

**CURRICULA AND COMPETENCY
IN
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION:
WHO DESIGNS WHAT AND HOW STUDENTS LEARN.**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Australian Centre for Education Studies
Macquarie University, New South Wales

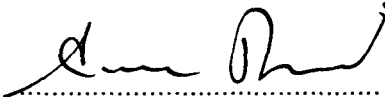
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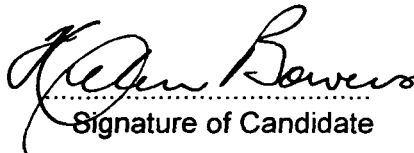
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Abstract

This thesis examined students' and teachers' experience of learning and teaching in the context of a TAFE course 'Internal Control Principles'. In particular it focused on the enacted curriculum to determine its contribution to students' approaches to learning and how the design of the curriculum was used and developed with classroom situations. The data comprised the experiences of 20 students as they undertook their study in the classes of 11 teachers of the unit that was part of the Advanced Diploma of Accounting at TAFE New South Wales. A mixture of three methodologies sought to identify students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of learning, and the things that promoted or inhibited their depth of understanding. Emerging from the phenomenographic analysis were categories highlighting the dominant cluster of experiences and perceptions of both the teachers and their students. Commonalities and themes were identified through discourse analysis that either supported or opposed the emerging theory. Woven into this was the autoethnographic reflection of a curriculum writer searching for meaning of the enacted curriculum.

Analysis of the data highlighted three main structural categories, a referential dimension and two outcomes of the approaches to teaching. The thesis documents the cognitive, challenging and demanding work that students undertook with their teachers in an effort to seek 'wisdom'. Students' experience of the curriculum, and hence their learning, was mediated through their 'classroom encounters' where students tried to 'establish competence' and excel at 'motivating and learning' as they 'tuned in to the same wavelength' as their teacher. Putting this pedagogical puzzle together depended on how well students negotiated the relationship with their teachers in the classroom.

An important finding was that the student-teacher relationship had the potential to significantly affect the way students perceived their learning experiences. Teaching approaches that facilitated an environment where the students had control over their learning meant that students changed their concepts of the object of their study. However, inhibitive or obstructive teaching approaches left students struggling to learn. Many teachers constructed their roles as information transmission/teacher-focused, at times with didactic approaches. They worked to retain control over the students' learning and when this occurred, whether intentionally or otherwise, they remained distanced from their students. These approaches and interactions between student, peer and teacher demonstrated that the relationship is a tripartite one and not linear in nature. Rethinking the way teachers can bring knowledge of student learning into focus with their teaching practices will enhance professional development and add to deeper and more lasting learning outcomes for their students.

Certificate

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

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

Approval for the in-depth interviews with the participants was received from the Ethics Review Committee,
No. HE25JUL2003-D02537

Signature of candidate


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“Education has really only one basic factor, a *sine qua non* – one must want it.”

[George Edward Woodberry (1948) *John Goffe's Mill*, Norton.]

This journey has been a most rewarding experience and my dreams and thirst for knowledge could not have been achieved without the participation in the study of the teachers and students. They shared their stories generously and with integrity. Their voices are a powerful and touching gift in helping others learn. I acknowledge and thank them and hope this research does justice to their contributions.

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