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CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

IN THE POLICIES OF THE NZQA:

CRITIQUE AND CASE STUDIES

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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ABSTRACT

The study originated from a concern that the nature of teaching in polytechnics was undergoing a fundamental change. Increasingly, it seemed, teaching and learning were being seen as the means for achieving measurable outcomes, rather than as processes, valuable in their own right, encompassing outcomes that are difficult to define and measure.

The research aimed to discover whether, in the context of changes associated with the educational reforms, which began impacting upon teaching in New Zealand polytechnics in the late 1980s and continued into the 1990s, polytechnic lecturers were conceptualising teaching and learning in a similar way to the conceptualisation implied by the reforms.

A major part of the study involved exploratory case studies of six polytechnic lecturers, aimed at discovering how the lecturers conceptualised teaching and learning. Data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews. Attention was given to not only the surface meanings clearly expressed by the lecturers, but also to deeper meanings and influences that may not have been clear to the individual lecturers, and, thus, not accessible by direct questioning. Three automotive engineering and three nursing lecturers were chosen for the case studies.

Documents and legislation relating to teaching and learning in polytechnics were analysed to find how teaching and learning were conceptualised. The conceptualisation inferred from the document analysis was attributed to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) which, in effect, is the government's "arm" developing and implementing policies and changes affecting teaching and
learning in polytechnics, including changes related to the National Qualifications Framework.

The findings reveal a marked contrast between the lecturers' and the NZQA's conceptualisations. The NZQA is inferred to conceive that the means are separated from the ends of teaching and learning; learning and knowledge are capable of precise description, pre-specification and accurate measurement; knowledge comprises the sum of its discrete components; and knowledge has a universal character. Whereas, with exceptions on some points, the lecturers are inferred to conceive that teaching and learning involve a continuing process in which the means and the ends are integrated; that teaching, learning and knowledge include more than can be described precisely, pre-specified and measured accurately; that holistic knowledge involves more than the sum of its component parts; and that knowledge is related to its context.

The NZQA's conceptualisation is argued to be consistent with economics discourses while the lecturers' conceptualisations are argued to be consistent with education discourses.

An interpretation of the differences between the NZQA's and the lecturers' conceptualisations, through the frames of poststructuralism and critical discourse analysis, suggests that the lecturers may be resisting the power-holders economics-based discourses because they are simultaneously influenced by, what are for them, more influential, educationally-based discourses.

A further analysis of documents indicated a change to the NZQA's conceptualisation, but no change to the means-ends conception implicit in its objectives/outcomes model of curriculum development and teaching.
The validity of the findings from the document analysis and the case studies is supported by their consistency with educational literature. However, the research was qualitative and exploratory and no claim is made that the findings are generalisable. The research, nevertheless, does raise an important question concerning the consequences for knowledge, if today's professional lecturers become tomorrow's technician-lecturers. It also suggests the need for more than one curriculum model in courses.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I wish to thank the six polytechnic lecturers who willingly gave their time to talk about their teaching practice. I valued the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences and was impressed by their professionalism and commitment to their work. I felt good about the work they were doing. I hope they do, too.

I am deeply indebted, too, to my supervisor, Professor John Codd, who quietly encouraged me, provided valuable feedback and helped me to get back on track when the first approach I chose to take simply did not work. At the same time, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to develop my topic in my own way. It has been an excellent learning experience. I wish, too, to thank Dr Janet Burns for her support and encouragement. Associate Professor Wayne Edwards is another member of the Massey staff to whom I am particularly indebted. He encouraged me to enrol for an M.Ed.Admin. in the first place and encouraged me to keep going at a stage when I was about to give up.

Recently, I read in the acknowledgments in a colleague's thesis that he had come to appreciate how selfish this kind of study is. He is right. My wife, Elizabeth, has had a lot to put up with over the last few months - and longer! Yet, so often she has unselfishly put her interests aside to discuss ideas, make suggestions and proof read my drafts.

Special thanks are due, too, to other family members - my mother, my brothers, their wives and our children, Megan, Marianne and Matt -all of whom have given me support and encouragement. Perhaps now that I have finally finished, my grandchildren, Alexander and Emily-May, will see me more often.
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