



From the President

Greetings to all AVETRA members!

Since our June Newsletter the Executive has met on two occasions. The first of these on the 21st June provided an opportunity for the group to think about the next stages of development for AVETRA

and how we might 'grow' the organisation. A draft work plan which incorporates activities across six areas has been developed. These ideas will be further shaped by a membership survey which is currently being reworked so that it can then be circulated to members to coincide with October VET. We hope the survey will provide all members with an opportunity to express their views about the future directions of AVETRA and the sorts of services that you would like to see the Association provide to you.

The section process for the new editor of the IJTR is progressing and we are hoping to be able to announce who will be taking over the journal from Peter a little later in the year once this process has been finalised.

Plans for October VET are now well advanced in most states/territories and details of events will be posted shortly. I would encourage you to take the opportunity to network with other AVETRA members by attending an event near you.

Finally I would like to draw your attention to the VET Research Repository that is now available on the AVETRA web site at <http://avetra.org.au/early-vet-researcher-resource-repository>. This wonderful resource has been developed by Roger Harris and draws a wide range of information about the process of conducting research. Many of the resources that are on the site have been developed by AVETRA members who have willingly shared their expertise and knowledge. I hope you will find the site a valuable reference point for your work.



Michele Simons

President of AVETRA, University of South Australia, September 2012



AVETRA welcomes NCVER's new General Manager Research

Sue Fergusson has been appointed to the role of General Manager Research at the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). Sue has led major policy development, data quality and reporting activities across the Queensland vocational education and training system. She has both managed and conducted data analysis and applied research into aspects of the labour market to support policy and planning within the sector. Sue also brings with her a wealth of experience in public finance and strategic planning, having held senior roles within Queensland Treasury, including four years as Director of the Education and Innovation Branch.

Some of the major projects for which Sue has been responsible include:

- Leading the preparation of a White Paper, the Queensland Skills Plan, including coordination of the policy process and preparation of detailed cost models and implementation plans.
- Leading the Queensland Post-secondary Education and Training Review project.
- Developing and deploying labour market and training information tools to the Skilling Solutions Queensland network to support better career decisions in the wider community, and in senior schooling.

Sue is delighted to be joining the great research team at NCVER. Throughout her career Sue has had an abiding interest in workforce participation and productivity, and in particular the impacts of labour market information and networks.

AVETRA sends out a warm welcome to Sue and wishes her an outstanding start in her new role at NCVER.



OctoberVET 2012

Preparations are well underway for the 2012 OctoberVET season. Not only will we see OctoberVET events in each State and Territory this year, but for the first time OctoberVET events will take place in New Zealand. Selena Chan (Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology) and Colleen Young (Manukau Institute of Technology) are each busy planning events that address current issues in the NZ post-compulsory scene.

In Tasmania, Jill Downing of the University of Tasmania (jillian.downing@utas.edu.au) has organised a Hobart event for 23 October that features well-known economist Saul Eslake who will present on *Australia's productivity challenge: Why productivity matters, and when it doesn't*. Get in touch with Jill for more details.

Tracey Singh from Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE (tracey.singh@deta.qld.gov.au) is convening an event at the Mooloolaba Campus on 12 October titled *VET: the workforce of the future* with a strong program of presenters and a keynote by Professor Stephen Billett.

Another Queensland event has been planned by Kathy Piccardi from Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE (kathy.piccardi@deta.qld.gov.au) which will be hosted by Griffith University and MSIT. *Industry and VET - the Ultimate Partnership* takes place 26 October and also features a strong line-up including a keynote address by Stephen Billett.

Helen Smith (helen.smith@rmit.edu.au) and David McLean (david.mclean@rmit.edu.au) from RMIT are convening a 14 November event in Melbourne on *Quality Teaching and Learning in a New Era*.

Another Victorian event will take place at the University of Ballarat on 19 October that will focus on *The Value of VET*. I am convening this one (s.hodge@ballarat.edu.au).

Events are also planned for Western Australia (Sue Thompson at Central Institute of Technology), South Australia (Michele Simons from UniSA and Sinan Gemici from NCVET) and ACT (Anita Wesney from Canberra Institute of Technology).

Wendy De Luca has planned an event to take place on October 12 at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga, and a Sydney event is currently being finalised by Linda Simon, Kevin Heys (South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE) and Keiko Yasukawa (UTS).

When all of these events have been finalised a full schedule event details and programs will be published.

By the way, in the lead up to this year's OctoberVET season we developed some new branding for OctoberVET. This move acknowledges the importance of OctoberVET events as a unique way to focus on VET issues and research in local settings. You will see more of the distinctive OctoberVET branding in flyers and advertising as the season progresses. Let me know if you have feedback on the design (03 5327 9532 or s.hodge@ballarat.edu.au).

A MINUTE WITH Sue Shore



Sue Shore is an Associate Professor in Education and has responsibility for the research portfolio in the School of Education at Charles Darwin University. She began working in the VET sector (before it was actually called that) in 1979, has worked in the university sector since 1988 and has a long-standing interest in issues of race, class and gender and their articulations with learning and research methodologies.

I first got interested in VET research in the late 70s when I was completing a graduate diploma in adult education. Believe it or not, one of my first projects was an evaluation of a “finishing course” for women who had been attending adult literacy courses for many years. We wanted to explore how they could be introduced to a wider variety of education and training opportunities. In truth, there was also close interest in the issue from College management who pressured us to ‘move them on’ because they noticed many women’s names reappearing on enrolment forms in each successive year.

The people who inspired me most to conduct research were many over the years: Edward Said; Dorothy Smith; Kathleen Rockhill; Jane Thompson; Margaret Somerville (Aust.); Ann Stoler; Sherene Razack; Donna Haraway; Ghassan Hage; Linda Smith (Aotearoa); Aileen Moreton-Robinson. You can probably start to see a pattern! But I have also been greatly influenced by people I have taught in undergraduate programs over the years. Often we worked together in distance and online modes. It was really difficult to find accessible articles that would resonate with what they lived as professional educators, especially when so many were committed to changing the really difficult conditions in which their students lived. Many of the trainers saw training as a way out of poverty or simply as a way to grab hold of a more financially secure future and they wanted that for their students.

I actually do just love doing research – the whole feel of it – but I suppose part of my motivation was a response to their rejection of the training literature that did not speak to them. You’d have to ask them if I have had any success with that.

The areas of VET research that interest me most are exploring professional knowledge and how trainers and educators navigate the demands of the systems in which they work. People I have worked with are often interested in ‘improving their practice’.

Recent Publications

Commissioned Projects by Early-Career Researchers

Earlier this year, NCVER commissioned a number of research projects, to be undertaken by early-career researchers. NCVER introduced the funding round because it can be difficult for these researchers to establish themselves in the research community, and this gave new researchers the opportunity to undertake research relevant to NCVER’s remit and build research capacity in the VET sector. From a field of 40 applications, the following five research projects were funded:

- **The provision of information services by private RTOs - Dr Mary Carroll, Charles Sturt University.**
This project will examine the formal and informal use of public libraries by private RTOs and their students to support programme delivery. This research will explore the motivation, purpose, frequency of usage, and experiences of students using public libraries, in large metropolitan and regional centres, and will identify the implications of this for the community.
- **The power of VET in Schools: vocational pathways for remote Indigenous students - Dr Helen Spiers, Kormilda College**
This study will examine the VET in Schools model and students’ perception of the influence their VET studies had on their post-school choices. Dr Spiers is particularly interested in identifying the effect of school-based VET experiences for Indigenous VET students from remote communities and a key outcome of the research aims to identify a best model of practice for achieving effective vocational outcomes for Indigenous adolescents.
- **How do VET practitioners understand and use units of competency? - Dr Steven Hodge, University of Ballarat**
This research will address a gap in current research about how VET practitioners understand and use units of competency. Practitioners with different levels of experience, industry backgrounds, qualifications and different employer types will be interviewed and key VET stakeholders consulted to generate a rich picture of how competencies are used and understood. The findings of the research will support improvements to the quality of training in Australia.
- **Transitioning from VET to university: strengthening information literacy through collaboration - Dr Sonia White, Queensland University of Technology**
This research will consider the effectiveness of embedding a stronger information-literacy focus in VET Diploma units, in order to better prepare VET-articulating students for university study. The project will build collaborative practice across sectors, using early childhood education and care courses as a case study. The rationale behind this cross-sector implementation is that an integrated approach is required to improve transitioning student outcomes.
- **Labour force participation of older men: the role of spousal participation - Dr Rong Zhu, Flinders University**
This project will present an evidence-based picture of the motivations behind mature age men’s decisions to participate in the labour force and investigate how spousal status, VET and university education affects labour market outcomes for Australian older men. This research will not only contribute to the literature with original and publishable insights, but will also provide policy makers with evidence about workforce development.

Further information about these new research projects will soon be available from the NCVER website at www.ncver.edu.au.

This often means they are willing to take on difficult conversations in the research we do, but it doesn't mean that we always come up with efficient recommendations to resolve all the dilemmas they face.

Methodologies that I have used are generally trans-disciplinary and qualitative in that they shake up the ways in which I have come to know the world. I am interested in the work Margaret Somerville does on place-making and emergent knowing. This work crosses many disciplinary boundaries. I have also had to learn how to engage with large scale international surveys on adult learning simply because I need to know how this research works and engage with its effects. At a basic level many of our partners in education systems want researchers to work with them on what global surveys say about local educational provision and I see it as part of my job to try and learn how to do that too.

The most interesting piece of VET research I conducted involved follow-up interviews with undergraduate students who took a course I taught on whiteness and education. I am still working on the data from that project and making connections between their everyday lives, their professional identities as educators and how they navigate whiteness in their organisations. I think the most interesting thing about the research was the chance to talk at length with trainers about the public pedagogies of race that exist in Australia – how we are taught from an early age about who and what we are in this racialised hierarchy that is Australia and how that shapes vocational training and other forms of professional education.

Currently I am researching remote teacher education and it is surfacing many issues I have been confronting over the years in the VET sector: how and in what ways educators identities are seamlessly constructed for them through so many institutional texts (policy documents, mission statements, curriculum frameworks, professional development funding guidelines); and, how learning spaces (a remote community, an industry worksite, a literacy classroom) are often pre-focused through a lens that imagines the 'metropolitan canon' (large, metropolitan spaces which channel people in a relatively orderly fashion along pathways to their daily work) as the norm that defines education and training.

Each edition of AVETRA News will feature a special interview with a VET researcher. If you are interested in being featured or you know someone who might – please get in touch with either Sarojni Choy or Sinan Gemici.

Vale Jack Keating

(By Assoc. Prof. Leesa Wheelahan)

When Professor Jack Keating died of cancer on 21 July 2012, we lost an elder statesperson from our research community. Jack touched many lives; as a friend and mentor to many of us and through his research which has informed policy and raised the status of vocational education and training within the policy community. Close colleague John Polesel wrote in his obituary of Jack in *The Age* on 31 July, that he 'was an education policy activist, academic at the University of Melbourne and, most important of all, a fine human being.'

Jack was a leading researcher in two research communities – schools and vocational education and training. This is unusual in Australia, where the schools, VET and higher education research communities are a sectorally differentiated as the sectors of education are themselves. He was an expert on student equity in post-compulsory education and training, school curriculum, senior school certificates, VET in schools, post-school VET, educational pathways, qualifications frameworks and many other areas of post-compulsory education and training.

Jack was part of a national and international research community and made key contributions to state, national and international policy debates and policy development. He was secretary of the Victorian government's 2000 Kirby Review of Post-compulsory Education and Training, and more recently, made a contribution to the Gonski Review of school funding. He undertook work for the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the International Labour Organisation, the OECD and UNESCO.

All of Jack's work was underpinned by a commitment to student equity. As well as being an academic who wrote about and researched social justice, he was also an activist and advocate for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This was expressed in his roles as senior adviser to the Victorian education minister and the premier (1989-92), with responsibility for policy advice on youth, education and training, and as deputy chairman to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board (1987-88). He was a member of the Higher Education Academic Board at Holmesglen Institute and was a fellow of the Australian College of Education and a board member of the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

Jack had many doctoral students and was instrumental in establishing the very popular Masters of Education Policy International at the University of Melbourne. He also played a key role in the establishment of the Graduate Certificate of Tertiary Teaching in 2012, which is designed for teachers of high level VET and higher education programs in TAFEs and private providers. Given the work he put into getting the course up and running, it is sad that he never got an opportunity to teach on it so that these students could get to know him.

Jack's family was his life, and he is survived by his wife Linelle and his children Liam and Bonne.

Jack was a kind and gentle colleague who pushed others forward and supported them personally and professionally. He created opportunities for younger researchers, supported them in their career development, and was always keen to make sure they were publicly recognised for their work. His work in our field has been very important, and he has done more than most to change policy, raise the status of VET and insist on its importance, particularly for the most disadvantaged.

Jack's family and colleagues have asked that his friends and associates consider donating to a scholarship fund being set up in his name that will assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds in gaining admission to postgraduate courses in education at the University of Melbourne, a cause dear to Jack's heart. This process is supported by the dean of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Field Rickards, and is being co-ordinated by Andrew Ius (formerly of the Victorian Institute of Teaching) and former premier Steve Bracks. For more details, please contact Andrew at aius@bigpond.net.au.

Leesa Wheelahan is an associate professor at the Education and Policy Leadership Unit and LH Martin Institute, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne

Fulbright Reflections from “The Big Apple”

Damien Pearce



As my time in the United States on my Fulbright Scholarship is coming to a gradual conclusion, and due to the ongoing interest of my AVETRA colleagues, I thought would share some initial reflections of this experience. Being awarded the 2011 Fulbright Professional

Scholarship in VET has been such an amazing experience, which has involved both cultural and academic exchange with colleagues particularly within the Tri-states and the Mid-west areas of the United States. The initial aim of the project was to compare approaches to Police education and training between Australia and the United States. However, after I made a decision to request a voluntary redundancy from the Australian Federal Police College following a restructure, there was increasing concern about external engagement and perceived scrutiny of police approaches to teaching and learning. One prominent federal jurisdiction in the United States even considered my involvement to be a risk to national security! Fortunately, I have been able to investigate local police education and training through my host institution the John Jay College of Criminal Justice within the City University of New York, although not to the extent initially proposed.

Subsequently, by necessity, the scope of the project was extended to consider the role of VET within education and training in the United States more broadly. As the United States does not have a readily definable vocational sector, as we do in Australia, it became a case of identifying where VET takes place. I will not go into specific details here, as I am working towards future publications, however locating VET within the United States has included analysis of post-secondary institutions such as proprietary technical schools, union movement apprenticeship programs and two and four year colleges.

From what I have experienced over the past few months during this project by visiting educational institutions and engaging with students and colleagues, I agree with the position of Cohen and Brawer (2008) who propose that there is a peculiar American belief “that people cannot be legitimately educated, religiously observant, ill, or healthy unless some institution sanctions that aspect of their being” (p. 1). As an example, Alice, a hairdresser who has been cutting my hair since I have been in the United States, works in a salon on the Upper West Side of New York City and has 15 years experience in the industry. Upon my enquiry regarding what she had to do to become a hairdresser, Alice described going “to hairdressing school and meeting the New York State licencing requirements”. The salon is 15 minutes away by car, when peak traffic is avoided, from her home in New Jersey State - immediately on the opposite side of the Hudson River.

After years experience within hair dressing including owning her own salon and employing staff, if Alice wanted to practice hairdressing in New Jersey she would have to apply formally to the New Jersey State Board of Cosmetology and Hairstyling. Alice would have to complete an interstate application, supply supporting documentation including verification of the number or hours tuition spent during hairdressing school, and pass the Board’s designated examination. Alice acknowledged the importance of public health within her industry, however was bemused that these requirements were just to work as a hairdresser where approval to open and operate a salon required engagement with a separate licence and application process concurrently with business registration requirements.

To offer a statement that the approaches in the United States to post secondary or tertiary education are incredibly diverse is an understatement. The United States, in terms of not having a federal qualifications framework, has a myriad of unconnected higher and adult institutions that includes community colleges, four-year colleges, universities, vocational institutes, proprietary schools and online institutions. There is an undercurrent for holistic change and innovation in tertiary education with some commentators suggesting that federal unification of education needs to be considered and in the future competency based credentials may in fact compete with a degree (Kirshhner, 2012). The proponents of change and innovation are divided. Some believe that the lack of a uniform tertiary system is detrimental to sustained change (Rosen, 2011), while others believe that the lack of a defined paradigm in fact allows tertiary education to respond to inherent uncertainty (Delbanco, 2011). Rhetorically, relating my observations to the Australian VET context, how much prescription do we need within a formal VET system to promote and sustain contemporary approaches to teaching and learning and still to be able to respond to change?

I would like to acknowledge the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, as my host institution and the support provided by the Australian-American Fulbright Commission and importantly DEEWR for sponsoring my Fulbright Professional Scholarship for VET. I would commend any Fulbright opportunity to colleagues within AVETRA for their consideration.

References

- Cohen, A. M., & Brawer, F. B. (2008). *The American Community College* (5th ed.). San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Delbanco, A. (2011). *College: What it was, is, and should be*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kirshhner, A. (2012). Innovations in Higher Education? Hah! Retrieved 25 Jul 2012, from <http://chronicle.com/article/Innovations-in-Higher/131424/>

CONFERENCES

- Women in Adult and Vocational Education Inc is celebrating 25 years with a WAVE National Conference: **SKILLS FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS: WHAT ABOUT WOMEN AND GIRLS?**, Friday 14th September 2012, 9 to 5pm at Conferences on Clarendon, 120 Clarendon St, Southbank, Melbourne.
- **TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) Annual Conference, Perth, 6-7 September, 2012**
The annual TDA conference will be held at the Perth Convention Centre this year and is the annual showcase for Australian TAFE institutes, providers of VET and higher education courses to thousands of Australian and overseas students. Further details will become available at: www.tda.edu.au
- **AUSTAFE 2012 National Conference, 3-5 October 2012, Alice Springs**
For further details contact Lyle Mellors at lyle.mellors@cdu.edu.au
- **Adapt International Conference on Productivity, Investment in Human Capital and the Challenge of Youth Employment, 16 – 19 October 2012, Bergamo, Italy**
The conference aims to contribute to the current debate around tackling the youth unemployment problem through a more comprehensive approach and an interdisciplinary and comparative framework.
Those intending to participate should submit an abstract (max. 1500 words) by 1 June to info@adapt.it. Adapt Scientific Committee will select up to 10 papers. For information about the submission of papers and reimbursement costs please contact info@adapt.it. The list of accepted abstracts will be published online on or after 1 July 2012 on www.adaptbulletin.eu.
- **Australian Training Awards, Melbourne, 16 November 2012**
The Australian Training Awards are the peak, national awards for the VET sector. These prestigious awards recognise and reward organisations, training providers and individuals for their outstanding commitment and contribution to building a skilled, productive and prosperous Australia. Further details at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Awards/ATA/Pages/default.aspx>
- **2nd UPI International Conference on Technical and Vocational Education and Training**, December 04 – 05 2012, Bandung, Indonesia. Conference website: <http://tvetric.upi.edu/tvetconference2012>
- **The International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship (INAP) invites to its 5th Conference: *Apprenticeship in a Globalised World: Premises, Promises and Pitfalls*. Date: April, 23rd and 24th, 2013**

The University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa in cooperation with the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority (merSETA) and the European Research Network in Vocational Education and Training (VETNET) is organising an international conference which will address topics related to the principal theme apprenticeship in a globalised world.

- **Research Learning and Work Centre (RWLC) 8th International Conference on Researching Work and Learning, 19-22 June 2013, University of Stirling, U.K.** This international conference is concerned with such questions as:
 - What knowledge, which actors, and what parts of the environment are most visible?
 - What and who remains invisible?
 - When do actors become aware of invisible infrastructures?
 - And what research methods and analytical approaches can make the invisible visible?

The deadline for submission of abstracts is 1 October 2012, and applicants will be notified of acceptance by 30 November 2012. Full details of how to submit proposals, along with further information are available at: www.stir.ac.uk/schools/education/researching-work-and-learning. If you have any queries, please contact RWL at: rwl2013@stir.ac.uk

- **Singapore International Technical and Vocational Education and Training Conference , 2012, November.** This is a great opportunity for Policy Makers, Leaders, Principals, Researchers, Educationists, and Specialists, Administrators and Planners of TVET to learn about successful strategies and models for TVET sustainability and growth. There are limited places available so sign up for the Conference now! <http://www.tvetsingapore.com/>
- **Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 10th International Conference.** Tenth JNET Conference will be held at Worcester College, Oxford from the 5th to the 7th July 2013. The formal call for papers will appear here later this year. <http://www.jnetconferences.co.uk/>
- AUSTAFE 2012 National Conference, 3-5 October 2012, Alice Springs, Kirribilli, Sydney. For further details contact Lyle Mellors at lyle.mellors@cdu.edu.au

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About AVETRA

AVETRA is the peak professional association for VET researchers. Its ability to be a sustainable and viable association depends on its membership. Members are urged to continue their membership and to encourage their colleagues to join AVETRA.

AVETRA services include:

- An annual VET international research conference
- Two editions of *International Journal of Training Research per annum*
- The quarterly AVETRA e-newsletter with the latest news in the VET sector as well as VET research.
- The new *Research Today* publication twice a year.
- OctoberVET workshops organised by AVETRA members in centres as widely spread as Perth, Darwin, Townsville, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.
- The AVETRA website with VET research links and information
- Awards for VET researchers including the joint award with TAFE Directors Australia, the Berwyn Clayton Award, The Ray Barker Award, and the AVETRA Best paper Award.

HELP AVETRA help VET research and join now if you are not a member. Full **\$160** (GST inclusive) and Student memberships **\$80.00** including GST are available.

If you are interested in contributing to this newsletter please contact either Sarojni Choy or Sinan Gemici.

[The September Issue was formatted by Tracey Singh, Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE, Queensland.]