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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Message from the AVETRA President

All those who experienced our 13th AVETRA National Conference in Queensland at Surfer's Paradise in April, will know what a stimulating atmosphere was created through the three days of events. Our thanks go to Stephen Billett and Sarojni Choy the co-conveners and their Queensland team for selecting such a vibrant venue, providing us with new visions through the key note speakers, and coordinating the continual stream of workshops and presentations that gave everybody as always an overflow of ideas to take away. I spent the Saturday in Surfers, trying to make sense of my scribbled notes and the contacts I had made during the week. My experience tells me that in the end the really good ideas filter through the next weeks as we settle back at the office and in the classroom. I try to take the three best learning issues and action those, to avoid overload. For those of you who did not make the conference and the highlight of the VET research year, pencil in April 2011 for the Melbourne AVETRA Conference.

The learning we take away from a conference is always personal. With so much to follow, it is inevitable that you find yourself listening to people who have breached the territory you are interested in exploring, or are using techniques that you are interested in developing. My personal reflections are threefold. I have to admit that the video clip shown by Laurent Filliettaz, was very powerful for me. Not just in terms of recognising how language **is** the curriculum of the apprentice learning situation, but also as an example of how we can investigate and capture data in ways that a decade ago were far beyond us. Of course, they raise new ethical issues about our practice. Perhaps it is time to revisit our AVETRA code of practice? I was also aroused by investigation of Victor Callan and Berwyn Clayton's into E-Assessment processes as I am involved in related research in WA. The issue they raised so well was that the issues voiced about the validity E-Assessment were simply mirroring the issues of validity for all assessment practices.. Finally, talking to Stephen Billett once again illustrated the value of even short conversations within our community. We told each other that we both quote to others what we have learned from each other in previous conferences. For me, Stephen had made a significant point when some years ago he said that he was often sceptical of the neat boxes and typographies displayed by others as research findings, when his own explorations often seemed to be a complex and messy series of relationships and tensions. Perhaps he addresses us to the core of our job. Ploughing through the cacophony of voices we collect, and trying to distil some simplicity so that we can convey meaning to others. Even through we know in presenting digestible findings, we may have had to exclude complexity that makes our practice the rich tapestry of interaction we deal with daily. The interesting thing is – I have no idea what will be my learning from next year's feast of research conversations – but perhaps that is what makes this field so interesting, challenging and often exciting for all of us.

Llandis Barratt-Pugh
AVETRA President

Contributions to Research Today

We welcome contributions from members of AVETRA to 'Research Today'. Contributions should preferably be 500 words or less and should focus on VET researchers, researching and the impact of research. Please send your contribution to me at e.smith@ballarat.edu.au, or you may phone first to discuss your idea, on 03-5327 9665.

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ERA (Excellence in Research for Australia) Journal Rankings

In 2007-8 AVETRA undertook a ranking of VET/Adult Education journals as part of the Australian preparations for the Research Quality Framework (RQF). The RQF never saw the light of day and has been replaced by ERA. The ERA will be used to evaluate research outputs from Australian universities, and hence is important for our academic members as well as more generally in relation to the standing of the VET discipline. Jo-Anne Reid, the President of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE), gave a great presentation on the ERA at the recent AVETRA conference.

In ERA, rankings of journals are even more important than in the RQF, as the ERA has a greater reliance on 'metrics', ie measures of research quantity and quality that are already established or that are easily quantifiable. The draft journal rankings were produced by the Australian Research Council (ARC), and in the case of VET/adult education journals were based on a ranking of all 900+ education journals, produced by a group called SORTI at Newcastle University for the AARE. Members will remember that our own ranking of the relatively small number of VET/Adult Ed journals involved an expert panel evaluating actual articles in the journals, rather than just a 'poll' among discipline members. (see *Research Today* Issues 1 and 4, and our web site at <http://avetra.org.au/avetra-initiatives/avetra-journal-rankings>). At this time, we worked closely with SORTI and also with officers in DEST (which at that time was responsible for the RQF). AVETRA made a submission to the ARC after the draft ERA rankings were issued in 2009, affirming some draft rankings and making an (unsuccessful) case for higher ranking of our top-rated journal, the *Journal of Education and Work*.

For members' information I provide below in one table a comparison of our own rankings, the draft ERA rankings and the final ERA rankings. AVETRA members should note that where the AVETRA ranking is higher than the ERA ranking, although it will not carry the same weight, it is still something that could be useful, for example in promotion applications, referring people to our web site for details of our ranking process.

Journal (Note: The edition number refers to the edition that was evaluated by the AVETRA panel)	AVETRA Ranking	Draft ERA	Final ERA
Journal of Education and Work, 19(1)	A*	B	B
Journal of Further and Higher Education, 30(1)	A	B	B
International Journal of Lifelong Education, 25(1)	A	A*	A
Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 58(1)	A	A	A
Studies in Continuing Education, 28(1)	A	A	A
Research in Post Compulsory Education, 11(1)	B	B	B
Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, 12(2)	B	B	B
European Journal of Vocational Training, 39(3)	B	B	B
Career & Technical Education Research, 31(3)	B	C	C
Journal of European Industrial Training, 30(2/3)	B	C	C
International Journal of Training Research, 4(1)	B	B	B
Studies in the Education of Adults, 38(2)	B	A	A
International Journal of Training and Development, 10(2)	B	C	C
Adult Education Quarterly, 56(2)	C	A	A
Education + Training, 48(4)	C	A*	A*
International Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 14(2)	C	B	B
Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 30(3)	C	C	C
Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 47(1)	C	A	A
Convergence: International Journal of Adult Education, 39(1)	C	C	C
New Zealand Journal of Adult Learning, 34(1)	C	N/A	C
Australian Journal of Career Development, 15(3)	C	C	C
Industrial and Commercial Training, 38(2-3)	C	N/A	N/A

Notes (i) 'Rankings' should more properly be called 'ratings' as no order is provided, but the word 'ranking' is always used.
(ii) The Editors/publishers of a small number of VET/adult education journals refused to provide us with copies of their journals for evaluation, and so you may not find on the list every journal with which you are familiar.

Fulbright Scholar studying VET workforce development

Mark Harris, Senior Strategy Officer with the Queensland Department of Education and Training, Product Services in South Brisbane has been awarded the 2010 Fulbright Professional Scholarship in Vocational Education and Training (VET) sponsored by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Through the Fulbright Scholarship, Mark will spend up to four months with State University of New York in Oswego researching the area of vocational education and training.

In congratulating Mr Harris, Executive Director of the Australian-American Fulbright Commission, Dr Joe Hlubucek, said that Mark's research "will give him a once in a lifetime opportunity to see how this issue is managed elsewhere and bring this knowledge back to Australia," Dr Hlubucek said. "He will look at crucial issues in the sector such as how to improve retention of knowledge as people retire and how to attract and reward staff to keep them working in the area."

The VET Fulbright scholarship was established in 1995 to support the exchange of research and ideas in VET between Australia and the United States. Previous winners of the Fulbright VET Scholarship include:

- Mr Martin Riordan, 2009, Researching the set-up and operation of the U.S. community colleges.
- Christopher Ainsworth, 2008, Research to increase professional respect between full-time and volunteer emergency management staff through equitable access to training
- Mr Mark O'Rourke, 2007, research to explore how current practice and theories of training-based game products can contribute to the development of alternative delivery strategies and tools for VTE.
- Dr Mark Brophy, 2006, Researching 'Study Circle's' as a learning approach and their application to the VET sector, with a focus on disadvantaged learners.
- Metta Young, 2005, Enhancing educational pathways for desert Indigenous people

Mark is one of 25 Australians to be recognised as a Fulbright Scholar in 2010. The prestigious Fulbright program is the largest educational scholarship of its kind, created by U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright and the U.S. Government in 1946. Aimed at promoting mutual understanding through educational exchange, it operates between the U.S. and 155 countries. In Australia, the scholarships are funded by the Australian and U.S. Governments

and corporate partners and administered by the Australian-American Fulbright Commission in Canberra. Applications for Fulbright Scholarships in 2011 open on 1 June, visit www.fulbright.com.au.

Note: This article was prepared from a provided press release.

VET Research Theses from New Zealand

In previous years we have provided a round-up of research theses awarded to Australians during the previous year. In this edition, thanks to New Zealand's Industry Training Federation, we have been able to contact New Zealand scholars about theses from that country. Three people responded to our invitation to tell us about their research theses.

▲ An investigation of the literacy and numeracy requirements and demands of entry-level supermarket work

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The author of this Masters thesis teaches on a programme called 'ESOL for Work and Education' in a New Zealand tertiary institution. All learners enter the programme with low or no English proficiency. Some also have low or no first language literacy and limited numeracy skills.

A requirement of the training is the provision of workplace learning. This obligation is met with a brief voluntary work placement (one day a week for eight weeks) for learners in the top two levels of the programme. Many learners are placed in supermarkets and other retail outlets doing work which generally is considered low skilled.

There is an apparent under-representation in workplace literature regarding the literacy and numeracy encountered and used in this type of work. In seeking to contribute to the body of knowledge about low skilled work in general and entry-level supermarket work in particular, research was carried out in a large, busy, suburban supermarket. The study was underpinned by the belief that both literacy and numeracy are social practices which cannot be separated from the contexts in which they occur. It adopted an ethnographic approach and was conducted through semi-structured interviews with supermarket managers and entry-level assistants; observation of assistants during induction and at work; and analysis of some significant supermarket texts.

Findings indicate that, while literacy and numeracy are generally not considered to be important pre-

requisites for entry-level supermarket work; supermarket assistants can be exposed to highly context-specific literacy texts and 'embedded' and invisible numeracy demands at induction and during parts of their working day.

The findings have significance for the teaching of workplace literacy and numeracy. They indicate that off-site programmes have an important role to play in providing a learning foundation, but point to the importance of and need for workplace-specific, on-the-job literacy and numeracy training.

Thesis available at:

<http://aut.researchgateway.ac.nz/handle/10292/752>

▲ Administrative staff in New Zealand: Their professional development opportunities and career pathways

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This descriptive study investigates the perceptions of administrative staff of their professional development opportunities and career pathways was conducted mid-2009. Administrative staff (office clerical, reception and secretarial) are predominantly female. In New Zealand there are approximately 250,000 working in roles which can be classified as administrative, of which 4/5^{ths} are female. The study used an on-line survey and focus groups. One hundred and ninety-three responded to the survey from throughout New Zealand. Fifteen of those respondents participated in the focus groups, held in both the North and South Islands.

Most participants were from larger organisations and perceived that training and professional development for them was available and supported. However many in these roles perceive themselves as undervalued within the business world. The professional development available was often *ad hoc* with no specific goal. The participants expressed unclear career pathways.

The findings from this research suggest that larger organisations provided considerable support for administrative staff but there were significant barriers, even where that support was available. These barriers were both internal (value of self) and external, impacting on the availability and the uptake of professional development opportunities. Career pathway limitations were related to internal and external barriers.

A conceptual model of the relationship of the key elements from the research, value of self, professional development opportunities and career pathways is presented.

▲ Towards a new theory of VET policy evaluation and engagement – a multiple stakeholder approach

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This research addresses the limitation in VET policy evaluative research where stakeholders' perspectives are ignored or taken for granted. It is based on the assumption that to build theory on evaluation of VET policy, it is useful to explore evaluation from the perspectives of its stakeholders. Industry Training in New Zealand is used as an example of a VET policy that has experienced increasing participation by stakeholders, but limited evaluation that largely ignores stakeholders' views.

Taking an inclusive, qualitative approach, this research seeks to unearth how different stakeholders in the state and tourism sectors evaluate the impact of Industry Training and how value is created for each from Industry Training. Fifty-two semi-structured interviews were completed with a cross-section of stakeholders representing policy makers, various interest groups, as well as HR and other managers, and trainees from four state and tourism sector organisations.

An analytical framework was developed from the VET, Human Capital, HRD and Policy Evaluation literatures. This framework consisted of two broad paradigms of evaluation:

- (1) The Strategic HRD/VET policy logic of skills investment = increased socio-economic prosperity, which views the outcomes of VET policy as largely value-free, quantifiable facts that are mutually beneficial to all stakeholders, which exist separately from these stakeholders, and;
- (2) The Critical HRD/Stakeholder logic that views the outcomes of VET policy as value-laden, not necessarily mutually beneficial to all stakeholders, nor existing outside of its stakeholders.

Responses from interviewees were compared against these paradigms and among different stakeholder groups to answer the main research question: How do stakeholders evaluate the impact of a VET policy?

The main research outcome is the development of a new framework and theory of VET policy evaluation, based on a comparative understanding of value creation from multiple stakeholders' perspectives.

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