

Doctor of Education Program: University of Western Australia  
The Graduate School of Education

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

**Qualifications in Education for TAFE lecturers in Western Australia:  
Background, Functions and Concerns**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This proposed research will focus on three closely interrelated aspects of the world of TAFE lecturers in Western Australia (WA). First, it will examine the background to the current requisite that TAFE teachers in Western Australia (TAFEWA) require a formal qualification in education. Secondly, it will investigate the contemporary functions of TAFEWA lecturers, and their perspectives on the adequacy of their qualifications in equipping them to fulfil these functions. Thirdly, it will explore the concerns of these lecturers, and their perspectives on the requirements of their qualifications to address these concerns. .

The reforms in the VET sector over the past two decades have transformed the role of the TAFE teacher. In turn, further reforms have focused on developing quality systems which will provide sustainable support mechanisms for these practitioners. A significant reform is the AQTF requirement that VET practitioners possess a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. This qualification has far more academic rigour than its predecessors and was introduced in 2005 as the minimum education qualification for TAFEWA lecturers. Since qualifications are closely associated with status and professional image this requirement is likely to impact on TAFE lecturers as a profession, and, consequently their understanding of their work roles. Thus, it appears timely to conduct research in this area.

Although there has been an abundance of research conducted in the field of VET in Australia, the majority of this research addresses an agenda which is driven by the policy directions of the federal and state governments. This proposed research on TAFEWA lecturers will focus largely on their own perspectives. It is located within the interpretivist paradigm and will adopt grounded theory approaches to data gathering and analysis. It will make a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of vocational education and training by generating substantive theory which will lead to understanding the situation faced by TAFEWA lecturers who are developing recognition as professionals in the field of education.

Interviews with current TAFEWA lecturers and the examination of contemporary official documents will be used to analyse the historical events and structures that have led to the current requirement regarding the possession of a qualification in education. Further interviews and document analysis will reveal the present functions and concerns of current TAFEWA lecturers. The emergent theory will make a valuable contribution to the body of research in the VET sector that informs policy and practice. In particular it will make a contribution to research in VET by providing an opportunity for unknown issues to be introduced to the VET research agenda.

## **PROPOSED STUDY**

### **The Research Aim**

The aim of this study is to generate substantive theory regarding three interrelated aspects of the world of TAFEWA lecturers. First, it will generate theory regarding the background to the current requisite that TAFE teachers in Western Australia require a formal qualification in education. Secondly, it will generate theory regarding the contemporary functions of TAFEWA lecturers who conduct training and assessment programs to a diverse client market in various learning environments, and their perspectives on the adequacy of their qualifications in equipping them to fulfil these functions. Thirdly, it will generate theory regarding the concerns of these lecturers, and their perspectives on the requirements of their qualifications to address these concerns.

This enquiry into the background, functions and concerns of TAFEWA lecturers requires an 'insider' study which explores the perspectives of the lecturers themselves. Grounded theory research methods will be used within an interpretivist framework to achieve the research aim. The focal issues of the study will be identified by the participants being investigated rather than from preconceived issues identified by the researcher. This approach is significantly different from the plethora of research conducted in the field of VET in Australia. The majority of this research addresses a research agenda which is driven by the policy directions of the federal and state governments. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is Australia's largest and oldest VET research agency and the major source of information which informs the direction for policy and practice in the VET sector in Australia. NCVER is jointly funded by the Australian, state and territory governments and managed through the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

### **Background**

Over the past two decades unprecedented changes in the global economy have placed a demand on the vocational education and training (VET) sector in Australia to contribute to the economic development and social cohesion of the nation. The response has been major reforms in the VET sector. These reforms include the opening of the once monopolistic market to a large number of private training providers, the introduction of a competency based training and assessment system, a national system of qualifications, national training packages, the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), and an increasing emphasis on the workplace as a venue for training and assessment. More recently there has been reform through the reduction of the terms of some apprenticeships, and the increase in the school leaving age. These reforms have resulted in a changing role for the VET practitioner.

The role of the VET teacher/trainer has shifted along a continuum from an emphasis on teaching and creating curriculum towards entrepreneurial brokering and meeting the increasing expectations of industry clients and individual students (Chappell & Johnson, 2003b; Dickie, 2004; Harris, Simons, & Clayton, 2005; Rumsey, 2002). In this context of rapid change the research direction has refocused on the quality systems which support the VET practitioner.

The reforms to VET quality processes have focused on providing the VET practitioner with the skills and knowledge they need to meet the changing demands of their positions. This has led to one of the most significant reforms, the introduction of

mandatory education qualifications for the VET sector. TAFE dominates the vocational education and training landscape in Australia, and TAFE teachers/lecturers are a subset of the broader term 'VET practitioners'.

Traditionally TAFE teachers have not been required to have any education qualification. They have, however, been required to have industry qualifications and/or related vocational experience. The absence of any requirement to possess a formal education qualification has impacted on the image of VET practitioners as a profession. The introduction of mandatory qualifications in education is a significant change in the VET sector. Accordingly, the professional status of the TAFEWA lecturer is likely to be affected, and this, in turn, may impact on their understanding of their role.

Despite the ongoing extensive research relating to reforms in the VET sector, there has been minimal qualitative research undertaken on these changes from the perspective of the VET practitioner. The methodological approach in this proposed study recognises that one important step in improving the quality of practices by TAFE teachers would be to take into account these teachers' understanding of their experiences. Given the effect of mandatory education qualifications on the professional status of the VET practitioner it is timely to gain an understanding of their experiences regarding this particular development.

The proposed study will adopt a broad interpretive research approach. This approach has been adopted out of a desire to reveal the issues rather than build on existing ideas. This will be a significantly different approach to recent research on the changing role of the VET practitioner as it will seek to discover and conceptualise the 'unknown' rather than address specific issues on a government funded research agenda. In addition it will adopt a 'grassroots' approach by investigating the understanding of the lecturers currently working in the TAFEWA system. The researcher believes this approach has the potential to make a useful contribution to informing policy and practice in the VET sector.

### **Definition of Terms**

A VET practitioner refers to those staff of public and privately funded Registered Training Organisations (RTO's) who are directly involved in the delivery of training and/or assessment programs. This includes lecturers, teachers, trainers, and assessors; permanent, full-time, casual and sessional staff, in schools, TAFE colleges, private RTO's and enterprises who are delivering nationally recognised training.

Mandatory education qualifications for the VET sector refers to the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104). Standard 7 of the AQTF requires a person training and assessing in the VET sector to have this qualification. However, it does allow a person without this qualification to conduct training and assessment programs under a supervisory arrangement. Thus the mandatory aspect of this qualification is not exact. However, the policy of the TAFEWA network has identified the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as the minimum qualification required to teach in the sector. If lecturers do not have this qualification when they commence employment with TAFEWA, they are required to obtain it within their first two years of employment.

This policy will not ensure all TAFEWA lecturers will possess or will obtain an education qualification. The policy became effective in 2005, and is only applicable to new full-time lecturers. The policy does not currently extend to existing lecturers, or the large number

of part-time and casual lecturers employed by TAFEWA. To promote the desired mandatory aspect of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment the TAFEWA Lecturers 2005 Certified Agreement endorsed barriers in salary progression relating to possession of this qualification. Thus, reference in this study to mandatory education qualifications for TAFEWA lecturers does not mean all current lecturers must possess or obtain an education qualification to work in the TAFEWA system.

### **Context**

Both locally and internationally there is an increasing realization that as the world enters the twenty-first century, characterized by further globalization, vocational education is crucial to the prosperity of all societies (Thomas, 2001). A comparison of the critical issues in vocational education and training in Australia, and in further education in Scotland and England by Mitchell (2005b), identified common themes in policy direction which recognise the impact of the vocational educational sector on the economic prosperity and social mobility of a nation. Mitchell identified a dependant relationship between continuing economic development and social cohesion, and a vibrant, high quality VET sector, capable of rapidly responding to new skill demands, new labour market conditions, new contexts for learning and increasing expectations of a diversifying group of clients of the system. Mitchell (2005b) noted that there was increasing recognition by the three governments that improving the quality of practices in teaching, learning and assessment is crucial if the sector is to respond to the new challenges.

In the 2006-2007 financial year the Australian government is investing more than \$2.5 billion in vocational and technical education – a real increase of 85 per cent on a decade ago. The Prime Minister, John Howard recently announced an investment by the Australian government in “Skills for the Future”. These new investments are aimed at building a more highly skilled and responsive workforce to support Australia’s long-term economic growth. In this announcement the Prime Minister said quite emphatically “that the days when a trade or vocational qualification was deemed second-class in our society are over” (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2006). Some view this as a change of direction. Such a view was expressed by Goozee (1995) when she described the history of vocational education in Australia as being characterized by long periods of neglect, and failure to recognize the importance of vocational education’s contributions to national prosperity. This historical neglect of the VET sector is not confined to Australia. There is ample reference in the international literature on similar neglect in the UK, USA and Europe. The irony of this neglect and the current reliance on the VET sector, specifically TAFE, as a key player in addressing the skills shortage was an impetus for this study.

The TAFE sector is a component of the VET sector in Western Australia. This state is the largest area in Australia and has a diverse and widespread training market which is serviced by a network of ten TAFEWA institutions. Four of these are located in metropolitan Perth, whilst the remaining six are located in regional and remote areas. The researcher has twenty years experience working in two metropolitan and two regional TAFEWA colleges and, consequently has access to a network which will facilitate accessing the research data.

The four TAFEWA colleges in Perth have numerous campuses located across the entire metropolitan region and service the needs of a diverse client market. The six regional colleges operate within an even more diverse market environment. To meet the needs

of all clients TAFEWA lecturers employ a variety of delivery modes for learning and assessment programs in various different learning environments which, in turn, vary from college to college.

In the current TAFEWA system there is a huge difference between the number in the relatively small permanent practitioner workforce, in whom much of the knowledge and skills unique to the VET sector and to TAFE are vested, and the large casual practitioner cohort. Given the core role played by permanent TAFE lecturers, the potential scale of exodus could place undue strains on the system (Guthrie, Perkins, & Nguyen, 2006). Consequently, the focus on developing skills and knowledge to equip the VET practitioner for current and future demands in the VET sector is at the forefront of research and many VET initiatives (Harris et al., 2007 - in press).

### **Substantial and Original Contribution to Knowledge**

This proposed study will make the following contributions to knowledge in the field of vocational education and training:

- The theory will lead to an understanding of the situation faced by TAFEWA lecturers who are developing recognition as a professional in the field of education.
- The methodological approach of the study will provide scope for new issues to emerge which have not been previously identified through government research agendas and, as a consequence, instigate further studies.
- The theory will be relevant to the development of policy initiatives relating to sustainable quality practices in VET and TAFEWA.

### **Literature Review**

There has been extensive research relating to reforms in the VET sector and the changing role of the VET practitioner. This research has addressed a wide variety of issues and provided a comprehensive body of knowledge. This proposed study on qualifications in education, and the background, functions and concerns of TAFEWA lecturers, will investigate this existing body of knowledge with a focus on three areas of research which connect the three interrelated aims of the study.

The VET sector has responded to the economic demands through major reforms over the past decade. These reforms, in turn, have led to recognition that quality is the key to the sector's impact. The skills and knowledge of the VET practitioner are integral to quality in teaching, learning and assessment. The introduction of mandatory qualifications for TAFEWA teachers is a significant reform on the VET quality agenda which aims to improve the competency of these practitioners. The following discussion will consider each of these three areas in turn. First, it will consider the broad concept of quality which has been the driver of change. Secondly, it will take into account the work of the VET practitioner which has become more complex as the sector responds to the changing economy. Thirdly, it will consider the role of qualifications in education for VET practitioners, and their impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

### **Quality Issues**

The concept of 'quality' is a multi-faceted one. Economic considerations, the desire to improve the cost-effectiveness of VET systems and the balance between who benefits from, and who pays for, training have proved to be strong determinants in the

formulation of policy pertaining to the quality of VET systems internationally (Meyers & Blom, 2002).

The degree of influence exercised by business and industry on VET quality systems is strong in countries such as Scotland, England, New Zealand and Australia, mostly due to the formation of national training authorities that regard business and industry as their key stakeholders. Some European Union countries, along with South Africa and the United States place a high degree of emphasis on the requirement to meet broad community needs in the formation in VET quality systems (Meyers & Blom, 2002).

The major set of legislative quality indicators in the VET system in Australia are embodied in the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) which has a key objective to provide a basis for a nationally consistent, high quality vocational education and training system (Australian National Training Authority, 2001).

Prior to the introduction of the AQTF in July 2001 there were no effective quality control mechanisms for teaching in VET in Australia. In 1998 the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training replaced the Category II Workplace Trainer and Assessor qualifications as desirable VET education qualifications. The regulatory requirement in the AQTF standards has been fundamental to efforts to promote quality in the vocational education sector (Simons, Harris, & Smith, 2006). This qualification has been recently replaced by the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and is the current 'minimum' education qualification required by the VET sector

#### Role of the VET practitioner

The profile of the new VET practitioner has emerged in the research published in the past 5 years (Dickie, 2004; Guthrie et al., 2006; Rumsey, 2002). The new VET practitioner is demand driven and requires a raft of new skills to address the idiosyncratic demands of students and enterprise clients (Mitchell, 2005a). This changing role of the VET practitioner has fuelled the ongoing debate on the professional status of the VET teaching workforce, and the requirement for these practitioners to have qualifications in education.

The change in the work role of VET teachers has impacted on the way in which they understand their professional identity, and their relationship with other parts of the VET sector (Chappell & Johnson, 2003b; Harris et al., 2005). VET teachers and trainers are required to work in an increasing range of contexts. VET programs are now delivered both on and off-the-job; in workplaces and in classrooms; in schools and colleges; face-to-face, on-line and by distance. VET practitioners are expected to spend a greater amount of time working in industry, and monitoring learner progress in workplaces. Contemporary quality teaching and learning practices emphasise the development of self-paced, independent learners (Smith & Blake, 2005). This expansion and diversification of work responsibilities has been driven by training packages which focus on assessment rather than training. This, in turn, has seen a change in the role balance for VET practitioners. VET teachers are required to take responsibility for a range of administrative functions. Assessment, record-keeping, quality assurance and accountability requirements are regarded as additional work duties. (Chappell & Johnson, 2003b). There is evidence of change fatigue and a decline in job satisfaction. VET practitioners feel a tension between traditional activities of teaching and training and the pressure to become involved in other work functions such as compliance with the AQTF quality standards (Australian National Training Authority, 2004).

VET practitioners have a dual identity, as both an industry professional and an educational professional (Dickie, 2004). The concept of VET professional practice is about achievement and maintenance of high standards in teaching, learning and assessment which are matched by high standards of industry practice and industry currency. A profession in VET is more complex than the concept of a profession in school teaching, medicine or engineering. There has been much discussion as to whether VET practitioners should be members of a professional body. Dickie (2004) suggests a shift of emphasis from 'VET teaching practice as a profession' to the application of 'high-quality professional practice among VET practitioners'.

### Education Qualifications

Professional image, status, and qualifications are closely associated in all vocations. Robson (1998) found that most VET teachers retain strong allegiances to their first occupational identity. 'The vast majority of VET teachers are professionals in other fields and their primary identification is therefore unlikely to be as a teacher'. Byrne (1992) argues that 'TAFE teachers often see themselves as a vocational expert currently involved in teaching'.

The practice of employing TAFE teachers who have only industry experience is seen as adopting a position which is remarkably similar to vocational education customs of the nineteenth century. Only those ignorant of the research into teaching effectiveness which has emerged over the past half century could adopt such a position (Cornford, 1999). Such a practice contributes to the disparaging view some hold of VET practitioners. This view regards TAFE teachers as second class teachers, and in turn VET qualifications having a second class status to university qualifications (Cohen & Brawer, 1996).

There is a parallel between the developments in vocational education qualifications and the current systems in the UK, Australia and the USA. The current practices in all three countries provide similar pathways to teaching in vocational education however these are categorized differently in each country. There is no absolute requirement for VET teachers in the UK, USA or Australia to obtain any formal qualification in education prior to commencing work in the VET sector.

The majority of international VET systems prefer a university-based education qualification to a vocational-based education qualification. In Australia the 2005 TAFEWA lecturers certified agreement requires lecturers to obtain the diploma from the TAA04 training package in order to progress above a bar in the salary scale. A teacher with a university-based education qualification but not this diploma can move above this bar. This is an anomaly in the current TAFEWA system.

The impact of mandatory qualifications in education for TAFEWA teachers on their professional status will affect their understanding of their functions in the workplace and raise further issues which need to be addressed. These issues which are unknown are a focus of this proposed research.

The changing economy and labour market has highlighted the role of vocational education and training in economic reform. This has resulted in unprecedented government funding to support a national and state research agenda in VET. Much of this research over the past decade has related to the effect of reforms in the VET sector,

the changing role of the VET practitioner, and issues relating to quality practices in teaching, learning and assessment. This research has focused on specific identified issues at a national or state level. There has been minimal research at a local level which takes into account the perspectives of VET practitioners. The focus in recent research in VET has been driven by economic demands on the sector, thus, given the current economic boom in Western Australia, this proposed study on the perspectives of TAFE lecturers in Western Australia is timely. In addition, there is no research on TAFEWA lecturer's perspectives of their qualifications in education since the introduction of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as a minimum requirement for a lecturing position. This lack of localised research on the perspectives of TAFE teachers has led to this proposed study.

## **RESEARCH PLAN AND METHODOLOGY**

The following central research questions reflect the three aims of this study and guided the direction of the research methodology:

- What is the background to the current requisite that TAFE lecturers working in Western Australia obtain an education qualification?
- What are the present functions of TAFEWA lecturers, and what are their perspectives on the adequacy of their education qualifications in equipping them to fulfil these functions?
- What are the concerns of TAFEWA lecturers, and what are their perspectives on the requirements of their education qualifications to address these concerns?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This proposed study is an enquiry into the background, functions and concerns of TAFEWA lecturers, focusing largely on their perspectives. This requires a method of investigation that allows for the interpretation of social phenomena. Thus, an interpretive approach located within the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism will be adopted. This theoretical perspective emphasises social interaction as the basis for knowledge, which aligns with the interpretivist view that interaction between human beings is essential to understanding meaning.

Symbolic interactionism is a theory as well as an approach to the study of human behaviour. It examines the symbolic and the interactive together, as they are experienced and organised in everyday situations. Social inquiry must be interpreted in the empirical world in which it is being studied: "the minute-by-minute, day-to-day social life of individuals as they interact together, as they develop understandings and meanings, as they engage in 'joint action' and respond to each other as they adapt to situations, and as they encounter and move to resolve problems that arise through their circumstances" (Woods, 1992, p338).

Grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis are consistent with the principles of interpretivism and symbolic interactionism. The essence of grounded theory is to describe and understand, rather than evaluate and measure for accuracy. Grounded theory research methods will be used to discover the patterns which develop through interaction of perspectives and actions. The following guiding research questions are the link between the theoretical perspectives and the grounded theory methods of data collection and data analysis.

## **Research Questions**

The aim of the study is to generate theory regarding three closely interrelated aspects of the world of TAFEWA lecturers. The research questions are the link between the interpretive paradigm and the grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis.

### The First Research Question

What is the background to the current requisite that TAFE lecturers in Western Australia require a qualification in education?

This first research question is aimed at developing an understanding of the background to TAFE lecturers in Western Australia requiring a qualification in education. The interpretivist paradigm will inform the work of the researcher in reviewing data contained in a wide range of public and private records and documents. However, as the study is exploratory, it will not be possible from the outset to determine the total of subordinate research questions needed to guide the research with regard to this first research question. However, the following guiding questions have been deduced from it:

### Guiding Questions

- In what circumstances have TAFEWA lecturers obtained their qualifications in education?
- Under what conditions have TAFEWA lecturers obtained their qualifications in education?
- What policy changes have enabled TAFEWA lecturers to obtain qualifications in education?

Such guiding questions are not specific questions to be answered, but rather, they are those that suggest themselves at the commencement of the study as being the most productive guides to generate data relevant to the central area of interest. From the guiding questions, an aide-memoire will be developed to initiate 'conversations'. As participants raise unforeseen issues they will be allowed to pursue these.

### The Second Research Question

What are the present functions of TAFEWA lecturers, and what are their perspectives on the adequacy of their education qualifications in equipping them to fulfil these functions?

This second research question of the study aims to develop an understanding of the present functions of TAFEWA lecturers who have the responsibility for delivering training and assessment programs to a diverse client market, and their perspectives on the adequacy of their education qualifications in equipping them to fulfil these functions. The term 'function' refers to all activities that these lecturers undertake whether they are officially assigned to them or not. As with the first research question, this aspect of the study is also exploratory. Thus it is not possible to determine from the outset the total number of subordinate research questions needed to guide the research into this second research question. Again, however, the following guiding questions have been deduced from it:

### Guiding Questions

- What systems have been established by TAFEWA to deal with the changing functions of TAFEWA lecturers?

- What procedures have been established by TAFEWA to deal with the changing functions of TAFEWA lecturers?
- What have been the actual duties carried out by TAFEWA lecturers? What are the perspectives of these TAFEWA lecturers on the adequacy of their education qualifications to equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to carry out these functions?
- What have been the actual tasks carried out by TAFEWA lecturers? What are the perspectives of these TAFEWA lecturers on the adequacy of their education qualifications to equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to carry out these functions?

### The Third Research Question

What are the concerns of TAFEWA lecturers, and what are their perspectives on the requirements of their education qualifications to address these concerns?

The third research question is aimed at developing an understanding of the concerns of TAFEWA lecturers who have the responsibility for delivering training and assessment programs to a diverse client market in a range of learning environments, and their perspectives on the requirements of their education qualifications to address these concerns? In this context 'concerns' are taken to be subjects that occupy a person's interest, attention or care. In order to address the third research question, the researcher will rely on data that comes from the same body of interviews and documents relating to the second research question. Again, as the study is exploratory, it is not possible to determine from the outset the total number of research questions needed to guide the research with regard to this third research question. Again, however, the following guiding questions have been deduced from it:

### Guiding Questions

- What issues and concerns have arisen in connection with the functions of TAFEWA lecturers? What are the perspectives of these lecturers on the requirements of their educational qualifications to address these issues and concerns?
- What are the formal systems and procedures in place to deal with these issues and concerns?
- How are the issues and concerns dealt with in practice?

### **Participants**

The participants in this study will be full-time TAFEWA lecturers who will possess a variety of industry and education qualifications. As outlined earlier, they may or may not possess the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Since the aim of the research is to investigate the background, functions and concerns of TAFEWA lecturers, it is the lecturers who have the capacity to provide the 'richest' data relating to the phenomenon of interest. Thirty-two current TAFEWA lecturers may participate in this study. Thirty-two is the upper limit which is regarded as manageable within the time and cost constraints.

Lecturers from four TAFEWA colleges – two metropolitan and two regional colleges – will be selected to participate in this study. The initial participants will be randomly selected from those who reply to an invitation to participate in the study.

The grounded theory principle of theoretical sampling will be used, (Punch, 1998), initial data will be collected and analysed, and the subsequent collection will be “guided by emerging directions in that analysis” (p.167). Beyond the decision concerning the initial collection of data, further collection cannot be planned in advance of the analysis of the first set of data. Subsequent participants will be selected by searching for a full range of perspectives as suggested by Taylor and Bogdan (1984). This process will continue until new data produces no additional insights, which will mean ‘theoretical saturation’ has been achieved. The participants will have a range of backgrounds, age, and qualifications and teaching experience. Accordingly, a wide range of perspectives will be canvassed which will contribute to the quality of data. Thus the number of participants will be determined by the achievement of ‘theoretical saturation’.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection and data analysis are closely woven terms in grounded theory research and are part of an iterative process rather than independent activities.

#### Interviews

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews will be the main form of data collection. An investigation on the background, functions and concerns of TAFEWA lecturers requires understanding the meaning these lecturers give to certain phenomenon. The researcher could interpret her own meaning through observation; however, the meaning the lecturers actually have of their background, functions and concerns is not an observable phenomenon. In-depth interviewing is one of the most appropriate ways of gathering data on phenomena which are not directly observable (McCracken, 1988; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990; Patton, 1989)

Open-ended questions will be posed, and an unstructured interviewing format will be adopted. This will allow the informants the opportunity to express their ideas using their own words instead of having to fit their thoughts and understanding into pre-set categories determined by the researcher.

Two important elements of interview technique will be adopted. First the length of the interviews will not be predetermined; rather, each interview will be sufficiently long for rapport to be established between the two parties. Second, because of the need for interviews to allow informants the freedom to recall and expound on events from their perspective, there will be no reliance on a standardised list of questions. Instead, initial questions will come from the ‘aide-memoir’ which is based on the guiding questions. The nature of the response will provide the direction that the interview will next take. It is likely that the questions developed in the initial stages of this study could become redundant as the study progresses.

Participants will be identified initially through their response to an email sent through the Managing Directors of the TAFEWA colleges. They will be then contacted by telephone for introductory purposes and to discuss the study. Following this initial conversation an information sheet and consent letter will be sent detailing the purpose of the study, expectations of participants and issues of confidentiality. This information will inform participants that their identification in the study will be anonymous through the use of pseudonyms, and no information relating to the participants will be released at any time. Furthermore, the information will also refer to the undefined time period for the interview, however, it will suggest that a minimum of two to three hours will be required. Two

hours is regarded as the minimum time which would allow a rapport to be established between the interviewer and the participant and 'rich' conversation to develop.

In the weeks following, a second telephone conversation will occur to verify that the consent forms have been signed and to arrange an interview time with each participant. Interviews will be tape-recorded with the participant's permission. The recorded interviews will be transcribed verbatim to provide the best database for analysis (Merriam, 1988). Prior to analysis a copy of the interview will be provided to the participant for checking and modification. This will allow an opportunity for the participant to withdraw any part of the interview, which they might deem inappropriate or too sensitive.

The attitude of the interviewer is a critical aspect of the process. The researcher will aim to become a partner with the informant with both of them working together to 'get the story straight'. (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). The interview is a complex procedure and requires the researcher to be cognisant of the problems which may arise and impact the outcomes of the process. Using a human as the research instrument brings in the problems of social interaction and in the interview "the way one responds to the interviewee is much more important than the wording of your questions" (Carspecken, 1996).

#### Observer Notes

Observer notes will be made during the course of all interviews and used as a means of collecting data. These notes replace observer's comments in the field, as it would be inappropriate to observe individuals in the context of their everyday lives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). These notes will be predominantly summaries of what was said, details of body language and attitude, and descriptions of the environment of the interview. They will provide clarification and substance to the interview transcripts. These observer notes will supplement other comments, such as those about the physical appearance of the TAFE college and the interview area, and contribute to providing "thick descriptions" (Punch, 1998, p.192).

#### Document Study

Documents from the Western Australian Department of Education and Training and its predecessors will be used to inform this research on TAFEWA lecturers. These documents will cover policy and procedures relating to the professional development direction and quality systems which impact on the working lives of TAFEWA lecturers. In addition various documentary materials will be gathered from each of the participating TAFEWA colleges. These will include a history of job descriptions and selection criteria for lecturing positions in the college, the lecturer qualification register maintained by human resources; organisational structures and professional development programs. These documents will also include minutes of meetings which may be internal between college personnel or include external stakeholders. These documents will provide insight to the decision making processes in the colleges which underpin changing practices. Strauss (1987, p.1) views documentation as an enrichment for interview data, providing the "conceptual density" that is required for authentic research.

## **Data Analysis**

The interview process will create a large amount of data. The immediate challenge, which will begin after the transcription of the very first interview, is to reduce the mass of text to something manageable and meaningful. In keeping with the principles of grounded theory the data analysis will begin immediately, because, future interviews and future sampling is dependant on the information which emerges from the first set of data. For more practical purposes, delaying data analysis could create an unmanageable workload for the researcher.

The grounded theory mode of analysis produces concepts, categories and propositions. Concepts are the basic units of analysis in grounded theory methodology (Glaser, 1992). They are defined by Strauss and Corbin as “labels placed on discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). Concepts are arrived at by selecting an element of data and asking “What is this an example of?” (Strauss, 1987, p.61). The concepts produced from the data are labelled with code words. Inherent in this grounded theory coding process are the two analytical procedures of making comparisons and asking questions. Consequently grounded theory is known as “the constant comparative method of analysis” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The analysis of data in this study will use the three levels of coding, namely, open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### Coding

Open coding represents the first level of coding when raw data are sorted and placed into conceptual categories. Open coding is described as the ‘breaking open of data’ to identify concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). The interview transcripts will be coded line-by-line and in some cases word-by-word. Code words will be written in the margins of the transcript sheets. As similar concepts present themselves to the researcher they will be coded as categories for further investigation. During the open coding process the following question will be constantly asked: “What category or property of a category does this incident indicate?” (Glaser, 1992, p.39). Memos will be used to assist the analysis of the data. These are detailed notes of ideas about the data and the coded categories (Glaser, 1978, p. 83-92).

The second level of coding, axial coding or theoretical coding, will be used to make connections between the categories of data identified in the open coding process. The categories will be examined for logical links and grouped into broader, more abstract categories. Some of the ways in which these categories may be linked include comparison and contrasts, searching for cause and effect relationships and other logical links. From this axial coding process propositions will be developed. Further data collection will be guided by theoretical sampling whereby the researcher samples events and incidents relevant to the emerging propositions.

The final stage of coding is selective coding. At this stage, a core category is identified. The core category is the central theme of the data and emerges through the processes of open and axial coding. Once the core category has been established, the researcher must relate the other categories to it, and to each other (Punch, 1998, p218). Sampling will continue until theoretical saturation occurs. Saturation means that no matter how much more data is collected there would be no new dimensions or properties to develop categories further.

Through this iterative process of grounded theory data collection and analysis a substantive theory will emerge. This theory will relate to how TAFEWA lecturers deal with the imperatives of their work positions. A useful definition of emergent 'theory' is offered by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p 15) when they state: "theory is a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena"

## **PROPOSED TIMELINE**

### January – June 2007

- Obtain ethics approvals
- Obtain and analyse official records and public documents from the various state and national government departments
- Continue literature review
- Draft background/context chapter
- Draft introductory chapter

### July – December 2007

- Draft methodology chapter
- Continue literature review
- Continue analysis of documentary data
- Complete background/context chapter
- Complete introductory chapter

### January – June 2008

- Complete methodology chapter
- Complete literature review

### July – December 2008

- Send letter to MD's at TAFEWA colleges seeking permission to request participants
- Send email requesting interested participants
- Make initial telephone contact with responding participants
- Send information and consent forms to prospective participants homes
- Contact initial participants and arrange interviews
- Conduct interviews

### January – December 2009

- Conduct interviews
- Obtain and analyse documents from participants TAFEWA colleges
- Transcribe interviews and confirm transcript with participants
- Code and analyse data and confirm with participants
- Write findings

### January – May 2010

- Prepare first draft of thesis
- Subsequent drafts

### June 2010

- Submit final thesis

## **FACILITIES**

### **Supervision**

Professor Tom O'Donoghue, EdD Coordinator, and principal supervisor of the proposed study will bring significant experience and knowledge, particularly pertaining to grounded theory research methods.

Associate Professor Marnie O'Neill, co-supervisor of the proposed study has extensive expertise in qualitative research. Her field of interest is teacher education and professional development, and in particular teachers' perspectives of policy change.

### **Special Equipment**

Interviews will be recorded on an audio cassette recorder, which will be the only special equipment required for this study.

## **ESTIMATED COSTS**

	\$
Printing	250
Copying	100
Email & downloads	120
IT Support	300
Miscellaneous, software, tapes etc	300
Telephone	20

**Total costs per annum** **\$1190**

**Total estimated costs over 3 years** **\$3570**

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidentiality will be assured to all participants. All transcripts, notes and audiotapes will be stored in a lockable cabinet at the researcher's home. Names, addresses and other identifying information will be kept in a secured place, but separate to the transcripts. TAFEWA colleges and the names of participants will be disguised in all research data to provide anonymity. The initial permission for participants will be sought from the Managing Directors of the TAFEWA colleges. When this consent has been obtained an email will be sent seeking participation from lecturers. Consent will be obtained from all participants in writing. Each participant will receive a information letter outlining the study and the confidentiality arrangements, with a consent form to be returned to the researcher as well as a copy for their records. A postage paid pre-addressed envelope will be provided to facilitate the collection of consent forms.

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