



Serving two masters: how vocational educators experience marketisation reforms

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary education reforms that draw ideas from the political and economic fields are said to be altering the nature of vocational education. While there are substantial policy studies on the effects of marketisation reforms, fewer analyse the perspectives of vocational educators on such reforms. How vocational educators negotiate the potential clash of values when marketisation reforms are enacted within the sector remains relatively unexplored. This paper aims to incorporate these perspectives in order to explore and help explain the responses of vocational educators to such changes. To do so the paper draws on concepts from Legitimation Code Theory, a sociological framework for analysing practices and beliefs. Specifically, it enacts ‘autonomy codes’, which reveal how external forces impact upon the internal practices of a social field. These concepts are used to analyse the beliefs and perceptions of a group of vocational educators in Australia who are undergoing marketisation reforms. The analysis suggests that many educators are experiencing a growing ‘code clash’ between the goals they attribute to reforms and their own beliefs about public education and the expectations of their students, one which problematises their capacity to reconcile these sets of values and colours their views of changes in the sector.

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Introduction

Neoliberal education reforms are having widespread effects on education systems across a variety of national contexts (Braithwaite 2016; Honingh and Karsten 2007; Oh 2011). These changes are variously labelled as ‘marketization’ (Kwong 2000), ‘consumerism’ (Naidoo and Jamieson 2005) and ‘New Public Management’ (Hoggett 1996), among others. Despite the diversity of nomenclature, analyses commonly identify the increasing influence of the economic sphere within education as a key feature of recent developments. Such reforms are particularly salient

within Vocational Education and Training (VET). The sector has been described as Janus-faced or 'fractured' in terms of serving both the needs of industry and the purposes of education (Barnett 2006; Robson 1998). Moreover, VET has historically enjoyed less independence from direct political intervention than many other areas of education (Simmons 2010). The VET sector has thereby become a regular focus of government reforms (Chappell 1999; Harris 2017; Huddleston 2016). Accordingly, there is an extensive literature discussing marketisation reforms within VET (e.g. Honingh and Karsten 2007; Strathdee 2013; Wheelahan 2015; Zoellner 2016). However, relatively few studies incorporate the expressed views and experiences of those frontline staff charged with pedagogically implementing reform: vocational educators. These perspectives are important: educators interpret and implement policy changes and so have a substantial impact on how policies play out in classrooms (Martin 2012). This paper helps address this gap by discussing the perspectives of a group of educators on the impact of a set of recent policy reforms in VET. Specifically, the paper draws on interviews with educators in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, who were experiencing the 2015 Smart and Skilled reforms that introduced a portable student entitlement system intended to create a market amenable to private training colleges.

At the same time, the paper introduces and illustrates a theoretical approach that can help explore how actors articulate potentially conflicting economic and educational values. At present, research that does include perspectives of educators highlights a diversity of effects for their beliefs and practice which vary depending on specificities of the policy context. However, such studies are typically descriptive, so whether these differences are fundamental or simply different realisations of the same underlying issues remains unclear. This paper will use concepts from Legitimation Code Theory to explore the organising principles underlying educators' experiences of change and systematically explain their varied beliefs and experiences.

The paper begins by briefly reviewing the focus of research into the effects on educators of marketisation reforms to highlight the need to more fully include the experiences and beliefs of educators in VET. Second, we introduce the concepts of 'autonomy codes' from Legitimation Code Theory, which enable the different ways in which actors, practices and beliefs from different contexts are brought together to be explored. Third, we describe the mixed-method approach of the empirical study on which this paper is based. Fourth, analyses resulting from the study are discussed in three sections that address how participants described their own educational values, their conceptions of the marketisation reforms and their perspectives on students' expectations of VET. We conclude by demonstrating that through systematically revealing the principles underlying the competing values within education one can show why these might be perceived by the educators within VET as conflicting goals.

On educational reform: a proclaimed clash of values

A key thread running through literature on contemporary education reforms is that traditional values of public education are at odds with values embodied by economic ideas underpinning marketisation policies (e.g. Natale and Doran 2012). Much of the education literature highlights contradictions between, on the one hand, the notions of social justice, humanist education and equality that have come to be associated with the field of education and, on the other hand, neo-liberal ideas of efficiency, cost-effectiveness and economic competitiveness that are identified as underlying reforms (Hodge 2016; Honingh and Karsten 2007; Kenway, Bigum, and Fitzclarence 1993; Simmons 2010). For example, marketisation reforms in education have been argued to lead to 'proletariatization' of educators (Verhoeven et al. 2006), with teaching increasingly deprofessionalised through its segmentation into separate, measurable parts that reduce space for the exercise of agency and expertise. Such developments are widely described as opposed to educational values of classroom autonomy and pedagogic flexibility (Hodge 2016). These kinds of contradictions are said to create problems for educators as they struggle to 'seek to maximise the attainment of mutually incompatible values' (Rosenbloom 1983, 219) resulting in what Ball (2003, 221) has described as 'values schizophrenia'. Coping with these competing values is described as creating disillusion and demoralisation among educators (Bartlett et al. 2002; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005; Savoie 2010).

Vocational education has been widely described as a sector that has long faced these challenges (Ainley and Bailey 1997; Harris, Simons, and Clayton 2005; Hodge 2016). Many commentators have suggested that the exacerbation of clash of values by marketisation reforms in recent years has prompted educators in VET to become more business focused in how they view themselves and their role (Chappell 2001; Hodge 2016; Watt 2016). However, much of the research on marketisation reforms does not include the experiences and perspectives of vocational educators (Wheelahan 2015; Toner 2014). One reason is that much of the literature on marketisation reforms in VET has been strongly focused on analysing policy itself (Corbett 2017; Yu and Oliver 2015). This work, much of it focused on reforms to the British Further Education sector in the 1990s and early 2000s, has provided a detailed understanding of the history and process of reforms in vocational education (e.g. Harris 2017; Smith and Keating 2003). However, the focus on policy is reflected in a tendency to read off the effects on vocational education and on VET educators from intended or anticipated policy outcomes (e.g. Avis 1999, 2003, 2005; Gössling 2016; Honingh and Karsten 2007; Simmons 2010; Strathdee 2013; Zoellner 2016), rather than empirically exploring the viewpoints of educators. This is problematic because policies are often neither clear nor comprehensive in how they are to be enacted (Coffield et al. 2007). Policy reforms often set broad-brushed mechanisms or goals and leave how those are to be put into practice to actors 'on the ground'. As studies have shown, VET educators can have a substantial impact

on how policies are implemented in practice (e.g. Coffield et al. 2007; Martin 2012). Thus, the effects of reforms for vocational educators cannot be simply inferred from policy; indeed, the beliefs of vocational educators themselves can play a significant role by shaping how they put those policies into practice, thereby determining how policies affect their everyday experiences. However, relatively fewer studies have examined the views and beliefs of these agents. This gap has a more troubling characteristic: in sidelining the voice of educators in VET, research is mirroring the reforms being undertaken in VET. Studies which have explored the perspectives of VET educators undergoing policy reform find they feel excluded from the policy creation process (Davids 2012; Martin 2012; Nair and Kigotho 2017; Schmidt 2017; Smith and O'Leary 2013). Thus to avoid echoing such exclusion from reform within research into reform, more studies that give voice to the experiences of VET educators are required.

Research that does include these perspectives (e.g. Chappell 2001; Martin 2012; Nair and Kigotho 2017; Randle and Brady 1997; Robson 1998) provides insight into how educational and economic values come together within the enactment of marketisation policies. Taken as a whole, they highlight the diverse ways in which these reforms are affecting educators. However, such studies are typically under-theorised, with the result that it is unclear whether differences are fundamental and systematic (such as depending on the nature of the subject area taught by educators) or simply different empirical realisations of the same underlying issues. While providing rich description, such accounts often offer less rich explanation as to why effects play out in the ways they describe, such as why some VET educators embrace marketisation reforms while others feel hostility and experience intense strains on their sense of self. There is thus a need for concepts that can reach beneath empirical descriptions to reveal the organising principles underlying the beliefs and practices of actors. This would then enable similarities and differences between, for example, their understanding of the values embodied by VET and by reforms to be systematically explored and compared with their experiences of those reforms.

This paper aims to contribute to resolving these two issues of the sidelined views of educators and need for theory. First, to help give voice to the beliefs and experiences of VET educators undergoing marketisation reforms, the paper reports on a mixed-methods study of teachers in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in NSW, Australia, who were experiencing a major set of reforms introduced in 2015 and called Smart and Skilled. It explores the values these educators viewed as embodied by TAFE, the values they attributed to the reforms, their attitudes to those reforms and their beliefs about students' educational expectations. Second, to illustrate one theoretical approach to exploring these issues, the paper draws on Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). This sociological framework offers concepts for exploring the organising principles underlying actors' beliefs, dispositions and practices. Specifically, the paper draws on the LCT concepts of 'autonomy codes', which provide insight into the principles shaping different ways that actors,

practices, ideas, etc., from diverse contexts (such as, in this case, values from educational and economic fields) are brought together. We now turn to introduce these concepts, before outlining the research methods of the study, and then analysing the findings using the framework.

Theoretical framework

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) is a multi-dimensional conceptual framework for researching and changing practice. LCT extends and integrates ideas from a range of theorists, most centrally the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein (see Maton 2014, 2018). Each 'dimension' of LCT comprises concepts that examine a different set of organising principles underlying the practices, perceptions, beliefs and dispositions of actors. These principles are conceptualised as different kinds of 'legitimation code'. LCT is rapidly growing as a basis for empirical research into education at all institutional levels and across the disciplinary map – from primary schools to universities, from physics to jazz – in a widening range of national contexts (e.g. Maton, Hood, and Shay 2016).¹ This includes a burgeoning body of work exploring areas of professional and vocational education, including marketing (Arbee, Hugo, and Thomson 2014), financial accounting (Myers 2016), business education (Arbaugh, Fornaciari, and Hwang 2016), theatre direction (Hay 2012), design (Dong, Maton, and Carvalho 2014; Wolmarans 2016) and engineering (Winberg et al. 2016; Wolff 2017).

In this study, we draw on the concepts of 'autonomy codes' (Maton 2005; Maton and Howard 2018), which explore the ways that actors draw on practices or beliefs from different contexts. For example, these concepts are being used in major studies of classroom practice to analyse how teachers integrate knowledge from such diverse sources as different disciplines or everyday experience and academic knowledge (Maton 2017; Maton and Howard 2018). Our aim is to explore how VET educators perceive recent marketisation reforms. Thus, here we draw on 'autonomy codes' to analyse how practices, beliefs and ways of working from the educational and economic spheres are articulated within the experiences and perceptions of educators in VET.

Autonomy codes

The notion of autonomy codes begins from the simple premise that any set of practices, ideas or beliefs comprises constituents that are arranged into particular relations (Maton and Howard 2018). Both constituents and their relations may take a manifold diversity of forms. Constituents may be actors, ideas, objects, artefacts, etc., and relations among constituents may be based on explicit procedures, tacit ways of working, mechanisms, rules, etc. Autonomy codes explore the degree of insulation around constituents and around the basis of their relations. These are conceptualised as follows:

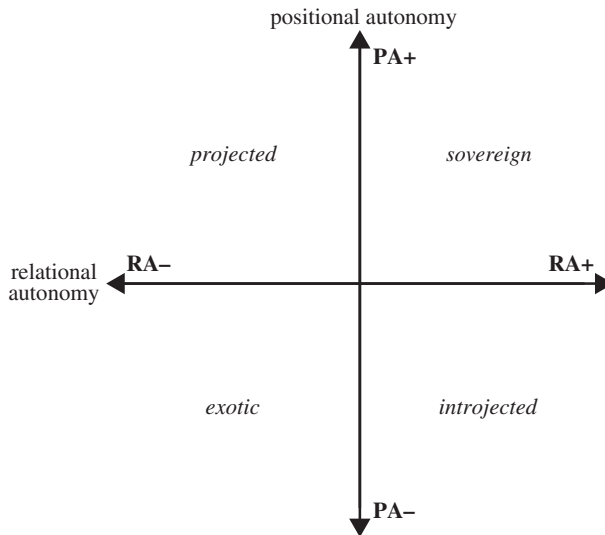


Figure 1. The autonomy plane (Maton and Howard 2018, 6)

- *positional autonomy* (PA) between constituents positioned within a context or category and those positioned elsewhere; and
- *relational autonomy* (RA) between relations among constituents of a context or category and relations among constituents of other contexts or categories.

Each may be stronger (+) or weaker (–) along a continuum of strengths, where stronger represents greater insulation and weaker represents lesser insulation. Thus, stronger positional autonomy (PA+) indicates where constituents are relatively strongly delimited from those of other practices, and weaker positional autonomy (PA–) indicates where such distinctions are relatively weakly drawn. Similarly, stronger relational autonomy (RA+) indicates where purposes, aims, ways of working, etc., are relatively specific to a set of practices (autonomous principles of relation), and weaker relational autonomy (RA–) indicates where they may be drawn from or shared with those of other practices (heteronomous principles of relation).

As shown in Figure 1, these continua can be visualised as axes of the *autonomy plane*. Varying the two strengths independently (PA+/-, RA+/-) generates four principal *autonomy codes*:

- *sovereign codes* (PA+, RA+), where status is accorded to strongly insulated positions and autonomous principles, i.e. what is valued emanates from within the context and acts according to its specific ways of working;
- *exotic codes* (PA–, RA–), where legitimacy accrues to weakly insulated positions and heteronomous principles; i.e. status is associated with elsewhere;

- *introjected codes* (PA–, RA+), where legitimacy resides with weakly insulated positions and autonomous principles, i.e. practices or actors associated with other contexts but (adopting the saying) now they are in Rome, they do as the Romans do; and
- *projected codes* (PA+, RA–), where legitimacy resides with strongly insulated positions and heteronomous principles of relation; i.e. what is valued emanates from within the context but acts according to ways of working drawn from elsewhere.

Within any context, a specific autonomy code may dominate as the basis of achievement, but may not be transparent, universal or uncontested. Not everyone may recognise and/or be able to realise what is required, there may be more than one code present, and there are likely to be struggles among actors over which code is dominant. One can thus describe degrees of code clash and code match (Maton 2014, 77) between, for example, an actor's practices and beliefs and those dominant within a field. These clashes and matches can have significant effects for actors within the field (e.g. Maton 2018).

In this paper, we shall use these concepts to analyse the degrees to which:

- actors are viewed as from inside education or associated with other fields such as business (positional autonomy); and
- their ways of working are viewed as based on specifically educational principles or on principles from elsewhere, especially the economic field (relational autonomy).

Using these concepts, we analyse how educators view the nature of reforms, how they are affected by these reforms and how they feel perceived by other groups in the vocational education sector, particularly students. The concepts enable us to analyse the degree to which educators view reforms and their effects as emanating from within the intrinsic characteristics of vocational education or from other contexts and serving other purposes.

Research methods

The study focused on vocational educators in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in NSW. TAFE NSW is the largest VET provider in Australia (Boston Consulting Group 2016), and the traditional public provider in NSW. It has been experiencing a series of substantial policy changes since at least the 1990s (Chappell 1999). One of the most recent set of changes is the Smart and Skilled reforms, implemented in 2015 (NSW Department of Education and Communities 2015). These reshaped public funding of the sector to be based on portable student entitlements that students can use in any public or private educational institution; i.e. a voucher system. This worked in tandem with the federal enactment of what was called 'FEE-HELP', which implemented an income-contingent loan scheme for vocational

Table 1. Teaching areas of survey respondents.

Area of TAFE	Percentage of respondents
Business and Finance	10.7
Child studies, Health and Community Service	28.0
Engineering, Building and Construction, Electrotechnology, Automotive and Maritime	10.7
Events, Tourism and Hospitality	13.3
Languages, Communication and Foundation Education	24.0
Hair and Beauty, Fitness and Sport	2.7
Horticulture, Floristry, Environment and Sustainability	8.0
Information Technology, Media and Entertainment, Design	2.7

Table 2. Demographic information of interviewees.

Pseudonym	Area	Teaching experience (years)
Kate	Visual merchandising	27
Alice	Allied Health	36
Sophia	Nursing	9
Rebecca	Hospitality	31
Susan	Veterinary science	6

education costs regardless of whether delivery was by a public or private training provider. Together these policies were intended to open up the vocational education market within NSW, a move publicly justified by politicians with promises of improved efficiency of educational delivery.² The ostensible aim was to encourage actors within TAFE through competition to adapt strategies from private sector vocational education, such as increased marketing, blended delivery options and improved workforce productivity (Boston Consulting Group 2016). The study we shall discuss was conducted in mid-2015, the first year in which these reforms were implemented.³ Thus, participants were in the midst of engaging with the policy changes.

The study utilised a mixed-methods approach, in two phases. Phase 1 comprised an anonymous online survey of current TAFE teachers from both metropolitan and regional areas of NSW. Teachers from the Hunter, New England and Sydney TAFE regions (a mixture of metropolitan and rural regions along the east coast of NSW) were emailed information about the study and an online survey link allowing them to self-select to participate. A total of 79 participants completed the survey, 56% of which were from regional areas and 44% from metropolitan areas, with an average length of tenure teaching for TAFE of 17 years. For a breakdown of teaching areas represented, see Table 1. The survey utilised both closed and open-ended response questions. Phase 2 entailed extended, semi-structured interviews of between 30 and 90 min duration with five educators who volunteered to be interviewed through the survey. Interviewees were from five different faculties within TAFE, representing a diversity of teaching disciplines and their teaching experience ranged from six to 36 years (see Table 2). All interviewees were employed at TAFE full-time and worked in metropolitan institutes⁴. All five interviewees were women; however, the survey respondents included the viewpoints of male teachers who made

up 38% of the respondents. The primary focus of the interviews was to explore educators' experiences of this context of reform. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to provide insights into the world of those actually engaged in educating (Goodson 1992). The questions in both the survey and interviews focused on educators' histories within VET, impacts of recent reforms and how these affected them as educators as well as other groups within vocational education. The project was approved by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee in 2015.

The data gathered from both interviews and survey were analysed thematically and emergent themes then analysed in terms of 'autonomy codes'. Three themes will be discussed here: (1) educators' perspectives of themselves and vocational education; (2) how they perceived the marketisation reforms they are experiencing (Smart and Skilled) and (3) how they perceived their relations with students and pressures they feel this placed on them as vocational educators. In each case, we analyse the autonomy code embodied by educators' perceptions and compare those codes to help explain their experiences of reforms.

Perceptions of vocational education and educators

A strong theme in responses to both the survey and interviews was a perception of the goals of contemporary reforms as inimical to educators' beliefs about education. Most respondents described what LCT conceptualises as a 'code clash' between their own values and those embodied by the reforms. This supports the assertions of many commentators on marketisation reforms. However, drawing on LCT, we can go further to explore the nature of this clash by analysing the codes involved.

Educators consistently described themselves as coming from and located within a resolutely educational field, or what can be conceptualised as stronger positional autonomy (PA+). In the survey, 64% of respondents identified themselves as 'teachers' as opposed to 15% who identified themselves as 'trainers and assessors'. This was mirrored in interviews: the role of 'trainer' was often constructed as referring to someone located beyond vocational education and typically contrasted with the interviewee's identity as a 'teacher'. Typical responses in interviews included: 'We see ourselves as teachers and we actually hate the idea of seeing ourselves as trainers, we're actually educators' (Susan) and 'We see ourselves as educators, but more than just educators, we are mentors' (Kate). As a third respondent stated:

I would rather describe myself as an educator because 'training' I think is too narrow ... I don't think I just go in and train people and then walk out. It's more looking at people holistically. Looking at what motivates them, helping them, assisting them with problems. (Rebecca)

Respondents also valorised what they saw as principles and practices specific to vocational education, particularly the promotion of equity, and disparaged a more 'economic' mindset that emanated from beyond the field. Their views on the values

of vocational education were thus characterised by *stronger relational autonomy* (RA+). As one survey respondent summarised:

We are a public education provider; our ethos should be about providing a fair and equitable education to all members of society. Rather we are turning into a business focused on the bottom dollar rather than the social good of education. (Respondent 42)

In short, these VET educators constructed themselves as positioned within education and oriented towards educational goals: a *sovereign code* (PA+, RA+).

Perceptions of marketisation reforms

Before analysing the perceived autonomy code of reforms, it is worth noting participants' views about the significance of change in the sector. Nearly all survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there had been substantial changes in TAFE due to marketisation reforms during their employment (93%) and that these changes were reshaping the way they conducted their work (87.5%). In interviews, educators described a wide variety of issues affecting their working practices, including commercialisation, changing contact hours and fiscal accountability. At first glance, this contradicts previous studies of VET that suggest reforms often fail to have significant impacts on teaching practices (e.g. Martin 2012). However, respondents indicated that reforms having substantial effects on their working practices were itself a relatively recent development. As one participant stated:

In the past various changes that we went through really didn't have much of an impact at the coalface with the teachers. I think there was quite a lot of rhetoric around, probably two reforms ago, 'TAFE is now working on a business model and blah, blah, blah', but this is really right down to the line. ... I noticed changes in my colleagues, changes in the relationship between staff and senior staff, and I don't like it. I think it's because of the environment we're in and the fact that it is pretty much 'do or die'. (Rebecca)

This description of 'do or die' was reflected in similar evocations of heightened danger by other respondents. The perceived threat was said by respondents to be generated by increased competition from private registered training organisations that could result in job losses for TAFE employees. In both the survey and interviews, educators stated that while past reforms may have involved significant rhetoric that echoed private sector practices, current reforms were introducing substantive policies which could transform that rhetoric into reality.

The autonomy code embodied by educators' perceptions of these significant changes was very different from that characterising how they viewed vocational education. Reforms were viewed by VET educators as emanating from beyond the field of education. They viewed reforms as drawing ideas and values from political and economic fields, rather than from education; for example:

I think there is pressure from outside of TAFE and that pressure has been distilled down to the teachers and head teachers, so I know it is not their own decision to post additional duties or additional tasks, but it feels like we are bearing the brunt of it all. (Alice)

Moreover, the respondents characterised reforms as attempting to reframe TAFE as comprising commercial businesses rather than educational institutions. As part of this process, the respondents described increasing pressure to view themselves as ‘trainers and assessors’, a role they viewed as situated beyond education. While 64% of survey respondents described themselves as ‘teachers’, only 15% felt that senior managers and policymakers viewed them as ‘teachers’. As one respondent described, ‘it has changed. They not only see us as deliverers of training, but they expect us to be businesspeople as well’ (Alice). The educators described management’s new conception of educators as devaluing the extra-curricular responsibilities that they believed essential to the role of a ‘teacher’, including ‘mentoring’, ‘guiding’ and ‘parenting’ students. Respondents thus felt changes both originated from beyond vocational education and constructed their role as involving practices from beyond education; in short, reforms were viewed as embodying *weaker positional autonomy* (PA–).

The educators also emphasised the heteronomous nature of the principles underlying reforms. These were often described by interviewees as embodying ideas and values from the world of business, such as commercial success, profitability and increased efficiency, notions typically summarised as ‘being focused on the bottom dollar’ (respondent 72). As one interviewee said of ‘business’: ‘I don’t know if it is the number one priority, but it seems to be on par [with education] at the moment’ (Alice). These principles additionally appeared to be altering the basis of achievement in TAFE; for example:

Well, the teachers who do the business and are out there and have a high profile, they are the ones who get the most rewards in terms of recognition, whereas those who are more educationally focused don’t get as much kudos. (Rebecca)

Thus, reforms were viewed as adopting business success instead of educational quality as the yardstick for achievement in VET: *weaker relational autonomy* (RA–).

In short, respondents viewed recent policy developments affecting VET as emanating from beyond the field and embodying commercial ways of working: an exotic code (PA–, RA–). This represents a potential code clash between: on the one hand, the sovereign code characterising participants’ descriptions of themselves and vocational education, and, on the other hand, the exotic code by which they described reforms. As illustrated by the arrow ‘1’ in Figure 2, educators experienced this code clash as a kind of pull or strain on their role. For example, Susan argued that educators are being pulled into a new role:

Management is trying to force them into thinking that they are delivering products... teachers are no longer ‘teachers’, they are ‘trainers’ or ‘assessors’. We are no longer ‘teaching’, we are ‘training’. Our students are not ‘students’, they’re ‘learners’. Our courses are not ‘courses’, they’re ‘products’. And it’s all commercial. TAFE has tried to change the way we think. But we don’t. We see ourselves as ‘teachers’ and we actually hate the idea of seeing [our]selves as ‘trainers’ – we’re actually ‘educators’.

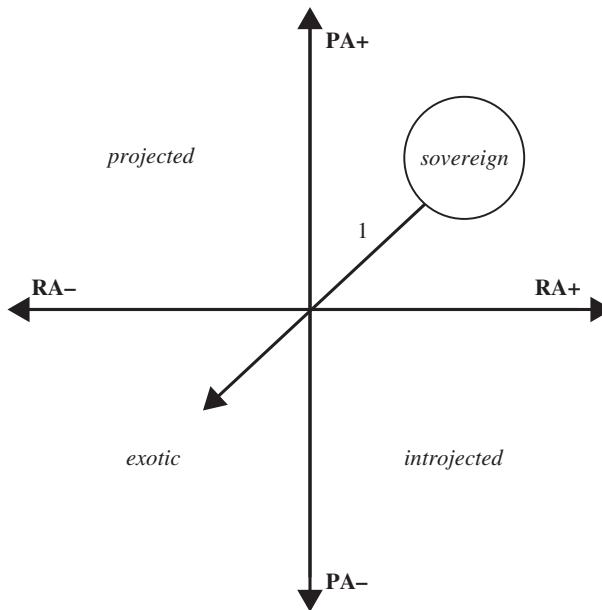


Figure 2. Educators perceptions of pressures of marketization reforms (1).

The code clash is clearly revealed by negative views of the consequences of marketisation among VET educators. Respondents highlighted the rise of administrative paperwork and corporate identity work at the expense of educating; for example:

We've got a lot more paperwork to do that we didn't have before. From a teacher's point of view, nowadays, they feel the paperwork has become the most important thing. [...] I feel as if the teaching part, which is the main part, doesn't matter, like it's not important. But the paperwork, having the right logo and all the right instructions, that's really important. (Susan)

In particular, increasing marketisation was viewed as being at the expense of classroom time and at odds with the purposes of VET; for example, one survey respondent stated:

My students are why I teach – and often they are not given appropriate timetables / hours / time necessary for their study due to constant cutbacks. (Respondent 12)

Further, many respondents experienced increasing pressure to teach the exact competencies and skills outlined in training packages: 'we have to stick to the training package and we can't go away from it' (Alice). This was mirrored in the survey findings, with 94% of respondents feeling they had less control over their teaching as a result of reforms. Participants who valued the educative aspects of VET, as opposed to the purely skills-training components, believed this change both limited and undervalued their teaching. As one interviewee stated: 'the courses we are delivering here are not just about training packages and the skills, it's actually education which encompasses a much broader view of learning... I feel as if that is being subverted' (Susan). Respondents also expressed concerns at

how juggling the different goals of profitability and quality teaching was making their work more difficult:

I have no time off, 52 weeks a year I'm supposed to respond to students' emails and phone calls... It's become worse in the last 18 months, it's really spilled over into my private life. (Susan)

The code clash between how VET educators viewed themselves and how they viewed marketising reforms was thus reflected in a negative view of the effects of those reforms.

Notably, an exception to this view was a respondent whose views of the values of vocational education and their own role exhibited an autonomy code that matched rather than clashed with that characterising reforms. This interviewee described how the purpose of the reforms matched the ways of working that characterised the subject she taught:

... visual merchandise is a really commercial area of work anyway, it's not like we're in the trade areas, so the mindset of anyone working in visual merchandise is all about the commercial side of things... so that's our mindset anyway, so relating that to education, it's not that dissimilar [to the reforms]. (Kate)

In characterising the mindset of those working in visual merchandise as more commercially oriented than other areas of vocational education, Kate positioned herself closer to the field of 'business' than other educators. This can be conceptualised as relatively weaker positional autonomy (PA-). In addition, she argued that changes were orienting courses towards current practices in the industry and thereby making those courses more relevant:

When I first started here I found that what was being taught here had no relation to what was being done in industry at all... the change has been all about making sure what we deliver in that training package has immediate reference to what's being done in store... we need to be training our students so that they can walk straight into jobs. (Kate)

Kate viewed the purpose and goal of vocational education as getting students jobs. In comparison to the holistic, educational concerns of many other respondents, Kate's emphasis on commercial principles (graduate employment rate) as a yardstick for success represents a different conception of vocational education, one that exhibits weaker relational autonomy (RA-). Kate's account of the role of vocational education and her own identity is thus characterised by an exotic code (PA-, RA-), matching the autonomy code she (and other educators) attributed to the reforms. Her views towards the reforms were accordingly more positive.

In summary, as shown in Figure 2, most respondents described themselves in ways that embodied a sovereign code: positioned within education and pursuing specifically educational principles. In contrast, they portrayed contemporary policy reforms as embodying an exotic code: coming from outside education and based on values from elsewhere, specifically business. This represents a fundamentally different way of conceiving status, practice and identity. The perceived clash between these two codes was reflected in their adverse and often hostile views

of reforms. The exception in this study was an interviewee whose account of vocational education represented an exotic code, matching that of the reforms. This suggests that the views of VET educators are neither homogeneous nor insignificant for understanding how reforms may impact practice. Analysing those views with autonomy codes suggests that the degree of match or clash between participants' perceptions of themselves as vocational educators and their perceptions of reforms may help explain their experience of the effects of policy changes. Educators who view themselves as located within a specialised field of VET and identify with its specifically educational goals (PA+, RA+) may feel marketisation reforms (PA-, RA-) to be in conflict with their own beliefs, while educators who view themselves as less strongly insulated from economic positions and practices (PA-, RA-) may more readily embrace such changes. However, this was not the only factor explored by the study. Respondents felt that alongside the pressure from marketisation reforms to shift towards an exotic code, they were experiencing opposing pressures from students.

Beliefs about students' expectations

Educators viewed students as pulling them in a completely different direction to reforms. Almost all survey respondents (94.5%) described students as seeing them as 'teachers' rather than 'trainers' or 'assessors'. As one interviewee stated: 'Students still see us as traditional teachers similar to those in school ... they don't see us as 'trainers', don't see us as 'providers of services' at all' (Susan). According to VET educators, then, students construct them as firmly located within education: stronger positional autonomy (PA+). Respondents also believed that students still value TAFE for its educational role rather than caring only for qualifications for employment. In open-ended questions in the surveys, respondents wrote answers such as: 'most [students] are at TAFE for the hands on / personal training delivered by passionate and experienced teachers and industry workers' (respondent 17). Similarly, in interviews educators recounted student complaints about declining educational quality of VET, such as concerns with 'cutting of course hours and moves to online learning' (Susan). For educators, students still value education for its own sake rather than simply a means to an end from beyond education: stronger relational autonomy (RA+).

Participants thus described their students as seeing them as 'educators' and as valuing education: a sovereign code (PA+, RA+). Accordingly, they described feeling a sense of responsibility to these students for continuing to provide high-quality education against what they perceived as the thrust of recent reforms. As one respondent puts it in regard to students, 'Now ... we aren't giving them what they need' (Alice). Figure 3 (arrow 2) depicts the perceived pressure placed on the educators by their perception of students' expectations.

Educators believed students viewed VET and themselves in the same fundamental ways as they did themselves: a sovereign code. Indeed, despite recent reforms,

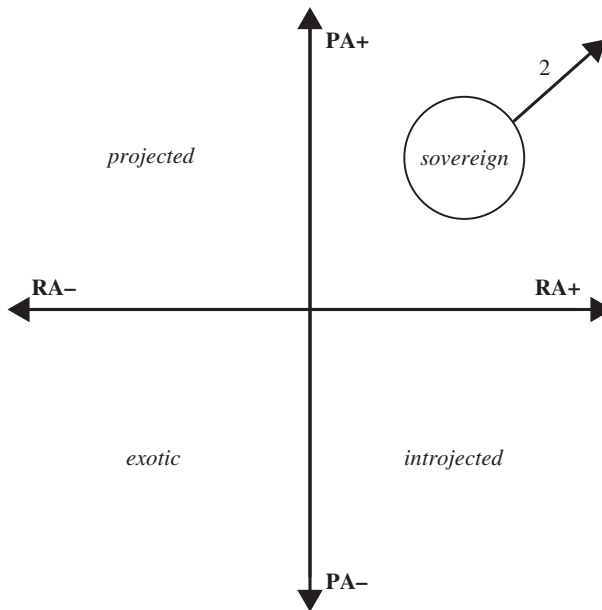


Figure 3. Pressure felt by educators from their perception of students' expectations (2).

95.8% of respondents felt students' perspectives had not changed in the last five years. This was further emphasised in open-ended response questions; for example, 'This is the one constant for me, when I walk into the workshop I know exactly what we have to achieve, as do the students' (respondent 34). Educators appeared to construct students and the student-educator relationship as a bastion of the traditional educational values they believe TAFE should stand for. Their beliefs in the values of education were thus reinforced by their perceptions of student beliefs. Researching the perspectives of students themselves was beyond the scope of the current study, so whether this perception was well founded or not remains open. However, the perception itself is a significant factor in educators' construction of the effects of reforms. For example, educators repeatedly emphasised the costs that reforms were having for students and the disappointment they felt for letting them down; as one participant stated:

...that's our core business: students. And I always love being in the classroom, I loved that interaction with students but I just feel I'm not giving them as much as I should. And across the board I think people feel that way too. (Alice)

In summary, the sovereign code that educators believe student attribute to themselves was perceived as exerting pressure to maintain educational quality in the face of reforms they felt were pulling them in a different direction (towards an exotic code).

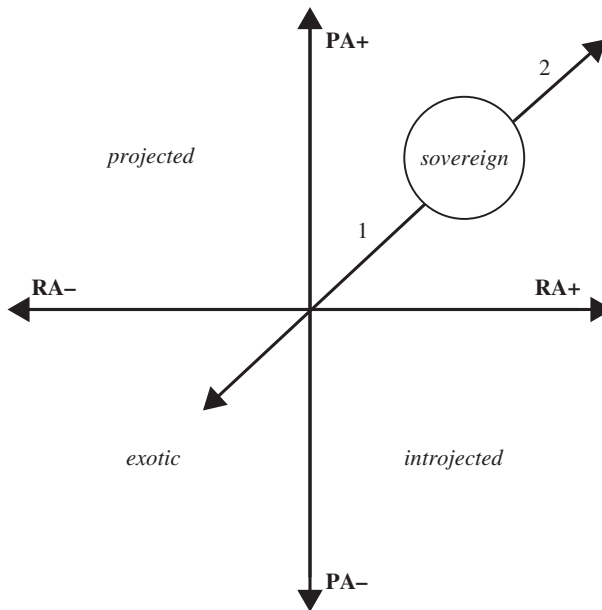


Figure 4. Pressures felt by educators within TAFE in response to reforms.

Conclusion

Most of the vocational educators in the current study were antipathetic towards the marketisation embodied by the 2015 Smart and Skilled reforms. As illustrated in Figure 4, respondents viewed themselves as being in education and for specifically educational values and purposes: a sovereign code. They felt that reforms were transforming their ways of working and value systems to conform to notions from beyond the field, particularly from business, while also constructing educators as non-educational ‘trainers and assessors’: pressures towards an exotic code (arrow 1 in Figure 4). In contrast, they believed that students viewed them in a traditional, educational manner, exerting perceived pressures to maintain if not move further into a sovereign code (arrow 2). These competing pressures are reflected in how educators believe they were perceived: only 14.9% of educators felt managers and policy makers primarily viewed them as ‘teachers’, while 95.4% felt students primarily viewed them as ‘teachers’. The competing organising principles underlying these different views of the roles and purposes of VET educators may help to explain their experience of reforms. In interviews, the participants made it clear they were struggling to negotiate and manage this tension, which was causing additional stress and led to them feeling less able to do their jobs. Rebecca described this as feelings of ‘fear and uncertainty’. The code clash between, on the one hand, the sovereign code of the VET educators and (they believe) their students and, on the other hand, exotic code pressures they perceive reform to involve, may help explain why educators expressed feeling increasingly dissociated from TAFE and overwhelmed by what one participant (Alice) described as the increasing ‘feelings of inequality and unfairness’ in the system.

While this study has provided insights into the competing pressures VET educators face due to reforms, its limited nature raises questions for further research. First, the study was relatively small scale and located in one context (NSW, Australia); further studies are required to determine whether its findings may be reflected in different policy contexts. Second, the study focused on the beliefs of educators, including their perceptions of reforms and how they felt they were viewed by other groups in vocational education. Future analysis of the policy documents and the views of both managers and students themselves will provide further insights into how well-founded are those perceptions. Nonetheless, this exploratory study illustrates the potential value of concepts from LCT, specifically 'autonomy codes', for moving beyond empirical descriptions of proclaimed identities, beliefs and practices towards exploring their underlying principles. Indeed, the flexibility of the concepts allows further studies of policy documents and others' perceptions, as well as studies of other national contexts, to be integrated with or related to this analysis. LCT can thus help us beyond claims that vocational educators are serving two masters towards showing systematically their demands, how they in turn match or clash and the effects on educators themselves.

Notes

1. To keep abreast of this rapidly growing body of work, see: <http://www.legitimation-codetheory.com>.
2. For debate about whether this kind of educational policy creates true 'markets', see for example Whitty and Power (2000); for more general critiques of the policy, see Yu and Oliver (2015).
3. Though both Smart and Skilled and VET-FEE HELP have been subsequently modified by changes to funding caps and increased focus on completion percentages of students, the fundamental architecture of the reforms remains in place.
4. Employees from only metropolitan institutes reflected the limits of the study and will be addressed in future research.

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