Remain the Vocational Professional: A Grounded Theory Study of IVET Teachers’ Continuing Professional Development

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Abstract: The Malta College of Arts, Science, and Technology (MCAST), Malta’s leading VET provider, opened its doors in 2001 and has since invested heavily in recruiting industry professionals to teach a variety of vocational subjects. New full-time educators commit to complete an in-service pedagogy course within the first five years of employment. However, as full-time IVET educators become seasoned teachers and academics, they run the risk of losing technical competences related to their former vocational profession or discipline. The aim of this grounded theory study is to explore Continuing Professional Development (CPD) practices that enable IVET educators to maintain and update subject-related technical competences. Five in-depth interviews were carried out with IVET lecturers within the Institute of Business Management and Commerce (IBMC) at MCAST. The findings show that, whilst the notion of what constitutes CPD was interpreted differently, all participants had participated in some form of technical CPD at their own initiative, ranging from reading, conferences, seminars, and courses, or practising in the subject-specific area. However, all teachers agreed that the value derived from work placements cannot be replicated by other forms of CPD. Teachers also expressed the need for individually tailored technical CPD, depending on the stage of professional development and subject area taught. Finally, the findings suggest that those teachers who are bound to carry out CPD to meet the requirements set by a professional board (e.g. Accountancy Board or Chamber of Engineers) engage in CPD more systematically and mindfully, highlighting the need for MCAST’s own career planning and CPD policy.

Keywords: Vocational education, IVET teachers, vocational identity, dual professionalism, continuing professional development, teacher-driven CPD, work placements, CPD policy, faculty development, professional autonomy, workplace learning

Background

The Malta College of Arts, Science, and Technology (MCAST) was inaugurated in 2001 with the aim of addressing the gap left in vocational education after the closure of trade schools in the 1990s (Cedefop 2017). Since MCAST’s inception, the popularity of Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) courses has more than tripled and in 2015 more students enrolled in IVET than other academic tracks offered to learners after compulsory education (Cedefop 2017; MCAST 2015). MCAST increasingly faces a challenge to offer quality education and there is little debate about educators’ crucial role in ensuring quality learning (Cogan and Martzoukou 2018; Lloyd and Payne 2012; Misra 2011; de Vries et al. 2013). At MCAST, teachers are recruited on the basis of their skills and qualifications. New full-time educators commit to complete an in-service pedagogy course within the first five years of employment. However, over time teachers run the risk of losing contact with industry and the technical competences related to their former vocational profession or discipline, unless they engage in professional development.
Teachers and trainers’ professional development continues to be high on the EU policy agenda as evidenced in the Bruges Communiqué and Riga Conclusions (Cedefop 2016). In Malta, the importance of ‘retraining’ IVET educators in ‘modern techniques’ is acknowledged in the National Vocational Education and Training Policy (Ministry for Education and Employment 2015: 20). However, MCAST, which is Malta’s largest IVET provider, falls short of offering career planning support to teachers and lacks a CPD policy that gives equal importance to the three pillars of professional development relevant for IVET teachers: pedagogical, technical, and core competences.

**Introduction**

MCAST has an ageing teacher population, with some teachers having left former industry employment more than 18 years ago. Meanwhile, the labour market kept evolving prompted by technological, business, and social influences (Cedefop 2014; Council of the European Union and European Commission 2010). With the 4th Industrial Revolution in full force, core academic knowledge must be integrated with technical and occupational knowledge (Venkatraman et al. 2018). It is necessary to identify practices that will develop and maintain the occupational expertise of full-time IVET educators who effectively need to combine their teaching identity with their vocational identity (Andersson et al. 2018). Furthermore, such CPD offer needs to be continuing and systematic because educators need to develop these identities **throughout** their careers – something that can only be achieved through easy access to CPD (Lloyd and Payne 2012).

The introduction of a teacher-driven CPD mentality is needed to ensure that teachers engage in ongoing work-related learning and a variety of CPD activities, such as visiting students on apprenticeship, conducting applied research, Erasmus+, conferences, etc. but perhaps more importantly engagement in a more hands-on-type of CPD such as work placements or part-time employment. Workplace CPD would allow IVET educators to gain the ‘current work-life experience of the occupation related to their teaching subject in order to prepare the vocational students for working life’ (Andersson et al. 2018: 142). Consequently, the aim of this research is to explore CPD practices that enable IVET educators to maintain and update subject-related technical competences (not pedagogical). The research question underpinning this study is:

**How can IVET educators keep abreast of industry developments?**

Stemming from this research question, this exploratory research addresses the following research objectives:

- To describe the experiences of IVET educators with subject-related CPD;
- To explore how IVET educators perceive industry placements for teachers;
- To investigate the need for teacher-driven subject-related CPD;
- To recommend practices that help IVET educators remain effective teachers over time.

**Literature Review**

Smith and Yasukawa (2017) asked the question ‘What makes a good VET teacher?’ Interestingly, both students and teachers consider both pedagogical skills and industry experience and expertise to be important. This suggests that IVET teachers have a dual identity: the pedagogical identity and the vocational identity (e.g. Andersson et al. 2018; Broad 2016). The pedagogical or teacher identity is formed at an IVET teacher’s
school or college. On the other hand, the identity of IVET educators is formed within engagement in prior employment. This dual, or hybrid identity of IVET teachers, which in turn suggests dual professionalism, implies that IVET educators need to engage in CPD in two distinct workplaces: the school or college to maintain their teacher identity and industry to maintain their vocational identity (King et al. 2016). However, for full-time IVET teachers, maintaining and developing both pedagogical and technical competences may be challenging because it ‘implies boundary crossing between school and working-life’ (Köpsén and Andersson 2015).

Developing the IVET Educator’s Dual Professionalism

In a study carried out amongst IVET teachers in England, Broad (2016: 150) suggests that IVET educators engage in a range of CPD activities for the purpose of subject and occupational updates including reading journals and books; accessing materials, resources, or communities online; attending workshops; practising in the subject specific area; involvement with a professional body; attending a short course; peer observation; accompanying students on educational trips; organizing guest speakers; attending a long course; shadowing someone in the subject specific profession; industrial placement; and other. However, it can be argued that ‘not all CPD supports professional development’ (Sugrue and Mertkan 2016: 9). Workplace/situated learning that spans over time (e.g. work placements, part-time employment in subject specific area, consultancy, etc.) is more conducive to acquiring tacit knowledge associated with vocational knowledge (Broad 2016; Fox 2000). Sweden acknowledged the unique requirements of vocational educators by introducing working periods backed up by a framework that is supported by the Swedish National Agency of Education (Andersson et al. 2018; Köpsén and Andersson 2015). On the other hand, Austria, Denmark, France, Norway, and Romania offer 4–5-day job shadowing opportunities for IVET educators.

In Malta ‘there are no formal channels through which industry and state IVET (mainly MCAST) cooperate to support teachers’ and trainers’ CPD’ leading IVET providers to use informal channels to obtain support from industry for the professional development of IVET teachers (National Commission for Further and Higher Education 2016: 11–12). However, shorter-industry related CPD activities are organized and employers also invite ‘IVET teachers to attend in-house staff training organized for their employees’ (ibid.: 12).

At MCAST, CPD that is not related to pedagogy is either organized centrally according to MCAST’s needs, by the individual Institutes to cater for their own sector-specific CPD training or through mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ (ibid.: 10). Whilst Erasmus+ does allow IVET teachers to engage in work placements, job shadowing, or observations, at MCAST these experiences are capped to a five-day period. Finally, an indirect opportunity for vocational CPD also arises when IVET teachers visit students on apprenticeships.

Model of Workplace Learning for IVET Educators

IVET teachers do not need professional development for themselves. Instead, the complexity rests in understanding ‘how teachers can capture vocational knowledge and how CPD experiences can be utilized to facilitate the transportation of vocational knowledge to formal classroom settings’ (Broad 2016: 146). First it is necessary to investigate how vocational knowledge can be learnt. Several theories appropriate for vocational learning exist, including workplace learning, spaced learning, knowledge in motion, and other theories (Khall and Elkhider 2016; Sartori et al. 2015). Workplace learning recognizes that vocational knowledge is developed through practice (Hordern
and can be defined as ‘the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for improving the quality and progress of work in situations at or near the workplace’ (Kyndt et al. 2016: 436). In an IVET CPD context, Broad (2016) suggests the adoption of a workplace learning theory framework because ‘vocational knowledge is on the whole tacit, non-formal, and largely uncodified’ (ibid.:145). The implication is that CPD which relies on codified learning (e.g. courses or textbooks) does not necessarily capture vocational knowledge because ‘codified knowledge is recontextualized workplace knowledge that has been simplified, recast, and made more teachable and learnable’ (Broad 2016: 151). Furthermore, vocational knowledge is not only tacit but also situated within a context (Fox 2000; Guile 2011).

- **Spaced learning** is learning that spans over time. This type of learning is said to be more effective in supporting knowledge retention (Kang 2016). In an IVET educators’ CPD context, the implication is that CPD needs to be continuing or carried out over a longer period of time rather than one-time contacts with industry. Finally, Broad (2016) uses Nespor’s (1994) concept of *knowledge in motion* which implies that ‘vocational knowledge moves across contexts through networks and it is the actions of vocational teachers through their CPD that enables this process’ (Broad 2016: 145).

Using a sociocultural constructivist lens, Zhao and Ko (2018: 45) advocate the integration of ‘work, place, and learning into a single construct’. The interaction between individuals at a workplace is viewed as an added dimension that is itself a source of knowledge in the learning process (Billett 1994; Zhao and Ko 2018). Such a rich experience cannot be replicated through other forms of CPD and hence the need for work-based professional development. Starting with Ileris’ (2003, 2011) workplace learning model, Zhao and Ko adapted the model to fit within the IVET educator’s dual identity reality (Figure 1). This model places IVET educator’s dual identity at the core of the model (*vocational teachers’ identity* and *workplace learning practice*) and recognizes that likewise students will learn from both *workplace situations* (e.g. teacher’s examples directly from the workplace) and other *learning situations* (e.g. classroom learning through textbooks). The model further identifies that workplace learning is influenced by both *organisational capacity* as well as *individual competence*, both of which can be drivers or challenges.

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**Figure 1:** Model of workplace learning for vocational education teachers (Zhao and Ko 2018: 50)
Cross (1981) developed a model with three barriers to participation in adult education: institutional, situational, and dispositional. Köpşen and Andersson (2015) apply this model to the provision of CPD for IVET educators. Institutional drivers and challenges result from the support teachers receive from the institution itself (ibid.). In Sweden, IVET educators who took part in work placements reported lack of support from management and lack of replacement teachers (Andersson et al. 2018). Indeed, finding replacement teachers is challenging, also because teaching is currently viewed as a low-status profession and fewer people are willing to take up teaching as a career (Attard Tonna and Calleja 2018; Lankford et al. 2014). Other concerns reported were workload, lack of funding, and impoverished networks (Andersson et al. 2018; Broad 2016). At MCAST, the Collective Agreement covers CPD and in-service training as well as participation in industrial placements for observational, research and CPD purposes ‘in order to keep abreast of new developments’ (Malta Union of Teachers 2008: 6). Nevertheless, the existing MCAST–MUT Collective Agreement does not treat IVET teacher's CPD as a clear strategic priority that helps to improve ‘quality, relevance, and attractiveness of VET'; nor does the Collective Agreement necessarily establish the ‘amount, duration, and expected outcomes’ of CPD as desired at EU Policy level (Cedefop 2016: 3–4).

Situational drivers and challenges relate to ‘individual life situations, and important factors [that] can include age, sex, and geographical location’ or other factors such as the teacher's family or financial situation (Köpşen and Andersson 2015). Finally, dispositional drivers and challenges ‘concern individual dispositions or motivation towards participation’ (Köpşen and Andersson 2015: 5). Robson et al. (2004: 191–3) argue that IVET educators give importance to ‘knowing why’ things are done the way they are and ‘going beyond’ the syllabus to protect industry standards and share values and expertise. In contrast, de Vries et al. (2013) argue that it is student-oriented beliefs not subject-matter-oriented beliefs that positively relate to teacher's participation in CPD. Other influential factors may concern the teacher identity versus the vocational identity (Köpşen and Andersson 2015). IVET educators may view themselves as a professional teaching industry-related knowledge or a teacher teaching a vocational subject (Andersson et al. 2018), leading to different engagement in CPD. Finally, IVET teachers who have distanced themselves from the vocational workplace may feel incompetent in relation to contemporary vocational practice (Andersson and Köpşen 2015; Fejes and Köpşen 2014) leading to an inverse relationship between the number of years in teaching and willingness to participate of CPD. In conclusion, dispositional drivers are perhaps the most important as they could overcome both institutional and situational barriers.

Research Methodology

This section describes the research methodology and methods employed to carry out this pre-test study.

Pragmatist Grounded Theory as a Methodology of Inquiry

At its inception, grounded theory was first associated with positivism which was the dominant empirical research philosophy at the time. Nowadays, grounded theory is considered a ‘methodological/methods package’ that can be used across several research paradigms (Birks and Mills 2015: 4-5). This research employed a pragmatist approach to grounded theory; favoured, though never articulated, by Strauss (Bryant 2009). The
pragmatist approach to grounded theory was adopted as opposed to objectivist grounded theory that resides in the positivist tradition or the constructivist approach advocated by Charmaz (2006). The question of whether the vocational and teacher identities exist objectively, or whether such identities are constructed cognitively and socially, is an ontological concern. This ‘born or made’ argument is difficult and perhaps not necessary to resolve. Using a pragmatist perspective, phenomena are experienced as processes that ‘are always in a state of becoming and transition, and are incomplete, emergent and experiential’ (Farjoun et al. 2015). In this study, the pragmatist approach meant adopting a relativist epistemology (knowledge claim) whilst treating both the vocational and teacher identity as incomplete and always in a state of becoming. Axiologically, researcher subjectivity and bias were accepted in this research.

Grounded theory is a methodology that looks for an inherent pattern of behaviour in some process (Bryant 2009) and, like pragmatism, it is real-world practice oriented, problem-centred, and concerned about the consequences of actions (Creswell and Creswell 2018). The choice of grounded theory as a methodology was influenced both by the nature of the research question that asks ‘how’ and aims to discover a process, as well as the research objectives that require an understanding of the contextual conditions surrounding the realities of IVET educators. Given that the study aims to find patterns adopted by educators to keep abreast of industry developments, a qualitative approach to research was desirable because the aim of this research is one of discovery and theory generation rather than one of verifying hypotheses. This study aims to give a voice to IVET teachers as a first step towards building theory in a substantive area of research that has not been studied extensively. Whilst literature on CPD or organizational learning is extensive, few academic journals focus on CPD for IVET teachers and none of these studies employ grounded theory. This implies that the current understanding of this phenomenon might lack theoretical grounding that provides insight into how IVET educators engage in CPD to keep abreast of industry developments.

Participants and Recruitment

This study focuses on CPD of full-time IVET educators in the area of expertise gained from prior employment. A purposive sampling strategy (targeted sampling based on knowledge related to the research) was adopted throughout and only MCAST lecturers with a former profession other than teaching were considered for this study (Table 1). Out of convenience, all the participants hailed from the Institute of Business Management and Commerce (IBMC) because all participants were easily accessible and well known to the researcher. A total of n=5 MCAST lecturers were recruited, all of whom teach a vocational subject related to their former occupational expertise and have been employed at MCAST for 5+ years. Similar to other colleagues at IBMC, none of the participants had ever participated in work placements. Participants signed a consent form and were informed about their rights to refuse or withdraw from the study at any time. Interviews were carried out between May 2019 and July 2019.
Initially the aim of this pre-test study was to recruit two participants only; however, the theoretical sensitivity principle in grounded theory led to the recruitment of more participants, allowing the researcher to be ‘guided by concepts emerging from the data they collect rather than being sensitized by concepts in existing theory’ (Charmaz 2006: 195). In fact, grounded theory does not establish a minimum or maximum sample size, but it aims to reach theoretical saturation. Due to this being a pre-test, theoretical saturation, which in grounded theory is understood to mean the point ‘when no new concepts are emerging’ (Corbin and Strauss 2015: 134), was not reached. However, sufficient data was collected to form a preliminary theoretical framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years teaching at MCAST</th>
<th>Part-time work (other than teaching)</th>
<th>Professional warrant (e.g. engineer, accountant, etc.)</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
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Table 1: Participant characteristics

Data Collection, Generation, and Analysis in Grounded Theory

This research sought ‘rich and detailed information’ and consequently made use of in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews (Rubin and Rubin 2012: 29). A set of initial questions and themes that appeared to be relevant to the research were prepared based on the insights of the preliminary literature review. Questions and the order in which they were asked were not fixed and during the interview probes and follow-up questions were used (ibid.). Open-ended questions gave participants freedom and ownership over their responses in an extended conversation style. Questions were modified over the course of data collection on account of what became more or less relevant and what needed to be known (Hoddy 2019). For example, the first two interviews focused more narrowly on the introduction of work placements for lecturers as a form of CPD but, as more interviews were carried out, it became evident that work placements cannot be isolated from other CPD activities and interview questions were adapted accordingly. All five interviews, which were digitally recorded, were conducted in Maltese and translated and transcribed in English.

To achieve constant comparison, data was analysed after each interview (Birks and Mills 2015; Corbin and Strauss 2015) using a three-stage coding process in MAXQDA. First, open coding was carried out by assigning codes to important phrases or sentences. Second, axial coding entailed using an abductive strategy drawing on extant theory to theorise linkages between categories. Comparison between concepts was carried out to reach what Glaser (2002) termed ‘grab’ by moving beyond the mere comparison of incidents. Initial codes were compared to see if they are ‘talking about the same thing’ and memos written on how they are related (Birks and Mills: 89). Data was questioned using Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) paradigm which assumes ‘A (conditions) leads to B (phenomenon), which leads to C (context), which leads to D (action/interaction, including
strategies), which leads to E (consequences)' (ibid.: 125). This model was preferred to the simplified 3-element paradigm proposed by Corbin because the former has a greater concern with structure and process that allowed for the creation of a ‘rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents’ (ibid.: 57). Finally, selective coding, was not fully employed in this research project, due to it being a pre-test study. Nevertheless, the core category remaining the vocational professional was identified as the central idea that ‘encapsulates the process apparent in the categories and sub-categories constructed’ (Birks and Mills 2015: 97).

To develop coding for context, existing literature, such as EU Policy documents as well as the MCAST–MUT Collective Agreement were coded. This was carried out in line with a Straussian view of ‘specifically coding for contextual conditions’ (ibid.: 103). Finally, throughout the data collection process, data generation, and analysis stages, personal insights and biases were identified and documented in memos to maintain integrity within the study and address any researcher bias. Nevertheless, the researcher’s own experiences and pre-understanding of the research area were used to identify participants and to be able to ask questions that provided more depth in the interviews (ibid.: 92–3). Memos were also used throughout the coding process to ‘define concepts, deal with methodological issues, or offer initial theoretical formulations’ (Babbie 2016: 391). Finally, the Code Relations Browser in MAXQDA was used to help in data analysis (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Code Relations Browser view
Discussion of Findings

Figure 3 illustrates the theoretical framework with the emergent core category *Remaining the vocational professional*. The following subsections systematically discuss each element in the framework.

**Figure 3:** Coding paradigm for IVET teachers’ engagement in CPD to remain the vocational professional

**Causal Conditions Leading to Participation in Subject-Related CPD**

**Professional responsibility.** Professional responsibility was demonstrated towards the former profession, the teaching profession and current part-time work. On professional responsibility, Participant B said:

*A teacher can’t remain detached from industry... as time goes by, the more you realize you are losing certain skills that you had before – it’s true that you gain others because teaching also gives you skills – but the skills that are really related to industry, the network that you had in industry, the applications that you used in industry, software, aids, technology, whatever... you are far away from them.*

Similarly, Participant D felt that over the years, he ‘was losing out by not being in touch with industry’ because ‘there’s a period in which you feel that you can still refer to experiences from the former workplace, but then you come to a point in which you feel blocked’.

Two participants also suggested that they engaged in CPD because they had to teach a subject-area they never worked in, whilst Participant E suggested that he attended an upskilling course motivated by current (related) part-time employment. In agreement with Robson *et al.* (2004), Participant D also suggested that out of professional responsibility, he sometimes went beyond the syllabus to make students aware of the realities within the Maltese context dominated by small businesses.
Interaction with students. Interaction with students seems to be the leading cause of engagement in CPD – a view supported by Vries et al. (2013). Participant A strongly felt that students learn better when theory is applied, especially with ‘us being a vocational college’, making extensive reliance in class on examples generated from his part-time employment. Participant B commented that his classes are not always effective anymore because although he engages in CPD, he has been detached from industry for several years and, with a sense of evident guilt, added, ‘quite frankly, I have to see where I’m going to start from to make myself more real in today’s world and for our students’. Similarly, like other participants, Participant C felt a very strong sense of duty towards students, affirming, ‘I feel that I have an obligation, a responsibility, that when I’m in front of a class, I have to give them the latest information’.

CPD requirement by external body. Participants C and D are warranted professionals and need to participate in mandatory CPD. CPD is also a requirement to retain affiliation with the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT), a UK-based awarding body that MCAST is partnered with. Participant C suggested that the hours and type of CPD he engages in are directly influenced by the requirements of the professional association which stipulates the minimum requirements of both structured and unstructured CPD. He also felt that mandatory CPD would inevitably lead more lecturers to engage in CPD – something that in his view most lecturers are currently not doing, preferring to use the Work Resource Allowance (WRA) funds and time-off hours in a different way. Both participants also suggested that colleagues who had not been engaging in CPD will find it harder to do so, especially those who have not been paying their membership with chartered institutes or associations. Finally, Participant D added, ‘although I am bound to do this, I encourage others to engage in CPD because I still see value’.

Context in which participation in subject-specific CPD takes place

Maltese labour market. Currently it is well-known in Malta that there is a shortage of employees across several sectors, including unskilled, skilled labourers, and professionals (including teaching). Skills shortages have become even more pronounced, with over 56.2% of employers reporting skills shortages in 2019 as opposed to 30% in 2018 (European Commission 2018, 2019). Consequently, Participant D argued that ‘industry really needs employees and that’s why I think it’s the right time to introduce work placements’. Participant D then added that employers are likely to desire continuity and perhaps they would be more willing to have teachers over a semester rather than twice a week. On the other hand, not having a lecturer at MCAST for an entire semester will put logistical strain on MCAST.

Socio-economic role of IVET. IVET plays an important socio-economic role because it promotes ‘social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability, and competitiveness’ (Ministry for Education and Employment 2015: 3). In Malta, investment in both VET and its teachers has increased (ibid.). This ‘help[s] shape quick and flexible responses to emerging needs, related both to the integration of thousands of refugees and migrants into the labour market and to the need to develop basic, digital, and entrepreneurial skills’ (Cedefop 2016: 1). VET education is also part of Malta’s strategic plan for the prevention of early school leavers (Ministry for Education and Employment 2014). Due to the current importance being given to VET education, Malta is prioritizing ‘training of staff, both teaching and administrative’ as one of the measures to increase the attractiveness of IVET as a learning option (Ministry for Education and Employment 2015: 20).
VET policies and regulation. MCAST operates in Malta which, in turn, is a member country in the European Union (EU). EU policies increasingly exert pressure on member states to ensure that IVET teachers engage in CPD, especially technical CPD, because ‘while the pedagogical competences of VET school teachers are generally considered adequate, most countries point to a growing need for VET teachers to keep up with the realities of industry and changing labour market needs’ (Cedefop 2016: 3). More importantly, the EU is calling for ‘systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuing professional development’ (ibid.: 1) as opposed to ad hoc engagement in CPD, emphasizing the importance of CPD throughout the teacher’s career.

Conditions of employment. The Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) is an important stakeholder because CPD for MCAST lecturers is regulated by the MCAST-MUT Collective Agreement. An analysis of the choice of wording used in the collective agreement, shows that CPD is largely considered employer-driven and a burden that teachers must endure. It is interesting to note that, whilst the collective agreement already includes provisions to cover work placements (and other forms of CPD), none of the participants in this research seemed aware of such clauses. Perhaps work placements are more popular in other institutes, such as aviation, because they reportedly have better relationships with industry (National Commission for Further and Higher Education 2016). However, this lack of awareness from IBMC lecturers is a clear indicator that they have seldom or never participated in work placements as a form of CPD. Similarly, one participant pointed out that it was not clear whether he needed to apply for time-off to attend CPD courses, seminars, conferences, etc.

Stage of professional development. The stages of professional development of IVET teachers oscillate between the teacher identity and the vocational identity. Participant A described this situation as ‘wearing two hats’. Interestingly, Participants A and C, who both engage in part-time work, identified themselves more as a practitioner/professional who teach whilst Participants B and D, who do not engage in part-time employment, thought of themselves more as teachers nowadays, although both suggested that a lecturer’s identity changes over time, gradually moving away from practitioner/professional to teacher. Participant E suggested the idea of permanent boundary crossing between the two identities where engaging in technical CPD would entail ‘going back’, an idea very similar to that proposed by Fejes and Köpsén (2014). But perhaps a worrying fact, as corroborated by Participant C, is that sometimes IVET teachers themselves do not realize that time has gone by so quickly and they have moved away from being the vocational professional they once were.

Intervening Conditions Influencing Teacher’s Engagement in CPD

CPD significance. Each participant had a different notion of CPD. Participants A and B hesitated before associating their post-graduate qualification with CPD. Neither did Participants A, C, or E explicitly suggest that their part-time work is a form of relevant CPD, although all three participants recognized that this work provides them with plenty of examples in class. Participant E suggested that CPD is sporadic:

CPD is when you never stop learning. Every now and then you attend a course, you engage in [student] apprenticeships – you go back and learn different skills and update yourself in terms of what’s happening in today’s world.

Apart from different meanings attached to CPD, participants suggested that not all teachers value CPD equally. For example, one participant described an instance in which
teachers thought of CPD as ‘a waste of time’. Possibly, this view of CPD has been shaped by previous experiences with compulsory teacher-related CPD that was not always directly relevant to teachers.

**Personal drivers and barriers.** Several drivers and barriers were identified including age, location, traffic, personal commitments, work hours, attitude towards CPD, aptitude to learn, and years spent in full-time teaching. As suggested by Andersson and Köpsén (2015), participants agreed that the longer a lecturer is detached from industry, the harder it will be to go back to industry either for fear of seeming inept or because some teachers shift into a comfort zone, leading to an unwillingness to participate in CPD.

*There needs to be a certain maturity and not look at it as though ‘I’ve got a teaching job and I’ll remain a teacher.’ We also need to be positive and encourage each other and celebrate the fact that we’ve got a colleague who is more prepared...*

All participants believed that, in general, IBMC lecturers would welcome the idea of work placements, with the exception of one participant who believed that several lecturers would react negatively, although eventually he still believed that lecturers will settle into the idea. Participant A thought that many would welcome work placements because ‘we have a lot of staff members who come from the private sector. Apart from that we also have several staff members who are still involved’.

**Organizational culture.** Participants identified management support as a valuable back-up to participate in CPD and they suggested that direct superiors were always collaborative. One participant mentioned that a former director used to flag conferences and seminars to teachers whom he believed could benefit from such training and encourage them to attend. This is not the case anymore and Participant B believes that, ‘we [lecturers] have to take the initiative and perhaps we should also encourage each other as colleagues’. On the other hand, one participant was critical of MCAST because, in practice, it does not really value or appreciate one’s effort to engage in CPD because it allocates the same resources (e.g. financial) to all lecturers, and lecturers who do not engage in CPD can use such resources on other things.

**CPD offer and awareness.** Participant D praised MCAST for its recent efforts at offering CPD related to teaching and transversal skills. However, whilst pedagogical skills are mostly common across all teaching staff, MCAST is not in a position to take a blanket approach to offering subject-related CPD. This implies that the responsibility of searching for relevant subject-related CPD rests on the teacher. It also transpired that teachers who do not have a mandatory CPD requirement dedicate relatively little time searching for CPD offers available because other aspects of the job are prioritized. Also, they might have lost contact with industry and might not be aware of CPD opportunities available to them. This demonstrates that a shift in mentality to teacher-driven CPD is required and support from MCAST is needed to enable each lecturer to devise a CPD plan as is the case in Croatia, Iceland and the UK where ‘teachers have to draw up their own development plans’ (Cedefop 2016: 3).

**Strategies to Remain the Vocational Professional**

**Participating in CPD.** Over the years, all interviewees had engaged in some form of technical CPD at their own initiative; however, as argued by Sugrue and Mertkan (2016) not all CPD is equal. For example, Participant E clearly stated that vocational skills and knowledge cannot be acquired via a textbook:
**When you read a book, you are not living the moment, you are not living that experience. Certain things can’t be learnt from a book. You have to live them!**

With the exception of one interviewee, participants were against making any CPD activity (including work placements) compulsory. However, it was suggested that the minimum number of CPD hours could be established as part of a CPD policy, both in terms of teacher-related and subject-area CPD. Finally, two participants who already engage in part-time work suggested that MCAST should recognize relevant part-time work as CPD hours.

**Developing coping mechanisms.** All participants said that making time for CPD was an issue and constructive coping was needed to engage in CPD by, for example, adjusting one’s workload, schedule, or personal commitments. Participants suggested that it is a challenge to balance MCAST responsibilities with CPD because activities are often held during the scholastic year, with Participant C adding that ‘MCAST work is a barrier’. Whilst replacing lectures to attend CPD is not strictly required (should a lecturer apply for time-off), two participants mentioned that they felt duty-bound to replace lectures due to time constraints and pressure to complete a curriculum on time. Similarly, Participants A and D, who both engaged in part-time employment, commented about the importance of time management, with Participant D saying that part-time work is ‘a sacrifice’. Other participants resorted to reduced hours to dedicate more time to family and part-time work.

**Tailoring work package.** All participants recognized that to implement systematic work placements, the contract of employment needed changing. Participant D pointed out that teachers could be given a choice to sign a new contract that includes systematic participation in work placements as part of the job. Teachers also implied that they feel the need for individually tailored technical CPD depending on the stage of professional development and subject area taught. Participant B said that, up to a certain extent, lecturers should be given the freedom to ‘negotiate their own package’, possibly including salary in cases where there is a big disparity between the pay in industry and that of the MCAST lecturer. Finally, Participant E suggested an insurance to cover for lecturers participating in work placements.

**Cultivating a CPD culture.** Participants argued that, for teacher work placements to be successful, a shift in mentality is required both from MCAST and teachers.

**At MCAST work placements are something relatively new, so a change in mentality is needed not only from the end of management but also the way lecturers perceive themselves, how they view colleagues, their reactions ...**

In most countries ‘identification of learning needs and possible training programmes remain with individual teachers’ (Cedefop 2016: 3): however, at some point of the interview all participants suggested that they were expecting MCAST to offer CPD opportunities, possibly a mentality that lingers from private enterprise culture. In fact, Participant C stated that, in former workplaces, CPD was paid for entirely by the company and it was held during work hours, and both employees and employer benefitted from this. Clarifying both MCAST’s and the teachers’ role in relation to CPD will help both parties to establish clear expectations and responsibilities, whilst creating a structure to support teachers who would like to continue developing professionally.
Implications of Remaining the Vocational Practitioner on IVET Stakeholders

The strategies and actions above will inevitably have consequences on teachers, students, MCAST, industry, and the VET offer in Malta. The following implications or consequences have been identified:

Quality VET education. Offering quality VET education is fundamental, especially now that MCAST is facing increased competition. All participants recognized that CPD (in all its forms) leads to quality VET education. Participant D suggested that this is because lecturers would be ‘touching what we’re teaching at the same time’. Participant D also suggested that the ‘middle ground’ needs to be found between theory and practice ‘to really prepare students for the work world’, because sometimes things work differently at the workplace and he is aware of this because of his part-time work. Being in touch with industry also led some participants to propose relevant changes to the unit specifications to be more in line with industry requirements.

Confidence and credibility. All participants recognized that CPD and contact with industry leads to confidence and credibility in class. Participants A and C suggested that students appreciate applied examples and distinguish between lecturers who are in touch with industry and those who are not. Participant C summed up confidence and credibility as follows:

I wouldn’t feel comfortable to walk into a classroom without knowing certain ... let’s say ... standards – which I know are always changing. What’s the current situation? I’d feel embarrassed if I didn’t know.

Job and personal satisfaction. Reaffirming oneself into their vocational profession and engaging in CPD brings a sense of job satisfaction to lecturers, which students will certainly notice. In turn, this might result in less teacher turnover because, as Participant D said, practising in the subject-area in addition to teaching, brings him a sense of fulfilment: ‘I’m very committed to my work at MCAST and my part-time work is secondary. But I feel that it’s necessary. It’s fulfilling’. Participants also mentioned that they would still feel satisfied even if they were to offer their time on a work placement and earn less money than other industry professionals – proof that teaching really is a vocation.

Enhanced industry networks. As a vocational college, all MCAST stakeholders need to co-exist and partner with industry to ensure ‘quality and relevance of learning’ (Cedefop 2016: 4). Participant C pointed out that contacts established with industry through work placements can be used to organize talks and other activities for students. Participant B added that MCAST itself will benefit from teachers’ CPD because ‘[MCAST] would have a more updated lecturing staff, more hands-on, who knows what is happening out there, who is still building networks’. In fact, networked collaborations are known to bring several benefits to all stakeholders as long as ‘every institution sees advantages in the collaboration’ (Bohne et al. 2017: 32).

Logistical challenge for MCAST. On the downside, a negative implication for MCAST is the logistical and operational challenge brought about by teacher work placements and more active participation in CPD. MCAST would possibly need to find substitute teachers so as not to disrupt lectures for students. MCAST also risks having lecturers lured back to industry after completing the work placement – a phenomenon that is also being experienced after students complete their apprenticeships. However, Participant C believes this is not a real risk because ‘the reality of working in a company is completely different to the reality of working as a full-time lecturer’.
A Model of IVET Teacher Engagement in Workplace CPD

IVET teachers recognize that workplace CPD, such as industry placements or part-time work, adds a ‘hands-on’ dimension to the acquisition of skills and knowledge – something that cannot be achieved by reading journals or attending conferences alone. However, depending on the stage of professional development, IVET teachers will participate in teaching or technical CPD at different intensities. Figure 4 presents a model of teacher’s engagement in CPD based on the type of CPD and hours devoted to CPD.

**Figure 4: A model of IVET teachers’ engagement in CPD to nurture the dual professional identity**

The four categories of IVET teachers depicted in Figure 4 are described below:

1. The *snail* devotes some time to teacher-related CPD, e.g. compulsory in-house teaching CPD. This could reflect new teachers who are still settling into the teaching job and are still developing their teacher identity. Alternatively, this could be a teacher who has reached a comfort zone or lacks motivation. To engage in more and other types of CPD, snails need support, a tailor-made career plan, and help in recognizing the importance of CPD.

2. The *bookworm* is the teacher who devotes a lot of time to teaching-related CPD, such as reading books and journals or attending conferences. Whilst the predisposition to engage in CPD is there, this teacher might need encouragement to go back to industry because he might lack the confidence or network to take part in a work placement.
3. The *sprinter* is the teacher who engages in occasional industry-based CPD, without backing this up with reading, further education, or other CPD activities. This could reflect the teacher who takes part in 5-day Erasmus+ work placements. Such teachers gain applied skills and knowledge but might lack the theoretical knowledge to back up non-tacit learning.

4. Finally, the *honeybee* invests in several hours of industry-based CPD, for example through part-time employment, adding value to both MCAST and students. Validation or recognition of relevant work as CPD hours would help these teachers, whilst encouraging them to engage in other forms of structured and unstructured CPD so as not to neglect their teacher identity.

Throughout their career, teachers can and will move between any of the four stages. However, IVET institutions need to avoid a situation in which educators develop a lopsided identity because they are not switching between the teacher and vocational identities. A solid CPD policy could help address these four types of teachers, allowing for teacher-driven, individually tailored technical CPD depending on the stage of professional development and subject area taught.

**Research Propositions and Conclusions**

In conclusion, based on this study it seems that the following propositions are true:

**Proposition 1:** Work placements are more effective than other forms of CPD for IVET teachers to keep abreast of industry developments. Due to the non-tacit nature of vocational skills and knowledge, IVET teachers and vocational schools and colleges should give more weight to participation in work placements over other forms of CPD. In fact, this study shows that teachers themselves are desiring an opportunity to engage in long-term work placements (e.g. over a semester or two days a week), driven by a sense of responsibility towards the student or their former profession.

**Proposition 2:** CPD needs to be teacher-driven and individually tailored depending on the stage of professional development and subject area taught. Teachers are professionals and they should be trusted and encouraged to devise their own CPD plan like other professionals (e.g. accountants, psychologists, etc.). This is essential because schools and colleges are not in a position to offer subject-specific CPD in a myriad of subject areas. Instead, the teacher himself is in the best situation to determine the stage of professional development and gaps which need to be addressed; an exercise that can also lead to job satisfaction.

**Proposition 3:** The introduction of a CPD Policy would encourage IVET teachers to participate in CPD systematically. A CPD policy would clarify the expectations and responsibilities of all stakeholders. It would also lead teachers to engage in CPD more systematically and mindfully. Schools and colleges could draw parallels to the CPD requirements established by professional associations, whilst adapting such policies to the realities of vocational education by giving equal importance to teaching-related as well as subject-related CPD. Recognition should be given to IVET teachers who engage in CPD, possibly through a points system.

**Limitations and Further Scope**

Although this research makes a contribution to existing literature on technical CPD for IVET teachers, this pre-test study has limitations because it is based on the experiences and perceptions of five lecturers working within the same Institute at Malta's largest
vocational education provider. Advanced coding as a process to integrate and
refine theory could not be applied fully and any attempts at forming a storyline are
preliminary. Findings would certainly differ if IVET educators from other disciplines
such as aviation, mechanical engineering, or applied sciences had to be considered.
Consequently, not all categories were exhausted, and theoretical saturation was not
reached. Future research should employ theoretical sensitivity to identify gaps in the
data (e.g. challenges for the school or college) and interview more participants who can
aid theory creation until all concepts and their properties and dimensions are saturated.

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