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An investigation into ITP tutors' understanding of policy and performance, to identify changes that have the potential to enhance teaching practice

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the reported views and experiences of tutors who work in the institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITP) sector in New Zealand. This phenomenographic based study focuses on elucidating these views and experiences in order to identify changes that have the potential to enhance tutors' teaching practice. The choice of phenomenography as a methodology for recording and analysing individual viewpoints – and the variation in these viewpoints – is complemented by case study analysis, designed to present a more individualised interpretive perspective.

Although studies have been undertaken on the way in which academics perceive working in the university sector, little research has been undertaken on the way in which ITP tutors understand and evaluate their teaching practice. This research revealed variations in the way that tutors: experience teaching in the ITP sector; measure their own performance; and interpret and use policy to support their teaching practice.

Thirty-two volunteer tutors participated in semi-structured interviews conducted within four ITPs and across four subject areas, namely: trades, business, art and design, and foundation studies. Interview data was transcribed and analysed in order to present the findings of this research, which are presented in two parts.

First, the aggregated views and experiences of tutors are marshalled into five qualitatively different categories: understanding and modelling effective teaching; developing and growing; building relationships; enacting government and institutional policy; and adapting to contextual influences.

Second, the thesis presents case studies of tutors drawn from four different subject areas. Their data was included in the categories of description before being re-analysed and reported in the context of the five categories identified in the aggregated analysis.

The researcher has formulated eight recommendations from the findings. These recommendations are of a long-term nature, and have the potential to enhance teaching practice within the ITP sector.

This research provides new perspectives on tutors' understanding and experiences of working within the ITP sector. It demonstrates that there is marked variation in the way in which they perceive and evaluate their performance; identifies potential gaps in their understanding and in the institutional environment in which they are employed; and offers recommendations for change.

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