

# Understanding and strategizing vocational teaching

by Dr Sai Loo

Brian Simon in 1981 asked a seemingly simple question, Why no pedagogy in England? This article seeks to answer it by using a theoretical framework and empirical findings from deliverers/lecturers with occupational practices ranging from industries such as airline and equine studies, fashion and textiles, and gas fitting/servicing (Loo, 2018). The larger project also draws from higher vocational/first degree and professional education.

The framework (see Figure 1) begins with a dual professional concept, i.e. vocational/occupational lecturers have experienced as deliverers and practitioners in their relevant areas. The framework needs not be linear or one-directional. So, a lecturer may teach before acquiring pedagogic know-how. The teaching pathway starts with acquiring teaching knowledge such as learning theories (e.g. social constructivism). The framework uses Bernstein's (1990) recontextualization to understand how knowledge is selected, modified and relocated for a different use. So, a gas servicing lecturer may start with learners' experiences/know-how on learning and scaffold to help them learn (i.e. social constructivism). S/he uses this learning theory to help in teaching a specific aspect (e.g. gas laws of physics) to make it relevant to that subject (Content Recontextualization). Next, he decides to translate this learning approach to teach in the classroom. It involves another process of recontextualization modifying the specific specification into a teaching session. Included in this process is also the 'work knowledge' relating to the particular teaching institution with its systems and protocols, e.g. emphasis on the use of certain technologies and delivery styles. Also, he needs to know his learners, their needs and related teaching know-how. Together, he devises a lesson plan (Pedagogic Recontextualization).

Concerning the occupational pathway, as a gas servicing practitioner, he needs to acquire theories relating to his area such as the gas laws of physics. This aspect of his learning curriculum needs to be made relevant to his vocational area (Content Recontextualization). Individually or collectively, this theory is applied in practice using the learnt experiences (e.g. classroom demonstrations or on-the-job) along with the work organisation's systems and ways of doing things, and industry regulation (Occupational Recontextualization).

Finally, he integrates the two pathways of teaching and occupational practices (Integrated Applied Recontextualization) to decide the best possible teaching strategy for his learners for that specific part of the specifications. This distinct framework explains lecturers' apparent conflation of the complex teaching processes. It draws on a wide definition of know-how to include disciplinary/theoretical knowledge, pedagogic and occupational experiences, abilities and skill sets. The know-how can be explicit or tacit and performed individually or collaboratively.

So, how to implement the findings? This framework allows stakeholders to understand the sources, types and applications of teaching know-how for choosing the relevant teaching approaches to a specific vocational lesson. It offers definitions of teaching

knowledge and vocational pedagogy for inclusion in TVET and teacher education curricula. It invites investigative areas for lecturers' professional development to improve their teaching and occupational practices. This empirically evidenced understanding significantly legitimises the deliverers' pedagogic and occupational experiences. It is by understanding what vocational pedagogy means that stakeholders can move forward to develop lecturers professionally (in teaching and occupations) and vocational curricula, and establish institutional support structures. [518 words]

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