

A Foucauldian strategy for vocational education and training research

Steven Hodge

Abstract

Vocational education and training (VET) is an area of research dominated by positivist approaches. Such approaches complement the behaviourist educational philosophy known as ‘competency-based training’ (CBT) that underpins Australia’s VET system. This paper reflects on a quandary encountered by researchers examining the history of competency-based education at a TAFE institution in South Australia. The issue was how to account for a series of mutations in the way CBT was understood and practised that subverted the largely unquestioned expectation of progress. The researchers found that Foucault’s ‘genealogical’ approach allowed for the construction of a mode of intelligibility that lends the history a disturbing cogency. At the centre of this construction is an understanding of CBT as a highly permeable system whose configurability supports the reticulation of multiple forms of power.

Biography

Steven Hodge is a PhD candidate in the Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work at the University of South Australia, where he is researching learning in vocational education. He was a secondary art teacher and also studied philosophy. Steven has worked in the vocational education sector over the last decade, becoming interested in epistemological problems in Australia’s vocational education system along the way.

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