

A MINUTE WITH Berwyn Clayton

Berwyn Clayton is the Director of the Work-based Education Research Centre at Victoria University. She has over 25 years experience as a practitioner-researcher in the VET sector. A founding member of AVETRA, Berwyn was the Association's president from 2000-2004. In 2001 she was made a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators for her services to education and vocational education research and in 2011 has received the NCVER Researcher of the Year Award.

I first got interested in VET research in the mid 1980s when I was involved in an initiative to address student attrition from courses at Bruce TAFE in the ACT. I learned at that time just how effective research could be in supporting policy renewal and improvements in teaching and administrative practice.

Two people who inspired me most to conduct research were Martha Kinsman, Associate Director, Canberra Institute of Technology and Peter Thomson, the deputy at the TAFE National Centre for Research and Development (now NCVER). Both actively supported my research development and provided me with the essential opportunities to 'do some research'.

The areas of VET research that interest me most are the VET workforce and its work, VET pedagogy, organisational capability and professional development.

Methodologies that I have used are generally qualitative; however I also have undertaken a number of studies using mixed methods. Words and pictures seem to work well with many end-users, while others prefer something more concrete. Together they can be a quite powerful tool in influencing thinking.

The most interesting piece of VET research I conducted was on cultures and structures in Australian RTOs. Undertaken as part of the *Supporting VET providers in building capability for the future* consortium research program, this research revealed to me just how incredibly fascinating and complex the organisations are which operate in our sector. Our research also highlighted how people struggle with this complexity and achieve great things despite it.

Currently I am researching professional obsolescence – defined in simple terms as the loss of once-held knowledge and/or the failure to keep up to date with new knowledge and skills as they emerge. It is a particular issue for people working in fields where technological change is constant. Our research team is interested to investigate how particular professions and knowledge-based organisations deal with the problem as the topic is directly related to the maintenance of vocational currency for teachers working in VET.

Source: A-NEWS, The Newsletter of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association, March 2011, p.4,
<http://avetra.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/A-NEWS-NEWSLETTER-MARCH-2011.pdf>