



Kira Clarke
 President, AVETRA

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The importance of diversity in VET research

As has often been the case in times of economic upheaval and the following periods of social and economic rebuilding, a spotlight is shining on the role of the Australian tertiary system as a backbone of workforce recovery, expanded productivity and economic wellbeing. As a community of researchers in VET, I'm sure like me you are watching, listening and reading with interest the ways in which political leaders at all levels are discussing what is and isn't working within our skills systems.

In reflecting on the evidence that is underpinning and shaping reforms already underway and potential reforms to come, it is clear that critical scholarship is needed from and within all corners of the skills and training landscape. From practitioners, trainers and teachers with deep understanding of what builds and develops vocational capability and identity in classrooms and workplaces around the country. From institutional and college leaders who can surface the conditions needed to enable a thriving VET workforce and to be sustainable partnerships between training providers, industry and employers. From those in universities, thinktanks and research institutions who can speak to efficacies and inefficacies of the systemic and policy trajectories shaping VET.

To drive the type of transformational change to skills and training being described by the new Federal Government, we need a breadth of insight and understanding of how VET is working, for who it is working and under what conditions. This diversity is needed because there are VET research questions that can only be asked by those outside providers and government systems. There are questions that can only be answered from within those contexts.

A thriving and critical research community is one that makes room for a breadth of ideas, a breadth of existing and emerging modes and methods of inquiry. We will always need an independent VET research community and for that we need a community of VET researchers that builds the capability and networks of new, mid-career and established researchers. That builds the capability for robust critique and debate.

AVETRA is committed to giving a voice to all researchers in the VET field regardless of the type of scholarship they pursue. *Research Today* aims to be an outlet for the dissemination of diverse scholarship and research, that explores problems and their solutions in all domains and dimensions of the VET system. As you read this edition, I hope it inspires not only your thinking about VET, but also your role in VET and the opportunity to contribute your ideas and insight in future *Research Today* editions. ■

CONTENTS

Strategies for skills and jobs in Melbourne's west	3
Done to or Done with? Doing it slightly differently to the plan. A progress report for an Applied Learning Research Project on the Efficacy of Instructional Coaching in a VET Environment	4
A Study of Photography Students' Assessment Experiences	7
Classroom research: teaching medical terminology online to School Based Apprentices and Trainees	9

ISSUE 30: DECEMBER 2022

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ISSN 1441 3183 3

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FROM THE EDITOR

The last couple of years have been tough. Coming out of COVID lockdowns has made me appreciate even more the value of collegiate interaction. I find discussions with colleagues inspiring and nourishing.

AVETRA is a rare community of practice for researchers of and in the vocational education and training sector. The events and activities of AVETRA bring us together to share research and innovations and thinking about how we can improve on the status quo.

This edition of AVETRA's *Research Today* magazine is another opportunity to showcase the diversity of talent and quality of inquiry that exists in our sector. As editor of *Research Today* I am delighted to receive and read the contributions of AVETRA members. As a platform for applied and practitioner researchers, I hope that the contributions featured in this edition of *Research Today* inspire and inform your own work.

Thank you to our authors and thank you to the AVETRA community who engage with their work. Let's keep up our spirited inquiry, keep sharing our research and keep being enriched through the sharing of others. ■



Andrew Williamson,
Editor,
Research Today

FROM THE ASSOCIATE EDITOR

This edition of *Research Today* continues with the tradition of supporting new and established VET researchers to share their learnings and experiences with their colleagues in a supported and accessible environment. AVETRA provides a unique opportunity which allows practitioners to take the first step in their research careers whilst helping to bring together like-minded colleagues who are natural collaborators and supporters of best practice within the Australian VET landscape. If anyone is interested in contributing to future editions, please reach out as we are always looking to widen our networks and share in experiences across the sector.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to travel to the USA for 3 weeks in September, to complete an International Specialised Skills Institute Fellowship to investigate how design education and makerspaces are used to influence student study choices and their ability to respond to real-world industry challenges. I met with numerous community colleges and industry practitioners in Silicon Valley, Fresno and Sacramento and I am excited by the learnings which I will share with the network in the coming months. I encourage all VET practitioners to get involved in the network and make an application for future fellowships in 2023. ■



Paul Boys,
Associate Editor
Research Today

WFCP APPLIED RESEARCH & INNOVATION AFFINITY GROUP



The World federation of Colleges and Polytechnics (WFCP) is an international network of national and regional associations of colleges as well as individual colleges. All TAFEs and Dual Sector members of TAFE Directors Australia are also members of the WFCP.

WFCP hosts eight Affinity Groups formed around the shared interests and common goals of members, to give members a space to collaborate and exchange best practices in their areas of expertise.

One such forum is WFCP Applied Research and Innovation Affinity Group: wfcpc.org/activities/affinity-groups/applied-research-and-innovation/

WFCP members can apply to join the Applied Research & Innovation Affinity Group here: wfcpc.org/activities/affinity-groups/applied-research-and-innovation/

Strategies for skills and jobs in Melbourne's west

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Extract from Wade, Williams, Knight, Tham, Gao, (2022) Strategies for Skills and Jobs in Melbourne's West: Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/strategies-for-skills-and-jobs-in-melbournes-west.pdf

Over the past year, the Victoria University project 'Skills and Jobs for Melbourne's West' has reflected on the challenges facing Melbourne's West, identifying what future we should be aspiring to, and how that future can be realised. This research has applied an evidence-based approach – identifying the specific problems facing industry and skills provision – and co-designing solutions to these problems with industry, education and government. The first phase of the research identified three specific challenges to be overcome if Melbourne's West is to thrive. Insufficient local jobs, leaks in the skill development pipeline, and the presence of only fragile networks linking education providers and industry.

Researchers uncovered a paradox of local industry seeking skills at the same time as many residents of the West commute out of the region to work. Better matching the skills of residents to the work opportunities in the West will be key to greater future prosperity. Much more than simply money, prosperity is more time for wellbeing, social connection and community connection. Reduced commuting also helps our environment through lower emissions and energy consumption. This report is future focused with Victoria University anticipated to impact the city-region of the West of Melbourne through both a leadership role and developing new ways of working with and supporting industry. Achieving a better future will require targeted investment to increase local jobs, alongside implementation of enabling strategies to sustain these jobs into the future.

Strategic Plan

This research project provided a strategic plan for achieving the West of Melbourne's future skills and jobs needs. Building on the findings of the first phase of the research which explored employers' perceptions across four focus industry sectors, the [previous report](#) identified three key impediments to sustained employment growth – fragile networks between employers and education and training providers, impediments to skill development by residents, and insufficient local jobs. While the Skills Needs in the West report focused on four key industries to uncover challenges faced in the West, this report extrapolates findings across all industries and its strategic plan has two dimensions.

Firstly, a set of strategic directions encompassing focal Enablers and Strategies is identified along with the development of an employment growth cycle, where skills are at the centre, as illustrated in the accompanying diagram. Together these will ensure an adequate supply of skills in the West alongside strong connections, so that employer demand for skills is met. An overarching feature of these strategic directions is that they join industry and education. Secondly, an initial stimulus is required to recalibrate the labour market by stabilising the level of commuting to jobs outside the West.

Based upon extensive place-based research, four focal Enablers are identified in the research for achieving industry-driven skills development and sustainable local job growth in the future.

Supporting the active pursuit of the focal Enablers are Strategies developed in consultation with stakeholders. It is envisaged that the Strategies themselves will only be required in the short-term to support the Enablers; the intent is that the focal Enablers will be able to be progressed by the momentum brought about by growth in Skills, Jobs and Industry.

Creating a local skill ecosystem

Creating a local skill ecosystem is where skill formation occurs in place-based settings with employers, through enhanced relationships between industry, education providers, and individuals.

Facilitating innovation, growth and change

Facilitating a culture of innovation across employers and education providers, who are looking to collaboratively redesign jobs, course content and how training is delivered.

Authentic industry engagement

Enhancing engagement between education providers and industry, ensuring that students are instilled with the skills and capabilities employers need.

Institutions as a space for industry and educational collaboration

Building capacity for educational institutions to be the hub of industry collaboration, responding to industry need, sparking innovation and providing initial and continuing training through robust partnerships. ■

Further reading:

vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/strategies-for-skills-and-jobs-in-melbournes-west.pdf

vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/sjmw_skill_needs_in_the_west_09032022.pdf

Done to or Done with? Doing it slightly differently to the plan

A progress report for an Applied Learning Research Project on the Efficacy of Instructional Coaching in a VET Environment

Lindee Conway, Tamie Cousins, Karen Dymke, Roz Hanratty, Sonia Saraullo, Kay Schlesinger, Alexandra Vardis, Cheryl Wilson, Melbourne Polytechnic's Professional Practice Team

Our Starting Point

We were keen to explore whether Instructional Coaches¹ could make a difference to support our theory that professional learning, based on Instructional Coaching, communities of practice and a learner-centred approach will build the capability of Melbourne Polytechnics (MP's) educators. *Research Today* published our intentions in May 2021.

We commenced this research in 2021 and aimed to report our findings in mid-2022. This article is a progress report, not a project summary, because our plans were somewhat disrupted by COVID. But the change to our plans has enabled us to take a longer-term view. When we reported in the *Research Today* magazine in May last year, we stated that Melbourne Polytechnic has created a team of Instructional Coaches, aiming to:

- Increase learner retention, reported by data
- Increase engagement between educators and learners, reported by educators and learners
- Increase positive feedback from learners and educators
- Deepen a sense of efficacy and capability reported by educators (Conway & Dymke, 2021, p. 7).

What we are presenting now is a report on what we've learned so far, and how, as we're not yet 'done', we aim to use the Action Research project to find out more and reflect further. This variation to our original plan sits well with Action Research as a methodology; educator and researcher, Mertler, says that:

Action Research is a process that improves education, in general, by incorporating change (Mertler, 2009, p.18)

The Melbourne Polytechnic Education Strategy and Directorate Annual Plan outlines an aim to have a consistent approach to the learning experience. The activities underlying this strategy are to develop a data informed learning culture which uses evidence when

planning, delivering and reviewing learning and teaching practices for continuous Improvement.

Our research project relates to our work as Coaches and our Coaching practice. We want to determine whether Instructional Coaching and Communities of Practice are making a difference to educators. We established SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Bound) goals to collate reflections from the Professional Teaching Practice (PTP) (Doran, Miller, & Cunningham, 1981). Our measures of success were defined to find out if the assumption is correct that '*Doing With*' will deepen the capability and capacity of MP's educators. We also aimed for the research to collect data on the efficacy of the Instructional Coaching model.

To support success, we invited all PTP Coaches – Action Researchers in this project – to reflect after each Coaching session or other interactions on the efficacy of their sessions. We used a Microsoft Form as a survey template to capture data. The questions on the form are listed below. In this first phase, we used this as our single data source, although we asked Coaches, as action researchers, to include feedback from educators as well as their own reflections. The Action Researchers – PTP Coaches – were asked to answer any of the questions that were relevant to their work and their reflections. In responses below, Coaches are de-identified and referred to as 'Coach/ Action Researcher'. Educators, when their comments are included, they are de-identified and referred to as 'Coachee/Educator'.

The questions:

1. What are you noticing?
2. What surprised you?
3. What has gone well?
4. What did you think had not gone so well?
5. What progress is your Coachee reporting to you?
6. What roadblocks are you running into?
7. What's a breakthrough you'd like to report – for yourself or as reported by your Coachee?
8. How are you feeling about the most recent session you participated in?
9. What are the next steps for you, or your Coachee?
10. Is there another question we should be asking ourselves, or our participants?

¹ AITSL defines Instructional Coaching as, "A coach working one-to-one with a teacher, to model and observe classroom practice and to support reflection and professional conversation. The aim is to build a partnership to develop evidence-based teaching practices" aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/instructional-coaching

From previous page

The most common reflection, by the Action Researchers was about time to work with their Coachees, or to further develop ideas for MP's educators. The words 'time' and 'busy' appear more than thirty-five times in our Action Research reflections, either mentioned by Coachees, or as something we observed in practice.

Another brief note on the responses over time: As the Coaches have worked in their new roles, and with time to support each other and discuss their work together, entries which reflect their own performance have diminished over time. Whereas, in earlier reflections some of us have noticed their own interactions, or capability:

'I'm developing capability.' (Coach, Action Researcher)

'I hope I don't seem too vague to my Coachee.'

(Coach, Action Researcher)

'I'm building a bank of Coaching questions.'

(Coach, Action Researcher)

'I didn't regularly revise the Coaching goal.'

(Coach, Action Researcher)

There is much more, now, about what is learned and how we might deliver it. So, one research finding may be a confirmation of the value of persistence as a valuable human, and learner, attribute (Mezirow, 1991) (McGivney, 2007) (Kroth & Cranton, 2014) (Francisco, 2022).

What we've noticed:

Once started most educators, Coachees, embraced the Coaching and it had a significant impact on their teaching and student learning. Coaches reported that they felt 'of service' and supportive to educators.

Patterns or trends that appeared was that confidence was developing for the Coaches with positive outcomes reported by their Coachees. Coaches were also reporting a high degree of satisfaction with Coaching and partnering with educators as they developed good rapport and trust with educators. The power of taking it one step at a time was evident.

'I'm getting smarter all the time and I have learnt so much.' (Coachee, Educator)

'Up until now I knew my content but I didn't know how to convey that. The penny has dropped!'

(Coachee/Educator)

'This session has helped me untangle things.'

(Coachee, Educator)

After ten sessions together, the Coachee expressed that this experience has reinvigorated her passion for teaching, she is considering her practice and is more intentional. (Coach, Action Researcher)

A further trend noticed was that Coaches were becoming both more reflective and intentional in their practice.

“ Coaches reported that they felt 'of service' and supportive to educators.

Initial training for Coaches provided the foundation and framework for Instructional Coaching. Ongoing learning through a fortnightly Coaches Lounge and 1:1 Coach the Coach sessions, supported the further building of confidence and capability of the Coaches.

'Each Coach has set a goal that focuses on their practice as a coach. I can see where this is making a difference!' (Coach, Action Researcher)

We are now starting to notice an extension of coaching as we embrace a coaching approach to our broader work with Educators at Melbourne Polytechnic:

'There are many opportunities for coaching conversations with Educators. It does not always need to be a formal coaching meeting., it can be a shorter conversation that is informal.' (Coach, Action Researcher)

'I am enjoying any interactions with teachers, in a variety of settings.' (Coach, Action Researcher)

This is an area of our practice we will further explore and consolidate.

Our Action Research, so far, is confirming the importance of Goal Setting (setting clear and targeted goals) works effectively: Educators and Coaches now utilise both SMART and PEERS goals (Powerful, Easy, Emotionally Compelling, Reachable, Student Focused) (Knight, Ryschon Knight, & Carlson, 2015).

Further steps were taken when Coaches began to use checklists to become even more precise in their Coaching with educators. The use of goals, and being clear and simple (a word mentioned many times in Action Researchers' reflections) is evident:

'I have gained a better understanding of the importance of keeping the goal simple and achievable and spending the time to go deep into doing one small thing very well.' (Coach, Action Researcher)

Conversely, but not in contradiction, the same researcher makes a compelling comment which shows, we believe, the humanity required, when working with educators:

'Sometimes I give advice, which (as a Coach) I know I'm not supposed to ...I can't help it.' (Coach, Action Researcher)

Challenges felt by Coaches also included the time required to communicate some ideas, and concepts. Sometimes our enthusiasm proved to be confusing or even overwhelming at first:

Continued on following page >

From previous page

'Teaching is hard work. Whilst observing Coachees teach, I am noticing that unplanned sessions cause increased stress for Coachees and confusion for students. When shown (some) planning strategies (the Coachee) saw their value but confided that time is against them and implementation almost impossible. As a Coach, I want to jump and offer assistance, with session plans and anything, really, but I understand that is not my role.'

(Coach, Action Researcher)

What was surprising or unexpected for the Coaches was how many of their Coachees, Educators, were willing to change their practice as confidence grew. Educators reported they had gained in confidence and in pedagogical skills, as a result of Coaching discussions. The words 'positive' and 'hugely positive' appear several times when Coaches reflect on their Coachees' development

'My brain has just gone 'POW!!!' I am going to incorporate this into everything I do. I'm so excited. I'm going to have a go.' (Coachee/Educator')

'With Coaching, came clarity.' (Coachee/Educator')

'My Coachee is talking about the development of her belief in herself as a teacher. She is explaining, more clearly, the choices she makes, and the benefit to the learners. She's become more intentional.'

(Coach, Action Researcher)

'I've realised that I helped (my Coachee) a lot!'

(Coach, Action Researcher)

These comments and findings are in accord with research into VET education by Smith and Yasukawa, who comment on the importance of:

Assisting VET educators to 'develop their distinctive pedagogical knowledge' (Smith & Yasukawa, 2017, p. 36)

NextSteps

Instructional Coaching is an ongoing journey and Coaches report that they are continuing to partner with educators to build confidence and capability in their educational practice.

The persistence of lockdowns in Victoria into 2021 has changed our plans but enabled us to reflect more broadly. We are, as a group, beginning to discuss what more we can offer and how it might be offered differently. The enthusiasm for working with VET educators has not waned among the Action Research group:

'Should we investigate peer Coaching?'

(Coach, Action Researcher)

'I love the ability to connect, with new educators.'

(Coach, Action Researcher)

We also have a renewed commitment to make findings relating to educators' stress levels and make recommendations that may help to streamline their work efforts.

“ My brain has just gone 'POW!!!' I am going to incorporate this into everything I do. I'm so excited. I'm going to have a go.

Overall, we have shared learnings with each other and with MP educators and deepened our awareness of the value of our work. Members of the PTP team, Coaches and Action Researchers, have continued to improve their formal training and to discuss their learning regularly, as well as using the reflections forms. We are also considering expanding our research methods and using Semi-Structured interviews to learn more from our Educators.

In relation to the change from Professional Development ('Done to') to Professional Learning ('Done with'), one Action Researcher made this reflection:

'I've realised that PL, Professional Learning, is actually an important change. It took me a while to come to an understanding of how much it matters that we say, 'you don't need development, but you, and all of us, can benefit from learning.'

(Coach, Action Researcher)

We aim to share the final stage of our exciting, shared, learning journey in a 2023 edition of Research Today. ■

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A Study of Photography Students' Assessment Experiences

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Introduction

Assessment in Vocational Education and Training (VET) is complex. It's also contentious. Competency-Based Assessment (CBA), the foundation of Australian VET, assesses the student as either *competent* or *not-yet-competent*. Over the past 20 years, however, many registered training organisations (RTOs) have introduced and trialled graded assessment. The aims being to differentiate levels of achievement and to arm students and employers alike with more information about student capabilities. Motivation for this research came from a perceived need to consider more in terms of students' lived experience of assessment. In this research, photography students completing a final unit of study for an Advanced Diploma of Visual Arts were assessed using the two different assessment models CBA and graded assessment. CBA was guided by TAFE policy and practice, whilst graded assessment was conducted by industry representatives. The students' experience of the two different assessment processes were explored with the aim to identify the impact on their identity as emerging professional photographers.

“ Motivation for this research came from a perceived need to consider more in terms of students' lived experience of assessment.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was taken as it was considered to be the most appropriate approach to gain insight into this complex topic. It allowed for sensitivity to the learning context as well as providing participants with the familiarity of a natural real-world setting. Ten students were approached, with six participating in semi structured interviews. The interviews were conducted in a confidential environment on campus.

Findings

Experiences of CBA

As all participants received a result of *competent* in the CBA for the unit, they were asked about their experiences of competency-based assessment. Two themes were most prominent in their answers. The first was related to the minimalist feedback that comes from CBA. The second was related to the participant's emphasis on the importance of effective feedback from assessment. All participants told that a result of *competent* was not useful to them in terms of understanding their performance or directing

them to areas for improvement. One participant said the result of *competent* “Didn't tell me where I was on a scale and how I could improve”. Some participants had further mixed interpretations of the term *competent*. Three of the participants equated the result to a pass or minimum standard. Another participant stated, “Well, I guess I would define the term *competent* as a kind of neutral term. It's not bad, but it's not good”

All participants talked about the experience of receiving effective, *informal* feedback from their teachers as being the most important element of the CBA process. They acknowledged the need for *formal* feedback to inform on the quality practice and performance. Four participants reported that a result of *competent* did not acknowledge either the effort that they had put into the assessment task nor the quality of their submissions. With one participant saying that receiving the result was “a bit of a let-down” and added: “I felt flat”; and another, “undermining my pride” in her work, which left her feeling “empty”. These sentiments were shared by others.

While the result of *competent* was not informative or useful for participants, one of the positive aspects of CBA, identified by three participants. It was the sense of empowerment the CBA gave them. One participant said this provided him the freedom to focus on the task itself, define the boundaries of his project, and “explore unlimited creativity”, rather than what he perceived to be the “limiting or stifling impact of graded assessment”

Experiences of Industry Assessment Using a Graded Assessment Model

For this project accredited professional photographers from the Australian Institute of Professional Photography (AIPP) were invited to assess students' work in a supplementary assessment process. The criteria used by the visiting industry judges, was the same criteria used to judge professional photography competitions in Australia and New Zealand. This was a graded assessment model that incorporates levels or grades (for example, silver and gold awards) associated with the production of images that exceeded professional practice and displayed high levels of communication, imagination, craft and skill, visual communication, emotional impact and technique (AIPP, 2021; NZIPP, 2021).

All participants reported a rising confidence in their abilities as a result of the secondary graded assessment process. One participant shared the effect that receiving a *gold award*, saying the result made him realise, “I can do this and do it well and I'm doing it in a style and to a standard that not many other people can do. You have no idea how motivating that is!”

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From previous page

A positive impact on motivation was a recurrent theme in their answers on questions about graded assessment. One participant said, "It is a big encouragement to continue with this work. It is confirmation that this is work that is valuable". Another participant discussed the impact of the graded assessment process in terms of providing motivation to take on more challenging projects), while another participant reflected that the outcome of the industry graded assessment process was a factor in her motivation to continue her studies at degree level.

Impact of the Assessment on Participants' Perceptions of their Skills and Emerging Identities

The two assessment processes for this final capstone unit of work had very different impacts on participants' perception of their skills and abilities and their identities as emerging professional photographers. None of the participants reported that CBA impacted their emerging status as professional photographers in any way. By contrast, the graded assessment process had a significant impact on all participants' sense of professional standing and perception of their skills. It also positively impacted participants' self-belief and confidence resulting from an acknowledgement of the quality of their work. One participant said, "Going from self-doubt to a vote of confidence had an amazingly positive impact on me. That little gold award from the visiting industry judges made me go, 'Wow, someone recognises the quality of my work! That is important. That has weight!'" In relation to building the professional identities and profiles of participants and the consequent impact for their future employment prospects. One participant said getting two *silver awards* made her feel like she "would stand out in a big crowd."

Conclusion

The findings of this research give voice to six students' perceptions of the experience of assessment and gave rise to a deeper understanding of assessment practices within VET. Participants emphasised the fundamental necessity for an assessment process that is informative and useful in terms of students' development and growth as well as preparing them for the demands of industry. As a result of graded assessment process, participants told of their sense of accomplishment, along with the boost to their confidence and their emerging view of themselves as professional photographers. The findings provide a fresh perspective on the potential of graded assessment to shape and transform students' self-belief and emerging identities, a perception on CBA's perceived place in creativity, one that needs further exploration. The importance of effective and meaningful feedback for students in terms of their need for information on the quality of their work sends a strong message to VET educators.

The graded assessment process afforded these participants something the CBA process did not: a real sense of

achievement, recognition for the extensive work that went into their final exhibition pieces, and acknowledgement of the quality of their work. The graded assessment process positively impacted participants' confidence in their skills and played a constructive role in their emerging identities, as well as built capacity for further work or study. ■

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issinstitute.org.au/fellowships/fellowship-reports/

Check out Fellowships available here:

issinstitute.org.au/fellowships/fellowships-available/

AVETRA'S REPOSITORY OF RESEARCH RESOURCES

Ever wondered how to begin research, or how you yourself got started on your research journey?

If so, you are not alone! Many early career researchers in the VET sector have been expressing the need for some means of readily accessing resources that would help them get started. This repository has been developed for you.

Check out the range of research resources on the AVETRA website: avetra.org.au/research_resources

Classroom research: teaching medical terminology online to School Based Apprentices and Trainees

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Cert IV T. & A. (Plenty), Independent Researcher

Before the Covid-19 pandemic and being directed to teach online from home, I was progressively implementing an online course on medical terminology (BSBMED301 Interpret and apply medical terminology appropriately). It is designed specifically for under-18-year-old School Based Apprentices and Trainees (SBATs). I necessarily provided the course in a hybrid way that included:

- self-paced learning and assessment provided on a Moodle-based learning management platform that involves formative and summative assessment activities and,
- individual viva voce and supervised written tests.

Research has shown that (“even”) medical students face anxiety when expected to learn and understand medical terminology. Abdullah (1) notes that

“the teaching/learning of medical terminology is an acute problem for both teachers and learners of medical discipline. The teachers cannot convey easily the ideas hidden in ambiguous lexemes which are derived from foreign languages other than English (i.e. Greek and Latin). In turn, the learners are frightened of long and complicated terms, and they find it very difficult to pronounce, spell and understand unfamiliar forms.”

Abdullah’s research paper investigates the difficulties encountered for the learners of medicine in understanding medical terminology. He provides some strategies for the learners such as the breaking down strategy, identifying the word – parts, removing affixation (pre- and post-) and memorisation of eponyms (terms named after persons). He suggests the most appropriate and efficient approaches which may help in the teaching process of medical terminology.

I know from having provided training in medical terminology for three years that under 18-year-old School Based Apprentices and Trainees (SBATs) are notoriously anxious about being required to learn medical terminology. It seems on the surface so foreign to them and therefore “it must be hard and a huge hurdle to understand and learn”. (Abdullah, 1)

The added dimension of the younger age of SBATs compared to medical students demands careful consideration by a teacher of what will help to overcome

that anxiety and what will motivate them to make a start and proceed particularly in an online provision environment.

In my case there are restrictive limitations of trainer face-to-face time with the SBATs and only one group is trained per year. This was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Because of the low student volume compared to the whole college and its courses, there were no additional resources for formal research available, despite the need for practical answers to meeting very specific needs to assist delivery of training within limited class contact time and, specifically augmented with online, self-paced learning and assessment opportunities. Medical terminology lends itself well to individual online learning as it requires a considerable amount of rote learning, e.g., learning how to pronounce medical terms correctly.

SBATs are still developing in their teenage years so motivating them to learn medical terminology is a primary issue. DeAntonio (2) suggests two objectives for teaching medical terminology:

- **Make it fun** – different learning activities make learning medical terminology fun and are an excellent way to reinforce and review material.
- **Make it real** – the objective for teaching medical terminology is to teach students how to decipher medical terms and use them appropriately. Simulating a real-life scenario can assess if these objectives were met.

These two objectives formed part of my online classroom lesson preparation.

Creswell (3) raises important considerations in selecting an appropriate research methodology. I particularly found the distinction between post-positivist, constructivist, transformative and, pragmatism enlightening for understanding how I could best approach my research question. Word restriction excludes me going into details here.

Then there are the three key methods of research that provide an important conceptual framework to work out what would be most effective for my classroom research question. The methods are qualitative, quantitative, or mixed.

Qualitative: Researchers support a way of looking at research that takes an ‘inductive (i.e. inference of general laws) style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation.’

Quantitative: Researchers have assumptions about testing theories ‘deductively (i.e., characterised by or based on the

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From previous page

inference of particular instances from a general law), building in protections against bias, controlling for alternative explanations, and being able to generalise and replicate the findings.’

Mixed: Researchers use a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches that aids ‘a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone’.

Classroom research is a special case.

I determined my classroom research to be most suited to a framework of qualitative methodology within a transformativist worldview i.e, the research contains an action-oriented agenda that may change lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher’s life.

As this research is practitioner-based within a classroom setting, Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (4) influenced my approach because of the need to develop a methodology that would be practical and unobtrusive in a classroom or

online setting. This was because enquiry (research) is usually tied to curriculum and its implementation. In this case, in the Australian Vocational Education and Training system, Industry Training Packages are sets of nationally endorsed standards and qualifications used to recognise and guide assessment of the skills and knowledge (competencies) people need to perform effectively in the workplace.

In addition, due to the link between curriculum and implementation to inquiry (research), inquiry shares the same core features of a popular professional development strategy called lesson study. “As a professional development strategy,” argue Dana & Yendol-Hoppey (4) “lesson study allows teachers to examine and improve their teaching practice through ‘studying’ lessons systematically and collaboratively. The result is not only a better developed lesson, but typically teachers also develop a stronger understanding of the content, enhanced observational skills, stronger collegial networks, and a tighter connection between daily practice and long-term goals”. (4, p.19)

Method

1. Prepare online medical terminology self-paced learning and assessment activities on a Moodle-based learning management platform including: interactive formative and summative activities suitable for under 18 year-old students based upon and consistent with a current paper based assessment workbook. This included:
 - Carefully selected explanatory and interactive video clips
 - Structure of medical terms activities
 - Spelling of medical terms activities
 - Rote learning of medical terms (prepared by myself)
 - Medical terms meanings activities
 - “A day in the office” activity – applying medical terminology
 - Teacher individually assessed pronunciation and written test.
2. Ask a colleague/s familiar with medical terminology to trial, validate and moderate what I prepared.
3. Adjust online course according to colleague feedback.
4. Give two groups (one group each year) of SBAT aged care health assistant trainees the choice of using a print-based workbook or online Moodle-based learning management activities.
5. Receive feedback from the first group of students/trainees that choose to use the online self-paced medical terminology learning and assessment on a Moodle learning management platform.
6. Refine the self-paced online learning and assessment modules as required.
7. Quantitatively record how many students in each group choose each of the learning methods each year over two years.
8. Note the preference of the under 18 year-old-students to use self-paced online medical terminology learning and assessment on a Moodle learning management platform compared to a current workbook based medical terminology learning and assessment.
9. Record the number of Competent results and number of attempts of the two groups of SBATs for comparison.

Results

Group 1 (25 students): All students chose Online learning, all students achieved Competency in Summative Assessments on first attempt.

Group 2 (23 students): One student chose to use the print workbook, all students achieved Competency in Summative Assessments on first attempt.

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From previous page

Conclusion

BSBMED301 Interpret and apply medical terminology appropriately can be successfully taught online to School Based Apprentices and Trainees. A hybrid approach is needed that makes ready use of self-paced learning, formative assessments that students and a teacher can track online and, summative assessments that a teacher may track individually for each student. ■

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