Chapter 5
Higher and Further: Can We Keep Our Educational Promises?

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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, educators find themselves accountable to “make good” on the promises of policy makers about the social and political intentions of education. In the case of Technical and Vocational Education (TVE), delivering policy-driven promises can be a complex task. Internationally negotiated and ratified educational intentions of TVE by bodies such as UNESCO provide a relatively common promise of what TVE should achieve in knowledge-driven economies. However, there are stumbling blocks on the path to success in that mission. The range of contexts and stakeholders encompassed by TVE compounds the complexity, as does the recent blurring of historic divisions between further education and higher education. The chapter reveals that deeply entrenched values around forms of knowledge and their sense of educational “place” get disturbed in the process of change, and educators for TVE must now critically reflect on how to improve the knowledge structures required to meet the educational promises of the 21st century.

INTRODUCTION

The world of the twenty-first century is a very “connected” place and in education, practitioners are often connected through policy frameworks that promote a common, shared perspective. However, the homogeneity and veracity of policy statements on Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) that perpetuate a position in educational practice that “everything is going along nicely” need careful examination. Without such examination there is a risk of the public falling victim to political rhetoric over the realities of practice.

The TVE community has a long–held reputation of manifesting skills for the world; a reputation that often obscures a symbiotic contribution of knowing and doing that is integral to the knowledge economies of the twenty-first century. Arguably the most influential shapers of TVE (and associated knowledge) are its practitioners, reflecting an onerous burden on the teacher–educators who prepare them for a variety of work. These
teacher–educators in TVE are strategically placed to underwrite the needs and contributions of future generations in knowledge–driven economies.¹

In this chapter I explore the educational “promise” that the knowledge constructed in TVE is legitimate and conceptually-shaped by its practitioners and teacher educators, and how this promise struggles to align with internationalized policy intent demanding new knowledge in TVE that has purpose and utility in a changing world.

BACKGROUND

In a neo–liberal framework of globalizing economies, Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) is often one of the state–regulated mechanisms through which societies are expected to sustain and develop their members’ capacity for self–reliance and self–determination. Within regulated systems of TVE, teachers are required to be effectively qualified and informed. Qualification of TVE teachers has historically been through university–led teacher education programs or in an amalgam of paraprofessional certificate–level training and credentialed industry experience. In developed economies, education for TVE is generally located within the technical–vocational domain of further education and subordinate to higher education. However, historic divisions are blurring due to the increasingly vocationalized nature of higher education. In the Australian context higher education is now no longer exclusively based in universities, as an increasing number of TVE providers gain higher education accreditation from government agencies. This indicates a physical and philosophical shift in the educational and institutional environments where the theoretical and conceptual knowledge of TVE is constructed and disseminated. Within TVE, knowledge is not abstracted or isolated from practice as a product per se, but rather viewed as an integrated component of technical / vocational competence. A distinctive difference of TVE is its educational intent of linking self–development with imperatives of socioeconomic development.

Internationally, the educational intent of TVE is underpinned by the stewardship of organizations such as UNESCO and their International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (UNEVOC); who provide a visible presence for TVE in the international context. The policy statements of these organisations inform the TVE community of the nexus of skills and understandings that UNESCO advocates for the knowledge–focused economies of the twenty-first century. Therefore UNESCO’s (2004) normative instruments for TVE provide an internationalized Litmus test around which to frame discussions on the intent and purpose of technical knowledge in changing educational settings.

Whilst UNESCO’s position on TVE is readily accessible in public documents, teacher–educators for TVE do not readily identify a role in attending to internationalized mandates. Very few university–based teacher educators for TVE are even aware of UNESCO’s statements on the global intent of TVE (Cartledge, 2011). This challenges the potency of UNESCO’s intentions with member states, especially as UNEVOC continues to report the need for better dissemination and communication of ideals (Bukit 2012). The premise presented here of TVE practitioners being vicariously subscribed to UNESCO’s TVE mandates, through national systems of TVE in UNESCO’s member states, questions the validity of such “subscriptions” and their associated levels of commitment to internationalized goals. It can be argued that such questions lead to political positioning of public perceptions of TVE, most especially the perception of TVE for public good (versus private gain). Public perceptions around education and social responsibility can be powerful political tools (Hursh, 2013), although the influ-
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