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# Teacher industry placement in Australia: Voices from vocational education and training managers

Annamarie Schüller

*Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia*

Roberto Bergami

*University of South Bohemia in Ceske Budejovice, Czech Republic*

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## ABSTRACT

An important aspect of vocational education and training (VET) teaching is education that is strongly linked to current industry practices. While this is a desirable pursuit, there are considerable challenges in it being implemented owing to increasingly changing work environments and the notion of 'industry currency'. One way for VET teachers to remain up to date with contemporary industrial practices is for VET to pursue teacher placement in industry (TPI) opportunities. TPI is an agreement in terms of which the VET teacher is seconded to a firm for a period of time in order to perform predefined tasks. The resulting benefits include enhanced teaching practices and the development of deeper, long-term links with industry. However, TPI opportunities are not without their challenges. This article reports on an exploratory study of the views of VET education managers of business studies on the value of TPI. Because management support is integral to creating TPI opportunities, we explored the extent to which TPI is desired and supported by education managers. We found that policies supporting TPI initiatives, if they are in place, are not well formulated, and that a lack of resources and difficulties in finding industry partners exist. Despite these problems, education managers believe that these activities are of value to teaching programmes and of benefit to their department. We conclude that TPI should be an integral part of any VET professional development for teachers, but that, in order for TPI to be successful, appropriate resourcing and the development of strong industry networks are paramount.

## KEYWORDS

*Activity Theory; communities of practice; education–industry partnership; teacher professional development; workplace learning; expansive learning*

## **Introduction**

This article reports on an exploratory study of the views of vocational education and training (VET) education managers of business studies on the value of teacher placement in industry (TPI). Because management support is an integral precursor to creating TPI opportunities, we explore the degree to which TPI is desired and supported by education managers, and the challenges accompanying these initiatives.

It is commonly accepted that education is a vital component of human progress. It is ‘teachers ... who are recognised as crucial to bringing about change in student outcomes’ (Perry & Ball, 1998:77), because

... learning means making practical experience (learning by doing) and is seen as a social process that happens through socialisation in communities of practice. Teaching mainly means to create the learning environment in which students can gain experience. (Cedefop, 2017:16)

‘It is what teachers do and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation’ (Hattie, 2003:2), and, importantly, it is those teachers themselves who need to keep abreast of the latest information and knowledge in order to ensure that student learning and the development of competences are maximised. To this end, an important consideration for any teacher should be continuing professional development (CPD). CPD is a notion that is widely applied across many workplaces, from education settings to professional organisations and in-house human resource development. The main philosophy behind CPD is continuous improvement in order to make processes and procedures more effective and efficient, often through the cross-pollination of ideas coming from different areas or perspectives. The cross-pollination of ideas in one area may lead to their application in other areas, and, through some form of exchange mechanism, these ideas may be adopted, either entirely or in modified form, to apply to different settings. Implicit in all of this is human interaction and learning derived from these activities. CPD is a form of learning, be it formal or informal.

Teacher placement in industry (TPI) has been defined as

... a form of professional development consisting of an arrangement whereby the academic [teacher] spends a predetermined period of time working in industry in a previously agreed to job role (Bergami, Schüller & Cheock, 2011:261).

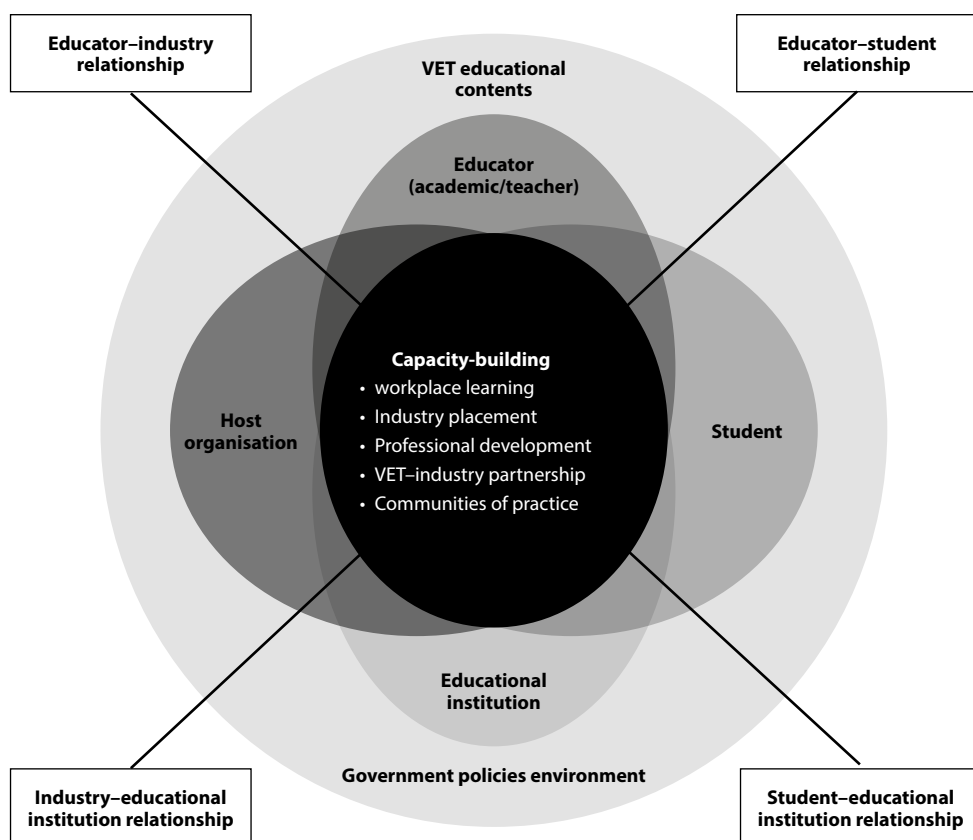
In Australia,

... education and training is a shared responsibility of all Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. Education, training and employment ministers collectively own and are responsible for the AQF [Australian Qualifications Framework] (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013:9).

Introduced in 1995, the

AQF is the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training. It incorporates the qualifications from each education and training sector into a single[,] comprehensive national qualifications framework (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013:9).

Consequently, TPI occurs in a VET education context and in the environment of government policies, with a number of key stakeholders involved in the process, as shown in Figure 1.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1:** VET educational education and government policies environment with key TPI stakeholders (adapted from: Schüller & Bergami, 2012:32)

1 For further details on this diagram, see: Schüller, A & Bergami, R. 2012. Industry placement experiences in vocational education:Voices from Australia. *International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management*, 11(6):29–47.

In their very nature, TPI arrangements are complex: they involve a number of key stakeholders and require multiparty negotiations related to time, place, and activities to be undertaken, as shown in Figure 2.<sup>2</sup> We argue that TPI activities can successfully and sustainably occur only when the three principal actors – the educational institution, the host organisation and the teacher – involved in a TPI activity are able to negotiate a meaningful agreement prior to its commencement, as shown in the shaded circle in Figure 2. Each of the three actors involved in a TPI initiative has an important role to play in the process of negotiating the purpose and role of the activities to be conducted on placement. But, from our perspective, we argue that the educational institution plays a pivotal role in enabling the placement either to proceed or not. This is because the placement will not happen unless a teachers' managers have given them their prior approval. In this process, the manager(s) needs to consider a number of matters, including:

- The duration and intensity of the placement – that is, the total duration of the placement (e.g. one month, six months or more) and the frequency of the activities causing absences (e.g. daily, once a week, once a month);
- Backfilling – that is, finding replacement resources for classroom activities, marking and other administrative duties while the teacher is on placement; and
- Funding – which must cover the expense of backfilling and, where applicable, continuing remuneration for the person who has to substitute while the teacher is on placement.

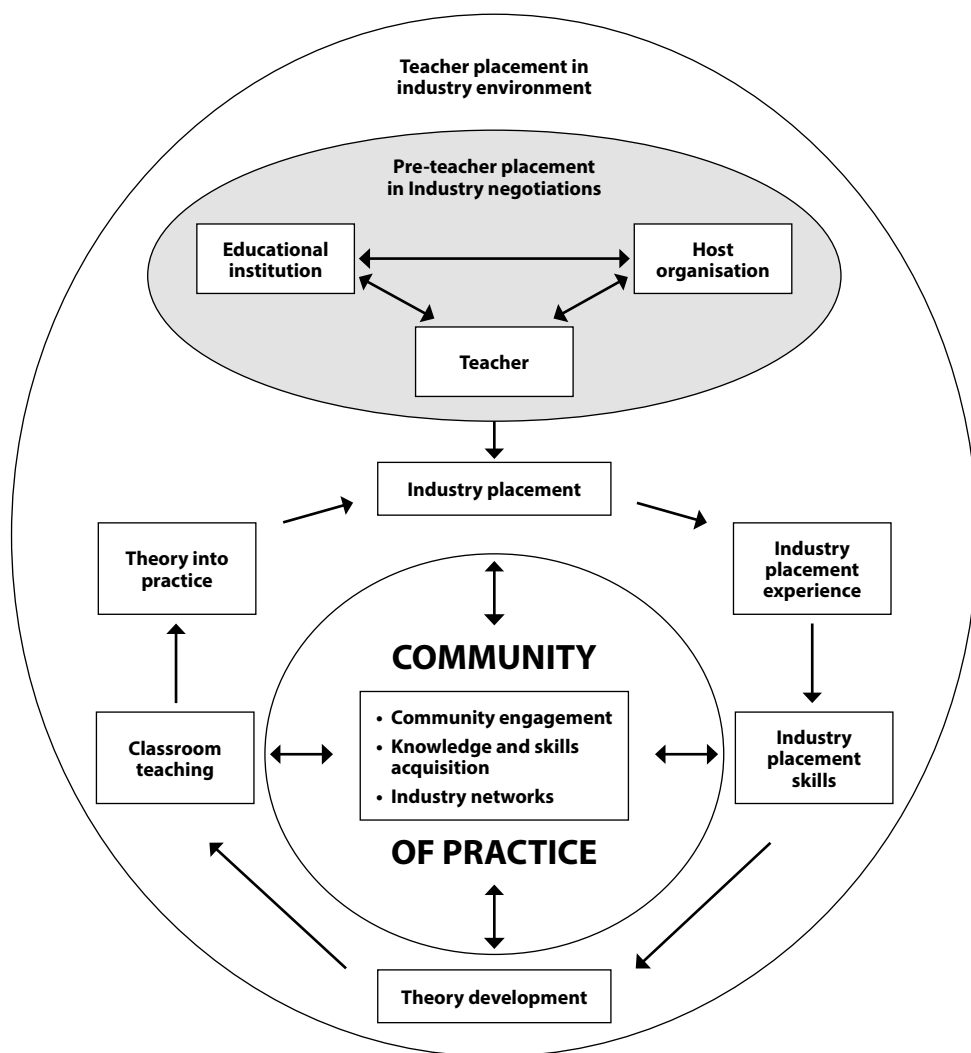
Consequently, it is unlikely that the TPI would happen in the absence of managerial approval, even where the teacher were to find a host organisation independently who is willing to offer a placement. Our view is consistent with that of Van der Bijl & Taylor (2016:104), who claim that

... a key role in the success of lecturer industry placement is the role played by college management in facilitating lecturer placement and incorporating this into human resources management processes and the academic function.

Since TPI activities occur subsequent to the pre-placement negotiations, the focus of this article is not on TPI activities per se, as shown in the unshaded circle in Figure 2. Rather, it is on the educational institution, through the lens of education managers of business studies. Their views on the value of TPI programmes should provide insights into the workplace environment in which TPI initiatives may be enabled or disabled.

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2 For further details on this diagram, see Bergami, R & Schuller, A. 2009. Perceptions on industry placements: A scoping study of academics in Australia. *The International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management*, 9(9):61–82.



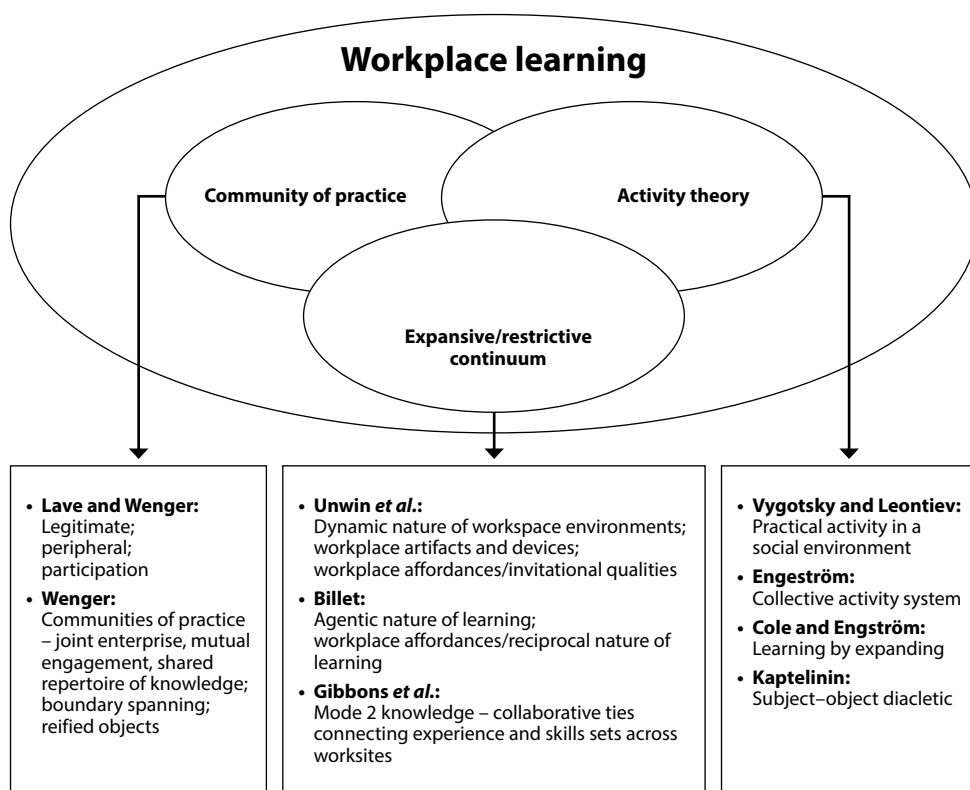
**Figure 2:** Teacher industry placement environment: A theoretical model (adapted from: Bergami & Schüller, 2009a:67)

The article first provides a brief literature review; this is followed by the methodology section, which precedes our discussion of the findings and the presentation of our conclusions.

### Literature review

The main social theories in TPI are summarised in Figure 3. The theoretical model shown in Figure 2 is largely centred on the notion of a community of practice, but the complex nature of learning is such that other social learning theories are also relevant to TPI activities. The

main social theories of learning explored in this literature review are summarised in Figure 3 and discussed below. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyse in detail all the theories that fall under this umbrella heading; consequently, our comments are limited to those theories and authors shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Main social theories of learning relevant to TPI (own elaboration)

### *Communities of practice*

Lave and Wenger (1991) define a community of practice as a group of individuals with different interests, holding different points of view, and making a contribution to an activity at multiple levels, implying ‘participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991:97–98).

According to Kelly (2003:499), Lave and Wenger’s (1991) work has its roots in Vygotsky’s (1978) theory on the situated nature of learning, remembering and understanding. Situated learning is an important aspect of TPI activities, because the teachers, although in situ, are limited to the negotiated tasks relevant to their secondment, as they are not full-time

employees of the host firms. The notion of legitimate peripheral participation is relevant to TPI settings; it

... provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person's intention to learn [is] engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledge and skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991:29).

'Workplace artefacts and devices' refers to organisational resources. However, these may be made available in a limited fashion to the teacher only on placement owing to a number of variables, including: commercial sensitivity, proprietary knowledge, privacy concerns, confidentiality, organisational culture, and control of worker autonomy.

A considerable body of literature supports the view that communities of practice make a contribution to organisational learning and social capital (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Henderson, 2007; Kelly, 2003; Lesser & Prusak, 2000; Liedtka, 2000; Mitchell & Young, 2002). Three dimensions of a community of practice support learning are (Wenger, 1998):

- Joint enterprise, which includes the process of negotiating and engaging with others across multiple sites of practice. These enterprises are reflected in the work practices of employees that 'are as complex as we are' (Wenger, 1998:78);
- Mutual engagement, which refers to its interdependence with a community of practice, as one cannot exist without the other; and
- Shared repertoire, which refers to the broad range of resources, knowledge, tools and other reified objects developed over time that 'reflect a history of engagement' (Wenger, 1998:83) with 'tacit and explicit aspects of the community's knowledge' (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002:38).

### *Activity theory*

'Activity theory' is a broad term applied to a range of social theories of learning drawn mainly from psychological and educational research and organisation studies; it offers a useful framework for analysing human activity in a practice, and human beings' interactions with the environment. Influenced by Vygotsky (1978) and Leontiev's (1978) tools of mediation and zone of proximal development (Foot, 2001; Russell, 2009), activity theory attempts to understand the 'messy networks of human interactions by looking at people and their tools as they engage in particular activities' (Russell, 2009:19–20). Hasan and Kazlauskas (2014) define it as being 'all about who is doing what, why and how'. It encompasses concepts of 'mediated action' (Miettinen, Fredericks & Yanow, 2009:1317) and complements Engeström's (1987) theory of expansive learning. Building upon the earlier work of Vygotsky (1978) and Leontiev (1978), Engeström (1987) expands the unit of analysis in an activity system through

his conceptualisation of cultural–historical activity theory (CHAT). CHAT focuses on the sociocultural structures and contradictions within an activity system in order to understand how activity is mediated (DeVane & Squire, 2012). Kaptelinin (1996:55) highlights three components of an activity system as being

... the motives, or objects that are impelling by themselves. Each motive is an object, material or ideal, that satisfies a need. Actions are the processes functionally subordinated to activities; they are directed at specific conscious goals. According to activity theory, the dissociation between objects that motivate human activity and the goals to which this activity is immediately directed is of fundamental significance. Actions are realised through operations that are determined by the actual conditions of activity.

There are overlaps between activity theory and the expansive–restrictive continuum, because, invariably, human activity is complex, varied and multidisciplinary in nature. This is evidenced by Cole and Engeström’s (1993) and Engeström and Cole’s (1997) analyses of the nature of socially situated and distributed contexts.

*Expansive–restrictive continuum*

Fuller and Unwin’s (2004) conceptualisation of the expansive–restrictive continuum considers various workplace environments and organisational approaches to workforce development, as shown in Table 1. Many variables influence individual and organisational capacity-building, including the diverse nature of organisational cultures across different worksites. Some workplaces have inherent limitations in place, such as different management controls over employee autonomy according to what management deems to be ‘appropriate’ (Unwin, Fuller, Felstead & Jewson, 2009). There is also an interplay between individual roles, organisational structures, systems, procedures and hierarchies that may operate to promote or hinder workplace learning.

**Table 1:** Expansive–restrictive continuum (Fuller & Unwin, 2004:130)

← APPROACHES TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT →	
EXPANSIVE	RESTRICTIVE
Participation in multiple communities of practice inside and outside the workspace	Restricted participation in multiple communities of practice
Primary community of practice has shared ‘participative memory’ and cultural inheritance of workforce development	Primary community of practice has little or no ‘participative memory’ and no or little tradition of apprenticeships
Breadth: access to learning fostered by cross-company experiences	Narrow: access to learning in terms of task, knowledge or location

← <b>APPROACHES TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT</b> →	
Access to a range of qualifications, including knowledge-based VQ	Little or no access to qualifications
Planned time off the job, including for knowledge-based courses and for reflection	Virtually all-on-job: limited opportunities for reflection
Gradual transition to full, rounded participation	Fast: transition as quickly as possible
Vision of workplace learning: progression for career	Vision of workplace learning: static for job
Organisational recognition of, and support for, employees as learners	Lack of organisational recognition of, and support, for employees as learners
Workforce development fosters for aligning the goals of developing the individual and organisational capability	Workforce development is used to tailor individual capability to organisational need
Workforce development fosters opportunities to extend identity through boundary crossing	Workforce development limits opportunities to extend identity: little boundary crossing experienced
Reification of 'workplace curriculum' highly developed (e.g. through documents, symbols, language, tools) and accessible to apprentices	Limited reification of 'workplace curriculum'; patchy access to reificatory aspects of practice
Widely distributed skills	Polarised distribution of skills
Technical skills valued	Technical skills taken for granted
Knowledge and skill of whole workforce developed and valued	Knowledge and skill of whole workforce developed and valued
Team work valued	Rigid specialist roles
Cross-boundary communication encouraged	Bounded communication
Managers as facilitators of workforce and individual development	Managers as controllers of workforce and individual development
Changes to learn new skills of jobs	Barriers to learning new skills or jobs
Innovation important	Innovation not important
Multidimensional view of expertise	Uni-dimensional top-down view of expertise

These variables underscore the 'restrictive–expansive' (Unwin, Felstead, Fuller, Bishop, Lee, Jewson & Butler, 2007; Unwin et al., 2009) nature of workplace environments through the degree to which they facilitate:

access to knowledge and information; the opportunity it provides to practice and develop new skills, the provision of effective support for learning and the extent to which it rewards learning (Unwin et al., 2009:108).

These fundamental requisites are the building blocks for knowledge creation and capacity-building. Drawing on Fuller and Unwin (2003), and later research by Dismore (2014), Doroftei, Da Silva and Araujo (2018) note that expansive forms of workplace participation, including professional development, are likely to contribute to deeper learning and restrictive approaches to surface learning. Holbery and Mitchell (2019) claim that expansive workplaces encourage a 'supportive environment ... to learn ... [and develop] higher level skills such as dialogue, problem solving and reflexive forms of expertise'.

### *Mode 1 and 2 forms of knowledge production*

Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzamns, Scott and Traw (1994) draw particular attention to two distinct forms of knowledge: Mode 1 and Mode 2. Mode 1 is 'traditional knowledge' (Gibbons et al., 1994:1), a distinct kind of homogenous disciplinary knowledge governed, by and large, by the conventional norms of scientific research and drawn from universities. Mode 2 refers to applied, transdisciplinary knowledge drawn from, and evolving through, a dynamic process of continuous negotiation across transdisciplinary sites, linking individuals, skills and experience through informal and socially distributed networks of communication (Gibbons et al., 1994).

Workplaces use many different tools and artefacts. These provide a useful means of mediating the activities of the organisation, and they also bring insights into how knowledge is created, distributed and used (Engeström, 1987; Leontiev, 1978; Wenger, 1998). Billett (2001; 2004; 2008:209) highlights the socio-relational and agentic nature of workplace learning through workplace affordances, that is, the extent to which organisations 'afford opportunities for learning', whereas workplace learning is shaped by the invitational qualities provided by organisations; the way in which individuals choose to 'engage with workplace activities and guidance also shapes the quality of their learning' (Billett, 2001:211). Workplace affordances are not equally distributed, as the bases upon which they depend include variable factors such as perceptions of competence, ethnicity and gender; work status and demarcations; and personal work relationships and loyalties (Billett, 2001). Such is the contested nature of co-participation in work practices that they can be 'the bases of competition and exclusion between competing interests' (Billett, 2001:211).

Apart from the main social theories of workplace learning, other literature considers the benefits and challenges of TPI schemes. Their various benefits have been noted to include the following:

- Teachers are able to use their specialist disciplinary knowledge in a consulting role in order to support the development of industry processes and systems (Ireland, Golden & Spielhofer, 2002);

- They are able to create opportunities for mutually beneficial projects between the educational institution and the host organisation (Klein, 2001; Ireland et al., 2002);
- They are in a position to build the vocational currency of teachers, raise awareness of an industry's needs, and enable teachers to share this information with students (Schüller, 2013);
- They can develop the professional identities of teachers and strengthen teaching practice through the renewed confidence, knowledge and enthusiasm gained during their industry placement (Haigh, 1997; Ireland et al., 2002).

Meadon (1990) argues that TPI benefits far outweigh the difficulties of possible disruptions to teaching workflow because

... knowledge of a company's management techniques, of marketing, financial management, the chance to develop curriculum materials and laying the foundation for a link with a local firm [are] just a few positive spin-offs.

Notwithstanding these benefits and the positive acknowledgment of TPI within broader policy frameworks (TAFE Development Centre, 2009), challenges remain with this form of CPD.

### *TPI challenges*

Previous research by Schüller (2013) and that of other Australian researchers (Harris, Simons, Hill, Smith, Pearce, Blakeley, Choy & Snewin, 2001; Mitchell, Clayton, Hedberg & Paine, 2003; Williams 2009; Guthrie, 2010; Guthrie & Clayton, 2010; Schmidt, 2019) into the experiences of Australian VET teachers who had participated in an industry placement revealed tensions between policy and practice. This is not unique to Australia: it is known that policy and practice commonly differ across the world. The focus of the existing international literature (Andersson & Köpsén, 2015; Hoekstra, Kuntz & Newton, 2018) appears to be on teachers' experiences and developmental requirements, and not on the role that the education manager – one of the key decision-makers – has in TPI initiatives. A South African study by Van der Bijl and Taylor (2016) considered 'the nature, internal dynamics and management of lecturer LWE [lecturer workplace exposure]'; however, that study does not appear to provide details on the role of managers in influencing TPI activities.

In addition, TPI outcomes are often nebulous and ill-defined and therefore their effectiveness in building teacher industry currency is difficult to evaluate (Mitchell, 2003; Guthrie & Clayton, 2010; Clayton, Jonas, Harding, Harris & Toze, 2013; Guthrie & Clayton, 2013). Having briefly reviewed the literature most relevant to this study, the methodology we used in the study is described in the next section.

## **Methodology**

A survey of Australian VET education managers in the area of business studies was conducted during the latter part of 2016. This study was exploratory in nature and largely one of qualitative analysis, its aim being to identify issues for further quantitative research with a larger sample.

No evidence has been found to suggest that a previous study of this nature has been conducted in Australia, as this study focuses on the role managers of business studies play in the decision-making process in TPI initiatives. Other Australian studies have focused primarily on the benefits and challenges of TPI from a teacher's point of view. For example, Perry and Ball's (1998) research was based on a teacher release to an industry programme for secondary school business teachers and its focus was on the benefits these teachers gained from TPI. Schüller's (2013) investigation focused on the TPI experiences of VET teachers of business studies. Whelan (2017) focused on graduate attributes and course learning outcomes. These studies are not relevant to the focus of this article.

### *Surveys*

An electronic survey was developed for this study, the questions being informed by various sources, including: discourses on VET teacher professional development (Guthrie, 2010; Guthrie & Clayton, 2010; Clayton et al., 2013); earlier TPI studies (Bergami & Schüller, 2009a; Bergami & Schüller, 2009b; Schüller, 2013) on teacher participation in previous TPI initiatives (2005–2012); and academic experience in teaching business disciplines in the VET sector, both with technical and further education (TAFE) and registered training organisations (RTOs). This collective knowledge resulted in a raised awareness of the complex variables that influence situated learning in TPI activities.

Following ethics approval, the survey was distributed to VET business studies managers using a purposeful sampling approach because of its exploratory nature. The dataset, unfortunately, has too many cells lacking responses, which makes the data unsuitable for meaningful statistical analysis. Consequently, hypothesis testing would not be meaningful in this context.

For the purposes of this research, 'managers' are defined as a head of school or head of department, or equivalent, responsible for coordinating or managing the delivery of courses in business studies; they bear direct responsibility for teaching staff and supervise them directly. Included in the survey were managers in private RTOs who are responsible for the delivery of AQF-accredited VET business studies courses, because most of these are, at least in part, publicly funded.

The survey outlined its purpose, stating that participation was voluntary, and assured potential participants that their data would be treated confidentially and anonymously, in accordance with ethics approval.

It should be noted that there was not a high number of VET education manager responses, although the respondents are responsible on average for between 331 and 488+ teaching staff (details are discussed in the next section). Consequently, we argue that the low response rate does not necessarily render the data invalid. Nevertheless, care should be taken in interpreting the findings reported on in this article. Because a study of this nature has not been undertaken before, the results should help to achieve a greater understanding of TPI initiatives from a different perspective, in this way adding to the body of knowledge in this area.

In Australia, the VET sector is divided among TAFE institutions, which are government-funded public entities, and RTOs, which are private concerns that receive significant government funding. This funding has been forthcoming because governments have sought to semi-privatise the VET sector in order to introduce ‘managed’ competition through government policy and funding. It should be noted that a discussion of government policies in this area is beyond the scope of this article.

The objectives of this study are to explore the following questions:

1. How aware are TAFE and RTO education managers of TPI schemes, and how familiar are they with them?
2. Do TAFE and RTO education managers believe TPI activities are beneficial to their organisation or to the individual teacher?
3. Are TAFE and RTO education managers prepared to support such schemes, and, if so, how?

The survey data, together with commentary and discussion, is presented in the next section.

## **Data analysis and discussion**

In total, 18 responses were received, of which 11 were from TAFE institutions and seven from RTOs. In Australia, a total of 59 TAFE institutions, as government-funded bodies, typically offer the full range of courses, ranging from certificate to associate degree. The number of RTOs in Australia offering business study programmes is virtually impossible to determine. According to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), as at February 2020 there were 3 253 RTOs able to offer training packages in business services. But the DESE figure cannot be relied upon because of a significant number of anomalies in the reporting. TAFE institutes are included in the RTO listing, effectively leading to a double-counting of the numbers. Commercial organisations that conduct in-house training for their staff only are also included in the numbers. Furthermore, the number of RTOs includes entities either with suspended registration or with pending re-registration. Registration is valid for seven years and an application for withdrawal takes six months to process. Finally, it is known that many RTOs have a specific focus on international students, using university articulation pathways as the main enrolment drawcard. Regarding TPI activities, these RTOs have little relevance to the VET environment in Australia.

Given the anomalies in the data, it is not possible to derive a credible number of bona fide RTOs currently offering education in business studies in Australia. As TAFE and the RTOs do not divulge the number of heads of department responsible for business studies courses, it is not possible to estimate these. We are not, however, claiming that our sample is representative.

In the discussion, the data are presented separately for TAFE and RTOs. This allows, wherever possible, a comparison to be drawn between the respondents in the two different sectors. It was expected, from personal experiences, that there would be differences between the two groups, as their primary purposes differ – TAFE is wholly government-funded, whereas RTOs are profit-making ventures.

### *Demographic profile*

The gender composition of the respondents – 61% (n = 11) females and 39% (n = 7) males – is broadly representative of the total teaching population in Australia, as ‘females represent 55.5% of TAFE staff in Australia and this trend is consistent across all states and territories’ (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2004:15).

The respondents spoke on behalf of between 331 and 488+ teachers. In trying to determine their level of experience and expertise, we found that 10 of the 11 TAFE respondents had been employed with their organisation for between 10 and 20 or more years, whereas all of the RTO respondents had been with their organisation for fewer than 10 years. Shorter-term employment periods have implications for longer-term workforce development and may limit opportunities for TPI activities, especially where full-time employees represent only a minor proportion of staff (37% in the case of TAFE and 23% in the case of RTOs).

### *Knowledge of TPI schemes*

Knowledge of TPI schemes was reported as 100% by TAFE respondents, whereas five out of seven RTO respondents (71.4%) were not familiar with the TPI schemes. Although the exact reason for the comparatively lower level of knowledge of TPI schemes in RTOs is not known, we may infer that one causative factor could be the considerably lower, full-time, direct-reporting staff numbers. It may be argued that part-time and casual employees are given less consideration for staff development compared with full-time staff. It may also be argued that there is an assumption that, because these staff are not employed full-time, they are likely to have other work, possibly in an industry related to their area of teaching; and, if this is the case, this fulfils their teacher currency requirements and TPI activities would not be necessary. Of course, the same comments would also apply to part-time and casual TAFE staff, but the greater number of full-time staff numbers may also tend towards more professional development in order to meet the requirements for industry currency of TAFE teachers.

### *Industry knowledge and skills required by teachers*

The respondents were asked whether TPI policies existed in their organisation. Notwithstanding the AQF-mandated requirements for teacher currency, it appears that not all organisations have policies in place to facilitate TPI, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** TPI policies

<b>INSTITUTIONAL POLICY TO FACILITATE TPI</b>	<b>TAFE</b>	<b>RTO</b>
No	1	4
Not sure	3	1
Yes	7	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>7</i>

The majority of TAFE institutions appear to have policies in place and this may be related to their larger full-time staff complement needing professional development and the institutions ensuring that their teacher currency requirements are met. There is still a certain amount of ignorance about the existence of these policies, but there is no evidence, one way or another, to suggest that the lack of awareness of these policies is a hindrance to the creation of TPI opportunities. However, it may be argued that such ignorance may result in missed opportunities.

The respondents were asked if they had previous experience in supporting past TPI activities. Two RTO and five TAFE respondents (with one respondent having been involved in two TPI activities) reported as follows:

- RTO
  - Work-placement support; and
  - Work-placement referral.
  
- TAFE
  - Full-time industry release for three months as a means of upgrading industry currency;
  - Limited encouragement in non-teaching time;
  - A) Placement provided the teacher with direct links with the business and to meet their workforce development requirements and customise training to meet the needs of the industry;
  - B) Supporting a teacher to work in a small business to mentor their staff in the financial aspects of their job and keep industry current in bookkeeping;
  - Return to industry placements; staff working in their own hours within their field; and

- When I previously supported a teacher, she took a combination of extended leave and leave without pay and related duties offsite as she was going to a paid role two days per week in a bookkeeping capacity.

As expected, the range of support varied from basic to more generous opportunities for teachers. The variety of opportunities may be linked to the organisational or individual need for a teacher currency upgrade in order to meet AQF and National Training Packaging requirements – the yardstick used being that the teacher should have industry experience that is no more than five years old, setting up a five-year ‘skill-upgrade’ cycle. Importantly, however, there is no minimum standard for the depth or length that the ‘upgrade’ should be.

In this context, a series of questions was asked of education managers about the level of time support they would provide their staff with for TPI opportunities, and their responses are summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3:** TPI time-release opportunities

<b>TIME-RELEASE OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>TAFE</b>	<b>RTO</b>
A one-month release for full-time work during the teaching period	2	1
A one-week release for full-time work in industry during the non-teaching period	1	6
A fractional teaching semester release for working in industry one day per week	3	0
A full teaching semester release for full-time work in industry	2	0
A two-week release for full-time work in industry during the teaching or non-teaching period	1	0
This should be determined by the purpose and desired outcomes of the placement	1	0
No response	1	0

The range of time support correlates well with previous Australian and South African studies conducted among VET teachers (Bergami & Schüller, 2009b; Schüller & Bergami, 2011; Schüller, 2013; Van der Bijl & Taylor, 2016). As Meadon (1990) suggests, a longer period of time is likely to yield greater learning benefits for the teacher and the host organisations, as ‘deep learning often proceeds slowly’ (Gela, 2004:8). However, TPI opportunities are driven by factors that are not necessarily within the control or influence of the TAFE education manager – the most obvious factor being that of the expenditure involved in implementing TPI opportunities. This point is captured, in part, in the next section.

### *Challenges of implementing and supporting TPI*

The influencing factors affecting TPI opportunities negatively were identified through a series of 10 Likert-scale five-point questions: 'Strongly agree'; 'Agree'; 'Neither agree nor disagree'; 'Disagree'; and 'Strongly disagree'. For analysis purposes, the 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' responses were combined, as were the 'Strongly disagree' and 'Disagree' responses. They are summarised below.

The main findings arising from these questions were as follows:

- Unfamiliarity with TPI arrangements was reported in 27.3% of the TAFE responses and 71.4% of the RTO responses. If we combine the RTO responses about TPI unfamiliarity and lack of policies, we can argue that these are barriers to learning new skills and, according to Fuller and Unwin (2004), this would point to a restrictive workplace.
- TPI activities that provide no added value to teaching programmes or no benefit to the department were rejected by 54.5% of TAFE respondents, but by only 14.3% of RTO respondents, with 57.1% remaining neutral. These responses suggest an expansive lens (Fuller & Unwin, 2004), as they indicate recognition of learning fostered by cross-company experiences and they encourage cross-boundary communication.
- Among TAFE and RTO respondents, a lack of resources to support TPI activities scored 72.8% and 71.4%, respectively. These responses indicate that under-resourcing appears to be a universal problem, regardless of the type of educational institution. Without adequate support, TPI activities are obviously much harder to undertake, if at all. A lack of resources to support TPI opportunities gives rise to a more restrictive environment by creating organisational 'barriers to learning new skills/jobs' (Fuller & Unwin, 2004) and the extent to which management can afford opportunities for learning (Billett, 2008). This also highlights the contradictory juxtaposition of VET policy calling for greater collaboration between VET and industry to support workplace learning, on the one hand, and VET's unwillingness to fund it, on the other.
- The notion that TPI activities offer no value for the host organisation, the teacher, students or the educational institution was rejected by 72.8% of TAFE respondents and 42.9% of RTO respondents, with 28.6% remaining neutral. Viewed in the context of a community of practice, education managers recognise that TPI activities contribute to workplace learning and developing social capital (Wenger, 1998; Brown & Duguid, 2000; Lesser & Prusak, 2000; Liedtka, 2000; Mitchell & Young, 2002; Kelly, 2003; Henderson, 2007).

Identifying a suitable host organisation willing to support TPI activities was regarded as a hurdle by 45.5% of TAFE respondents and 57.2% of RTO respondents. These responses support the notion that TPI initiatives are complex, with multiparty negotiations being required, as these activities are experiences of participation mediated by the contribution of the workplace (Billett, 2008), through mutual engagement, and through the sharing of a repertoire of knowledge across joint enterprises (Wenger, 1998).

### *Evaluation of TPI outcomes*

The respondents were asked to identify, from a given list, the best approaches for evaluating the effectiveness of TPI arrangements. This was another five-point Likert-scale question similar to the one used in the previous section, and it was treated likewise.

The top three approaches to evaluating the effectiveness and outcome of TPI activities are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Evaluation approaches in respect of top three TPI activities

<b>TPI EVALUATION APPROACHES</b>		<b>TAFE</b>	<b>RTO</b>
<b>1</b>	The host organisation meeting or exceeding the teacher's professional development expectations	90.9%	91.9%
<b>2</b>	The teacher having access to adequate resources to support the industry placement initiative (e.g. induction; working space; work equipment; staff mentors)	91%	93%
<b>3</b>	Effective participation demonstrated through various forms of engagement and collaboration between the teacher, the organisation and the educational institution	90.9%	93.9%

It can be observed from Table 4 that there are implied commitments in TPI arrangements, for, in order to be able to evaluate these experiences, prior agreement needs to be reached in a three-way negotiation involving the teacher, the host firm and the educational institution. Item 1 is underpinned by stated goals and objectives agreed to prior to the commencement of the TPI, and this correlates with the need for 'mutually negotiated meanings and understandings' (Ling & McKenzie, 2001:9) across joint enterprises through a shared repertoire of knowledge and expectations (Wenger, 1998).

Item 2 is meant to ensure that the TPI experience is meaningful, that there is legitimate participation, even if it is peripheral, depending on the duration of the placement, and that the host organisation can facilitate an expansive approach (Billett, 2001; Billett, 2004; Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Unwin et al., 2009) and provide opportunities for Mode 2 knowledge.

Item 3 requires the teacher to be able to demonstrate, post-TPI, that the activities undertaken have value for the key stakeholders. If so, we can imply from this that the formation and nurturing of longer-term communities of practice can be pursued (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Finally, the participants were asked whether more should be done to nurture mutually beneficial alliances between educators and industry, to support workplace learning, build organisational capacities, and prepare work-ready graduates.

Despite the challenges associated with the TPI schemes mentioned above, the overwhelming majority of respondents (10 out of 11) answered the questions positively. These responses correlate well with the notions of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) and with discourses supporting education–industry links (Skills Australia, 2010).

This article reported on and discussed the findings of a study in Australia, seeking the views of VET education managers of business studies on the value they place on TPI activities. Three questions were posed for this study and the answers to each are given below.

1. How aware are TAFE and RTO education managers of TPI schemes, and how familiar are they with them?

The data revealed a lack of policies to support TPI activities and the answers about the challenges of implementing and supporting TPI indicate there is some knowledge of TPI schemes, but that this was not as high as expected. We argue, here, that the lack of institutional policies regarding TPI schemes, coupled with the poor dissemination of information about them, may be a factor hindering their development to their full potential.

2. Do TAFE and RTO education managers believe that TPI activities are beneficial to their organisation or the individual teacher?

Based on the answers about the challenges of implementing and supporting TPI activities, the vast majority of TAFE respondents (72.6%) believe this to be so. The situation with RTO respondents is less clear, as only 42.9% agreed that benefits could be reaped and 28.6% gave a neutral response. If the responses are considered in aggregate terms, then the majority agree that TPI activities are beneficial at the individual and organisation levels. A contributing factor to the more negative perceptions about TPI scheme benefits may be the answers to the previous question, that is, that if there is a lack of policies and knowledge about TPI schemes, it may be more likely that TPI is viewed less favourably as a result of ignorance about it. The responses to Question 2 may therefore have been influenced partly by the responses to Question 1.

3. Are TAFE and RTO managers prepared to support such schemes, and, if so, how?

While there is overwhelming support for TPI activities, the level of support varies. Based on the data in Table 4 it appears that TAFE has a greater propensity for a more varied placement approach, but, as one respondent succinctly put it, ‘and, of course, what is able to be negotiated at the educational institution level, with the host organisation, and the ability of the individual to pursue opportunities’. This highlights the complexities of mediating workplace learning and development alluded to by

Engeström (1987), Gibbons et al. (1994), Engeström and Cole (1997), and Billet (2001, 2004).

In Australia, currently, TPI arrangements are not mandatory, and are not incorporated into human resource planning either. Perhaps these should form part of future workforce planning through their incorporation in employee work plans, as suggested by Van der Bijl and Taylor (2016).

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, this study has pointed to the complex nature of TPI arrangements from the perspective of education managers, whose role influences TPI initiatives and continues to be central to their success. It is encouraging to see the high level of in-principle support reported by the respondents, despite the challenges associated with these initiatives. Education managers see value in TPI activities for their teaching programmes and their departments as well as for the teacher, the student and the host organisation. However, the challenges remain, because not all of the institutions have policies in place to support these initiatives; and even when such policies exist, they are not well formulated. Furthermore, TPI activities are generally under-resourced.

Accordingly, there is scope for more research in this area aimed at discovering the drivers behind support for educational institutions. Some of the questions that could form part of future research may include these: For the educational institution, is TPI merely about compliance with a five-year upskilling cycle to meet AQF requirements, or is there more to it? What are the incentives for private firms to facilitate TPI activities? How do stakeholders benefit in all of this? How could TPI outcomes be measured meaningfully and transparently? What reforms may be needed to correct the contradiction between policies encouraging TPI and the practice of providing little, if any, funding to have them implemented?

Further research on these aspects of TPI schemes and experiences is certainly warranted in order to learn whether there is the scope to influence governments to enhance TPI initiatives.

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