

Life rafts: supporting the continuing professional learning of novice VET teachers

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Abstract

VET teachers often begin teaching with little or no experience in teaching, and with no education related to learning how to teach. As a result, the continuing professional learning (CPL) in which they engage is crucial in supporting the learning necessary to fulfil the role of a teacher.

This paper reports on a qualitative research project that explored the continuing professional learning undertaken by novice VET teachers. Specifically, it explores the CPL strategies/activities that nine novice VET teachers used during the first two years of their teaching and the factors that enabled and constrained teacher learning as a result of these activities. These teachers were involved in various continuing professional learning activities, including accessing the support of colleagues and supervisors, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, professional networks, and induction courses. The support of colleagues and supervisors was identified by the novice teachers involved in this research as the CPL strategy they considered most influential in supporting their learning.

The support of colleagues and supervisors was found to have a number of facets and its effectiveness was influenced by a range of factors. These included how the support was accessed, whether it was supervisor-designated, teacher-sourced, or ad hoc. The support included both formal and informal mentoring, advice provided by a former teacher, and advice and support provided by a supervisor. In the two instances in this study where the mentoring of novice teachers was a component of the workload of the experienced teachers, both successfully supported novice teacher learning.

The research found that a range of local factors enabled and constrained novice teacher learning. These included shared industry-related language, the development and use of VET-related language, the physical environment, and social relationships. One interesting finding is that a communal table that was used daily by experienced and novice teachers served to support novice teacher learning. Another interesting finding is that shared morning tea breaks were valuable in providing a social setting in which novice teachers were able to learn by either seeking direct advice in a safe environment or by hearing stories shared by more experienced teachers.

The findings presented in this paper indicate that the basis of employment of novice VET teachers influences their learning to undertake the role of a teacher, with those employed casually to teach a few hours a week most at risk. Supervisor support was found to be of most value to teachers employed casually for just a few hours a week. However, the heavy workload of some supervisors impacted on their ability to provide this support.

Introduction

It's just that things happened so fast. It's just like all of a sudden you are in deep water and then you're swimming. (Michael, Horticulture teacher)

I was sort of chucked in the deep end. (Ewan, Air conditioning and refrigeration teacher)

Right now, given I'm in a new area, it's a bit like sink or swim, and fend for yourself. (Sarah, Business administration teacher)

Novice vocational education and training teachers are likely to begin teaching with no formal education or other preparation related to how to undertake the teaching role (Wheelahan & Moodie 2011). They are required to meet the learning needs of a diverse range of students, to do so in a broad range of environments, and often initially without any prior teacher training (Wheelahan & Moodie 2011). This can lead to the perception of a 'sink or swim' approach to learning to be a teacher. This paper considers the continuing professional learning of nine novice TAFE teachers over a two-year period. It highlights the factors that enabled and constrained the continuing professional learning that supported them in undertaking the role of a teacher.

Navigating complex environments

Increasingly sophisticated expectations of the VET sector by industry, government and the community are driven by workforce change, demographic change, and an increasingly globalised economy (Clayton 2009; Wheelahan & Moodie 2011). These expectations are related to, and informed by, technological developments, increasing participation rates, higher-level qualifications, and ongoing regulatory changes (Innovation and Business Skills Australia 2014). Ongoing changes to VET-related national and state government policies, including an increasingly competitive market, also increase the pressure on the VET sector (Innovation and Business Skills Australia 2014; Wheelahan 2010; Productivity Commission 2011).

While the demands on VET teachers are recognised as complex, and high-level skills are required, the large majority of TAFE teachers begin teaching as casual teachers (Wheelahan 2010). Crucially, in many cases they begin to teach with no education qualifications and no other means of preparation for their role as a teacher (Wheelahan & Moodie 2011). This is exacerbated by high levels of casualisation of the TAFE teacher workforce, which has been increasing since the early 1990s (Nechvoglod, Mlotkowski & Guthrie 2010). Currently, casual teachers make up a large proportion of the TAFE teacher workforce (Productivity Commission 2011; Simons et al. 2009) to the extent that the Productivity Commission notes that 'non-permanent employment is a characteristic of the VET workforce in all jurisdictions, particularly of TAFEs. Within non-permanent forms of employment, casual employment is the most prevalent' (2010 p.183). While the proportion varies across Australia, the percentage of TAFE teachers employed casually is more than 50% nationally, and much higher than this in some states (Nechvoglod, Mlotkowski & Guthrie 2010; Simons et al. 2009).

VET teachers require the skills and knowledge to work with diverse student groups with a wide range of needs and abilities. Wheelahan and Curtin (2010) note that: 'There is widespread recognition that achievement of government objectives for the growth of VET, increasing the workforce's skills, social inclusion, and specific participation and equity targets requires highly skilled VET teachers' (p.62). VET students are a diverse group and are becoming increasingly so. They can: be aged anywhere from 15 to 70 years of age or more; have various ethnic backgrounds and levels of English language skills; have a history of educational and social disadvantage; be highly skilled professionals; be unemployed; have a range of skill levels and needs in relation to literacy and numeracy; and have a range of prior

learning experiences and learning skills. A novice VET teacher, whether employed permanent full-time, on a contract, or on a casual basis teaching three hours a week, is likely to be facilitating learning with groups of students who have a range of these characteristics (Wheelahan 2010). VET teachers also facilitate learning in a range of environments. This can include: the students' workplace; traditional classrooms; online learning environments; lecture theatres; and environments such as simulated hospitals using simulated patients. Other VET teaching contexts include gyms or restaurants, which are simultaneously a teaching environment and a commercial entity, with clients. The ability to support learning in each of these complex conditions requires sound skills. Wheelahan (2010) argues that: 'The demands on VET teachers are more complex than either schools or higher education' (p.11). It's perhaps unsurprising then that a novice VET teacher with no teacher preparation might use a sink or swim metaphor and be concerned that they are out of their depth.

In this context of increasing complexity of the VET sector and high levels of casualisation of VET teachers, there is an expectation of high-quality VET provision (Productivity Commission 2011; Skills Australia 2011). Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) argues that: 'Delivery of consistent, high quality training and assessment services is a fundamental concern for government, employers and individual students and remains one of the most enduring issues facing the VET sector' (2014, p.6). A number of recent reports have argued that the capability of VET practitioners is important in ensuring the provision of quality VET outcomes (Guthrie 2010; Wheelahan 2011).

While most European countries require teachers who are involved in initial VET (IVET) provision to have a bachelor degree qualification (Productivity Commission 2011), the required qualification for Australian VET teachers is a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (Cert IV TAA). The Productivity Commission (2011) acknowledges that 'The Certificate IV in TAA cannot, even in an improved configuration, remedy all of the capability gaps that the Commission has identified as affecting the VET workforce' (p.303). They also found that as many as 40% of TAFE VET teachers, and probably a higher proportion of non-TAFE teachers, do not hold that qualification (2011, p.43). As many novice VET teachers begin teaching without any prior learning about how to teach, their continuing professional learning becomes an important component of the development of their skills, knowledge and understanding about teaching and their role as a teacher. Throughout this paper I use the term 'continuing professional learning' to refer to the activities that novice teachers identified as contributing to their learning to be a teacher, and which were additional to the learning that occurred through undertaking that role.

In this research, CPL includes everyday learning such as that which results from colleague support and mentoring, as well as more formal professional development such as the Cert IV TAA. In the absence of a requirement for higher-level qualifications and that a large proportion of TAFE teachers do not have a Cert IV TAA, work-based learning and continuing professional learning activities become important in supporting novice VET teacher learning. This is compounded by research findings that indicate that casual TAFE teachers are less likely to undertake professional development than permanent or long-term contract teachers (Guthrie & Clayton 2010; Innovation and Business Skills Australia 2014).

There are significant gaps in our knowledge of the VET workforce (Guthrie 2010; Simons et al. 2009), and one of the important gaps relates to how novice VET teachers learn how to undertake the work of a teacher. While there has been research exploring the Cert IV TAA (for instance Clayton 2009; Clayton et al. 2010), there has been little work on the learning that novice teachers do in addition to this qualification. Clayton notes that there is 'little research existing in Australia into the initial preparation of VET practitioners, and virtually none that includes direct accounts drawn from the

experiences of beginning teachers and trainers' (Clayton 2009, p.14). The Productivity Commission (2011, p.280) has called for research into how VET teacher capability develops. The research reported in this paper responds to this call.

Research scope and methods

The research findings reported in this paper are part of a broader qualitative longitudinal research project undertaken for a PhD. The PhD study investigated how novice VET teachers learnt how to undertake the role of a teacher. The research was conducted across four TAFE campuses and explored how nine novice VET teachers learnt to fulfil the role of a teacher in their first two years of teaching, or for the proportion of that time for which they were employed as a teacher. The findings discussed in this paper address the research question: How do novice VET teachers learn how to teach through activities that are additional to their role as a teacher?

This paper reports on the continuing professional learning that was identified by the research participants as contributing to their learning to undertake the teaching role. It is not a comprehensive discussion of all the possible CPL that could be available to support novice teachers to become better teachers; rather, it discusses the continuing professional learning that the participants in this research accessed. The paper also deliberately focuses on continuing professional learning that is not tightly interwoven with working practices. So, for instance, it does not address the learning that teachers do as a result of teaching, or of providing feedback to students. That is the subject of another paper.

The data collection methods were chosen to allow an in-depth exploration of the complexities associated with novice VET teacher learning. The data collection methods that contributed to the findings reported in this paper are outlined in table 1.

Table 1 Data collection methods

Data collection method	Details
Semi-structured interviews	Up to three interviews of one to two hours duration were held with each novice teacher over the two years of the study. The first interview was held in the first semester of teaching, the second interview at the end of the first year of teaching and the third interview at the end of the second year of teaching. All interviews were transcribed for analysis.
Field notes associated with the interviews	Field notes taken after each interview, as well as during campus visits.
Regular campus visits	Included visits to the teaching areas, staff rooms, coffee shops and other environments where the teachers were operating. It did not include deliberate or detailed observation of their learning. Campus visits were undertaken at least monthly.
Novice teacher responses to regular emails	Emails asked one or two questions about their learning to teach in the previous month. These were sporadically responded to by all participants.
Participant journals/notes about their teaching and their learning to teach.	All novice teachers agreed to keep a journal in relation to their learning to teach. In practice one teacher did keep an electronic journal.

All of the novice teachers who began teaching on one of four urban campuses in one year and who had no prior teaching qualifications were invited to participate in the research. All eligible teachers agreed to do so.

The focus of the research was the continuing professional learning that the novice TAFE teachers identified as informing their learning and so it did not:

- aim to explicitly address the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment except where it was raised by the participants in the research

- aim to address any other educational qualifications unless raised by the research participants. Lack of teaching-related educational qualifications when first employed as a teacher was one of the criteria used to determine whether teachers were eligible to be involved in the research
- explore the learning of VET teachers in enterprise registered training organisations or in private RTOs.

The research data were analysed initially using thematic coding, and then re-analysed using a practice architectures framework (Kemmis et al. 2014). The theory of practice architectures is based on the premise that practices (such as teaching and assessment) are not only influenced by the experience and intentions of individuals, but are also shaped by 'architectures' or arrangements that pre-existed, or are brought into, the site where the practice is undertaken. These arrangements are language-related (the language that is used in and about the practice), physical (objects and physical set-ups) and social (relationships of power and solidarity). Language arrangements (more specifically, cultural-discursive architectures) prefigure what is likely to be said in and about a practice (the 'sayings'). Material or physical arrangements (more specifically, material-economic architectures) prefigure what is likely to be done in a practice (the 'doings'), and social arrangements (more specifically, social-political architectures) prefigure the relationships of solidarity and power (the 'relatings') that are likely to be formed while undertaking the practice (Kemmis et al. 2014). In using a practice architectures lens to analyse the data, I sought to gain greater insight into which language, material, and social arrangements enabled and constrained the continuing professional learning of novice teachers.

I refer to each of the teaching departments as sites. This is a physical site, but it is more than this. For instance, the Horticulture Teaching Department includes all of the buildings, sheds and glasshouses that are used to teach horticulture as well as the staff room, where the teachers work, and the shared area, where they have morning tea. It also includes the gardens around the TAFE, which the teachers use to support student learning. For the novice VET teachers the site of their learning included all of these, as well as a variety of other places such as their home, where they might access a YouTube video to gain a greater understanding of the content of the following day's lesson, and the coffee shop, where they might be discussing a teaching issue with a colleague.

The employment basis of the novice teachers in this study is referred to in a number of places throughout this report. Table 2 provides information about the employment basis of each of the teachers over the two years of the study. In the first semester of teaching, six of the nine teachers were employed on a casual basis, while three were employed on a full-time contract basis. By the end of the second semester of teaching, four participants were employed on a casual basis, and five were employed on a full-time contract. By the end of the second year of the study one teacher was employed casually, two on full-time contract, one permanent full-time, and five participants were no longer employed by the organisation.

Table 2 Employment basis of study participants

Participant pseudonym	Teaching dept	Semester 1	Other work	Semester 2	Other work	End of 2nd year	Other work
Sarah	Business Admin.	Casual 4 hrs/week	None	Casual 10–16 hrs/week	None	No longer teaching	N/A
Michael	Horticulture	Casual 6 hrs/week	Two hort. jobs	Casual 6 hrs/week	Five hort. jobs	No longer teaching	N/A
Grant	Sport and Fitness	Casual 3–8 hrs/week	Casual PT, admin work	Casual 18 hrs/week	Casual PT, admin work	Casual 5 hrs/week	Perm. PT, casual admin
Alice	Community Services	Casual 6–18 hrs/week	Casual contract	Teaching contract	Casual contract	Perm.	None
Ewan	Air Conditioning & Refrigeration	Teaching contract	None	Teaching contract	None	Moved to another TAFE	N/A
Trevor	Electro-technology	Contract as coordinator and teacher	None	Teaching contract	None	Teaching contract	None
Simon	Engineering	Teaching contract	None	Teaching contract	None	Teaching Contract	None
Tabitha	Beauty Therapy	Casual 3 hrs/week	F/T perm admin. Casual MU	Casual 3 hrs/week	Perm. admin. Casual MU	No longer teaching	N/A
Sam	Building Design	Casual 15 hrs/week	Casual contracts	Teaching contract	None	No longer teaching	N/A

Notes: PT – Personal training
 Hort – Horticulture
 MU – Make up
 F/T Perm – full-time permanent.

Findings

The research identified several CPL strategies/activities that supported the learning of the novice VET teachers in the study. These were: the support of colleagues and supervisors; the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment; professional networks; and induction courses. The support of colleagues and/or supervisors and the Cert IV TAA were found to support teacher learning in each of the teaching departments. Table 3 identifies these strategies and the teachers who used them. Care should be taken in interpreting this table because it does not show the extent to which these continuing professional learning strategies were used by each teacher.

Table 3 Continuing professional learning strategies by teaching department

Teacher	Teaching dept	Support from colleagues and supervisors	Cert IV TAA	Industry networks	External education networks	Induction courses
Sarah	Business Administration	x	x	-	-	x
Michael	Horticulture	x	x	x	-	-
Grant	Sport and Fitness	x	x	x	-	x
Alice	Community Services	x	x	x	x	x
Ewan	Air Conditioning & Refrigeration	x	x	x	-	x
Trevor	Electro-technology	x	x	x	-	x
Simon	Engineering	x	x	x	-	x
Tabitha	Beauty Therapy	x	x	x	-	-
Sam	Building Design	x	x	x	-	x

Learning through the support of colleagues and supervisors

The CPL strategy/activity identified by each of the novice teachers as contributing most to their learning was the support of colleagues and supervisors. While the support provided varied in nature and scope, it included: advice about teaching and assessment strategies; debriefing after critical incidents; feedback on novice teacher lesson plans, resources, and assessment tasks; ongoing professional discussions; and the novice teacher observing and modelling the actions of a more experienced teacher.

Mentoring of VET teachers has been viewed as an important and valuable strategy to support VET teacher learning (Innovation and Business Skills Australia 2014; Wheelahan & Moodie 2011). For the participants in this research the support of colleagues and supervisors had many facets and was somewhat more complex than just mentoring.

Access arrangements and forms of support

There were three main ways by which novice teachers accessed the advice and support of colleagues and supervisors. One approach was where a designated person was given the role of supporting the novice teacher. This approach included a more formalised mentoring relationship; former teachers who worked with the novice for a limited time; the supervisor identifying themselves as the support person; or a colleague employed permanently or on long-term contract who was designated to provide support. Some of these resulted in mentoring relationships and others did not. The second approach was teacher-sourced support, which included support by colleagues, their supervisor, an informal mentor, and administrative and technical staff. The third approach was more ad hoc, whereby advice was sought or offered 'on the run' and from whomever was available at the time. This ad hoc support was provided by colleagues, supervisors, and administrative and technical staff.

While colleague and/or supervisor support was apparent in each teaching department, different approaches were used, and different levels of support were available. Teacher-sourced and ad hoc support were more available to those employed permanently or on contract than for casual teachers. Those teachers employed to teach six hours or fewer a week had less access to ad hoc or teacher-sourced support than teachers who were teaching more hours and were consequently on campus more

often. The forms of support from colleagues and supervisors as experienced by the teachers from different teaching departments are discussed in the following sections.

Formal mentor

There was a well-established, organisation-wide mentoring program at each of the campuses at which this research was undertaken, with all staff (including casual teachers) eligible to engage in the program. The mentoring program included two types of mentoring – induction and developmental. Induction mentoring was seen as initial support for new staff to become familiar with their work and the tasks associated with their role. Developmental mentoring was directed at more experienced teachers and focused on supporting the development of mentees in a particular area such as online teaching or work-based learning. The organisational mentoring program recommended a specific approach to mentoring and provided workshops, resources, and guidance on establishing mentoring to provide learning support in teaching departments.

Induction mentoring was made available to two novice teachers in two different teaching departments and took place quite differently for each of them. Below is a detailed discussion of the mentoring experience of each of these teachers. The business faculty had established an induction mentoring strategy some time before the broader organisation-wide mentoring program was developed. This induction mentoring program was embedded as a practice across the faculty. It was discussed at staff meetings, clear roles were established and an overview of these was available in written form to both mentors and mentees. It was also often associated with team teaching arrangements, where the mentor and mentee taught together. Perhaps most importantly, a mentoring role was an expected and accepted part of a permanent teacher's workload. Sarah, the novice teacher in business administration, was set up with an induction mentor as soon as she began her teaching, and she found that the mentoring relationship supported her development as a teacher quite well. The support of her mentor and knowing that she had someone to call on when she wanted guidance was important in supporting her learning as well as supporting her confidence as a teacher. As the journal entry below indicates, just knowing that her mentor was available if she needed her guidance may have been as important as the actual support that she received:

My mentor is back – felt more confident knowing she was only a phone call away – I didn't need to call her though.

Because of changed staffing arrangements Sarah was moved to a new team within the faculty at the beginning of her second year of teaching. In this new team she was not provided with a mentor as she was now in her second year of teaching and no longer considered to need an induction mentor. In the first month of teaching her journal noted that:

Right now, given I'm in a new area, it's a bit like sink or swim, and fend for yourself.

This suggests that even though Sarah had been teaching casually for a year before moving to the new teaching department, she still felt the need for mentor support.

In contrast to Sarah's induction mentoring experience, Trevor's mentor worked in a different teaching department from him. Shortly after he was employed, a mentoring relationship based on the organisation-wide mentoring program was arranged for him by his supervisor. Trevor's mentor was an experienced teacher who was highly regarded in the faculty and in the organisation. Her advice and support was sought broadly, and she mentored a number of people. Initially Trevor's mentor received some release hours for the mentoring she did across the faculty. By Trevor's second year of teaching this release time was no longer provided, but his mentor still made herself available if Trevor needed guidance.

Grant, in sport and fitness, sought a formal mentor about 18 months after he was first employed as a casual teacher. He established a developmental mentoring relationship with an experienced teacher in his department at this time and maintained this relationship for the rest of the time of this research.

Each of the people who was provided with a formal mentor spoke positively about their learning as a result of this support. This was especially the case for Sarah.

Informal mentor

Informal mentoring relationships were apparent for four of the novice teachers, and in each case these teachers did not name the relationships as mentoring.

While Grant in sport and fitness undertook a more formal mentoring relationship in the final six months of this study, for the first 18 months of teaching he can be seen to have been in an informal mentoring relationship. During this time there was no single person who formally assumed the role of Grant's mentor, but three of the permanent teachers could be seen to be providing informal mentoring. In his first semester of employment as a casual teacher Grant's work was to undertake practical assessments. Grant describes the support that he received from the teachers for whom he did the practical assessments:

I think the biggest influence for me is talking with the other teachers, they're really influencing what I do mostly because a lot of what I'm doing is based off their subjects.

This informal mentoring initially arose as a result of working together and then extended beyond that. These teachers continued to provide informal mentoring for Grant when he went on to undertake a full teaching load in the second semester of his employment as a casual teacher.

Two of the other novice teachers were engaged in an informal mentoring relationship with colleagues over an extended period. One other teacher experienced informal mentoring from different colleagues for limited periods of time according to her needs at particular times. The informal mentoring available to these teachers can be seen to have been useful in supporting their learning.

Former teacher

In two of the teaching departments a teacher who had previously taught there provided initial support to the novice teacher. Both novice teachers identified the former teacher as aiding their initial learning; however, once this initial support was finished no further guidance was available from these former teachers. For one of these teachers, who was employed casually, no other teacher was identified to provide ongoing guidance. Thus, while the advice of a previous teacher was useful in the short term, it did not provide an ongoing relationship to support learning in the way that the mentoring approaches did.

Supervisor support

Most of the novice teachers referred to support from their supervisors. A number of the teachers identified their supervisor (often the course coordinator) as the first person from whom they would seek support. Ewan's supervisor had a graduate diploma level qualification in adult education and was considered an advanced skills teacher. Ewan had easy access to his supervisor and spoke with him on an informal basis regularly. For instance, when he was concerned about a difficult class who were not progressing well, he spoke with his supervisor to seek advice on what to do:

Afterwards I spoke to my coordinator and I said listen, got a few issues here ... and we just discussed it and he told me some ... methods I could use to hopefully change their behaviour and work from there.

The degree to which the supervisor supported novice teacher learning varied considerably, with three of the teachers identifying their supervisor as the main person supporting their learning. Supervisor support was one of a number of means of support for many of the teachers, but Tabitha, teaching in the evening for three hours a week, had little or no other contact with her colleagues for the first semester of teaching. The support and advice of her supervisor thus became particularly important.

For many of the teachers, supervisor support was limited by the availability of the supervisor and the demands of their workload. For instance, Simon found discussions with the course coordinator useful in supporting his learning; however, he was very aware of his coordinator's heavy workload:

The coordinators have a lot of responsibility put on them, I feel. And I think because those coordinators are so busy, they have a lot of responsibilities with RPL [recognition of prior learning], and running the courses, they're just so snowed under. I just don't think that he's got much time to assist me.

This was echoed by Michael, when, following on from a previous discussion about accessing supervisor support, he said:

This is also where I probably could do with a bit of guidance or be grateful for some learning. But it's just everyone's struggling for time at the moment.

Sam considered the coordinator of his teaching department to be the person who provided him with the most support. His coordinator also did some team teaching with him in one of his subjects and provided direct feedback on his teaching. Sam found this strongly supported his learning. However, Sam also identified the time pressures on his supervisor as impacting on this support:

There's support there. But there's not a lot of time.

The heavy workload of their supervisors was referred to by most of the teachers a number of times. The demanding workload carried by coordinators/supervisors, together with novice teacher perception of the lack of availability of their supervisors due to other demands on them, impacted on the support that was available to novice teachers from this experienced group of permanent teachers.

In summary, this section has outlined two important factors that influenced colleague and supervisor support. Firstly, the way the support was accessed, which included supervisor-designated, teacher-sourced, and ad hoc. The second factor was the role of the person who provided the support and the nature of the relationship with that person. Formal and informal mentoring was provided by experienced colleagues. Others who provided support to novice teachers were former teachers, and the novice teacher's supervisor. For the novice teachers involved in a formal mentoring relationship, this relationship was valuable in supporting their learning. The informal mentoring relationships were found to support teacher learning to some extent. The professional learning as a result of the support of a previous teacher was found to be useful for the time it was available, but it did not provide ongoing support. Supervisor support was also found to be of value in supporting the professional learning of novice teachers; however, this support was often limited because of the heavy workload of the supervisor, which impacted on their availability to support novice teachers.

I now turn to the local site-based arrangements that enabled and constrained novice teacher learning through continuing professional learning strategies. That is, the language-related, the physical, and the social arrangements in each of the teaching departments.

Site-based arrangements that enabled and constrained continuing professional learning

Site-based factors impacted on what teachers needed to learn as well as the arrangements that influenced how they were able to learn these things. More explanation of the concept of 'site-based arrangements' is provided in the research scope and methods section. In brief, the arrangements in place in each teaching department can be seen to influence what it is possible to do and to say as well as the relationships that are likely in that teaching department.

This section begins with a brief discussion of the different teaching environments in which the teachers operated. Although space does not permit an extended discussion of the various teaching environments, two examples are provided to illustrate that different teaching environments required novice teachers to learn different things.

In sport and fitness, Grant was initially employed to undertake practical assessments in the gym that was operated by the TAFE. These assessments were undertaken with each student individually, and Grant also used this time to support student learning through discussions related to the subject he was assessing. What Grant learnt and what he needed to learn was bounded by his role as well as by the environment in which he was operating. Grant's teaching environment was a gym with paying customers. Consequently, his work with students and his learning through the support of other teachers was influenced by this. The exception to this was the learning he did through the Cert IV TAA, which he was able to more fully use in his second semester of employment as a casual teacher when he was timetabled to do classroom teaching.

In business administration Sarah was initially employed to teach in a flexible learning environment. In this environment Sarah worked in a team teaching arrangement to provide individual support for the learning of up to 30 students in the one room. These students included: refugees or migrants, some with English language difficulties; people with mental health issues; people with physical health issues; people with learning difficulties; people who were relatively high achievers seeking to study flexibly to allow rapid progression through the qualification; and an age range from 17 to 77 years. Each student was studying one of 30 different competencies at their own pace using a workbook, or online equivalent. When students wanted support or advice related to their learning they took a number and waited until a teacher was available. The support of her mentor and the team teaching arrangement were important in Sarah's learning to teach. It wasn't until her second year of teaching, when she moved to another campus and was doing classroom teaching, that she felt she was able to use the learning she had gained as a result of the Cert IV TAA.

These two examples illustrate that, while all of the participants in the study were employed as teachers, the tasks they undertook to fulfil this role varied considerably. As a result, novice teachers in different teaching departments had different learning needs. Also, each teaching department was made up of different language-related, physical and social arrangements, which enabled or constrained VET teacher learning.

While a range of different approaches to colleague support were apparent in the sites where this study was undertaken, there were a number of arrangements that enabled and constrained novice teacher learning, regardless of how the support was made available and by whom. In the section below I explore these in relation to the language-based, the physical, and the social arrangements, which in turn prefigured the sayings, the doings and the relating in each of the teaching departments. I separate each of these to enable a discussion of their contribution to teacher learning; however, in reality they are interwoven. The language-based arrangements were shared industry

understandings and the development of shared language and understandings related to the teaching role. The physical arrangements included the physical set-ups of the teaching departments, while the social arrangements included shared morning teas, and reciprocal sharing and valuing. The employment arrangements influenced the language, the physical and the social arrangements.

I now turn to a discussion of the language-based arrangements that enabled or constrained the continuous professional learning of novice VET teachers.

Shared industry understandings

Shared industry language and understanding emerged as being important for supporting novice teacher learning. This was particularly the case in the early stages of their teaching. While shared language and a shared industry background can be seen to be valuable in supporting teacher learning, it was also apparent at times that the lack of a shared industry understanding hindered novice teachers' willingness to learn from more experienced teachers. Some of the novice teachers did not value the advice and support of those teachers who did not have the same industry background as they had. For instance, in the first interview, Ewan, in air conditioning and refrigeration, discussed an experience in which a teacher from another teaching department was supporting his learning. He reports dismissing her advice because of his perception that she did not understand the needs of his particular industry.

For some of the teachers an understanding of shared industry background was quite narrowly interpreted. For instance, one novice teacher felt able to dismiss the teaching-related advice of an experienced teacher who taught different competencies in the same qualification because she did not consider that teacher's industry experience to be relevant. A related finding was that novice teachers, especially those teaching only a few hours a week, were willing to take teaching advice from relatively inexperienced teachers with the same industry background. For instance, one casual teacher identified another inexperienced casual teacher as someone from whom he sought teaching advice because they were teaching similar competencies. This was despite his teaching department having a number of experienced and knowledgeable permanent teachers teaching in the same qualification as him.

For those teaching full-time, or close to full-time, the understanding of a shared industry experience became broader over time. This became apparent in a number of the second and third interviews at which teachers reported taking advice from a wider group of colleagues. However, for those teachers teaching only a few hours a week the narrow interpretation of shared industry understanding as described above remained a barrier to learning from other more experienced colleagues.

Development of shared language and understandings related to teaching and assessment

Novice teachers who were employed on a full-time contract, or full-time permanent basis, developed an understanding of, and language related to, their teaching role relatively quickly. Essentially, they were immersed in the concepts and language of training packages, competencies, training/teaching, lesson preparation and assessment. For instance, after less than one semester of teaching Ewan was using language related to his teaching role fluently:

I created the subject guides ... with that you also need to check the training packages and then, usually when you're writing the subject guides is when you get the basic outline for the lesson content ... and what sort of assessment technique you want to use as well.

This quote and information gleaned from other discussions held after he had been teaching for about nine weeks showed that Ewan had quickly developed a good understanding of VET language and associated concepts.

The Cert IV TAA supported many of the teachers in developing the language and understanding related to their teaching role. Conversely, one teacher, teaching only a few hours a week and not having her learning from the Cert IV reinforced through ongoing contact with colleagues, struggled with this throughout the whole year of her teaching. An understanding of this language was one of the things that she needed to learn; however, because she was only on site for a short period of time each week and was teaching for most of that time, she wasn't regularly exposed to VET-related language in the way that other teachers were, and did not become familiar with it. As a result, support took longer because she had to clarify meaning regularly, and when she didn't do this it occasionally resulted in her being uncertain about what was being discussed. When talking about her teaching and assessment, she stumbled over the language and sometimes misused language. In the second semester this lack of familiarity with VET language and concepts contributed to her misunderstanding what she was meant to be teaching. While this was discovered by a colleague after four weeks and rectified, a good grasp of VET-related language would have avoided this problem.

I now turn to a discussion of the physical arrangements that enabled or constrained the ongoing professional learning of novice VET teachers.

Physical set-ups – shared spaces

While the physical set-up of each teaching area varied, two physical arrangements that impacted on teacher learning in a number of the teaching departments were the placement of desks and the availability of a large regularly used communal table in the staff room. A staff room that had been set up to allow for and encourage engagement with colleagues supported the learning of a number of the participants in this study.

In this research the existence of a communal table, which was kept free of debris and used regularly by permanent and casual staff, was found to be a good enabler of novice teacher learning. For instance, in the Community Services Teaching Department the physical set-up that enabled colleague support was a large table that was easily accessible to all in the staff room. The staff room was set up so that the table was the first thing you see as you walk through the door. Teachers used this table for a range of things, including marking, eating lunch, paperwork, preparing classes, reading, sharing ideas, and talking about their teaching. It was rare to walk into the staff room and there not be someone sitting at the communal table. For Alice, this table enabled her learning through the support and advice of colleagues. A communal table was also an important part of the physical arrangements in horticulture, and teachers met at this table daily for morning tea. However, a large communal table does not necessarily enable the learning of novice teachers: the Sport and Fitness Teaching Department also had a large table at one end of the staff room, but it did not serve to bring experienced and novice teachers together. This table was always covered with debris, and each time I visited the area it was not in use. The lack of chairs around the table reinforced the notion that it was rarely, if ever, used as a place for teachers to congregate.

The arrangement of desks, and particularly the placement of the desks that novice teachers used in relation to the desks of experienced staff, impacted on the availability of ad hoc advice. This was especially an issue for casual teachers, because some of the departments separated the casual teacher workstations from the permanent teacher workstations, in one instance having them on different floors, and in another instance in a different building. For those teachers who were employed casually to teach fewer than ten hours a week, the available desks were hot desks, which a range of casual teachers used. In the departments where the hot desks were near the desks of experienced teachers, casual teachers reported learning through ad hoc discussions with other teachers. In departments where the hot desks were separated from the desks of experienced

teachers, this ad hoc advice was not as easily accessed. The arrangement of desks also impacted on the availability of ad hoc advice for novice teachers who were employed permanently or on contract. For instance, in air conditioning and refrigeration the way the desks were set up allowed teachers to easily ask questions and seek advice from each other. Ewan talked about useful teacher discussions in relation to delivery and assessment approaches, noting that the set-up of the offices where he worked supported this discussion. While initially Ewan focused just on advice and support from teachers in his industry area, by the beginning of the second year of teaching he was learning from experienced electrical teachers, who shared the same staff room.

I now turn to a discussion of the social arrangements that enabled or constrained the continuous professional learning of novice VET teachers.

'Smoko' — the link between the professional and the social

During smoko all teachers were timetabled to have a break from class at morning tea time. Smoko was a feature of many of the trade teaching departments on the campus where Ewan was based. Teachers could be seen to be filling out forms, or doing other administrative work at this time, but most trade teachers made an effort to join the others every morning for this 'break'. The air conditioning and refrigeration teachers had a regular 'smoko', when all teachers met in a communal space to have their morning break. A number of times Ewan mentioned asking someone about something at smoko and his comments suggest that this was an important time and place for sharing ideas, seeking support, and camaraderie:

Well I'll discuss with the other teachers, they'd discuss what works for them, or what doesn't work for them. You know, just sort of pretty much get around at smoko, saying we'll try this next time, we'll do that. So basically just peer support really.

Similarly, in his first semester of teaching Michael reported trying to be on campus during the shared morning tea break, which was a characteristic of the Horticulture Teaching Department:

I make a big effort to be here for the morning tea break even if I'm not teaching at those times. Just to hear what they are doing. What's difficult for them. What they find nice. All their good and bad stories.

Where it was available, this shared informal meeting time was valued by the novice teachers.

A regular mid-morning break and access to the informal support that was a characteristic of smoko in the trades areas was not common outside these teaching areas. After being employed for some months and realising that he needed more access to advice and guidance from experienced colleagues, Trevor instigated a regular shared afternoon tea. This weekly 'get together' served to bring together a number of teachers in a social situation:

We've started a thing on a Friday afternoon to all get together and have a hot chocolate, and this afternoon I brought in freshly cooked muffins, just to get together and talk. And that's when you pick up things, just general conversations rather than talking seriously with them. We just talk openly ...

Trevor found this informal arrangement critical to his learning:

I wouldn't be able to survive without these contacts.

Reciprocal sharing and valuing

Most of the research participants were well established in their field, and were novices only as teachers. The novice teachers had a wealth of experience in their industry, and had quite a lot to offer both their students and their colleagues in relation to recent or current industry knowledge. This impacted on the relationships they had with their colleagues. Most of the novice teachers in this study saw that the support and advice from colleagues was a reciprocal arrangement, whereby they had something to offer their colleagues in return for their support and advice.

While it is possible to some extent to separate many of the site-based arrangements into mostly language-related, physical or social, the employment arrangements cut across each of these.

Employment arrangements

The basis on which the teachers were employed impacted on almost all aspects of colleague and supervisor support. Apart from Grant in sport and fitness, those novice teachers who were employed on a casual basis and who were teaching only a few hours a week had the most difficulty in accessing the support of colleagues and supervisors. These teachers had obligations elsewhere, and were only able to be on campus for a limited time. Table 2 provides an overview of the basis of employment for each of the participants over the two years of the study.

In horticulture Michael taught six hours a week and had a number of other horticulture jobs to be able to support himself financially. He was very interested in becoming a full-time teacher, keen to learn as much as possible from fellow teachers, and tried to be on site as much as possible in the first semester. As noted earlier, he particularly tried to be on campus during the morning tea break attended by the teachers in his teaching department. He also worked many additional hours to develop good lesson plans and tailored resources to meet the needs of his students. By the end of the first year of teaching Michael needed to work elsewhere most of the time, which limited his ability to learn from colleagues and his supervisor:

If I could have been at the school more, but for making the money business, then I would have accessed all those experienced people ... And they could probably just throw stuff at me, or just give so much. But this was just the length of time that I can be here. I can just be here the minimum amount of time then I have to race at night to this job or then very early in the morning do something here or there. Otherwise I would have chosen to be here a lot more and hence would have shared a lot more because they are all great, and it's just a reflection of my situation. Not the school.

Teaching only three hours one evening a week effectively limited Tabitha's access to support from her colleagues because many of the permanent teachers had left work by the time she arrived. To some extent this was addressed by Tabitha arriving some time before her class was scheduled, and the supervisor remaining later to be available to respond to her queries and to support her learning. Once Tabitha began her class there were no other teachers available to provide her with support if she required it.

By the end of the first year of the study both Michael and Tabitha had left teaching. Although Michael had hoped to make teaching his new career, and there was strong evidence that he was a good teacher, the department was not able to provide him with more than six hours a week of casual teaching and he did not receive income from teaching during non-teaching weeks. As a result, at the end of his first year of teaching Michael found casual teaching unsustainable and very reluctantly had to find more permanent and sustainable work elsewhere. Tabitha had also initially indicated that she would like to make teaching her long-term career. At the end of a year of teaching she decided to

leave teaching and gave her main reason as not liking evening work. Tabitha had limited contact with her colleagues – less than any of the other teachers in this study – and it would be surprising if this lack of contact and advice from others, combined with some mistakes made due to this lack of advice, did not contribute to her decision to leave.

By the end of the second year of teaching Sarah and Sam had also chosen to leave teaching. Sarah gave her main reason for leaving as the long hours of unpaid work that she felt obliged to do. While employed on a casual basis to teach between ten and 12 hours a week, she was on campus for 20–30 hours a week. Sarah also noted that, if she was still teaching on the campus at which her mentor from the first year of teaching was located, she might have made a different decision. Sam was the only one of the four teachers who had left teaching by the end of the second year of the study who was employed on contract. He left teaching to go travelling, and when asked if he intended to return to teaching after his 12 months of travel he said that he wasn't sure, but that because the teaching contracts available to ongoing teachers had recently decreased from five years to 12 months he was less inclined to return to teaching.

Interestingly, Grant, who was employed casually for limited hours, was still teaching at the end of the two years of the study. There are a number of factors that contributed to Grant being able to continue working as a casual teacher, including his relatively young age and lack of family commitments. Nonetheless, it is worth considering that the strong informal and formal mentoring support that was available to Grant throughout the first two years of teaching may have contributed to his willingness to continue as a casual teacher, even though his preference was for a full-time teaching position.

The final three continuing professional learning strategies identified in the research were the Cert IV TAA, professional networks and induction courses. The findings related to these are below.

Learning through the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment

All of the novice teachers in this study had completed the Certificate IV TAA within the first year of teaching, and most had done so in the first semester of teaching. On each of the four campuses it was made a compulsory component of teacher employment that teachers would undertake or had completed the Cert IV TAA within the first year of teaching. This included all teachers, casual, contract and permanent. The qualification was delivered by the TAFE that employed them and was offered free of charge to all teaching staff.

While not asked specifically about their learning in the Cert IV TAA all participants mentioned it as having contributed to their learning and to their development of an understanding of the broader VET system. Sam felt that the Cert IV TAA had introduced him to many of the key concepts of which he had been previously unaware:

Doing the Cert IV at the moment has been a big eye opener for me too. I think it's more a problem with the system really ... It's a strength of the system and it's a problem with the system of getting subject matter experts to come in and teach people. They're aware of industry standards, and all those sorts of things, but can they actually ... do they understand the goals, the learning outcomes, the competencies and analysing all those things, and so for me doing the Cert IV it's like 'oh wow' there's a lot there, and it's all really important stuff. And realising where students sit – in terms of Cert I's to Advanced Diploma and what amount of feedback they need, what instruction they need and so on.

The Cert IV TAA was influential with a number of the teachers in supporting their understanding of the language of training packages, VET language and associated concepts. In acknowledging the value of the Cert IV TAA in supporting his learning, Sam also indicated that it provided a useful and sometimes confusing introduction to the language of VET.

One of the Cert IV assessment tasks undertaken by all the novice teachers was the requirement to observe a class being facilitated by an experienced teacher, and to have an experienced teacher observe at least one of their classes and provide feedback. Almost all of the teachers in this research referred to that experience as having influenced their own teaching. For Simon, not only did his experience as a result of this observation support his learning in the short term, it also assisted him to develop a relationship with a more experienced teacher in his faculty, whom he was able to seek out when he needed advice. Interestingly, Sam identified the Cert IV TAA as reducing his need to rely on his colleagues:

If I hadn't done the Cert IV I'd be feeling ... I'd certainly be relying more on my colleagues. The Cert IV for me is where I learnt those things.

For many of the teachers, learning as a result of the Cert IV TAA was reinforced through colleague and mentor support.

Learning through professional networks

Because VET teachers can be seen to be dual professionals it is useful to consider two different types of professional networks: networks associated with their industry; and networks associated with their teaching. Most of the teachers accessed their industry networks during this study. The learning they can be seen to be doing as a result of this was identifying how these networks could be used to support their students. For instance, Sam in building design used his industry connections to ensure that his authentic assessments were consistent with local industry expectations.

In their first year of teaching the only teaching-associated professional networks accessed by teachers were those within their TAFE. A number of teachers used the email-based, college-wide Staff Information Service to make contact with these networks. Trevor used his mentor's networks and then his other personal networks within the TAFE to seek support. In the first year he found this quite time-consuming:

If I'm not sure of something I will search them out and somebody knows somebody that knows somebody else that knows somebody else ... I waste a lot of time running after people who, when I get them are brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

Once Trevor was able to access the appropriate people they were valuable in supporting his learning.

Professional networks associated with teaching and those outside the TAFE where each participant worked were not identified by any of the participants in their first year of teaching. The enterprise agreement operating at each of the campuses allowed for funding for each permanent teacher and for some categories of contract teachers to enable them to access annual funding for conference attendance and/or other professional development activities. While in a number of the sites it was accepted practice for permanent teachers to attend conferences, Alice was the only participant in this study who attended a conference or accessed this professional development fund during the two years of the research. In her second year of teaching Alice used this fund to attend a conference, where she was able to make contact with other TAFE teachers involved in innovative practice in an area where her faculty planned to develop their offerings. Thus for Alice conference attendance

resulted in the development of professional contacts, which in turn led to learning for a range of teachers and managers in the faculty.

Learning through induction courses

A number of the teachers expressed surprise at the extent of the administrative work that they had to do. Induction courses related to administrative processes and accessing online learning technologies were discussed by a number of the participants. Apart from the Cert IV TAA, there was no discussion of induction courses related to VET pedagogy. Two of the teachers said that they would have valued more extensive induction. The three induction courses discussed were training for the administrative software to record student results; another administrative system associated with teacher hours and pay; and an introduction to the online learning platform. Each of these courses was a prerequisite to accessing the associated systems.

The induction courses to use the administrative system were provided at the teacher's workstation, and were often provided one to one. While there was a standard 'training program' the trainer followed, it could also be seen as a coaching session, taking the learner step by step through the processes involved. It also included a step-by-step manual for teachers to work through at a later time when using the system.

Learning through other continuing professional learning activities

Two other continuing professional learning strategies were used by teachers to a limited extent during the two years of the research. These were attending a conference, and the Diploma of Training and Assessment (Dip TAA). The three teachers on contract or permanently employed at the end of the two years of the research had just embarked on a Dip TAA, offered free of charge by the TAFE. They had attended only one introductory class for this qualification at the time of the completion of this study and no data are available in relation to their learning as a result of undertaking that qualification.

As mentioned previously, one teacher was supported to attend a conference that contributed not only to her understanding of a new teaching approach, it also supported her in extending her professional network to include VET teachers in another state who were using an innovative approach to support student learning.

In summary, the Cert IV TAA supported the learning of all the novice teachers in this study to some extent. It was considerably more significant in supporting learning than professional networks and induction courses.

Discussion

The novice VET practitioners in this research identified the support of colleagues and supervisors as the CPL strategy/activity with the most influence on their learning to undertake the teaching role. A range of factors enabled and constrained this support, with the basis on which teachers were employed and the number of hours teaching being the most influential of these in most of the sites.

Colleague and supervisor support

The support of colleagues and supervisors was one of only two continuing professional learning strategies/activities that were used in every teaching department to support novice teacher learning. It was discussed the most by all participants, and all teachers identified it as having an important influence on their learning. This is consistent with other research into work-based learning (for

instance, Eraut 2007). The extent to which the support of colleagues and managers was available and of use in novice teacher learning varied from site to site as a result of site-based arrangements.

An important way to support teacher learning through colleague support is through mentoring. Mentoring was identified by Wheelahan (2011) in her report on quality teaching in VET in Australia as important to the development of novice teacher skills and knowledge, and mentoring can sometimes be seen as the default option for ensuring that teachers are supported in their learning by their colleagues. For instance, in a research project including a large survey of VET practitioners as well as interviews with VET stakeholders, Wheelahan and Curtin found that 'mentoring emerged as a central strategy for supporting the quality of teaching and most argued that it was intrinsic to supporting new teachers' (2010, p.58). The research reported in this paper found mentoring to be available to six of the novice VET teachers participating in this study. It also found that in the first year of teaching only two of the novice teachers were involved in a formal mentoring relationship. For each of these teachers, their supervisors arranged a mentoring relationship shortly after they commenced employment. In both cases mentoring was considered to be a component of the mentor's teaching role, and they were provided with time release to undertake their mentoring work. This is consistent with Wheelahan and Curtin's (2010, p.4) findings that:

The provision of effective mentoring requires, we are told, institutional structures so that it is embedded in the culture and framework of the institution, rather than relying on the goodwill of individual teachers or enlightened departments. It also needed to be appropriately resourced.

The lack of formal mentoring for the other participants is a concerning finding. While there was a TAFE-wide mentoring program, the only teaching departments where formal mentoring was available to novice teachers were in those faculties where time release was provided for mentors.

While learning through the advice and support of colleagues and supervisors was identified by all teachers as contributing to their learning to teach, the basis on which they were employed impacted on teacher access to this type of CPL. This finding is consistent with Guthrie's argument that 'whatever the level of casualisation, a key issue is that [casual teachers] generally have less access ... to ongoing support from other VET staff' (2010, p.10). One casual teacher's experience of not having her learning in the Cert IV TAA reinforced through the support of colleagues in the way that other teachers did, and her consequent lack of understanding of many of the concepts addressed in the Cert IV TAA, reinforces Guthrie's argument that 'those undertaking the Cert IV TAA require adequate support both during and after completing the qualification' (Guthrie 2010, p.23). This teacher did access the support of her supervisor to some extent; however, this access was restricted as a result of the teacher's limited time on campus and the availability of her supervisor during that time.

Casual teacher access to continuing professional learning

Consistent with the findings of the Productivity Commission (2011), this study found that casual teachers accessed all forms of continuing professional learning, apart from the Cert IV TAA, less often than those on contract or employed permanently. This is especially concerning in the context of the Productivity Commission's claim that 'casual employment might, at times, reduce the quality of the teaching or learning experience in VET, and restrict opportunities to develop teaching and assessment ability. This supports a need for adequate professional development for casual and other non-permanent staff' (p.XXXV). While the Productivity Commission does not identify what 'adequate professional development' might entail, this research showed that supervisor-designated support was especially of value to those casual teachers who were on campus for only a few hours a week. This support, and especially the support provided by the supervisors themselves, was contingent on the

availability of the experienced VET practitioners at a time when the novice teacher was on campus. It was also influenced by the workload of the experienced teacher or supervisor.

The TAFE organisation's strategy of making the Cert IV TAA both compulsory and free of charge to the teachers that it employs, regardless of how many hours they are teaching, seems to have been a successful one for the novice teachers in this study. All of the novice teachers, including casual teachers, held this qualification by the end of their first year of teaching. This is a positive outcome in the context of findings by the Productivity Commission (2011, p.XLVII) that:

Development opportunities are especially limited for casuals and newer recruits. In 2010, about a quarter of casual and sessional trainers and assessors had not undertaken any professional development in the preceding 12 months. More generally, trainers and assessors were less likely than other VET professionals to engage in professional development.

The provision of the Cert IV TAA was most successful in supporting teacher learning when combined with the support of colleagues and/or mentors.

Teaching department specific arrangements

It became apparent throughout the research that the arrangements present in each teaching department influenced the activities that were likely to be carried out at that site; what is likely to be said in and about that site; and the relationships possible in that site (Kemmis et al. 2014). For instance, Grant's teaching area revolved around the gym that was used to support student learning and which was also a commercial entity open to the public. What was said, and done, and the relationships that were possible in this gym were different from those, for instance, in the classrooms where Simon did his teaching. As a result, the things that Grant needed to learn to be a teacher in that site, as well as the continuing professional learning that was available to support that learning, were unique to that site. Access to activities associated with learning how to teach also varied between each of the sites, so that, in effect, some activities such as mentoring were available to some teachers but not to others, even though at an organisation-wide level it might have been considered that they were available to all.

This research indicates that whether novice teachers were supported by experienced teachers or by supervisors was not critical. The exception to this was when support was provided by a former teacher who was subsequently no longer available. What was important were the site-specific arrangements that enabled or constrained novice teacher access to support. For instance, all teachers undertook the Cert IV TAA within their first year of teaching; however, the colleague support that was available in each teaching department to further enhance this learning varied. The usefulness of the Cert IV TAA in supporting teacher learning was also influenced by the practices of the teaching department. Sarah, who was teaching in the Flexible Learning Centre in her first year, did not find her learning as a result of undertaking the Cert IV TAA to be of value until she began classroom teaching in her second year. As another example, colleague and supervisor support can be seen to have been available to all teachers; however, for those teaching fewer than eight hours a week, teacher-sourced and ad hoc colleague support was in reality very limited. The research found that what each teacher needed to learn and the factors that enabled and constrained their learning were different for each site.

Workforce development

As noted, what the novice teachers in this study needed to learn to operate successfully as a teacher varied between teaching departments. Further, the continuing professional learning they engaged in

also varied between teaching departments and was influenced to some extent by the number of hours that they were employed as teachers. Guthrie and Clayton (2010) call for more focus and expenditure on workforce development in TAFE, together with 'bringing casual staff in particular ... in from the cold and finding ways to develop their skills and better value the work they do' (p.27). If these calls for increased focus on and funding for TAFE workforce development are heeded, then the strategies to address workforce development will need to be well considered and take into account the needs at a local level rather than just those apparent at an organisation-wide level.

Conclusion

The research reported in this paper found that the continuing professional learning strategy that novice VET teachers identified as having had the most influence on their learning was colleague and supervisor support. The Cert IV TAA was also important in supporting novice teacher learning and making this qualification compulsory and available to teachers free of charge was a successful strategy, which resulted in all teachers holding the qualification by the end of the first year of teaching. The professional networks that novice teachers accessed were, with only one exception, those associated with industry, and the induction courses the teachers undertook were found to be useful in a relatively narrow way.

Colleague and supervisor support was found to be more complex than the often-cited formal mentoring and included informal mentoring, supervisor support, and the support of a former teacher. The first three of these allowed for ongoing access and relationship development, whereas the latter approach was short-term and didn't provide ongoing support. Mentoring was found to effectively support novice teacher learning as well as novice teacher confidence.

The way that colleague and supervisor support was accessed was also found to vary. Access could be supervisor-designated, teacher-sourced, or ad hoc. In some sites teachers had access to all three of these, whereas in other sites access was more limited. Except for the sport and fitness department, where a casual teacher was well supported into the teaching role using a variety of approaches, teachers employed on a casual basis were less likely to have access to teacher-sourced or ad hoc support. As a result, supervisor-designated, and particularly supervisor-provided, support became especially important.

A number of local site-based arrangements influenced the learning of the novice VET teachers. The most influential of these was the basis on which the novice teacher was employed. This influenced many of the other arrangements in the teaching department. Other site-based arrangements that enabled or constrained VET teacher learning were industry knowledge and understanding, reciprocal sharing, the development of an understanding of VET language and concepts, access to shared spaces, including the social space created at 'smoko' as well as the physical spaces in the staff room that enabled social interaction. These arrangements played out differently in each of the teaching area sites.

This research found that making the Cert IV TAA available free of charge and compulsory for all teachers, combined with the support of colleagues and supervisors, was a successful strategy to support teacher learning. Such an approach is likely to be most successful if it is combined with a designated formal mentor who has mentoring as a recognised component of their workload. This approach merits trialling more broadly.

The research findings reported in this paper indicate that some novice VET teachers, and particularly those employed on a casual basis, are struggling. For the novice VET teachers in this study this is most

powerfully articulated in the metaphors they use – they feel they are left to sink or swim, based on the support that is available to them in learning how to teach.

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