



Pre-reading

Professional Judgment in VET: snapshots from recent research

Over the last few years, VET research has started to identify the importance of practitioners exercising their professional judgment. The following excerpts from these key reports demonstrate that more effort is required if professional judgement is to be developed, fostered and applied more widely in VET.

The need for judgement to inform innovation

Interestingly, the introduction of competency-based training in the early 1990s and the industry-led, demand driven National Training Framework in 1996 provided much greater scope to free up VET professional practice and professional judgement, note Mitchell, Clayton, Hedberg and Paine (2003, p.55) in *Emerging Futures: Innovation in Teaching and Learning in VET* (ANTA):

This new and increasingly diverse environment will increasingly challenge, contest and extend the capabilities required of VET pedagogy, learning design and management, and the professional judgement of teachers and trainers operating from institutionalised systems. (p. 56)

In response to these challenges to VET practitioners, Mitchell et al. (2003) recommend that practitioners find out about successful practice elsewhere in the sector and match this with appropriate innovations of their own:

This is not to suggest that VET practitioners simply imitate others, but rather that they use knowledge of other practice as a way of informing their own judgement and professional imagination, and that this helps to open up the possibilities that exist for innovation in their own arena of practice. (p.103)

The need to make choices and to adapt

VET programs are now delivered both on and off-the-job, by public, private and non-government providers, in workplaces and in classrooms, in schools, colleges and in-house, face-to-face, on-line and by distance, notes *The High Level Review of Training Packages Phase 1 Report* (Chappell, Hawke, Rhodes and Solomon, ANTA 2003) The use of multiple settings for learning places much greater responsibility on the increasingly diverse group of practitioners who are now involved in preparing, delivering and managing VET programs at the local level. Chappell et al. (2003) underline the need for practitioners to use their judgement to make choices and to adapt their practices:

It (the VET context) requires practitioners who have a sophisticated appreciation of the pedagogical choices that are not only available to them but which are also consistent with the context, clients and learning sites that make up the arena in which they work. In short, the successful implementation of VET programs relies on learning specialists who have expertise and a pedagogical orientation that they are able to deploy to meet the increasingly diverse requirements of clients. For example, the learning needs and expectations of remote Indigenous communities, urban regional communities and inner city communities are likely to be quite different. VET teachers and trainers must be able to recognise and adapt their teaching and learning practices in order to respond to such diversity. (p.21)

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The need for professional practice

Dickie, Eccles, FitzGerald and McDonald (2004) in *Enhancing the Capability of VET Professionals Project: Final Report* (ANTA) note that the exercise of judgement is a characteristic of professionalism:

professionalism includes the following characteristics: a strong motivation or calling, the possession of a specialised body of knowledge and skills ... control of standards, admission, career paths and disciplinary issues, autonomy in organising and carrying out their work, the need for the ongoing exercise of professional judgement and members accept and apply a professional code of practice (Senate Employment, Education and Training Committee 1998).

Professional judgement is also one aspect of professional practice, defined as follows:

Professional practice includes expert knowledge of the field, a deep understanding of underlying principles, accumulated experience in the practice of the profession, a familiarity with recent advances in the professional knowledge base, and mastery of the best available techniques and tools (Masters 2003: 46)

Professional judgement is intertwined with professionalism and professional practice.

The need for capacity building

In the final report of the High Level Review of Training Packages, *Moving On...* (ANTA 2004), Schofield and McDonald call for a new focus on capacity building in VET, instead of a focus solely on compliance:

The current compliance framework of the AQTF is a necessary but not sufficient means of ensuring good quality teaching, learning and assessment. What is needed is a capacity-building approach that emphasises quality, creativity, professional judgment and growth rather than simply compliance.

Moving On... recommends that VET practitioners develop “high-order professional expertise” such as the ability to make “context-specific judgments”.

The need to apply judgements

In response to the call from Schofield and McDonald (2004) for practitioners to develop creativity and professional judgement, Mitchell, McKenna, Perry and Bald in *New Ways of Working in VET* (ANTA 2005), describe numerous teams of VET practitioners who used their creativity and applied professional judgement in implementing Training Packages. This led to the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment. Teams of practitioners provided examples of creativity and professional judgment in:

- implementing a qualification not previously offered in a local region
- embedding sustainability principles in the delivery of Training Packages
- integrating employability skills in training
- establishing a simulated working production company for the delivery and assessment of a Training Package.

Are you interested in reading further?

Emerging Futures and *New Ways of Working in VET* are available on the Reframing the Future website <http://reframingthefuture.net>

The other reports are available on the ANTA website www.anta.gov.au

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