

**Framing the Future of FET: Student
Engagement, Quality Assurance and
Lifelong Learning in Further Education and
Training Teacher Education Programs**

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Paper presented at the 5th International
Lifelong Learning Conference,
Ryldges Capricorn International Resort,
Yeppoon, 18 June 2009

Abstract

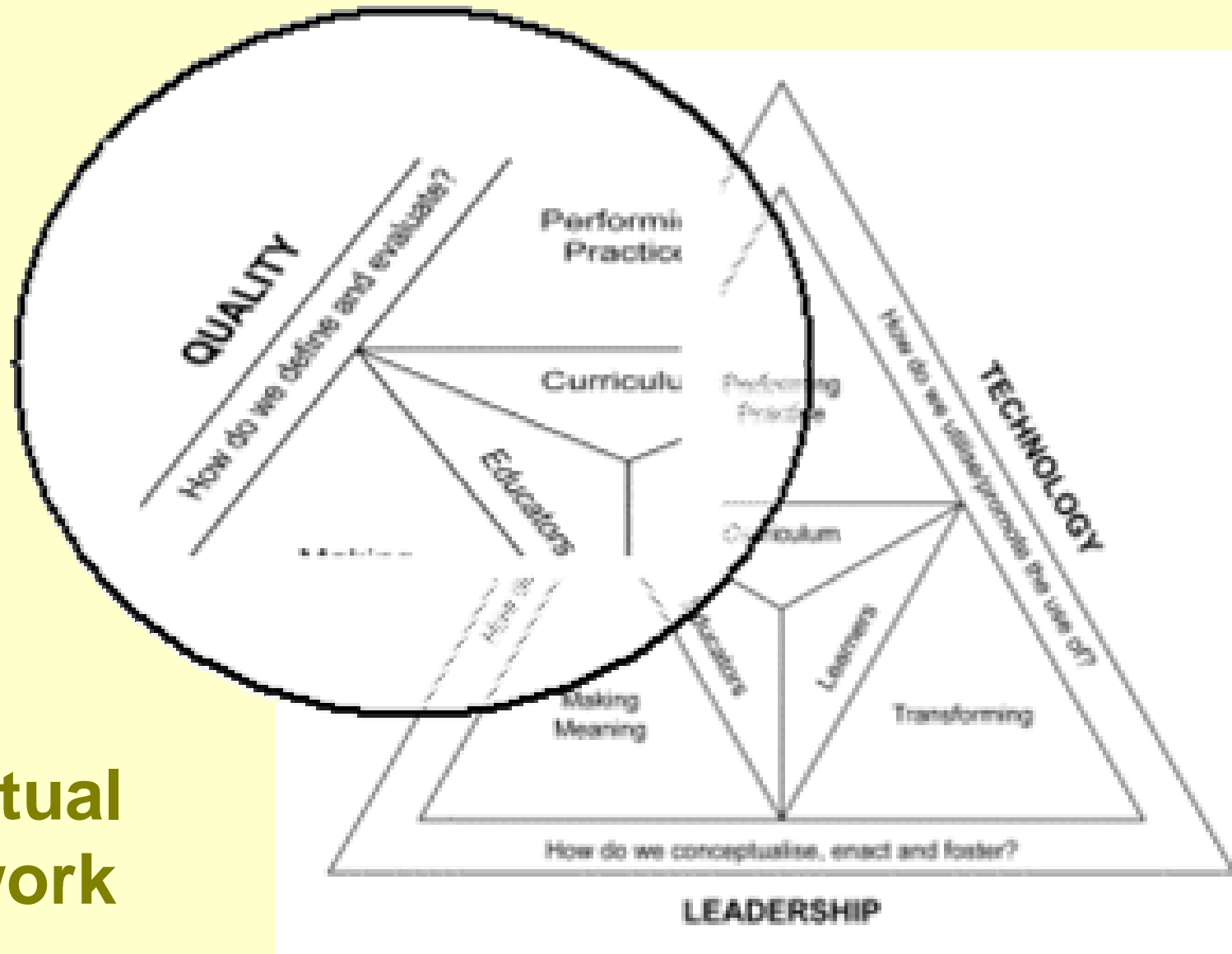
This paper interrogates options in redesigning the Further Education and Training (FET) teacher education programs at the University of Southern Queensland in relation to student engagement as influencing quality assurance. Critical understandings of lifelong learning are proposed for framing FET futures that maximise student engagement and quality assurance in the programs.

Overview of Presentation

- Introduction: focus and argument
- Conceptual framework
- Quality – student engagement
- Quality – quality assurance
- Critical questions for framing the future of FET
- Proposed framework for conceptualising and evaluating quality in FET programs
- Focused discussion

Introduction: Focus and Argument

- Further Education and Training (FET) Programs
(Associate Degree, Bachelor Degrees [3 and 4 year] and Graduate Diploma)
- Respond to Coates' (2005) challenge: focus directly on student engagement indicators as potential influences on quality assurance in higher education
- This challenge has particular resonance with FET curriculum (distance and online education for adult learners, in some ways marginalised within teacher education)
- Critical understandings of lifelong learning and quality assurance in higher education as conceptual resources



Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 Spotlight on quality: Conceptual framework for interrogating curriculum leadership, quality and technology in the USQ FET programs (adapted from Danaher, Tyler & Arden, 2007, p. 81)

Quality – Student Engagement

What do students do in relation to engagement?

- Educational activities likely to lead to high quality learning (Coates, 2005)

But conceptions of student engagement are variable.

1. Person perspective
2. Situational perspective



Quality – Student Engagement

Further Education and Training (FET) programs at USQ:

- Mostly mature aged students; X generation and baby boomers
- Enrolled in distance mode
- Endeavouring to reinvent themselves as teachers/trainers

Student Engagement - FET

- It's more than just getting them involved
- It's about prompting these students out of what Krause (2005) identifies as an inertia - passive engagement in learning.
- It's about helping them deal with the “battleground” of engagement.
- “University study runs the risk of simply becoming another appointment or engagement in the daily diary” (Krause, 2005, p. 8)

Student Engagement - FET

What do we do?

- ✓ Direct contact with program director at the beginning
- ✓ Personalised interview with personalised program of study
- ✓ Embedding of information technology literacies within programs

Can we do more?

Quality Assurance

Evaluating the Quality of FET Teaching, Courses and Programs:

- Stakeholder views, benchmarking and audit activities
- Student feedback (satisfaction with courses, teachers and support services):
 - SEDLT (Student Evaluation of Distance Learning and Teaching)
 - CEQ (Course Experience Questionnaire)
- **Student engagement** emerging as an important measure of quality in tertiary education (Scott, 2005)
- Need for an emphasis on what the student is actually doing (ie extent to which they are engaging in a range of educational activities that are likely to lead to “high quality learning” including “beyond-class experiences” (Coates, 2005, p. 29))

Quality Assurance

Problem?

- Indicators of quality and student engagement reveal a strong **focus on traditional ‘on campus’ mode** and **transmissive** approaches to teaching and learning
- Indicators of engagement based on research conducted primarily with larger universities (three out of 14 representative of smaller, regional universities with larger external student enrolments (Scott, 2005))
- Relevance of established indicators to FET student cohort?

Critical Questions

- Challenging Scott (2005), to what extent do current measures of course and program quality in higher education – and in particular student engagement – accurately reflect the needs and circumstances of students enrolled in distance education programs at regional Australian universities?
- Following Coates (2005), what kinds of conditions are likely to enable, facilitate and stimulate the kind(s) of engagement(s) that distance learners value in their tertiary studies, and to what extent is the current operating climate of the university conducive to the provision of those conditions?
- Drawing on Krause (2005), to what extent are our conceptualisations of quality as specifically related to student engagement measures a reflection of an outdated ideology based on institution-centric expectations and conceptualisations of teaching, learning and quality assurance?

Proposed Framework for Conceptualising and Evaluating Quality in FET programs

- ✓ Aligned with critical understandings of lifelong learning (Grace, 2006) rather than corporate managerialism
- ✓ Based on a more holistic understanding of the external student experience informed by research into what constitutes “high quality learning” and “engagement” for distance students
- ✓ Educator and learner engagement as measures of, and requisites for, quality
- ✓ Institutional and system factors can serve to support or hinder engagement

Focused Discussion

- What are some other possibly critical questions for framing the future(s) of FET?
- What are other experiences of maximising (distance) student engagement?
- What are other experiences of promoting and assuring quality in distance education?
- What are potentially productive links among student engagement, quality assurance and lifelong learning?
- What are some [other] good questions for focused discussion of this paper?

Thank you for participating!