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Trish Chaplin-Cheyne

INTRODUCTION

At Otago Polytechnic, all kaiako (educators) are supported to complete a tertiary teaching qualification within their first three years of employment. When the Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education (GDTE) Level 7 was first introduced in 2012, it reflected a traditional teacher training approach, emphasising conceptual frameworks and the application of theory to teaching practice. Over time, this model was critiqued for not fully preparing novice vocational education and training (VET) kaiako for the real-world complexities of tertiary teaching (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Trautwein, 2018; Walne, 2020). In response to stakeholder feedback, the GDTE was redeveloped in 2019, and was eventually replaced in 2024 by the New Zealand Certificate in Adult and Tertiary Teaching (NZCATT) Level 5.

The NZCATT is better positioned to equip novice kaiako, especially those transitioning directly from industry, with foundational teaching skills. It provides a valuable entry point for individuals who bring subject matter expertise but limited, if any, classroom experience. Designed around a practice-based pedagogy, the programme situates novice VET kaiako within their own teaching context, allowing them to evidence their learning *in* and *through* work.

While this work-based approach offers greater relevance and contextual alignment, it is not without limitations. One key challenge is the development of a teaching identity. Identity formation, alongside the acquisition of skills and knowledge, plays a critical role in strengthening pedagogical practice, deepening "understanding of the teacher's roles and responsibilities" (Cobb, 2020, p. 1), and building meaningful relationships with ākonga (students) and colleagues.

This identity shift is particularly significant for vocational educators who enter teaching from industry roles. Walne (2020) highlights that the transition into tertiary teaching often requires practitioners to renegotiate their professional identity, moving from expert practitioner to novice educator while simultaneously developing pedagogical knowledge and teaching confidence.

This raises the overarching inquiry question of this article: under what influences does a subject matter expert, such as an automotive mechanic, begin to identify as a teacher of automotive rather than a mechanic who teaches automotive? This review of the literature seeks to understand the factors that influence when, and under what conditions, VET kaiako shift from identifying primarily as industry experts to recognising themselves as teachers and will

consider how these insights can inform the content that should be included in tertiary teaching professional development programmes.

To explore this issue, the article examines three guiding questions. First, how is teacher identity conceptualised for vocational educators? Understanding how identity is defined provides a foundation for considering its relevance within vocational teaching contexts. Second, what personal and professional factors influence the development of teacher identity for vocational educators? This question considers the interplay between personal beliefs, prior experiences, and the expectations of the institution. Finally, how can institutional professional development programmes influence the shaping of teacher identity in vocational educators transitioning from industry to education? Addressing these questions highlights the role institutions play in deliberately supporting the professional development that explicitly shapes teacher identity.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Defining teacher identity

Although teacher identity is widely discussed in the literature, there remains limited guidance on how it should be deliberately supported within vocational teacher education programmes. This lack of practical direction is particularly problematic in VET contexts such as Otago Polytechnic, where many kaiako enter teaching with strong occupational identities but limited pedagogical preparation.

Rodrigues and Mogarro (2019) argue that this complexity is not just a phenomenon for novice kaiako but remains a constant tension throughout one's teaching career. Many vocational educators enter teaching as a second career, resulting in a dual professional identity that merges occupational and educational roles (Beijaard et al., 2004; Bükki & Fehérvári, 2024; Van Lankveld et al., 2017; Zembylas, 2003). Initially, this identity leans toward their occupational background, as novice VET kaiako view their subject-matter expertise as giving them credibility, but over time industry experience must strike a balance with developing pedagogical skills (Walne, 2020). Bükki and Fehérvári (2024) describe this as "boundary crossing" (p. 400) and argue that dual professional identity enhances the authenticity of vocational pedagogy. This dual professionalism highlights why teacher identity in vocational education must combine both pedagogical expertise and subject-matter knowledge. It also reflects the broader process through which vocational educators negotiate their personal beliefs and experiences alongside professional expectations as they transition into teaching.

Tyler and Dymock (2019) along with Bükki and Fehérvári (2024) and Van Lankveld et al. (2017), argue that while a balance is required, in practice industry currency is often prioritised. This tension illustrates how identity is negotiated in practice, with the professional self-concept shaped by experience and expertise. Tyler and Dymock (2019) also highlight the importance of experienced practitioners transferring skills and knowledge to others in a way that assists them in their professional growth and capability development. This suggests that teacher identity is not only developed through individual experience but is also shaped through participation in professional communities and the ongoing exchange of knowledge.

At another level, identity can be viewed as the interplay between the personal and professional self, and expanded to include self-knowledge, perceptions, and the meanings individuals attach

to teaching (Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019; Zembylas, 2003). Novice vocational kaiako may enter teaching bringing their beliefs shaped by early classroom experiences or from workplace-based teaching, such as training apprentices (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017; Bükki & Fehérvári, 2024; Chen et al., 2018). As they transition from industry experts to kaiako, these beliefs may alter as new pedagogical understandings emerge. Sometimes this shift can cause tension between what novice VET kaiako find is relevant to them personally and what is considered relevant by the profession—these tensions, if not resolved, can impede development and may lead some novice VET kaiako to leave the profession (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017).

Considering the continuous, adaptive, and contextually influenced process of becoming and remaining a VET educator, terms implying a fixed or stable nature do not capture the complexity of teacher identity. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) therefore argue that commonly used terms such as identity "construction" or "formation" are contradictory to the fluidity associated with identity development and instead propose the more appropriate notion of "shaping" identity (p. 178). In recognition of this, the term "shaping" is used throughout this article.

In VET, a teacher's identity is dynamic and socially constructed, requiring ongoing negotiation between the personal and professional selves. This dynamism aligns with a social constructionist perspective in which identity is continually co-constructed through interaction with others and reshaped in response to changing institutional, disciplinary, and policy contexts. Within the NZCATT programme at Otago Polytechnic, this fluid view of identity suggests that professional development must support kaiako not only to acquire pedagogical skills but also to actively reinterpret their existing industry identities within a teaching context.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER IDENTITY

What then are the personal and professional factors that influence the shaping of teacher identity in vocational educators? Cobb (2020) frames teacher identity as a "merging of the professional and personal self" (p. 1) and, along with Trautwein (2018), emphasises the significance of critical reflection, sense-making, and relationships, particularly between novice VET kaiako and their more experienced colleagues. Leeferink et al. (2019) explain that the personal self pertains to one's beliefs, values, and prior educational experiences, while the professional self emanates from the demands of the workplace or educational institution. They describe identity shaping as a friction between these two selves, with this friction often producing transformative moments. For VET kaiako, such moments arise from the challenge of maintaining industry currency while developing pedagogical knowledge, or from difficult classroom experiences, such as with disengaged ākonga (Tyler & Dymock, 2019). While such experiences can lead to positive shifts in practice, they also expose kaiako to emotional strain and frustration, making resilience a critical factor in identity shaping.

Emotional strain

Day (2018) and Zembylas (2003) emphasise the role of emotional investment in kaiako professional lives, especially in the classroom. They explain that because kaiako give part of themselves to understand others, and through this "willingness to be vulnerable" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 230), they develop and sustain authentic relationships. However, this same emotional investment by kaiako in interactions with ākonga and the institution can deplete reserves, reduce resilience, and potentially undermine their ability to maintain a strong sense of identity.

Similarly, Rodrigues and Mogarro (2019) argue that "classroom experiences are pivotal" in shaping novice kaiako, but caution that the positive and negative experiences arising from work-based learning environments can cause "tensions and ethical dilemmas" (p. 8). These fluctuating experiences may create emotional strain, influencing a sense of belonging for novice kaiako in the profession. Here, Day's (2018) notion of the "collective influence" (p. 61) of identity, emotions, and resilience is central to buffering against the fragility caused by emotionally taxing experiences. For career-changing professionals, these findings highlight resilience as a central factor in identity shaping and in sustaining long-term teaching careers.

Resilience

Sappa et al.'s (2019) work is particularly valuable in the VET context because it explicitly links resilience with the negotiation of dual professional identities, a challenge frequently faced by educators transitioning from industry. They argue that resilience is essential for novice kaiako, supporting them to manage a range of challenges while developing their teaching skillsets. Importantly, resilience and teacher identity are not only closely aligned but influence one another, with the potential to impact each other both positively and negatively.

These authors further explain that resilience and the formation of teacher identity are multi-dimensional, dynamic, and ongoing processes shaped by tensions between the personal and professional selves. These complexities are heightened in the VET context, where the demands and role requirements differ from those in primary and secondary education, making "the boundaries of [one's] professional identity … difficult to define" (Sappa et al., 2019, p. 1673). For programmes such as the NZCATT, this suggests that resilience should not be assumed to develop incidentally through teaching experience alone, but should instead be deliberately fostered through reflective activities, mentoring relationships, and structured opportunities to interpret challenging classroom experiences.

Identity-agency

This negotiation between resilience and action brings into focus the concept of identity-agency, which is described as critical to shaping a teacher identity, especially when a novice kaiako is challenged through the "conceptualisation of their professional self" (Cobb, 2020, p. 2). Agency can be understood as kaiako having ownership of their professional decisions, with opportunities to build confidence through practicums, critical reflection, and a level of autonomy in their actions (Beijaard et al, 2004; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Cobb, 2020; Day, 2018; Zembylas, 2003). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) refer to the broader identity literature when highlighting the link between identity and agency, while Sappa et al. (2019) and Broad (2019) stress that agency must be within authentic educational contexts and supported by the institution to be meaningful.

Cobb (2020) agrees with others that identity shaping is a "fluid and dynamic" (p. 2) process and emphasises that novice VET kaiako continually negotiate or renegotiate their identities in response to professional experiences. She explains that this negotiation can follow three possible pathways: (1) an experience may align with their original identity and require no negotiation, (2) it may be challenging enough to prompt significant change and identity is reshaped, or (3) it may be resisted, with renegotiation rejected. This highlights how agency interacts with teaching contexts to determine where identity change occurs.

Building resilience and agency in VET kaiako requires "social recognition" (Sappa et al., 2019, p. 1671), where they are valued, respected, and engaged as active contributors to the VET institution. These supportive conditions buffer against burnout and reinforce a strong, enduring teacher identity.

Socio-cultural development

Many of the personal and professional elements that shape teacher identity are reinforced within socio-cultural contexts, highlighting the importance of collaborative and reflective professional environments. A key theme throughout the literature is the value of a social constructionist perspective in enabling VET kaiako to make sense of, interpret, and reinterpret their experiences, while building professional relationships grounded in shared language, understandings, and practices (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Carrinus et al., 2010; Cobb, 2020; Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019; Van Lankveld et al., 2017; Zembylas, 2003). For novice kaiako, such relationships function as socio-cultural spaces where beliefs and values can be challenged, supported, and renegotiated, positioning identity shaping not as an isolated task but as a collective and relational process.

While these collaborative spaces provide an initial socio-cultural grounding for novice VET kaiako to reshape their identities, broader disciplinary and institutional contexts play a role in supporting or hindering how teacher identity matures over time. Within a social constructionist perspective, identity is not only co-constructed through shared meaning-making but remains adaptable and responsive to contextual change. For VET kaiako, shifts in institutional priorities, policy directions, or industry expectations require ongoing renegotiation of identity, reinforcing its dynamic and evolving nature (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Zembylas, 2003).

Trautwein (2018) argues that academic identity is socially constructed through subject-matter discipline, social interactions, and pedagogical training. To achieve this, she supports the implementation of "constructivist learning theories" (p. 1005) in training programmes through the role of relationships, particularly between the personal and professional self and with more experienced colleagues. Initially, teaching is often focused on content delivery; but for VET educators, this shift toward learner-centredness involves developing both pedagogical confidence and industry knowledge into meaningful teaching moments.

Overall, the literature suggests that teacher identity in VET is influenced by personal and professional factors. Personal beliefs, emotional investment, resilience, and identity-agency, combine with professional demands such as industry expectations, mentorship, pedagogical development, and the culture of the institution. These factors are interconnected, demonstrating that teacher identity cannot be shaped alone, but is co-constructed through personal commitments, professional practice and institutional influences, and wider socio-political contexts. Within the NZCATT context, this highlights the importance of designing programme activities that foster collegial dialogue and shared reflection among kaiako, rather than positioning professional learning as an individualised process.

TRANSITIONING FROM INDUSTRY TO EDUCATION – THE INSTITUTION'S ROLE

This section explores how institutional educator development programmes influence the shaping of teacher identity in vocational kaiako. Trautwein (2018) discusses the development of kaiako as multi-dimensional, "complex and career-long" (p. 997), involving ongoing reflection

and reassessment of practices and goals. Yet she and Broad (2019) caution of a general scarcity of literature on how tertiary teaching programmes influence identity shaping. Beauchamp and Thomas' (2009) article further highlights a gap in current kaiako training programmes, arguing that explicit guidance on the shaping of teacher identity is lacking, or at best, peripherally connected to content. Beijaard and Meijer (2017) and Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) advocate for teacher identity to be an intentional component of professional development programmes (or curriculum), supported through work-based practices that enable self-exploration within authentic teaching contexts.

In addition, Tyler and Dymock's (2019) research explored VET professional development provision in the Australian context and found inconsistencies across institutions. Although VET educator programmes in Australia are mandatory, they are frequently criticised for failing to adequately equip their kaimahi with the necessary knowledge and skills required to teach. While VET professional development provision is not mandatory in New Zealand, what is available is also inconsistent across institutions. Walne (2020), examining the New Zealand ITP sector specifically, similarly notes that many vocational educators begin teaching with little formal pedagogical preparation and rely heavily on institutional professional development to develop their teaching capability. This reinforces the importance of programmes such as the NZCATT in supporting both pedagogical skill development and teacher identity formation.

Beijaard and Meijer (2017) emphasise that if certain factors are not included within kaiako training programmes, identity shaping could be impeded. To place teacher identity at the core of professional development, they propose embedding three concepts: "agency, ownership, and sense-making" (p. 4). These authors advocate for the role of educators of kaiako to support and facilitate the identity transformation process through recognising times of tension and facilitating dialogue, acknowledging the challenge of shifting long-held beliefs, putting respectful engagement first, and ensuring that both agency and reflection are prioritised.

A key point from Broad's (2019) literature review is that a one-size-fits-all approach to training fails to meet the complexity of discipline-specific knowledge and the challenges that VET kaiako face in maintaining industry currency and adapting their expertise to teaching. They identify three characteristics of effective pedagogy, consistent with Beijaard and Meijer's (2017) concepts discussed in the previous paragraph. Agency and ownership align with the first two themes that follow, while the third, sense-making, is what Broad (2019) describes as "hidden pedagogical practices" (p. 1770), and is reflective of the inconsistent nature of professional development in VET. Tyler and Dymock (2019) argue that inconsistent provision of kaiako training highlights a need for VET specific professional development frameworks that balance pedagogical skills alongside industry currency.

Work-based learning

Consistent with wider literature (Bükki & Fehérvári, 2024; Chen et al., 2018; Leeferink et al., 2019; Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019; Walne, 2020), Tyler and Dymock (2019) emphasise that effective professional development programmes must be applied, and work based. They argue that professional development opportunities must incorporate explicit processes of self- and peer reflection and are to be situated within collaborative learning environments. In this way, identity shaping is anchored in the lived experiences of the classroom, rather than in abstract training. Rodrigues and Mogarro (2019) emphasise the importance of supervised practicums that incorporate scaffolded reflection practices.

Cobb (2020) further supports the importance of high-quality work-based classroom experiences that provide novice kaiako with opportunities to practice agency over their actions. However, she cautions that positive outcomes are dependent on the quality of the mentor. Mentors, generally senior VET educators, play an important role in validating and supporting the novice's practice. Building on this, Carrinus et al. (2010) and Sappa et al. (2019) take the argument for mentoring novice kaiako a step further, advocating for a collaborative institutional culture to not only support identity development but also resilience.

Finally, Broad (2019) and Day (2018) extend the conversation by linking work-based learning to agency and resilience at the institutional level. They argue that providing opportunities to express agency through learning *in* and *through* work that is supported at institutional level strengthens resilience, minimises emotional strain, and encourages the development of a responsive and inclusive teaching identity. Together, these perspectives position work-based learning as more than training, but as a socio-cultural process through which novice VET educators shape their professional identities.

Socio-cultural professional learning

Rodrigues and Mogarro (2019) examine the importance of the wider institutional community in supporting the social aspects of learning. For example, communities of learning can be useful in helping novice VET kaiako recontextualise industry knowledge in a learning and teaching context (Bükki & Fehérvári, 2024; Sappa et al., 2019; Van Lankveld et al., 2017; Zembylas, 2003). Broad (2019) adds that collaborations with colleagues are "richer and not bounded by notions of formal learning. Learning [in this way] is informal and ongoing [facilitated] through discussions, consultations, and sharing [of] materials and ideas" (p. 1772).

Consistent with the literature, teacher identity is widely understood as shaped through socio-cultural contexts that emphasise collaborative and reflective professional environments (Van Lankveld et al., 2017; Zembylas, 2003). Relationships play a key role in this process, particularly in negotiating the personal and professional self and through engagement with more experienced colleagues (Cobb, 2020; Trautwein, 2018). In the vocational context, however, these relationships extend beyond the educational setting to include maintaining authentic connections with industry, such as through professional associations (Broad, 2019). This industry context highlights an additional consideration for professional development programmes in VET, particularly in supporting kaiako to sustain dual professional identities.

Dual professionalism

Broad (2019) points to the limited literature on pedagogical development for VET kaiako and argues for the importance of promoting a "dual professional identity" (p. 1772). They claim that both novice and experienced VET kaiako should maintain currency in their industry discipline while simultaneously developing pedagogical experiences. A strong dual identity can enhance the authenticity of vocational teaching by allowing kaiako to connect learning activities to real-world practice.

To address this, teacher educators must ensure there are authentic and regular opportunities for VET kaiako to maintain both their industry and pedagogical proficiency. This requires structured and targeted professional development programmes that not only value industry experience but also enhance teaching practice. In this way, dual professionalism is not left to chance but is deliberate, supported by the institution, and enhances both the credibility and resilience, and therefore, identity forming for VET educators.

DISCUSSION

The literature broadly conceptualises teacher identity in VET education as a dynamic, socially constructed process of negotiating the personal and professional self. This reinforces that identity development is not simply an individual process, but one that is relational, socially mediated, and continually negotiated in response to changing contexts. In the VET context, personal aspects such as beliefs, values, prior experiences, and emotional resources intersect with professional aspects such as industry expectations, institutional culture, collegial relationships, and pedagogical demands. These intersections often create tensions that should not be viewed as barriers to, but as essential drivers of, identity shaping. While the literature consistently recognises the tensions inherent in developing a vocational teacher identity, there is less clarity regarding how professional development programmes should respond to these tensions. For programmes such as the NZCATT, this suggests the need for deliberate curriculum design that explicitly addresses identity negotiation, rather than assuming identity development will emerge organically through teaching experience.

Current studies highlight the importance of recognising the vast experience novice VET kaiako bring with them from industry. While authentic learning is recognised as essential for building confidence and enhancing ākonga engagement, there is little evidence of how prior experiences, such as training apprentices, might be formally recognised against the graduate profile outcomes of teacher education programmes. This is a risk for professional development designers as they must consider ways to recognise and integrate prior knowledge and skills, ensuring industry-based expertise is not overlooked but is central to identity development.

The literature supports the *in* and *through* work model currently used in the delivery of the NZCATT at Otago Polytechnic. This encourages moving away from a one-size-fits-all professional development model toward a more flexible approach that provides opportunities for practical teaching activities and collaboration with colleagues, often afforded through work-based learning (Broad, 2019; Canrinus et al., 2010; Cobb, 2020; Day, 2018). However, the literature rarely acknowledges inequities in how these opportunities are experienced. Those designing professional development must consider kaiako who are part-time or teaching at a distance, for instance, and ensure the appropriate affordances are made. These considerations must be driven at the institutional level, addressing diversity to ensure equitable practices to multi-discipline novice VET kaiako.

Some concerns were identified with the knowledge base. A limitation of the existing literature is that much of the foundational research into teacher identity, (for example, Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) predates contemporary VET reforms and is not specific to vocational contexts. This lack of empirical evidence leaves a gap in understanding the challenges of dual professionalism. Ongoing research is needed to further guide professional development designers and institutional leaders in ensuring that teacher identity is not left to chance, but deliberate and explicitly supported through institutional culture, robust mentorship, and formalised professional development programmes.

CONCLUSION

For institutions such as Otago Polytechnic delivering the NZCATT programme, these findings suggest that teacher identity should not be treated as a peripheral outcome of professional development but as a central organising principle. Programmes must therefore create structured opportunities for novice kaiako to reflect on their transition from industry expert to educator, engage in collaborative professional dialogue, and integrate pedagogical knowledge with their existing vocational expertise. Teacher identity is not formed in isolation but co-constructed through ongoing interaction with colleagues, institutional contexts, and wider sector and policy changes. By intentionally embedding these elements within professional development curricula, institutions can better support the emergence of confident dual professionals who are able to sustain both industry credibility and effective teaching practice.

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