

PAPER:

***THE VALUE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING IN A NON-METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY***

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Abstract:

Contemporary research on the value or outcomes of VET often focuses on industry outcomes or particular activity rather on its value to its wider community. This is primarily the consequence of VET policy and assumptions about its content and delivery. Field (1998, p.49) considers that VET to date has been predominantly concerned with the delivery of structured training programs, the focus therefore has been on training that is pre-planned, centrally controlled and objectively measured. As benchmarks have been developed around structure and outcomes measurement are largely quantitative. Values related to VET are couched in terms of quantifying benefits of different modes of delivery, completion rates, and qualifications gained. This research moves beyond these quantitative points of reference and takes up the challenge put by Robinson and Guthrie (1998, p.14) that more research is required if we are to better demonstrate outcomes from VET.

Meyer (1977, p.21) aptly described vocational education as constantly shooting at a moving target. This condition still challenges economists, educationalists and community developers. This study recognises that there are no simple solutions to hitting the vocational target, it therefore takes on an exploratory role in that it probes the concept that models of vocational provision constructed to service one sector, as opposed to mutualities of sectors, may mitigate against attempts by non-metropolitan communities in Australia to reposition themselves economically and socially in an increasingly globalized economy. As suggested by Kearns (1998, p.3) the environment in which VET now operates is marked by escalating change and discontinuity in the drive towards a post-industrial information society. He further suggests (p.6) that the Australian VET system still exhibits the signs and symptoms of a system in transition and that reforms are incomplete. If this is the case a more inclusive definition of VET may be appropriate so as to more accurately describe VET activity and its benefits to communities in their quest to maintain and further develop economic and social capacity.

Our research questions:

How does learning and training contribute to consolidating and developing sustainable social and economic activity in a non-metropolitan community?

What are the respective contributions of schooling, post school education and training, learning at work and learning outside of work to sustainable social and economic activity?

What are some possible frameworks for valuing the respective contributions of schooling, post school education and training, learning at work and learning outside of work in a non-metropolitan community? Aim to further the literature of VET in this area for despite unprecedented changes critical questions regarding outcomes of VET still remain.