who read and respond to the research findings to possibilities that may be further researched through more quantitative methodologies. For the moment, we can only claim that the results and implications here presented reflect the realities experienced by the identifying teachers. While they are indicative of more general possibilities, those indications require independent assessment.

Despite the limitations of this study, the ethical issues reported across the participants provide a reasonable framework for identifying the kinds of issues future teachers are likely to encounter and are likely to identify as ethical issues. Ethical dilemmas as perceived by the participants can be used to develop and implement an ethics curriculum that is relevant to pre-service VET teachers.

Implications of the Study for Future Research

The study pointed to the value of dilemmas as constructs through which to generate knowledge of ethical conflicts arising from contextual changes. It highlighted the significance of those conflicts to VET teachers involved in the study. It helped in understanding how VET teachers in Australia experienced, interpreted, explained, and responded to the ethical challenges raised by changes in the contemporary cultural context of their work and what they saw as being the impact of those challenges on them as teachers in the sector. While the research reported here provides pointers to the nature of those dilemmas, by its phenomenological nature, it does not provide any quantification of them. Such quantification may, perhaps, become the focus of future research.

While the extrinsic imperatives – and hence the challenges for educational action – identified in this study may be expected to vary across educational and policy contexts, the dilemmas themselves, of which they are a part, may well be more stable. Therein lies an argument for further research to examine the extent to which the findings of this study may be applied to other educational sectors and contexts where policy changes of a similar nature are being implemented.

Given the important responsibilities assigned to the teachers and the complexity and problems faced by them, this study identified the abject failure of the codes of conduct in guiding participants’ response to those dilemmas. There are still many undefined grey areas that exist within ethical codes, and the research reported here adds
to the imperative for further research and development on the questions of what it means to be a morally responsible agent in contemporary workplaces and of how workers may be assisted in learning to so act. As Bourdieu (2002) reminds us, one of the most important activities scholars can engage in during this time of economic rationalism and imperial neo-conservatism is to analyze critically the production and circulation of these discourses and their effects on the lives of so many people. This study would urge us to take this role even more seriously than we have in the past.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation Letter to Potential Research Participants

Study Title: Ethical Dilemmas Faced by VET Teachers in Times of Rapid Change

Dear ____,

My name is Sonal Nakar. I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the Griffith University, conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree and I would like to invite you to participate.

The study is sponsored by Griffith University. It is an exploration of the strategies used by vocational education and training (VET) teachers in addressing ethical dilemmas encountered in their work as teachers. A brief project description is attached for your kind perusal.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview lasting about an hour to discuss the ethical dilemmas faced by you as teacher in your workplace. We will discuss one or more ethical dilemmas, what they means to you, how you understand them, what you to to address them and what other support might have helped you in doing so. The interview will be audio taped so that I can accurately transcribe, analyse, an reflect on what was said. They will then be destroyed.

Participation will be confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the Griffith University. The results of the study will be published in form of thesis at Griffith University, but your identity will not be revealed. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. Although you probably won’t benefit directly from participating in this study, we hope that others in the VET teachers in general will benefit by experience of the participants and consequent findings of the study. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at sonal.nakar@griffithuni.edu.au or my Principal supervisor; Professor Richard Bagnall at r.bagnall@griffith.edu.au if you have study related questions or problems. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the Griffith University at +61 7 3735 3817.
Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the number listed below to discuss participating. Sign the attached consent form and return it to me during the interview.

With kind regards,

(Signature)

Sonal Nakar

0403646746
Appendix B: Project Description and Informed Consent to Participants

Research project conducted by Sonal Nakar on the strategies employed by VET teachers in addressing the ethical dilemmas encountered by them in their teaching practice.

Dear Participant,

The following information has been compiled to enable you to be fully informed about the research study in which you have been invited to take part. It is important that you feel comfortable about your contribution and that the process takes place in an atmosphere of trust and transparency. If any aspect of it seems unclear, or should any matter of concern arise, please feel free to discuss it at any time. This document consists of 3 pages.

The following information pertains to the following study:

Title: The ethical dilemmas faced by Vocational Education and Training teachers in the times of rapid change

Purpose of the study:

The study aims to explore and describe the subjective experiences of the VET teachers. This study also aims to contribute to an existing body of research on teacher dilemmas by employing a different methodology and focussing on a not yet researched context of ethics in decision-making.

Procedures:

The process will consist of an interview. The researcher will interview each participant, separately and privately. You will be asked to reflect on your experience of dilemmas in decision-making in relation to your teaching as a VET teacher. You may talk about anything that comes to mind when you reflect on these experiences. You will be free to talk about these experiences in a way that is comfortable for you, and not to talk about anything with which you do not feel comfortable. The interview will be audio recorded.

The time required for the interview may vary, but is estimated to take 60 minutes.
Individual interviews will be scheduled according to each participant’s preference. Individual interviews will be analysed and themes will be extracted from each set of information.

You will be presented with a summary of the interview and the themes derived from your interview. You will be given the opportunity to comment (agree, disagree and elaborate) on the researcher’s preliminary analysis.

The aim is to complete the study within the year of 2016.

The results of the study will be reported on in the form of a research thesis. The data gathered will be safely stored for the duration of research and will be destroyed.

Risks:
No risks or discomforts are foreseen.

Benefits:
No specific benefits for participants are foreseen. No remuneration is given for participating.

Participants’ rights:
Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without fearing negative consequences. You should feel free to ask about any aspect of the study about which you are uncertain and need further clarification.

Confidentiality:
Be assured that all information that you provide will be treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality at all times. Fictitious names (pseudonyms) will be used and your identity will not be revealed. This will be done from the outset so that the pseudonym is used from the very first word that is written about your experience.

Documents in electronic format will be password protected, stored on external media (CD or DVD). Original documents will be also placed in a code-protected safe.

You have the right not to participate in this study. Furthermore, should you wish to withdraw at any stage, you may do so without consequence.

Thank you for being available for this research process.
Researcher: Sonal Nakar
Griffith University

I …………………………………………………………………..fully understand the nature of the research project and I am willing to take part in the process.

Signed at ……………on this ………day of…………………year……..

________________________
Participant
Appendix C: Participant Details and Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Interview Date and Duration</th>
<th>Age Range/Gender</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Casual/Permanent</th>
<th>Pvt/TAFE</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Industry expert or Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13.01.2016 / 100 minutes</td>
<td>50-60 M</td>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>RPL</td>
<td>TAE, Advance Dip of Management</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19.01.2016 / 45 minutes</td>
<td>65 M</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>TAE</td>
<td>Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.01.2016 / 60 minutes</td>
<td>40-50 F</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td></td>
<td>TAE, Studying Masters in Vocational Management</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.01.2016 / 40 minutes</td>
<td>50-60 M</td>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>TAE</td>
<td>Industry turned into Teacher/Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.01.2016 / 70 minutes</td>
<td>40-55 M</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Any subject given to him</td>
<td>TAE, Masters in Vocational Management</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.01.2016 / 60 minutes</td>
<td>50-60 M</td>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.01.2016 / 65 minutes</td>
<td>50-60 M</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Centre link-Life Skills</td>
<td>TAE, Linguistics</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.01.2016 / 55 minutes</td>
<td>35-50 M</td>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>TAE, Studying Masters in Vocational Management</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Interview Date and Duration</td>
<td>Age Range/Gender</td>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Casual/Permanent</td>
<td>Pvt/TAFE</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Qualification</td>
<td>Industry expert or Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>31.01.2016 / 60 minutes</td>
<td>35-50 M</td>
<td>Drake</td>
<td>Lead Teacher Permanent</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Rescue Training</td>
<td>TAE</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>31.01.2016 / 40 minutes</td>
<td>40-50 F</td>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Literacy and Numeracy, Work readiness</td>
<td>TAE, Bachelor in Vocational Education</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.02.2016 / 60 minutes</td>
<td>30-40 F</td>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>TAE, Master of Training and Development</td>
<td>Teacher and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.2.2016 / 55 minutes</td>
<td>30-45 F</td>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Project Management, Compliance Requirements of Company</td>
<td>TAE, Master of Training and Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>16.2.2016 / 45 minutes</td>
<td>40-55F</td>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>University Pathways</td>
<td>TAE</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.2.2016 / 90 minutes</td>
<td>60-65 F</td>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>TAE</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>24.2.2016 / 60 minutes</td>
<td>30-45 M</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>RPL</td>
<td>TAE</td>
<td>Industry expert turned Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>25.2.2016 / 60 minutes</td>
<td>40-55 F</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>TAE, Bachelor in Vocational Education</td>
<td>Teacher and Industry Expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>28.2.2016 / 70 minutes</td>
<td>35-50</td>
<td>Annabelle</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>TAFE (Left job)</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>TAE, Masters</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.3.2016 / 55 minutes</td>
<td>40-55 F</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>TAFE (made redundant)</td>
<td>LLN</td>
<td>TAE, Masters</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix D: Sample of Derived Themes from Dilemma of Manipulating Learning Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Themes</th>
<th>What sorts of ethical dilemmas do VET teachers now face in their workplaces?</th>
<th>How do they understand those dilemmas?</th>
<th>How do they address them?</th>
<th>How well equipped are they in addressing them?</th>
<th>What more might be done to assist them in doing so?</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue of Authenticity</td>
<td>How to pass student from Diploma of Business, when student doesn’t know simple business terminology like what profitability and action plan means but submit very well written assignment.</td>
<td>Students usually get assistance, either from other trainers or from friends or someone and just submit their assessment and pass. Such students could further enroll themselves in advance diploma of business. When such student with a diploma of business will go to apply for a job, saying that they have the dip of business, the participant fears that they don’t really know anything about business. Attendance not compulsory so not easy to judge who has done the assessment. Knowing that they might not be actually ready for a diploma if they have not done the assessment but a teacher cannot fail. The dilemma is offering them, issuing these diplomas when the students who are not writing their assignment or taking help might not</td>
<td>Dilemma whether to mark the assessment as competent or fail them and be responsible for being the reason for throwing the student out of Australia. Some students’ intention is to work in Australia and they just undertake the student visa for the purpose.</td>
<td>Discuss it (sometimes) with manager as to what would they like participant to do and that, how would they like him/her to approach. The participant prefers and tends to speak more with colleagues, about what their opinions are, and how they feel it. The teachers are hesitant to discuss it with their seniors because that makes it look like the one whose causing trouble.</td>
<td>Keep the check on the working hours of the students</td>
<td>As long as they are passing the assessments, which they are doing at home, they pass. So, anyone could be doing the assessment, who knows what is going on? (Jim) That's another ethical issue too we have now. People submitting stuff online. How do we know it is their work? (Renee) They think they are here to work and have a holiday, so they … leave study 'til the very last minute, or give it as little time as possible. And some of them obviously get around it. … They are working full-time and they can afford to get somebody</td>
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<td>Identified Themes</td>
<td>What sorts of ethical dilemmas do VET teachers now face in their workplaces?</td>
<td>How do they understand those dilemmas?</td>
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<td>How well equipped are they in addressing them?</td>
<td>What more might be done to assist them in doing so?</td>
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<td>the student as the student might argue that they have passed this assessment, so they are ready.</td>
<td>really confident in what they meant to be learning. At the same time realizing that the participant works for a company, and needs his/her job, so they have to do whatever the company, requires them to do even pass the student.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(James)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue of Evidence</td>
<td>How to pass student who has not demonstrated enough employability, and transferability skills. Teachers found themselves in a conflict of passing a student knowing that they were not actually ready to be deemed as competent.</td>
<td>Teachers reported their concern that some RTOs got away with providing as little evidence as possible. The evidence that was once required to evidence the assessment as meeting clients' needs, confirming competency, was replaced with providing little evidence that can be perceived as Dilemma of whether to assess with as little evidence that is required for audit or make thorough assessment of student competency in terms of skills.</td>
<td>On talking with management, they were persuaded by the RTO that the students who demonstrated very little evidence of understanding, would learn on the job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do I mark [an] assessment paper as satisfactory when I know that the student has not ... performed his work satisfactorily? But there is a fair bit of pressure to beat them out of the road [pressure to pass the incompetent assessment]. (John)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I think not directly but sometimes there were hints made in that direction. I</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identified Themes</td>
<td>What sorts of ethical dilemmas do VET teachers now face in their workplaces?</td>
<td>How do they understand those dilemmas?</td>
<td>How do they address them?</td>
<td>How well equipped are they in addressing them?</td>
<td>What more might be done to assist them in doing so?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>Whether to fail the assessment of the students who plagiarise, as it would mean failing 20 to 30 per cent of the 300 students and losing lot of money. Or instead, send a warning letter to students as it would just enough for compliance with ASQA. In the absence of proper understanding of the content by students, the teachers were concerned that the students could not transfer core ideas, knowledge, and skills to challenging tasks in a variety of contexts.</td>
<td>Copying from internet doesn’t prove to the participant that the student has understood the question. For participant, it is easier to send them letter rather than expelling them and losing revenue. Participant usually sends the warnings requesting the students to re-submit in their own writing, as this is being documented. Participant also mentions that even if the assignment is in simple English with</td>
<td>The students are given the Student Handbook at the beginning of the course where it laid out that plagiarism is not allowed. When the participant confront the management or bring it to their notice, the</td>
<td>Do I just pass it and they stay in the country or could I be the one leading them to be kicked out of Australia? So, it’s a bit of a dilemma or me, yeah because I feel sorry for them (Jim). But they’re coming here for a better life or whatever, and that’s their</td>
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<td>don’t think I was told, not by senior people but I think I was told by coworkers and we were sort of told that although this one – or something They need to pass these modules. So that there would be some in cash? I had to pass certain things or not give – for certain things. there was that pressure. (James)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Themes</td>
<td>What sorts of ethical dilemmas do VET teachers now face in their workplaces?</td>
<td>How do they understand those dilemmas?</td>
<td>How do they address them?</td>
<td>How well equipped are they in addressing them?</td>
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<td>Quotes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>mean losing students.</td>
<td>Also many of these students were international students as well. Their English was not that good that they can read policy on plagiarism. Hence a lot of them might not even know, they’re cheating or that it is not allowed.</td>
<td>spelling mistakes, that is fine as long as it is student’s writing.</td>
<td>management agrees that the participant is doing the right thing by sending letters to students who plagiarize. And, if students do, they should reference what they are writing.</td>
<td>opportunity of working and them coming to Australia (Natalie) We’ve got about 300 students, so when I am marking it I could say may be 20 or 30% of the students have copied work. So, if I was going to fail them or take away their enrolment because of copying, we could lose a lot of money. That’s Roughly about 30% is a large number (Robin) It depends on where students come from. If they are coming from China or something, where this might be acceptable, they might not even know it’s wrong, until they get a warning (Jim).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue of helping students to be Deemed Competent</td>
<td>Whether to pass the students under the pressures to find ways to pass such struggling students</td>
<td>Be a teacher who gives in to student demands and get good student feedback and promotion</td>
<td>For teachers’ personal gain, they pass students and try to be</td>
<td>Decision making for participant comes from his/her own belief, as to what’s right and wrong and</td>
<td>The focus needs to be more on education rather than student numbers,</td>
<td>They have enrolled candidates on some of the government-funded programs, which is a</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Themes</th>
<th>What sorts of ethical dilemmas do VET teachers now face in their workplaces?</th>
<th>How do they understand those dilemmas?</th>
<th>How do they address them?</th>
<th>How well equipped are they in addressing them?</th>
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<th>Quotes</th>
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<td>in order to preserve funding and reputation of the RTO or fail the students and get negative feedback from them and lose the job. Follow the rules or bend it to survive.</td>
<td>or be a bad trainer and lose job. Student might get angry if they are not happy with marks and give bad feedback that will make teachers lose their job. Private colleges depend more on student feedback to attract more student numbers.</td>
<td>funny and a good teacher. Differing perspectives on handling such challenge. Many of the teachers in VET has perspective that as long as the students pass the assessment, we have done our job as teachers. The trainers also believe that as long as they are providing the students financial stability in the future once they have the certificate, once they are also doing a good job.</td>
<td>speaking with colleagues who might have their views different from participant than student feedback Making teacher jobs more secure, not dependent on the number of students, the student feedback; VET environment less competitive between RTO’s by making a local government organizations work with private companies and providing government guidelines through RTO’s.</td>
<td>Certificate III, guarantee. They have notoriously low achievement rates, and what they are then doing is, they are completing the candidate’s portfolios for them, even though they have been absent for some considerable period of time. It is all about pulling down the funding. (Daniel) The more students you have, the more money you’re making and student feedback is very important for the teachers advancement as in promotion or retaining their jobs is affected. And that’s kind of deteriorating education (Mark). I’ve spoken with the other colleagues and their opinion is that our job is not to provide the learning, our job is to provide a certificate that leads them...</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Identified Themes</td>
<td>What sorts of ethical dilemmas do VET teachers now face in their workplaces?</td>
<td>How do they understand those dilemmas?</td>
<td>How do they address them?</td>
<td>How well equipped are they in addressing them?</td>
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<td>Quotes</td>
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<td>to a better job than they had previously. So they believe that ethically they are doing the right thing, just by helping them pass the assessment and not focusing on deeper learning. So again it’s a matter of perspective (Thomas)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I’ve changed the language of the assessment, so the directive really when we wrote a lot of these material was literally whether they will be competent or not competent (Gina).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>