



Welcome

Professor Erica Smith, Convenor – RIVET

The year closes on a busy and exciting period in the VET sector and in RIVET's research. RIVET's new members Cathy Down and Wendy De Luca have added great value to RIVET in the second half of this year, and we farewell Hilary Timma, and thank her for her contribution over the past two years. Although leaving Charles Sturt University, Hilary will maintain her links with RIVET. We look forward to more research in 2008 and to building further links nationally and internationally.

Report on OctoberVET research colloquium, *Researching good practice in the workplace delivery of qualifications* 26 October, 2007

RIVET continued its research colloquium series with another successful event held on Friday 26 October, at the Primary Industries Centre, TAFE NSW Riverina Institute, Wagga Wagga. The colloquium, which attracted more than 70 people, was organised in conjunction with the Riverina Institute and once again enjoyed the support of the Faculty of Education Research Development Fund. The event was also included as part of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association's national OctoberVET program, for the second year.

The program for the day was delivered in two sessions. The morning session "OctoberVET in the Riverina" featured an overview of six research projects conducted by members of RIVET and of the Riverina Institute. RIVET presentations were given by: Cathy Down – Enterprise RPL; Peter Rushbrook – Employers' engagement with VET; and Erica Smith – Quality in traineeships. The afternoon session included further presentations from the Riverina Institute and also a presentation from Mission Australia on TAFE market share of traineeships.

Notes from the speaker presentations, as well as some photographs are available on our website via the 'RIVET Colloquia' link.

Training of mature-aged workers

RIVET's Erica Smith with researchers Andy Smith and the late Chris Selby Smith, from the Centre for Organisational Performance, Ethics and Leadership (OPEL), recently produced a report for Manufacturing Skills Australia, *Pedagogical issues for the training of mature-aged workers in the manufacturing industry*, which investigated the issues involved in the training of mature-aged workers.

Some key findings of the report include:

- The value of the mature-aged worker is increasing due to the tight labour market and the change in the age profile of the population.
- The spread of nationally recognised training in Australian enterprises in recent years has opened up new formal training opportunities for mature-aged workers, who tend to have lower levels of qualification than younger people.
- Mature-aged workers are heterogeneous, so any generalisations must be treated with caution.

- Mature-aged workers are valued for their reliability and work ethic. Mature-aged workers are able to adapt to change more readily because of their wider life experience and broader understanding of an organisation's purpose.
- Mature-aged workers may fear age discrimination more often than they actually encounter it; this perception needs to be combated to improve the self efficacy of some mature-aged workers.
- Mature-aged workers generally want to learn, but may lack confidence and need some persuading into training programs.
- Mature aged workers may suffer from some health problems that need addressing both in work organisation and in training arrangements.
- Mature-aged workers may find RPL, with its emphasis on assessment rather than learning, threatening as well as alien.
- Teachers and trainers need assistance to understand and better service mature-aged workers, particularly in avoiding stereotyping such workers.

The full report is available from Manufacturing Skills Australia <http://www.mskills.com.au/DownloadManager/downloads/Training%20of%20mature%20aged%20workers.pdf>

International book series and new VET contacts

Ros Brennan Kemmis is one of the chapter authors in the new book 'Enabling Praxis' – the first in the international 'Pedagogy, Education and Praxis' Series to be published by Sense publishers (Rotterdam). This chapter focuses on VET pedagogy and practice in Australia. This work has led to Ros establishing collaborative writing arrangements with colleagues in the Netherlands, Sweden and a range of other Nordic countries. Seven of the Australian authors met with authors of the Dutch, Swedish and Nordic volumes for the Series in Stockholm in November 2007 where the Swedish and Nordic books were collegially critiqued. The Australian authors presented their work at the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) conference in Umeå, Sweden immediately after the Stockholm meeting. In February 2008, twenty-three researchers involved in the collaboration – from the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland and the United Kingdom – will meet in Wagga Wagga to discuss and settle on the content of the fifth volume in the Series. This volume will bring together different historical and cultural perspectives on concepts such as pedagogy, practice and praxis in a volume provisionally entitled 'A Conversation of Traditions'.

You can download a free preview of Volume 1 of this series, and also order the book, at the following link:

http://www.sensepublishers.com/index.htm?http%3A%2F%2Fwww.sensepublishers.com%2Fcatalog%2Fproduct_info.php%3Fproducts_id%3D455

During her current study leave (July to December 2007), Ros has also, separately, established a strong international network of contacts in the areas of vocational education and training (VET), and online teaching and learning in a University context. Ros is currently writing an article with Ivan M. Jorin Abellan from the Faculty of Education at the University of Valladolid, Spain, on the subject of 'Platforms and Practice' in which they compare the methods used to select online platforms in three Universities (CSU, Valladolid and the University of Illinois). The paper examines the impacts of these choices on academic practice.

During her time at the University of Illinois Ros presented two seminars to Faculty members. The first focussed on online teaching and learning at CSU, and the second on a discussion of the Australian VET sector. Ros has established contact with staff in Umeå University and is working with VET staff in central Sweden who are beginning to deliver VET programs online to geographically remote students. Ros has met and established working relationships with Dutch, Swedish and American colleagues in VET and online learning in VET that will be further developed in the New Year. These relationships have created possibilities for exchange (both virtual and real), writing and collaborative research projects.

For more details about Ros's work email her on rbrennan@csu.edu.au

'Living and learning': Communities of practice re-engaging young mothers through vocational education

In the previous issue of RIVET news, Hilary Timma reported on a small-scale research project in which she investigated re-engaging young mothers through vocational education. The 2007 project was conducted by a regional New South Wales community college, where a parenting programme for young mothers ran for two days per week, over a six month period. Participants formally studied selected units from the Certificate III in Children's Services and also engaged in personal development and relaxation activities including meditation, journal writing and creative art.

The parenting programme (based on a successful regional model) was delivered in a community centre/childcare facility and Hilary's visits focussed on the sociality of vocational learning within this local community of practice. Of particular interest were the ways participants viewed the acquisition of parenting skills, leading to an accredited statement of attainment and what they planned to do personally and vocationally when the course came to an end. Informal discussions, observations, and semi-formal interviews with participants were the main forms of data collection and Hilary also sought verbal and written feedback from the programme coordinator. Documentary evidence, including units from the Children's Services Training Package, was also accessed.

Hilary employed a case study methodology to examine factors that have contributed to providing positive learning experiences for one young mother in the programme and how this girl's self-perception and expectations have altered during the course of the programme. Hilary's focus is on identity construction and how this young mother's outlook has altered, as she has experienced vocational learning, parenting skills acquisition and formal and informal support from a variety of sources. The study of a unit on nutrition for young children opened this girl's eyes 'I am now careful to monitor amounts and when (my daughter) is to eat. I now know how big a 'serving' is (and) have more of an understanding of what you need to do, to monitor types of food and the quantities'. Additionally, a unit on children's play and leisure showed this mother '... about all types of play and cognitive skills and the way to set up play at home'. She has learnt '... to observe the children playing and to direct them to play areas. I role model play so my children can observe what they (are) to do'. These skills are significant to this young mother,

as she '... came here to learn and to be a better parent'. Her aspirations are to '... pass everything (in the course) and to be a better mum. That doesn't sound right! I don't know how to phrase it. I want more knowledge of how to raise my children'. She is also keen to find work and is cultivating friendships with a new group of people whom she considers 'successful'. She credits these new friends with influencing a change in her attitude '... as they make me want to succeed'. Community support has also assisted her to find a house to rent and she has accepted a position in the 'Bright Futures' programme for two years, which offers specialist support and counselling for parents with young children. Financial and practical advice is available to assist with further study and childcare so she can go to paid work.

Findings from this project could contribute to enhancing understanding about the ways in which young, single mothers 'live and learn' and can be supported to cultivate socially- and vocationally-located learning opportunities, to meet immediate aspirations and future prospects. Hilary will be presenting a paper about this project at the Lifelong Learning Conference to be held in Queensland in June, 2008 and she is also writing a journal article about this most challenging and fascinating topic.

For more details about Hilary's work email her on htimma@csu.edu.au

RIVET hosts international visitors

Over the last few months RIVET members have had several opportunities to discuss VET research with visiting international researchers:

- Dr Hisham Al-Dajeh, University of Jordan (6 week visit to CSU as part of a DEST Endeavour Fellowship). While Hisham's visit was primarily to investigate CSU's VET teacher training programs, it has also led to a comparative research study of learning styles in Australia and Jordan – RIVET's Cathy Down and Wendy De Luca are conducting the Australian study.
- Jeff Gold, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK – discussing a UK and international project on engaging young people and adults in VET funded by the Learning & Skills Council.
- Tara Kennedy and Kate Shoesmith, City & Guilds Institute, UK. Two visits have taken place since July 2007 to discuss the formation of a new research institute.

Recent publications by RIVET members

- Brennan Kemmis, R. (2007). Freedom for praxis: An unburied and unforgotten tradition. In S. Kemmis & T. Smith (Eds.), *Pedagogy, education and practice: Vol. 1. Enabling Practice: Challenges for education* (pp. 195-216). Rotterdam: Sense.
- Down, C. (2007). Understanding VET pedagogy, *Campus Review*, 13-19 November, pp. 10-11.
- Dumbrell, T., & Smith, E. (2007). *Pre-apprenticeships in three key trades*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).
- Smith, E. (2007). Are we throwing away the TAA? *Campus Review*, 2 - 8 October, pp. 14-15.
- Smith, E., & Green, A. (2007). The place of work in school student's lives. In S. Knipe (Ed.), *Middle years schooling: Reframing adolescence* (pp. 39-58). Sydney: Pearson.

To be added to the RIVET mailing list, email vetresearch@csu.edu.au or write to
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