# CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

## IN THE POLICIES OF THE NZQA:

## CRITIQUE AND CASE STUDIES

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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

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