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Teacher or Technician?

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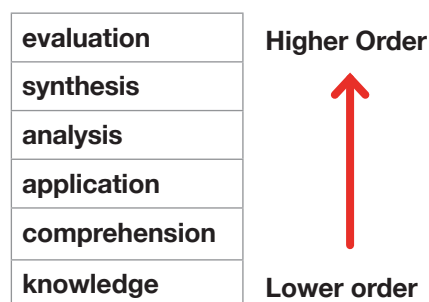
I am a teacher of the original TAFE System. By that I mean I worked in industry then spent a full year, three days a week, at a technical teachers' college studying for a Graduate Diploma in Education that included teaching methodologies and practice. It included two days a week as a supervised trainee teacher with allocated mentors and coaches and being associated with the same school and allocated classes for the whole year, registered by the Technical Schools Division of the Department of Education. I did some 35 critiqued lessons as one part of my overall assessment requirements. Such professional education and preparation is in stark contrast to the requirements of Certificate IV in Training and Assessment that I have also completed and updated through its various iterations when the Australian VET System was introduced and of which thousands of Private Registered Training Organisations became part of.

I have been prompted to write because on enquiring I have been officially notified by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations that there was insufficient interest to form a "vocational education jobs and skills council." Teaching education *per se* is not achieved via a Cert IV in Training and Assessment but that is the level of education expertise that now appears to be commonly advising on VET System matters. I am very concerned that there is no vocational education jobs and skills council and that such matters will be an afterthought on an obscure meeting agenda, however, the problem is deeper. I don't believe the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment produces vocational teachers. There is no explicit pedagogy, andragogy or heutagogy content in the qualification. I think it has led to a deskilling of the vocational educator workforce. I have speculated how this has led to the wider skills shortage in Australia including the shortage of

appropriately qualified vocational educators. In general, 40 years of VET System has caused an intensification of a learning technician role, i.e. compliant application of instruction, that was once a professional vocational teaching role.

I love vocational teaching whether to under 18-year-old students or adults. This article is a summary about how I practically understand what vocational teaching and vocational learning is after almost a lifetime of involvement. I will leave it to readers to come their own conclusions in the main however I will not sidestep this important issue.

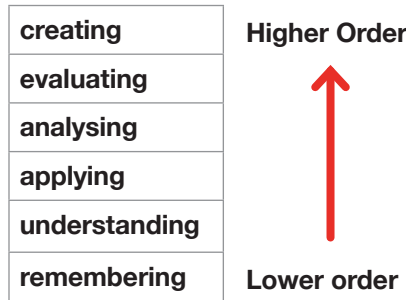
A common component of teaching courses is Bloom's Taxonomy of learning. Benjamin Bloom, in the 1950s developed a taxonomy of thinking skills and ordered them from lower to higher order being: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation. He argued that a student had to have "knowledge" before "comprehension" could occur. And that "application" could only occur with "comprehension". And so on.



Lorin Anderson (2001), a former student of Bloom, published a revised Bloom's Taxonomy in 2001 that used lower to higher order verbs rather than nouns being: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, creating. Each of these taxonomic elements has a few key verbs associated with it. Once again it was a linear process where, for example, "creating" could not occur without first being able to "analyse".

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With both versions of Blooms Taxonomy I always wanted to add two-way arrows between the categories and one from top to bottom or make them circular diagrams with interconnections between each element as I do not have a linear conception of the learning process. It is not the way our brains work. This probably comes from my original qualification and industry experience as a medical scientist. Our brains don't think linearly like most desk computers are programmed to. For example, learning may begin at any level and move backwards and forwards between the various levels during the process of learning as mistakes are made or when small steps forward are made and added to. Learning can start at any stage in my view of the learning process. And there in lays the need for the art and skill

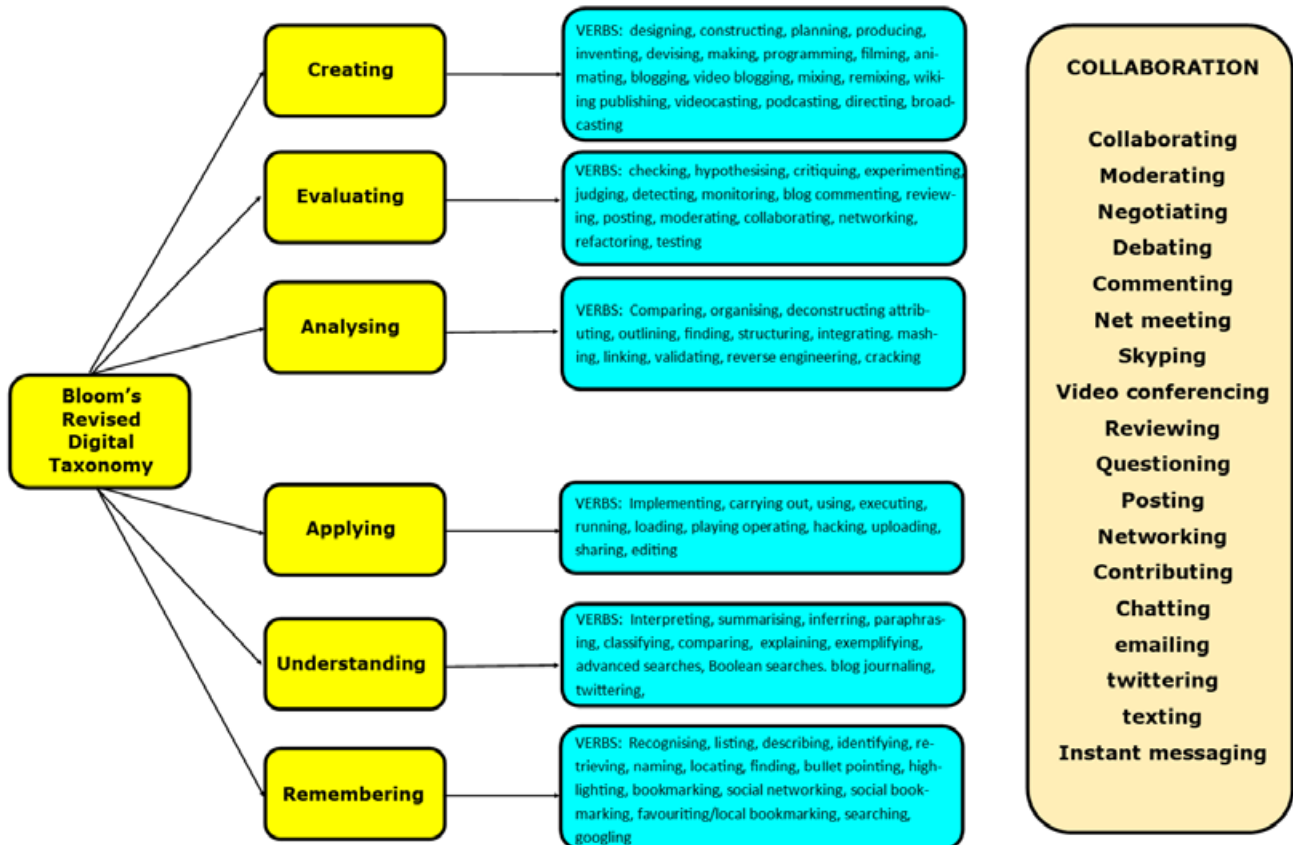
of how a vocational teacher may guide a student in their learning process.

Andrew Churches (2008) developed Bloom's Digital Taxonomy as the previous versions did not address the emergence and integration of information and communication technologies. Overall, this meant that he added more verbs to Anderson's revision of Bloom's Taxonomy such as social bookmarking, searching ("googling"), subscribing, journaling, online etiquette.

Churches diagram, that follows, provides a useful summary of how times have changed with respect to the influence of information and communication technology to learning processes.

I have long had a problem with the concept of competency that is promoted by the Australian VET System. To my mind competency is something that comes from years of experience and regular application and does not equate to being able to do a work task, say, three times for assessment purposes. In such circumstances, a trainee has demonstrated a capacity to be likely to be able to develop competency over time in circumstances where the employment the graduated trainee requires them to regularly undertake that task they have been assessed for. I believe this is an unfortunate outcome of an "industry-led VET System" that excluded vocational educationists

Bloom's Revised Digital Learning Taxonomy 2008



Bruce D. Watson 2023, reproduced after A. Churches, 2008

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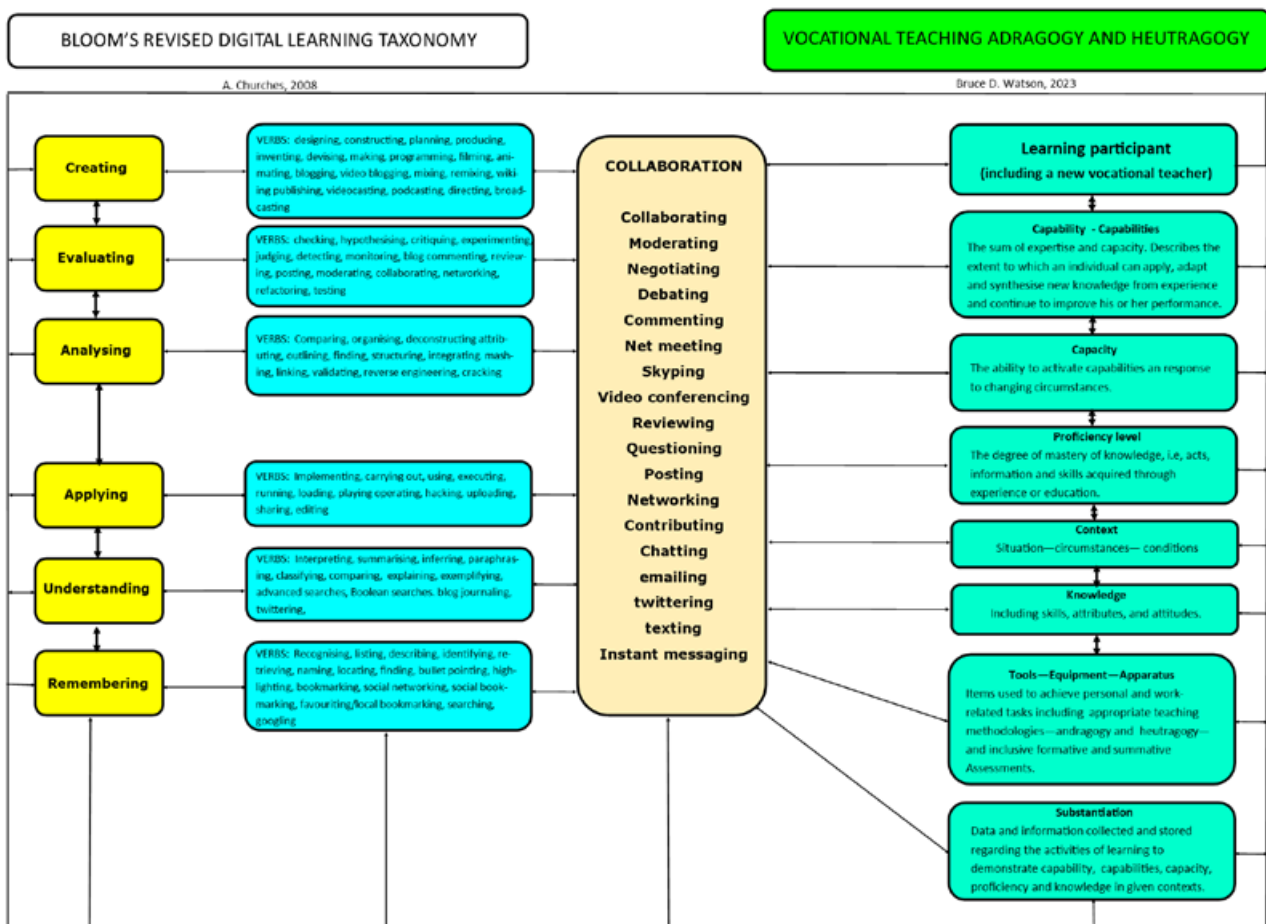
from the inception of the System 40 years ago. And to my mind, it may explain why Department of Employment and Workplace Relations found there was insufficient interest to form a “vocation education jobs and skills council.” That is worth repeating, there was no interest in the formation of a vocation education jobs and skills council in the VET System. So much of the VET System structure has been industry-led for so long that it now appears to be unattractive for vocational educationists, i.e., qualified above Certified IV in Training and Assessment, to become involved as it is now virtually fait accompli and educationist reputations would be at stake due to too many compromises having to be made.

During the 2000s I began devising a diagram that would aim to explain in summary my understanding of competency beyond the Australian VET System view. It has been through several versions and clarifications as I exercised my brain. I have shared the updates for open comment over the years and it seems to resonate with senior VET educationists (see Watson Bruce D.,2022). My model focuses on how to represent competency as a rich construction of specialist tacit and explicit knowledge. The heart of the model is to treat knowledge, not as a possession, but as a contextualised multi-dimensional capability either actual or potential. Where knowledge is defined as acts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education.

In other words, knowledge is a combination of theory, skills and experience they are not exclusive.

When I recently studied and analysed Churches Bloom’s Revised Digital Taxonomy I concluded that it was needed to update my diagram that aimed to explain competency and vocational education teaching. However, more than that, it means the combined diagram would provide a substantial summary for understanding the basis for vocational teaching practice as distinct from what I call “compliant learning technician practice”. I have presented where I have got to below. However, despite the use of double headed arrows, the linear, block-like nature of the diagram still tends to bely the way our human brain’s function, so my next task is to look at how to represent the same material but more characteristic of how human brains function. I envisage and predict a three-dimension diagram or hologram.

I believe the problem of Australian VET System vocational educator qualifications and experience has been known for 40 years i.e., since the inception of the Australian VET System. It is based on the same model of competency that I have demonstrated as being insufficient in academic level and has insufficient consideration of andragogy and heutagogy. In my opinion the Australian VET System is a self-perpetuating workforce deskilling system that previous senior, well qualified and industry experienced TAFE



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vocational educators warned would happen 40 years ago and there is evidence to support this (for example, see Smith and Yasukawa, 2017). The recent Strategic Review of Online Learning in the VET sector asserted that there is no single issue or feature that is an indicator of greater risk to quality. I think there is i.e., the qualification and experience level of entry level VET educators.

I argue that VET trainers who are only qualified to the minimum Certificate IV in Training and Assessment are prepared by the Australian VET System to be compliant learning technicians, not teachers. Calling them 'trainers' is not a compliment. ■

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National Skills Taxonomy Discussion Paper

National Skills Taxonomy Discussion Paper

DEWR Consult hub

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- 1 Do you agree with this Privacy Statement?
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- 7 Please select how you would like to provide a response.
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8 Thank you for choosing to provide a response to the National Skills Taxonomy Discussion Paper.

Not answered

9 Lessons from existing taxonomies

They become outdated quickly.

10 Potential use cases for a National Skills Taxonomy

A National Capabilities Register is needed, not a National Skills Taxonomy. Capabilities include adapting to new work contexts and situations rather than more narrow-defined skills that quickly become outdated. A notion of VET limited to preparing people for specific workplace tasks and roles is far too limited. However, a Capabilities approach starts with the person and not specific skills. It asks about the capabilities people need to achieve a range of outcomes. The capacity to exercise skill at work is an emergent property of more fundamental, complex and wide-ranging knowledge, skills and abilities. Capacity arises from the inter-relationship between personal, social, and working lives, meaning that learning for work needs to go beyond work.

11 Building a National Skills Taxonomy – design considerations

The information being asked for here assumes a Skills Taxonomy is the best data to develop and design. It isn't in my view. What is being proposed is remarkably similar to that specified for the current "Competency-based" system, which is based on the discredited behavioural educational theory of the 1950s. The danger is that just the words will be changed in existing material without considering current vocational education theory and practice. The central role afforded to industry constrains the adoption of a systematic and deliberate approach to improving and enhancing proper vocational education and training, i.e., beyond a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment knowledge and experience. Ensuring early expert input from highly qualified and experienced experts in vocational education would be a wise move to avoid the issues experienced with the "Competency-based system". Competency-based training was interpreted as current work-based tasks rather than ongoing capability. The National Skills Taxonomy risks being interpreted as current work-based tasks rather than ongoing capability.

12 Building a National Skills Taxonomy: Implementation considerations

Given the scale and pace of change in society and the economy, building a National Skills Taxonomy as described is going to generate a large amount of data and documentation

that will never be up-to-date . VET must prepare students for a broad occupation within loosely defined vocational streams rather than workplace tasks and roles associated with particular jobs. Therefore, an ongoing Capability-based system would require less regular updating as it would not exist in terms of minutiae work-based tasks that keep changing.