

Welcome

Erica Smith, Convenor, VET Research Group

Welcome to the first edition of the newsletter of the CSU Vocational Education and Training (VET) Research Group. In this newsletter we will be showcasing some of the research undertaken by members of the VET Research Group.

The VET Research Group at Charles Sturt University has five members, Ros Brennan, Annette Green, Richard Pickersgill, Peter Rushbrook and Erica Smith, all of whom have substantial histories of involvement in national research projects. We are ably assisted by our part-time Research Assistants Melanie Bowman and Anne Kent, whom we were able to employ through Charles Sturt University's Community of Scholars funding. The research group members are all also involved in the delivery of VET teacher training to the university's 300 VET students and VET-in-schools teacher trainees, and benefit from this relationship between teaching and research.

This edition is being brought out to coincide with our first Research Colloquium, on 10 November 2003, at which we are delighted to host Professor Thomas Deissinger from the University of Konstanz in Germany.

VET history: the Kapooka Tragedy 1945

Peter Rushbrook

The history of the development of Australian vocational education and training is seen by some as a 'black hole'. Relative to the primary, secondary and higher education sector, little research in the field has been completed. Many fascinating stories remain to be uncovered and told by the vocational education and training historian. The Kapooka Tragedy is an example of the potential richness of the area.

The Australian army's largest training accident occurred on 21 May 1945 at the Royal Australian Engineers Training Camp (RAETC), Kapooka, on the outskirts of Wagga Wagga, NSW. At around 2.45 pm a large explosion occurred in a roofed earthen bunker resulting in the deaths of twenty-six trainee demolition engineers or 'sappers'. The tragedy attracted national attention through newspaper, radio, film and federal parliament reportage. No blame was attributed to the demolition trainers or participants, nor was a cause clearly identified, though later changes were made to the amount of people and explosives located in a confined space during training classes.

The Kapooka Tragedy is made remarkable by its virtual absence from all histories of the period, as well as popular memory. This historical amnesia raises interesting questions about how we 'make' history and the mechanisms we put in place to remember or forget our past. It also points out an important difference between the work of the historian and what is loosely called 'the heritage industry'. The historian brings to the attention of academic colleagues and the wider population incidents and events that may not 'fit' popularly received and often distorted views of the past. This emerging tension between what may be a sanitised 'heritage' and its reality is often an indicator that worthwhile historical research is underway.

Book authored by CSU VET Research Group member.

Smith, E. & Keating, J. (2003). *From training reform to training Packages*. Tuggerah Lakes, NSW: Social Science Press.

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Like its predecessor, *Making sense of training reform and competency based training*, the book has three major sections. The first section outlines vocational education and training (VET) policies and structures, tracing the major training reforms from the late 1980s through to the introduction in 2002 of the Australian Quality Training Framework. The second section is devoted to curriculum and delivery issues, explaining the distinctive characteristics of competency-based training and Training Packages, and the importance of assessment in the current system. Workplace delivery and the development of generic skills are also discussed. Finally the book examines the VET teaching workforce and the ways in which VET teachers are trained and keep up to date with change. The book highlights the successes of the current policy and curriculum framework while also adopting a critical approach.

Erica Smith is a senior VET academic at Charles Sturt University with a high profile in research, and previous working experience in TAFE and in enterprise human resource development. She has recently worked as executive director of a state Industry Training Advisory Board gaining detailed knowledge of the development and implementation of Training Packages. She is a member of the National Steering Committee for the review of the Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training. Jack Keating is an Adjunct Professor at Melbourne University. Over the past 15 years he has been actively involved in policy and development for post compulsory education and training in Victoria and nationally. This role has included chairing several

key State committees and preparing of government reports and policies. He has undertaken research and consultancy projects for State and national governments, written a large number of publications and reports, and made numerous conference and workshop presentations.

The previous edition proved popular with several groups of people: students undertaking initial teacher-training in VET, staff of Registered Training Organisations and industry trainers seeking an understanding of the VET system. The current edition aims also to be helpful to everybody who needs to work with national Training Packages including school teachers. The second edition has already been used by overseas agencies seeking to understand the Australian VET system and is currently being translated into Russian.

Bridging two worlds: From industry to school

Annette Green

This article is about my PhD research. By combining teaching involvement in a program working with students who are moving from industry to school with on going research exploring the attitudes and approaches to their practice of teachers who have moved from an industry background into teaching, the researcher is able to reflect and evaluate in both an informed and empathetic manner. The participants in the research study are graduates of the Charles Sturt University (CSU) Accelerated Teacher Training Program (ATTP) which was designed to offer a viable alternative second-career pathway into the teaching profession. The researcher was involved in designing, teaching and coordinating successive cohorts of this innovative program. The central questions are: What are the effects of an industry background on their orientation to their practice? Is their approach to students, the curriculum and the culture of senior secondary school significantly different from other beginning teachers?

The rate of change in the VET in schools implementation across Australia has meant that systems have been under pressure to train, retrain and recruit staff to manage, teach and develop the programs which put policy into practice. The high take up rate by students across the whole country has brought further pressure to systems, both public and private. To make it work, these teachers must have vocational knowledge and industry experience; they must have developed pedagogical expertise; they also require an understanding of secondary education. Teachers need to bring together their experiences at the intersection of diverse and changing schools and post-compulsory systems, adolescents and parents needs, the world of work and training in order to develop new and innovative programs. They need to have relevant current industry knowledge, academic credentials suitable for various systemic requirements, general knowledge and understanding of the needs of young people within educational institutions as well as a sound knowledge of the National Frameworks of VET. To develop teaching programs to meet the competencies specified in the relevant Training Packages, teachers must adapt pedagogical practices to fit within the frameworks of both VET sector approaches and school practices.

The methodology involves following eight of these teachers through the first two years of their teaching experience through telephone interviews, interspersed with emailed discussions based on discussions from the transcripts of interviews with the individual participants. There will be one extended on site visit to each school followed by a second round of telephone interviews and individual discussions. The data from this process will document and explore the emerging identity these participants are constructing as teachers in rural schools in New South Wales.

The role of VET in National Innovation

Richard Pickersgill

This article reports on the preliminary findings of a project funded by the National Research & evaluation Committee. Internationally, innovation is seen as playing a crucial role in the 'new economy', 'knowledge economy', 'knowledge-based economy' or 'learning economy'. Recent innovation policy in Australia has tried to encourage large-scale industry and university investment in technology development. Recent work by the CSU VET team suggests that although basic science and investment in R and D is undeniably important, VET has played an important and underestimated role in the development of innovation in Australian.

Relatively small domestic product, capital and labour markets have given Australian industry particular characteristics. Manufacturing has been primarily directed towards import substitution with a capital intensive agricultural and minerals sectors directed towards export. The relatively small average size of Australian firms and short production cycles required a broadly skilled and adaptable workforce. This encouraged the development of skilled *occupational* labour markets rather than the *internal* labour markets characteristic of large firms in North America and Japan. Small firm size also limited enterprise investment in training, and state funded technical colleges filled the gap.

Although there are important areas of basic science where Australia has made major international contributions, the industry and market structure has emphasised *process innovation*, rather than *radical innovation*. In this 'technical education' has played an historically critical role in providing the skills and knowledge to adapt technology to local conditions. In 1901 for example, there were only four state high schools in Australia but over 30 technical colleges in NSW alone. Technical education continued to develop different characteristics in different states, however all systems emphasised broad occupationally defined skills, rather than job specific skills.

Overall, innovation in Australian has been characterised by an emphasis on incremental and process innovation rather than radical technological breakthroughs. Technology transfer and diffusion has underpinned industrial development. This has depended on a broadly skilled occupationally defined workforce, primarily developed and served by VET institutions.

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