



AVETRA Conference 2016

The whisper of the VET practitioner

Linda Simon
Melinda Waters

Outline of the study

- Builds on our previous study:
 - *New practices for new times: a case for scholarly activity in Vocational Education in Australia* published in the Higher Education, Skills and Work Based Learning Journal, 2015.
- Qualitative methodology
 - Purposive sample of 22 people:
 - connection with the VET sector and currently involved in research
 - A letter followed by a face to face or phone interview for 30 minutes, except for one respondent who completed the questions by email.
- Textural analysis of data:
 - Common themes
 - Challenges and issues
 - Opportunities

Continuum of scholarly activity



- Practices of inquiry - Systematic, rigours and critical reflection about professional practice, and the contexts in which it occurs, in ways that question taken for granted assumptions (Reid, 2004)
- Formal research involves creating new knowledge/or using existing knowledge in new and creative ways so as to generate new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings (ARC, 2014). Research is central to practice of inquiry.

New practices for new times

- High time VET is recognised as a knowledge building and innovative sector
- All VET educators should be inquirers – some should be researchers
- Inquiry as pedagogy – a ‘professional being’
- If educators are not involved – there is a risk that their practice being inadequately informed and they do not value scholarly activities by students (Dymock and Billet, 2009)
- The challenge is to recognise the value.

What is the value?

Educators:

- New skills and knowledge
- Voice in the operations of institutions
- Ability to makes sense of complex discourses
- Increased disciplinary knowledge and skills
- Stronger relationships with students and enterprises
- Educational credibility

Learners

- Work ready skills
- Critical thinking skills
- Innovation skills
- Preparation for higher education

Institutes

- Pedagogical capital and educational reputation
- Links with industry
- Placements for students
- Access to research and data

Industries and communities

- Stream of skilled graduates
- Innovation and applied research

Policy makers

- Access to practice based knowledge



If we are to develop workers with the capability to think 'critically, flexibly and creatively', then educators too must possess these capacities and model them to learners (Reid, 2004).



Common themes from the interviews

Research:

- **Develops new and different narratives, acknowledging that there are different conversations to be had**
- **Gives a vision of something different from what we have – a voice of what is a possible future**
- **Can re-imagine VET and its importance to the workforce**
- **Provides an evidence base for practice and change, and data to make sense of what is happening**
- **Is a key condition for transformation**
- **Empowers teachers and gives them a say in what is done**

Common themes from the interviews

Research enables individuals and VET organisations. It can:

- Establish networks and communities of practice
- Help students to consider their own practices, leading to innovation and change
- Give time to step back and reflect on practice
- Give time to consider what has worked and what needs to change
- Broaden the understanding of policy makers
- Help build a VET profession

Challenges and issues

Government sees that VET is about compliance not the creative

- **Continuous change in the sector – a time of turmoil – workforce is demoralised**
- **Policy makers have narrow views of the sector and undervalue its expertise. Split between university based researchers and the rest**
- **Do decision makers take notice of the research? A lot of people don't what to hear the results of research**
- **Governance and structures are preventing innovative practice**
- **Focus on compliance and regulation. Is quality improved by regulation?**

Challenges and issues

And the VET researchers?

- **No time to research – too much administrivia**
- **Shortage of resources and funding – especially in remote areas and with cross-cultural groups**
- **Training Packages rarely recognise research**
- **Research is not considered part of their job**
- **Research skills have not been enhanced – the CIV is a low qualification base for a profession**

Opportunities

- **A time of turmoil is a time to challenge the prevailing views of VET and to engage in innovation**
- **To make research ours – is it Applied Research or a continuum of research?**
- **Applied Research and messages from Canada**
- **AVETRA Educator Hub**
- **TDA/AVETRA scholarship**
- **VET Professional Research Network (VPRN)**

**Is it time to change a whisper to
a roar?**