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Its Construction and Negotiation in an Accelerated Teacher Training Program

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Introduction

Teacher retraining from industry is currently being presented as one of the key solutions to the international shortage in teacher supply. With impending shortages in technology teaching New South Wales (NSW, DET, 2001), and across all areas of teaching in NSW (Williams, 2002) and with past success in the area of retraining it is not surprising that this area should emerge again as a teacher training initiative and a key program area within the School of Education, The University of Newcastle. The fast-tracking NEWSTART programs, initially seen as contentious, are now developing a track record of success. Nationally recognised, the program has received positive feedback from the government and non government sectors keen to employ graduates and has been acknowledged as a future significant factor in shifting traditional boundaries existing between general and vocation education (Ramsay: Quality Matters, 2000. 244). Described as ‘intensive and rigorous’ by the employment sector it presents its participants with a range of issues that manifest as teacher identity dilemmas. Tensions arise as these learners are presented with, and engage in, a range of disparate curriculum implementation philosophies, the technocratic nature of vocational and trade training; the discipline orientation of traditional technology subjects; and the critical nature of adult learning. This paper will examine relevant theory underpinning our understandings of how knowledge is institutionally polarised in education. It will identify ways in which this innovative experiment is blurring these institutional boundaries, confronting change across all three sectors, general, vocational and university education and challenging its learners and their construction of identities as beginning teachers.

Background into ‘NEWSTART’ in Teacher Education, Innovation in Teacher Education

In an attempt to ground this paper and the discussion following it is possibly best to begin with a short background into the history of retraining at The University of Newcastle. A recent innovation by the school has been Newcastle ‘NEWSTART’ in Teacher Education program. This program offers entry into mainstream teacher education programs to people who have relevant content qualifications, but who do not have teacher training. Rather than require them to complete a full undergraduate teaching degree, the program uses the principle from Industry Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to give applicants some advanced standing.
First initiated in response to the large scale downsizing of the local steel and allied industries, it offered redundant industry workers from the Newcastle and Hunter regions retraining opportunities into teaching. This initiative concurrently emerged along with staffing shortfalls within the NSW education system in the learning area of Technology and Applied Studies and Vocational Education. The Bachelor of Education: Design & Technology (Industrial Technology) was the first degree offered in this accelerated program, and saw a working partnership between the BHP steel industry, the NSW Department of Education and the University of Newcastle gain national recognition for their partnership initiative. The initiative has to date resulted in two national teaching awards: The 1999 Award for Outstanding Achievement in Collaboration in Education/Training, and The Australian Award for University Teaching.

**How does it Work?**

An entry scale into the teacher education program is worked out, relative to the individual’s qualifications and industry experience. The base RPL profile must contain a Certificate 3 trade qualification, significant industry experience and a demonstrated capacity and continued ability for life-long learning. Delivery is structured to accommodate a fast-tracking mode (greater than the usual academic program), which sees the adult learners able to complete their teaching qualifications in 2 years. Given the profile of most students entering this program, mature aged with economic and family commitments, the accelerated mode is highly desirable.

The program provides an opportunity for workers from other industries, who seek a change of career direction the opportunity to consider teaching as an option. Penny Gilmore from the NSW Teachers Federation sees the benefits as such: to the employer it is obvious, the provision of more teachers in the areas of demand; to the students it offers an attractive career change option that maintains a rigorous standard; for the university it is able to offer a new option in study, and increase its attractiveness to students, while also being at the cutting edge of new ideas in teacher training and pedagogy (2000). The Newcastle Program has been consistently in high demand since its instigation, and there has been a sustained high demand for its graduates, in both government and private school sectors. To date the university has graduated 115 teachers, since its first graduating group in 2000.

**Discourses in Knowledge Construction: Establishing Boundaries**

Post structuralism has positioned language and discourse as the keys to meaning and ‘truths’ within its social organisation and power constructs. ‘Language is how social organisation and power are defined and contested and the place where our sense of selves, our subjectivity, is constructed’ (Denzin &Lincoln, 2000.929). This paper focuses on three social organisations and learning communities, the initial industrial workplaces and training sites; the new workplace and training site, the classroom and the school as well as the university as a learning community. The discourses at each site have been historically constructed and present as strong messages of knowledge ‘truths’ and professional practices constituting what is ‘normal’ thinking. For the retrainees discourses at each of these sites contribute to
their subjectivity. For Carabine these discourses have a relationship to Foucault’s concept of normalisation and discourse as a way of deploying power, in effect they establish the norm (2001.277). Hence each of these sites can be seen as employing language and discourses that facilitates the maintenance of their very social structures.

For the retrainees on entering the program, the vocational and industrial workplace cultures are the normalising force and the associated knowledge and power relationships within discourses privilege skills and workplace knowledge. These have shaped much of their subjectivity and sense of self, within the world (Mansfield, 2000), they see themselves as ‘tradeys’. Stevenson (1998, 1999) acknowledges that it is useful to understand how these learning communities or communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) present differing valuing of epistemological knowledge and how they present different forms of communicating this difference. When one gives legitimacy to certain practices in schools, for example over other institutional structures such as universities and vocational colleges, the blurring may present as dilemmas for its students. As adult learners, knowing how we as subject, have constructed our epistemological understandings is useful, particularly useful to the retrainees who experience that the boundaries of their identities as skilled worker, university student and beginning teacher are blurred and free floating (Featherstone, in Rhode & Platteel, 1999).

**Institutional Polarisation of Knowledge**

Each of the social organisations or different learning cultures mentioned above have unique epistemological understandings. These can be defined as unique territories, and when learners are required to cross the boundaries of these territories it is not surprising that tensions will arise between the knowledge communities. At this point it is important to conceptualise the various institutionalised views of knowledge with which the retrainees are engaging. As future teachers they are required to engage with 3 different institutionalised views of skills and knowledge. The university presents one discourse, the polarised discourse between general and vocational education, another.

While it is understood that the traditional general/academic divide rests at the centre of these various views (Smith, 1998), it is useful to consider some of the dualisms and tensions operating within industry/workplace, university and school settings. The table (Figure 1) is an attempt to summarise some of the presenting polarisations and can be combined in different dualisation, such as school/workplace or university/school.
While Stevenson (1993,1998) refers to such dualisms as ‘rival constructs, which exist as polarised and impermeable discourses in both general and vocational education’ (p3), he points out that such polarisations seem to indicate different constructs within different educational communities (Kelly in Stevenson, 1998) and each epistemological understanding appears deeply entrenched within the workplace and different educational communities. Hager (1996) and Cornford (1999) argue that too much has been made of these dichotomies, and that such an obsession might get in the way of sensible and productive thinking (Hager, 1996.11) about relations between different institutions such as schools and work. Hager acknowledging that ‘the influence of the dichotomy still runs deep’ (p12), while Cornford sees that the VET sector can potentially benefit from experiences in school education. Gaining an understanding of how a more liberal education, concerned more with self development, self growth, values and beliefs within a socio/political and cultural framework (Smith, 1998) may help reconcile differences and disputes between work and competency based education. Understanding how we have come to value or privilege one rival educational and socio-cultural construct over another, is complex. Understanding aspects of the disputes between them may shed light on the nature of the dilemmas experienced by the retrainees who must attempt to position themselves in the boundary territory between these polarisations if they are to develop a strong sense of their new professional identity and implement vocational education curriculum change in general education.
Site-Based Teacher Education, Innovation and Boundary Blurring, Working with Different Discourses in Communities of Practice

One of the key features of the program was the recognition by the School of Education of the unique nature of this adult learner cohort, the vocational/technology curriculum content and the small time frame for the delivery of content and acquisition of beginning teacher key competencies. The model of site-based teacher education draws on the research of Gore (2001) on teacher education, and secondly the role of communities of practice and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Stevenson, 1998), and a constructivist epistemology. This theory connects action to praxis, focuses on transactional learning that occurs under circumstances of personal inquiry and discovery (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000. 165). Hence the program aims for rapid enculturation and cognitive development through emergence in the school learning community.

The retrainee program draws on the teacher education model currently being implemented within the study program for all education students at the University of Newcastle. The curriculum framework places pedagogy at the core of the teacher education enterprise and is approached from a research base of critical perspectives, presenting discourses of empowerment, diversity and equity. Emphasis is also given to the achievement of higher order thinking, deep understandings of ideas and a recognition of knowledge as socially constructed, rather than accepting knowledge as a body of facts.

The teaching program has also been required to respond to the aggressive curriculum reform agenda in vocational education and training, and work-based learning. McIntyre and Solomon (1998) go so far as to argue that recent policy discourses of education ‘reform’ in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector have dismantled the socio-democratic settlement in education, and resulted in the de-schooling of knowledge (p.142), particularly knowledge deemed to be vocational. Reforms to the senior secondary certificate will see from 2000, senior secondary students in NSW studying vocational education subjects. These courses differ from the current nature of general education curricula. Based on Industry Training Packages, they are organised and assessed through units of competency that are recognised by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). On completion of their degree the retrainees will have dual accreditation to teach across the general and vocational curriculum areas.

Another area of curriculum reform and innovation that has disrupted traditional boundaries has been the use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as an entrance procedure for these retrainees. In other words, the program has employed a traditional vocational assessment tool in an academic accreditation process. Not only has this area challenged the preconceived notions and assumptions of education academics, it has also challenged the teaching profession and teacher accreditation/registration bodies. They are valued by the vocational education and training reform agenda, seen as a threat to traditionally trained general industrial arts teachers and illegitimate participants in academic circles.

The second acknowledgement was that the innovative program would ensure that the retrainees were emerged at specific sites in a range of communities of practice. It shifted much of its traditional academic lectures to school based sites, with classroom teachers (with relevant academic qualification) as lecturers. This characteristic of the program set it apart from the usual teacher education
programs. In this model the school environment as a whole, including the classroom are seen as the workplace learning resource. To this end students are involved with the classroom and practicing teachers very early in the program with curriculum design ensuring integrated university and workplace learning. The program also acknowledges that what the trainees need to learn may be found at a range of different learning sites. For example, some skills training may occur in a vocational/technical learning environment while concurrently applying the knowledge within a general education environment.

This site-based orientation to learning aims to disrupt the existing discourses in an attempt to facilitate new dialogue and change. It is not unlikely that the retrainees will be presented at times with lecturers/teachers who espouse opposing discourses on teaching and learning. As a result for the retrainees the site represents conflicting forms of subjectivity (Weedon, 1997 in Jackson, 2001). The extent of the possible disruption can be seen in the examples below. Research to date at the university carried out by Scevak & Cantwell (2001) identified that the nature of the technical training undertaken by these students, and the nature of their occupational experiences, both contribute to an epistemological framework in which knowledge (and task) may be conceived on in terms of simple, often procedurally defined (p.12). This framework was dramatically less appropriate in dealing with the more theoretically oriented subjects.’ (p.15). As well it has been identified by Cornford (1998, 1999) that the Vocational Education and Training (VET) learning community, does not model best teaching practice, in terms of the development of expertise, transfer of learning and lifelong learning principles or teachers as critical mediators of knowledge (Mason, 2000; Pithers,1998), that is teachers who are aware of a learner’s level of understanding and development so that learning can be appropriately targeted (p. 347). Blunden (1999) also finds the VET sector wanting in relation to its dominant concern for skills and specific job training over an education system that is likely to develop all the qualities of the person. It is likely that when the retrainees value the normative discourse experienced within a community, these communities will be more effective in reinforcing their set ways of doing things and establishing core values. If this is disrupted, they are forced to renegotiate their values and ‘truths’, in so doing it is likely that new knowledge relationships will form, but not without the occasional dilemma to be solved. Not surprisingly one could expect some disruption for the retrainees as they were subsequently exposed to a range of different learning sites that presented as rival constructs of epistemological understandings (Stevenson, 1998; Grushka & Lugg, 2000). Overtime, however, the relationships between the communities of practice, may result in an overlapping or peripheral shifts in how the retrainees view their old and new vocational/professional identities. The extent to which they privilege ways of knowing, and where they position themselves as teachers may be dependent on the relative impact on these communities ability to shape the emergent identities of the retrainees. They entered the program valuing the workshop, workplace apprenticeship model where discipline skills and high levels of competency were measures of successful teaching, and these mastered skills formed a strong sense of their epistemological understandings of the world and their identities. The presenting rival constructs and competing discourses will necessitate new subjectivities.
Constructing a Teacher Identity

Adult identity

Discussions around identity have gaining critical prominence (Denson & McEvilly, 1996) in recent times following the impact of post structural thinking. We now see the self, not as a separate and isolated entity, but operating at the intersection of general truths and shared principles (Mansfeld, 2000). Hence the formation of identity repositions itself in response to a presenting normative discourse within institutional knowledge constructs and communities of practice. As well, the notion of the subjective self, as a site of disunity and conflict that is always in process and constructed within power relationships presents another dialogue that may inform the development of the retrainees’ beginning teacher identity. In teacher education, this theory of subjectivity troubles the notion of a predetermined, unified teacher identity assumed to emerge if the novice teacher follows a linear program pathway of student teacher experiences (Youngblood Jackson, 2001). It is now acknowledged that identity is what we make of ourselves within society, and that we create our own beliefs and values (Habermas, 1979, Rhode & Platteel, 1999; Magolda, 1999; Robinson, 199, Barker, 2000, Mansfeld, 2000). These constructs of self, are relative to interpretations of history, culture, and beliefs and ‘dependent on free access to the interpretive possibilities of cultural tradition’ (Habermas, 1979. 93). Casey (2000) has also identified that as an adult learner, the workplace contributes significantly to self identity and its ongoing negotiation and construction, not surprising, given the years of workplace identity forming as an industrial worker that shifting to a teacher identity will require a considerable focus.

In the process of investigating how one might begin researching and understanding adult identity generally, some attention has been given to research in other fields. Habermas acknowledges that adults have the capacity to construct new identities in conflict situations (1979.90), to supersede other identities. In particular, the research work on the construction of adult identity by Magolda (1999) will be examined. Her research gave considerable attention to the work of Kegan (1994) who saw self as evolving from both the cognitive and affective domains within a constructivist-developmental framework (Kegan in Magolda, 1999.3). The mind is not cognition alone, but rather the capacity of individuals to construct and organize meaning in their thinking, feeling and relating to self and others. What is subject and object for us is not permanent but rather changes as we adjust to account for new experiences. Habermas previously identified that the subject and object are reciprocally constituted (Habermas, 1979.100). Magolda presents us with a range of dimensions for the constructing of adult identity. Firstly, the epistemological dimension, making meaning through experience, secondly, our intrapersonal dimension, developing various ways of viewing self; thirdly, the interpersonal dimension, making meaning by relating to others (Magolda, 1999.2). Constructing identity also relied finally on our meaning making system itself becoming an object of our reflection.

Teacher education research has similarly acknowledged the subject/object interplay with meanings and interpretations constructed from multiple perspectives and practices. (Blunden, 1999; Youngblood Jackson, 2001). This post structuralist positioning of self, identifies that identity is fluid, and that constructing and negotiation ones identity requires a constant repositioning of self against identified boundaries and interpretive positions within our perceived collective whole. For the retrainees their subjectivity will be shaped by the different discourses of the
institutional knowledge communities, their families and friends, students and the broader community.

**Mode of Inquiry**

The research is grounded in the field of qualitative inquiry. It will use a rich compilation of phenomenological approaches to best represent the researcher’s field of study, questions and data sources. The most important assumption is that the lived experience lies at the heart of one’s perceptions and interpretations of self. This means that one can rarely make a positive prediction, as the life experiences are socially and personally complex and dynamic. The research will embrace both an philosophical hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001 & Plager, 1994), combined with the field of inquiry of the critical discursive psychology methodology (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001).

**Participants**

The data draws from 3 years of retrainee participants. The group consists predominantly of males whose age range from 55 to 22 and who have all entered the Bachelor of Education, Design & Technology (Industrial Arts) and (Food Technology) through the RPL entry pathway. The prior occupations of the group draw primarily from the metals and fabrication industry, building industry and hospitality industry with a small percentage from allied industries such as mechanical and electrical fields. The majority are married with domestic responsibilities and dependent children. A small group are single males and females, some with dependent children. Some have passed through the course as part-time students, holding down considerable part or full time work. The majority have chosen a full-time study pathway. However, they have managed to financially survive through either: AUS study, part-time work or scholarship funding, sometimes combinations of the above.

**Results and Discussion**

‘My opinion of teaching before was pretty negative. I think most of my schooling was with pretty ordinary teachers. I feel they complain and whinge and want more pay and more time and I thought their life style looked pretty impressive’ (refrigeration mechanic).

This comment was not atypical, many of the retrainees who decided to make the career change to teaching made their decision based on a very strong community perception that teaching was an easy job, good pay and great holidays. While some came to the course to fulfil a desire to be a teacher, the majority were making a very practical decision to retrain faced with heavy redundancies in their industrial fields or life style changes from shift work and unsafe work environments. Sirasch records the following recollections of the first retrainees to commit. ‘Do you remember the thoughts as you signed those application forms; Teacher? Who Me?, Yeah sure!!, Do you think I could?? What if??? Yeah I’ll give it ago.’ (2001). They were coming to the profession from vastly different work experiences; ‘crash hats, ear muffs, safety glasses, security sign in and dirty boots’ (Sirasch, 2001).
Initial Impact: off and Running, Little Time to Reflect

They arrived confident that their normative discourse (which valued knowledge as skills, experience in the practical world and knowing how to do things) was firmly established. This was quickly disrupted by the academic world. In this environment you were not regulated by 7.00 starts and 4.00pm finishes, no overtime or shift work. The university wanted you to register for tutorials via the internet, have a student email address, use the library catalogue, research, read, study and write essays. What did this have to do with the skills of being a teacher on the job? ‘Its been difficult, such a change from my old work’ ( Retrainee, Sydney). There was on going self-doubt and they had difficulty organising their time around study and family life. Sirasch recalls the following: ‘The things I remember are the visit from one couple who came to my office and the husband said “ You explain it, then it sounds all together, when I say it I sound as if I’m having a crisis and don’t know what I’m doing anymore”. Or the one who came in and said “tell her why I can’t paint the house and why I have to do Uni work on Saturday” (2001). Not only were they struggling with their new experiences, they were struggling with how others saw them, and how notions of self were shifting. ‘ When I first started the course one of the things I thought was I would be able to fit it into my normal life. I knew I would have to make a few adjustments here and there. After the first week I realised how much of an effort I would have to make, once I got through that, it wasn’t too bad’ ( Chef, 2001). When ones world is disrupted, even by choice, you are forced to renegotiate your values and the dilemmas presented regularly. It was hard enough dealing with your physical world changing, now there was to be a complete attack on their knowledge constructs of what, where and how you learn.

Sites of Conflict: Lectures, Tutorials, Classrooms, Web, Schools

‘ To be honest it’s a contradiction. What you learn at university and from teachers in the field are two totally different things. Its up to you to weigh up the pros and cons and accept what you feel is the most constructive and valuable approach for teaching’ (retrainee, 2001)

Of all the dilemmas faced by the retrainees, the powerful discourses between rival constructs of knowledge presented by the university, curriculum and the school, constantly emerged as areas of contradiction and confusion for the students. These dilemmas were part due to the innovative nature of the course. The students were positioned in the border territory, and had not only to contend with their own perceptions of self and knowledge, but many of the lecturers and teachers were also renegotiating their own knowledge constructs about teacher education, theory and practice. The teachers and academics involved in the new courses were also in the border territory creating new curriculum knowledge and reassessing old values related to traditional teacher training as well as classroom practices. The retrainees often found themselves involved in skirmishes in this border territory.
Coming to Terms with New Territory: Acquiring Academic Skills and Beginning Teacher Competencies

What in effect the retraining has done was disrupt the retrainees ‘truths’ base and imposed two more learning cultures that present further disintegration of what to ‘value’ in learning. The notion of competence (knowing how), as an indicator of success, rather than excellence and higher order critical thinking (knowing that), lies at the heart of the general and vocational education divide and the core of the disruption. The best measure of demonstrating thinking from the theoretical perspective, which demonstrates an understanding of knowledge is the academic essay, or curriculum design and pedagogical implementation. This form of knowledge demonstrated through essays, was seen as totally foreign and of course, unnecessary, or ‘useless’ knowledge, “they, (the academic subjects) could be condensed down into a couple of subjects and more time spent exposed to ‘real life’ issues in the teaching profession” (retrainee). Making the shift to valuing this form of knowledge requires reflection and time to practice writing skills, and the rapid delivery of academic content made this task difficult. They wanted to be seen to be good (skilled) teachers and the messages and rhetoric of academic theory irrelevance over classroom competency and performance was ever present. Not only was it embedded deeply in their ‘truths’ about the value of different kinds of knowledge, they heard the rhetoric from classroom teachers, who similarly lamented the focus on research and theory over the development in the students of solid classroom management and discipline skills. They were interested in knowing most about the real life skills required to teach, not just the ‘airy fairy skills that are not necessary, and aren’t real’.

It was not uncommon to have conflicting messages being presented to students in relation to the value of educational theory or curriculum implementation. Not surprisingly both the university tutorial and the classroom learning environment became sites of contention for academics, teachers and student teachers, because the ‘curriculum of work’ attacks the accepted order (codification) of academic knowledge and its associated production practices and threatens the power of those with interests in its maintenance’ (McIntyre and Solomon (1998.144). Similarly there was resentment by teachers over the interpretation and implementation of new knowledge in relation to design theory and problem solving teaching strategies within new curriculum. These were also perceived as attacking the traditional curriculum and classroom practices. An example that emerged constantly was the perceived threat by teachers to the traditional learning culture in the industrial arts area of this new design curriculum and its problem solving strategies. The rhetoric messages of ‘this is not going to last’, don’t bother learning that stuff’ or ‘that stuff won’t work in a workshop environment’ were constantly received by the retrainees when they visited classrooms. These normalisation discourses were extremely powerful, and in the example of the implementation of design theory into the classroom students clearly saw themselves as compromised. They were damned if the did teach from a design perspective by the supervising classroom teacher (often told to do it the teacher’s way) and they were damned if they didn’t by the academic staff who were seeking to see them implement new curriculum thinking. While the above represents a specific example of the implementation of curriculum change and its effect on...
trainee teachers, in general the main rhetoric was ‘forget everything you learnt at the university—this is the real world’ cited in Williams (2002.3).

**Positioned between the Boundaries, Creating New Territory Constructed from Prior Knowledge**

Teacher education is charged with the responsibility to train beginning teachers in new educational initiatives, and that the new teacher is thus seen as the catalyst for change in the wider teaching community. Ramsay has clearly identified that this new cohort of industry retrainees has the potential to contribute to the teaching profession in this way (2001) by bringing their professional industrial skills and knowledge of the world of work to the general education arena. Retained industrial teachers, will be expected to bring about workplace and epistemological change within the secondary school context, in the vocational training area. This is a considerable thing to ask of a beginning teacher let alone a retrainee, and I have already given an example of how the retrainees have been threatened by such a positioning in relation to curriculum change.

As agents of change within the secondary school context they were being required to straddle the polarised knowledge positions of general and vocational education at the same time as they were trying to gain academic skills and an understanding of the relationships between vocational and liberal education generally. This presented them with a three way knowledge conflict between the university, the schools and vocational education. They were expected to make sense of this as socio-cultural critics (Mason, 2000), where by they could critic the debates around knowledge, values and the politics of curriculum design, a significant task, requiring yet another realignment of their subjectivity as a teacher. Figure 2 indicates by use of arrows the direction of this mediating activity.

\[ \text{Workplace knowledge} \Rightarrow \text{university knowledge} \Rightarrow \text{school knowledge} \]

**Figure 2**

Little wonder they began to doubt who they were and what knowledge they were to value as beginning teachers. All prior knowledge must now be reconfigured to construct the new generalist and vocational educator.

\[ \text{School knowledge} \leftrightarrow \text{workplace knowledge} \]

The new vocational curriculum agenda would require them to teach trade skills within a school context, and implement competency assessment procedures when they were just grasping outcomes based education and profile reporting.

It was therefore important that the training ensure that the value of the initial workplace knowledge was valued and not considered to be a legacy of their historical past, but a part of their current discourse practices. On the one hand they were seen as ‘making a difference, yet it was these very high skill levels and workplace knowledge that made them vulnerable to high levels of criticism by the traditional industrial arts teachers, who saw them as undermining their professional credibility, in relation to their limited skills and industry experience in the new vocational curriculum areas and industrial work environments generally. The most
frequently occurring conflict between the general education v’s industry culture was in the Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) area. The new industry retrainees were highly critical of the classroom teachers OH&S standards in schools, especially in relation to machinery maintenance and regulation clothing, while the teachers were equally critical of the retrainees OH&S understandings related to classroom management and discipline.

This criticism by teachers manifested itself in an ongoing dialogue reflecting concern over their lack of classroom management skills and more content and skills in areas where their skills transferability was high. The retrainees reflected this concern as ‘I just wonder whether there is enough time to learn all the content and skills in a variety of subjects you could be teaching.’(retrainee). The debate about skills, competencies, transferability and workplace knowledge has only appeared in the general education sphere as generic Mayer Key Competencies and many teachers have little awareness of the vocational and general education research behind its emergence from an industry competency perspective into general education rhetoric (Borthwick, 1993). It was not until their final stages of training that they were able to see that their skill levels were indeed adequate, transferable and valued in vocational education terms and generally valued for the unique knowledge they could bring to the profession, ‘even the teachers were learning, they are learning from us, it’s a good thing’.

Modelling New Community of Practice Learning Sites and Valuing New Emergent Knowledge Understandings

The sites within this retraining model are emerging as potential sites of new knowledge between academics, trainees and teachers. The model requires academics and teachers to create educational opportunities that are able to bridge old codes of practice and weaken much of the traditional educational knowledge divides to facilitate the required rapid enculturation of the retrainees. A substantial proportion of this new program is firmly established at these new communities of practice and primary learning sites, schools. There is acknowledgement that tensions still exist, however, there appears to be a weakening of the knowledge boundaries and a lessening of the initial tensions that appeared when the first group of retrainees began their internships in local secondary schools.

The successful transformation of these retrainees is best evidenced by their comments after and during their final practice teaching experiences within the program. The retrainees are given a wide range of opportunities to explore different school learning communities the culmination is a final ten week internship, which allows the students to become legitimate teachers in schools (given full casual teaching status). Once they had overcome their anxiety and initial steep learning curve adjusting to their internship school and teacher responsibilities, they began to see their learning more from the perspective of life long ‘ I don’t think that my school will expect you to do everything to 100% first day… its going to be a learning process’ (retrainee).

The internship offers them an experience which consolidates a beginning teacher’s subjectivity formation. For the retrainees they have constructed their new teacher identity by rationalising their emergent self with their historical training experiences. They drew together their apprenticeship understandings of ‘learning on the job’ into alignment with their internship and beginning teacher status. This
site-based teacher training model was far closer to their understandings of where and how you learn, ‘To me ...it should be more like an apprenticeship, you are set up in a school so you can learn there things hands on. Sure do subjects at university as well’ (retrainee).

Towards the end of the retrainee’s internship they were able to reflect and acknowledge the value of the university subjects and the types of knowledge they represent. ‘I think learning how to gain that knowledge, gain those skills and then teach them is something that the course did do. To me that was the most valuable thing, concentrating on research...it was a learning experience in itself’ (retrainee). Most had been able to make the appropriate shifts in terms of working practices, knowledge constructs and work environments, but all acknowledge the importance of continued learning and that ‘you can’t get anywhere without hard work, and that the majority of learning is to be done on the job’.

For most they had been very grateful for the opportunity afforded by this program to pursue a new career path. Some tentative and assured by the fact that they can go back to their trade if they do not like it.

**Conclusion**

On final completion of their internship there is an awareness by both the training body and the future employers that this new identity is fragile, and that the cementing of the teacher rather than beginning teacher identity is dependent on the retrainees ability to adjustment their new identity, in terms of their next community of practice, or first teaching appointment placement and accept responsibility for their continued learning, ‘the university can’t give me everything’. To this end the NSW Department of Education and training has begun a mentor program to support new technology and other retrainee teachers to succeed in their first year of teaching (NSWDET, 2002). The jury is still of out on the long-term success of these graduates, but initial responses have been extremely positive. Some discourses are more powerful than others and have more authority and validity. Time will tell as to whether they can successfully navigate these strong discourses, to be able to bring about change in the general/ vocational area and see the evolution of a new teacher identity, vocational, industrial and general.

The site-based teacher training model presented in this paper has positioned the learner within their professional community of practice, recognised RPL and in so doing confronted and challenged many of the traditional assumptions about teacher retraining. Through the window of subjectivity formation it has illustrated the unique dilemmas experienced by an industry worker who chooses to retrain via this accelerated mode. It demonstrates some of the conflicts they experience, not simply with their own identity negotiation but in the new boarder territory between educational institutional epistemological boundaries.

**References**


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About the Author

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A practising artist, art teacher and academic Kathryn Grushka has been working in the field of art and design education for 20 years. During this time she has been represented in the National Fibre Arts Collection of Australia as well as being published both nationally and internationally. Currently she holds the position of Manager Retraining within the School of Education at The University of Newcastle. In this capacity she has been responsible for the successful
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