

# **THE POLICIES AND DISCOURSES OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING:**

**and their impact on the formation of teachers' identities.**

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## **CERTIFICATE**

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Education and training, in Australia, has experienced unprecedented levels of change in recent times. Government educational policies are now dominated by economic discourses that point to the need for all educational systems to contribute to economic development, by increasing the knowledge and skill levels of the present and future workforce. The twin discourses of new vocationalism and economic rationalism have now transformed Australian educational systems. But the effects of this transformation on the identities of teachers working in this changed environment have not been adequately examined. This study examines the impact of government policies on teachers' identities by investigating a particular group of teachers working in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in Australia.

The study has chosen teacher identity as its focus, because much of recent research has involved investigating the new knowledge and skills required of teachers working in this changed environment. However, this can be seen as making an overly instrumental means-ends connection between teachers' knowledge and skills and the professional practice of teaching. It fails to appreciate that when teachers are asked to 'do things differently' in their everyday teaching practices they are also being called on to become different teachers. That is, to have different understandings of their role in education, to have different relationships with students, to conceptualise their professional and vocational knowledge differently. In short, to change their identity.

In order to investigate the impact of the policies and discourses of VET on TAFE teachers' identities the study locates itself, in part, within the interpretivist tradition of social research and uses the methods and methodologies of critical policy analysis, phenomenology and ethnography to investigate the research questions. It then uses a number of diverse theoretical perspectives to challenge and interrogate the interpretation made of the data gathered.

The study undertakes a critical analysis of contemporary VET policies utilising a 'policy-as-discourse' approach to the analysis and draws on the methods of phenomenology and ethnography in order to generate situated discourses that are often

overlooked in critical policy analysis. The study also uses the perspective offered by poststructuralism, which foregrounds the power of discourse in the formation of both the social world and individual identity.

The conclusions reached suggest that TAFE teacher identity is an ambiguous discursive achievement constructed out of the multiple, historical organisational and individual discourses that all circulate in teachers' life worlds. These discourses now interact in complex and contradictory ways with the contemporary policies and discourses of vocational education and training resulting in teachers experiencing a degree of doubt and uncertainty concerning their identification with the new institution of TAFE.

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# Glossary

**ANTA** - Australian National Training Authority

**DTEC** - Department of Training and Education Coordination

**ITAB** – Industry Training Advisory Board

**MACTEQT** - Ministerial Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and the Quality of Teaching

**MEST** - Ministry of Education, Skills and Training

**NBEET** - National Board of Employment Education and Training

**NCVER** - National Centre for Vocational Education Research

**OECD** - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

**TAFE** - Technical and Further Education

**VET** - Vocational Education and Training

**VEETAC** - Vocational Education Employment and Training Advisory Council