RESEARCH TODAY

AVETRA
PROMOTING, DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING THE AUSTRALASIAN VET RESEARCH COMMUNITY

FROM **THE PRESIDENT**

Steven Hodge
President, AVETRA

Ethics? Research? Why they go hand-in-hand

When I was learning to do research there was a dreary process of 'getting ethics clearance'. There was a long form with endless questions (that sometimes didn't make sense to me) and you had to create and attach other documents like the information you would provide to research participants. Then, there was an ethics committee somewhere that reviewed your application and almost always (it seemed) had some issue that you then had to fix. Sometimes it was a long process and you couldn't start your research until you got that final clearance. Ethics seemed a bit like an inconvenience!

Once I started doing research it dawned on me that there is a deeper ethical aspect of research with and on people. At the most basic level, when people agree to take part in your research they are giving up their time and they are trusting you with their insights. They are also demonstrating faith in the power of research to improve things, and assume you are devoted to that too. They are helping you and are contributing to the progress of knowledge itself. When you think of it, there's quite a lot of responsibility you need to be willing to take on.

But the ethical responsibility begins well before data gathering begins. Designing and planning your research is a process that involves ethical decision making. How will you set things up so your intended participants do not feel pressured to be involved? That's a critical matter especially in settings where participants will be students or other vulnerable groups. How can you ensure people believe there won't be consequences for them if they decide not to participate? Are we aware of the power we have in these situations? Also, we have a responsibility to ensure the research is really worth doing, is worth the effort and resources, that it will contribute something of value.

After data collection the responsibility continues. The data you have gathered from people is worth respect and great care in analysis. The ethics of analysis and reporting is important. People who use and reference your research trust that your analysis was conducted with the highest integrity and what you report is absolutely truthful. Deserving that level of trustworthiness requires time and attention to detail. It demands a willingness to report exactly what you find, whether it suits your purposes or not.

For me it is very clear that research and ethics go hand-in-hand. At the national level, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and Australian Research Council (ARC) offer guidance on doing research in an ethical way.

CONTENTS

Here is the most recent version of their code:

Principles of responsible research conduct (2018)

1 Honesty in the development, undertaking and reporting of research

- Present information truthfully and accurately in proposing, conducting and reporting research.

2 Rigour in the development, undertaking and reporting of research

- Underpin research by attention to detail and robust methodology, avoiding or acknowledging biases.

3 Transparency in declaring interests and reporting research methodology, data and findings

- Share and communicate research methodology, data and findings openly, responsibly and accurately.

- Disclose and manage conflicts of interest.

4 Fairness in the treatment of others

- Treat fellow researchers and others involved in the research fairly and with respect.

- Appropriately reference and cite the work of others.

- Give credit, including authorship where appropriate, to those who have contributed to the research.

5 Respect for research participants, the wider community, animals and the environment

- Treat human participants and communities that are affected by the research with care and respect, giving appropriate consideration to the needs of minority groups or vulnerable people.

- Ensure that respect underpins all decisions and actions related to the care and use of animals in research.

- Minimise adverse effects of the research on the environment.

6 Recognition of the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be engaged in research that affects or is of particular significance to them

- Recognise, value and respect the diversity, heritage, knowledge, cultural property and connection to land of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

- Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples prior to research being undertaken, so that they freely make decisions about their involvement.

- Report to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the outcomes of research in which they have engaged.

7 Accountability for the development, undertaking and reporting of research

- Comply with relevant legislation, policies and guidelines.

- Ensure good stewardship of public resources used to conduct research.

- Consider the consequences and outcomes of research prior to its communication.

8 Promotion of responsible research practices

- Promote and foster a research culture and environment that supports the responsible conduct of research. (NHMRC, 2018, p. 2)

This code applies to all Australian organisations and researchers that are funded by the NHMRC or the ARC, which means that the bulk of research conducted in Australia needs to follow these principles. As you can see, the code is strong on values and takes a holistic view on the relationship between how you design research, how you treat your participants, and how you analyse and report your work. The whole process requires an ethical approach all the way through.

Organisations have a role to play in ensure research they are connected with is consistent with the code. That's why we often end up with formal ethics processes. But as you can see, regardless of any inconvenience that comes with a process like that, the larger issue is that research is an ethical undertaking. Good research is not just a matter of great design but it is about a commitment to growing knowledge is an ethical way. ■

Reference

National Health and Medical Research Council (2018). *Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research.* https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/attachments/grant%20documents/The-australian-code-for-the-responsible-conduct-of-research-2018.pdf

Vale Peter Noonan

It is with great sadness that AVETRA recognises the passing of Peter Noonan, a man who has played a major role in shaping Australia's Tertiary Sector and VET research landscape.

Most recently as Emeritus Professor at the Mitchell Institute, many in the sector will be aware of Peter's contributions through decades as a researcher, public servant, consultant and advisor to both national and state governments. Peter deployed his keen intellect in his passionate advocacy for Higher Education and VET policy, and has left an indelible mark on Australia's tertiary education system.

In the context of this magazine, long will Peter Noonan's research and policy work be referenced by both emerging and seasoned VET researchers.

As we anchor our own research in yours, Peter Noonan: we salute you.

FROM **THE EDITOR**

Welcome to the latest edition edition of AVETRA's *Research Today* magazine.

Across the world, the global pandemic has created challenges for societies, economies, businesses and communities. As with other service industries, all sectors within education have been forced to innovate to maintain their continuity and quality of service provision.

Andrew Williamson, Editor, *Research Today*

This extraordinary level of disruption presents once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to explore new ways of doing things. For the Vocational Education and Training sector, that includes our own systems and processes, VET pedagogy and the service profile that we offer our clients and communities. Arguably, VET is the best-placed education sector to lead applied economic and social reform. But how do we know that we are on the right path?

From the application of principles derived from the pure research of our stellar University sector, through to the aggregation and synthesis of lessons learned at the coalface of teaching or work, research-informed, reflective practice makes us more effective at what we do.

AVETRA's *Research Today* magazine seeks to harness the collective capability of the Australasian VET research community and share learning in a way that lifts our collective capacity. The need for this has never been greater, in my working life. Thank you to all of this edition's contributors.

I also wish to extend my thanks to AVETRA's outgoing President, Dr Steven Hodge, who has provided another thought-provoking message for this edition of *Research Today*. Steven has been an ardent supporter of the move to re-focus *Research Today* towards applied and practitioner research. It provides an accessible entry point for new and practitioner researchers who want to share the results of their structured enquiry projects with their community of practice, and do so safely.

As AVETRA President, Steven's contributions to *Research Today* are considered, constructive and highly accessible. In this edition, Steven reflects on Ethics in research through his own research journey and acknowledges the significant evolution of thought that has established the set ethics principles for some of our research regulators.

I tip my hat to Steven Hodge – and others – who are leading and supporting the emerging acknowledgement of the value of VET practitioner and applied research in Australasia. We will all grow stronger, together. ■

FROM **THE ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

The ongoing disruptions of the COVID pandemic have seen VET educators expand their engagement with hybrid facilitation models to support students to remain connected to their learning. The importance of collaboration

Paul Boys, Associate Editor *Research Today*

and human connection at a time when lock-downs and restrictions have impacted student health and wellbeing has shown the critical role that educators play in the holistic student experience. As we enter the next phase of "COVID normal", the VET sector needs to look to our local and international partners to share in the learnings from the past 2 years so we can shape a better and stronger VET sector that maintains its focus on students accessing world-class education connected to industry best-practice.

AVETRA's *Research Today* magazine provides all VET practitioners with the opportunity to share their experiences and research activities with the wider VET community to strengthen collaboration in a supported environment. If any budding researchers are looking to take the first or next step in their research journey, then Research Today is a great vehicle to support your personal and professional goals. Reach out with any questions or comments and remember that the VET research community is better when we all work to support the future strength of the network.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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How can I join AVETRA? >
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What events do AVETRA run? >

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Supporting the workplace learning of VET teachers: Mentoring and beyond

Susanne Francisco

How do people learn to become Vocational Education and Training (VET) teachers? What enables and constrains that learning? These questions are important ones. We know that education and training courses are part of the answer. We also know that they are not the entire answer. Since the ground-breaking work of Lave and Wenger (1991), people have become more aware of the importance of the workplace as a place of learning. And yet, in research spanning four different industries, Billett et al. (2014) found that the managers that participated in their research held a view that supporting the learning of their workers primarily involved learning as a result of training and education programs. This is consistent with Eraut's (2004) finding almost two decades ago, based on research across a range of different industries, that there is little understanding of "how much learning does (and how much more learning might) take place on the job" (p. 271). Research shows that a lot of the learning that a teacher does, takes place in the teaching workplace (Francisco, 2022; Francisco & Boud, 2021). And some places are better at supporting workplace learning than others.

Arrangements in the teaching workplace enable and constrain teacher learning. These arrangements vary from site to site, with some arrangements taking precedence in some sites, and others having a greater influence in other sites. These arrangements are not just physical. They involve the cultural-discursive, the material-economic, and the social political dimensions. The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) holds that the cultural-discursive arrangements in a workplace enables and constrains the sayings in a site. This includes what is said and how it is said. In VET this includes the use of industry language, broader education language, and VET specific language (such as language associated with training packages). Access to, and an understanding of, this language impacts on teacher learning. The material-economic arrangements, which enable and constrain the doings in a site, include things such as the physical arrangements, the available resources, the basis of employment of the teacher, the access to support staff, and timetable arrangements. Physical arrangements include things such as how teachers' desks are arranged, access to a shared tearoom, or how far the staffroom is from the teaching rooms. Social-political arrangements include arrangements associated with power and solidarity, and these enable and constrain the relatings in a site. This includes arrangements such as the inclusion (or exclusion) of casual teachers in the staffroom, who is invited to a shared coffee break, as well as things such as the

hierarchical arrangements in the organisation (see Mahon et al. 2017 for a brief introduction to this theory).

What teachers need to learn also varies between sites. There are various reasons for this. For instance, some teaching areas teach entirely online, others provide a range of blended or face to face options for students. Teaching disciplines also impact on what teachers learn (in addition to the content area). For instance, the teaching and assessment approaches of a teacher in Sport and Fitness is likely to vary to some extent from the approaches in Air Conditioning and Refrigeration, or Business. At a broad level what is learnt is the same (including teaching, assessment, student support), but in terms of specifics, each of these can look very different in different teaching areas and the practices that a teacher needs to undertake can be quite different. Novice teachers usually learn to undertake these practices in the same way they are undertaken by others in the site where they are teaching. The actions of experienced teachers thus become an important influence on the actions of novice and developing teachers.

Mentoring has been found to be a valuable support for teacher learning (Francisco, 2017, 2022). This includes induction mentoring as well as developmental mentoring. Induction mentoring is usually used in the first few months of a new job. Developmental mentoring focuses on the specific learning needs of the mentee (such as

> **"In many cases where teacher learning is well supported in the workplace, a trellis of practices that support learning (PSLs) develops.**

the development of online teaching skills, or authentic assessment approaches). There are a range of mentoring approaches, including face to face mentoring, peer group mentoring, and e-mentoring (Francisco, 2022). Whatever the approach, a focus on the learning needs and goals of the mentee is an important component of a successful mentoring relationship (Zachary, 2012).

In many cases where teacher learning is well supported in the workplace, a trellis of practices that support learning (PSLs) develops. This is a series of inter-related PSLs that create a strong framework for teacher learning. PSLs include (but are not limited to) shared coffee breaks, access to well-developed teaching resources, team teaching, and the collaborative development of teaching resources. Each trellis of PSLs varies, however in my research I have found that mentoring has always formed part of a strong trellis of PSLs.

Supporting the learning of teachers can require different approaches and strategies depending on the basis on

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which teachers are employed (casual, contract/permanent); the number of hours a week they teach; their level of teaching experience and level of accomplishment as a teacher; and the level of access they have to accomplished permanently employed teachers. Because a large proportion of the VET teacher workforce are casually employed (Knight et al., 2020), it is important that casual teacher learning is supported. Often the workplace arrangements for teachers who are employed on a sessional basis (casual teachers) constrain the learning of these teachers (Francisco, 2020). Casually employed teachers often do not feel welcome in the staffroom, have been given a staffroom well away from permanently employed teachers (in one instance from my research, a 10-minute walk away), or if they are in the same staffroom they are separated in some way from permanent teachers. This removes one of the important supports for casual teachers: interaction with permanent teachers. One of the reasons that casual teachers are separated from permanent teachers is so that the busy permanent teachers are not distracted by questions and requests for support. This is especially an issue where there is high casualisation and high staff turnover. Where there is high turnover of casual staff, permanent staff become increasingly less inclined to volunteer to support new teachers (knowing they are only likely to stay for a short time) and this can lead into a dangerous downward spiral with casual teachers leaving because they are not supported.

In addition to those accessed by novice teachers, experienced teachers often have a broader range of external input that supports their learning, including networks, conferences, communities of practice, and undertaking education and training courses specifically focused on the development of teaching and assessment approaches. Accomplished teachers (experienced teachers with well-developed skills) take the new ideas and trial them in their own workplace, making site-specific alterations as appropriate. Accomplished teachers also often further develop their skills through undertaking more difficult projects, engaging in an action research project, or through mentoring others (Francisco, 2022).

Much of the learning that VET teachers do in relation to being a teacher takes place after they become a teacher. For most VET teachers (novice, experienced, and accomplished) the learning that they do in the workplace is fundamental to their developing role as a teacher. The arrangements in their workplace play a crucial role in enabling and constraining that learning.

For more information about how to support the workplace learning of VET teachers, see the following book: Francisco, S. (2022) *Supporting the Workplace Learning of Vocational and Further Education Teachers: Mentoring and beyond*. Routledge. ∎

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Universal Design for Learning in Tertiary Education: A systematic review's implications
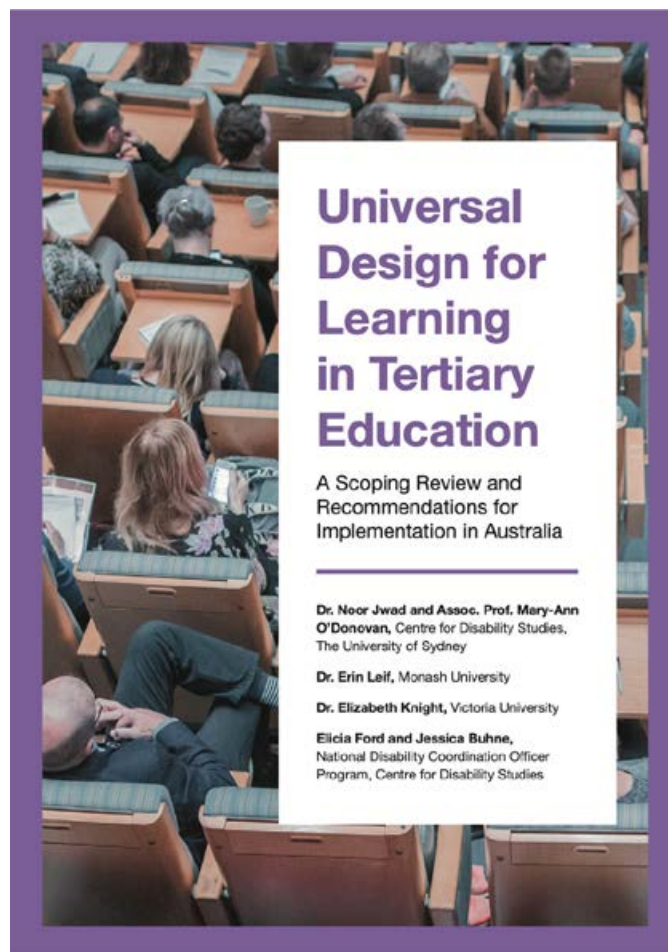
Ford, E., Buhne, J., Knight, E., Leif, E., Jwad, N. and O'Donovan, M.-A.

Research was recently undertaken using the systematic review method (Newman and Gough, 2020) to understand the Australian and international applications of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This work contributed to a published scoping review with a number of recommendations, one of which has been fully realised – a national eLearning training program on Universal Design for Learning. There has to date been great take up of this free eLearning program which was been developed by the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program and the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ACDET). It is open to everyone but is primarily designed for educational staff working in Higher Education and the Vocational Education and Training sector.

Here we trace the background work that supported the development of the eLearning training on Universal Design for Learning. In Australia, UDL appears in only a small number of policies and tertiary institute websites, likely attributed to lack of reinforcement in Government policies in higher education and VET, and subsequent slow adaptation of UDL in these sectors. In the past decade, examples of the UDL approach in higher education have been published, though only a few examples of applying UDL in VET institutions are available in the literature despite a growing awareness and interest.

UDL is defined as a framework to improve and optimise teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn (Meyer et al., 2014). Learner diversity can comprise physical, visual, hearing, sensory, attention, and communication barriers. UDL recognises there is no 'average' learner and that learners come with a wide variety of prior experiences, abilities, preferences and needs, and enables curricula to be written flexibly so they are accessible to the highest number of learners, addressing the variance in the student population. At the same time, UDL does not negate the need to make extra accommodations for some learners. This project fills a gap in the Australian literature by drawing together literature and practice on UDL in the tertiary level in Australia, uniquely it treats post-school education as a single system and presents findings that are in the most part applicable in both VET and higher education.

The review demonstrated a lack of evidence available on the use of UDL in tertiary level education in Australia. From a human rights perspective, diversity should not deprive people from equal opportunities in education. However, initial scoping has identified that UDL principles are not yet fully or consistently embedded in the development of

Universal Design for Learning in Tertiary Education

A Scoping Review and Recommendations for Implementation in Australia

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Universal Design for Learning in Tertiary Education

tertiary education coursework or curriculum in Australia. Further there were barriers identified for those who implemented UDL into their academic courses. These issues included the time required to prepare, the expense of technology as well as the physical environment of the classroom and require structural support for UDL implementation. The research suggests that an increase in the application of the UDL framework and principles in tertiary educator practice is likely to generate evidence to inform a shift in tertiary education policy towards inclusive design that will better meet the needs of diverse learners.

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An increase in the application of the UDL framework and principles in tertiary educator practice is likely to generate evidence to inform a shift in tertiary education policy towards inclusive design that will better meet the needs of diverse learners. Based on our analysis of the literature we identified the following practice and policy-based recommendations, ADCET and the NDCO have made significant steps toward supporting the first recommendations:

1. Training in UDL should be a requirement for all staff involved in course design and student facing engagement in the tertiary education sector. This type of training should be based upon and model the principles of UDL and be tailored to the needs of the tertiary education sector to proactively meets the needs of diverse learners

2. Tertiary education institutes should publicly commit, through organisational strategy and policies, to provide educators and learning designers UDL training programs and activities to increase institutional capability

3. Tertiary education institutes should, through organisational strategy and policies, adequately resource application of UDL in curriculum design and delivery, and support UDL application through procurement practices which ensure learning technologies are accessible

4. Through a coordinated approach of working parties, consortiums, and/or communities of practice, tertiary educators and learning designers could strategically share and document learnings for continuous improvement in effective implementation of UDL

5. In conjunction with the Recommendation #4, researchers could capture and publish new findings related to the implementation of UDL in the Australian tertiary education sector, to build the local evidence-base and inform a shift in Australian Government tertiary education policy towards inclusive design that will better meet the needs of diverse learners

6. Tertiary education institutions, as part of strategic planning and student support frameworks, could look for ways to garner support for UDL by articulating how UDL might proactively meet the needs of a larger number of students, thus reducing the need for students to seek additional support to successfully complete their studies (and thus reducing workload for educators and administrators). This may allow more targeted and intensive resources to be prioritised for those with more complex needs

7. In conjunction with Recommendation #6, tertiary education institutions could look for ways to measure the impact of the introduction of UDL into course design and delivery (for example, through user testing, surveys, and focus groups with students) and how UDL might maximise equitable access to tertiary education for all learners (for example, by reducing the onus on individual students to share information about their personal circumstances and reducing the number of requests for individual accommodations)

8. The proposed Student Equity in Higher Education Roadmap could include a national tertiary education strategy for people with disability aligned to the recommendations of the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education Final Report

9. Aligned with the Australian Government widening participation priority, Australian Government Agencies could articulate their broad support for the application of UDL principles in the design and delivery of tertiary education coursework, through position statements, funding for initiatives to increase knowledge and skill in UDL, and the development of policy that includes reference to the implementation of UDL. ■

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Summative Assessment using the WorldSkills Methodology

Mick Prato

Australia's VET system embraces competency-based training and assessment (CBT/CBA), which makes the measuring and recognition of excellence, challenging. There is a significant body of formal and informal research dedicated to the merits and pitfalls of CBA. Several commentators have in recent years suggested that CBA could be strengthened through independent and/or scored assessment. For example, the 'Quality of assessment in vocational education and training' discussion paper by the Australian DET (January 2016) noted that "external assessment provides a clear mechanism to ensure the validity of the assessment process".

Numerous countries around the world do not use CBA and instead use a graded system to assess the skill level of VET students (e.g: Finland). Some recently-reformed VET systems in the world have deployed the internationally-recognised WorldSkills model of assessment, with Russia being the greatest exponent.

WorldSkills is an international skills competition for young people that takes place every two years. It is the world's largest vocational education skills excellence event that truly reflects global industries skills expectations. The success of the integration of the WorldSkills assessment and competition methodology and the WorldSkills Standards Specifications (WSSS – WorldSkills Foundation, 2012) into the VET systems of other jurisdictions suggests that it has the potential to strengthen and enhance the Victorian VET system.

There is evidence to suggest that skills competitions can "raise quality, promote professional development and drive improvements in vocational training" (MoVE 2011). Although Australia has been involved with WorldSkills competitions since 1981, very little use has been made of the broader benefits and learnings from the competitions and their potential application within mainstream VET delivery. When analysing the differences between competitions and typical VET class activity, it is easy to define where enhancements (see full paper, here) can be made to the current system that will better prepare graduates for the challenges they will face throughout their careers.

Competition in any form brings out the best in people; pushes them to excel, promotes excellence, lifts aspirations and, if used effectively, can enhance learning (Fabien 2018) depending on the industry. There are currently very few ways in which VET students can test themselves and demonstrate their practical capability. WorldSkills Competitions simulate as near as possible the day-to-day

> " …There is evidence to suggest that skills competitions can "raise quality, promote professional development and drive improvements in vocational training".

routine of the workplace, a task needs to be undertaken and completed accurately, within a tight timeframe, in what can be a highly stressful environment. Studies have been undertaken, most notably, the Modelling of Vocational Excellence (MoVE) (WorldSkills Foundation 2011), demonstrating the link between WorldSkills competitions and the development of the transversal skills of competitors. Surprisingly, this growth and development is irrespective of the students finishing position within the competition, with many previous WorldSkills competitors finding that through the experience they now have the confidence to set-up their own businesses and in turn employ apprentices who then go on to compete as well.

Perhaps the greatest resource available to the Australian VET system, through its association with WorldSkills Australia, is the rigorous assessment criteria developed for the WS competition projects, enabling a graded assessment to more fully identify the level of competency of graduates. The assessments focus on competence through to excellence, using the WSSS. The WSSS have been developed through consultation with industry globally to determine the intermediate work roles of relevant skill areas with a weighting built into the assessment based on the identified relative importance as demanded by industry. With numerous projects and assessments already developed and aligned to Australian National Training Packages, potential capstone assessments are already available, negating the need to allocate funding and resources to establish the criteria required for implementation. Alignment to the WSSS assessments would ensure more mobility of qualifications in an ever- increasing global marketplace.

A key area where the use of the WorldSkills assessment model in VET could provide some benefits is in Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) or VETDSS (VET Delivered in Secondary Schools). The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) achieves a high status due to a robust common measurement of student learning, with students guaranteed a high-integrity independent and widely acknowledged assessment providing both internal and external validity of their learning (Brown & Sutton, 2008). Unfortunately, students undertaking a VCAL pathway - which includes a mandatory VET component - are not currently given the same opportunity. Although VCAL achieves commendable internal validity through its flexibility, it is viewed as "lesser by some students, teachers, schools and the wider community" (Brown & Sutton 2008). The authors also cite cases of industry questioning whether VETiS graduates are really prepared to perform entry-level tasks within the workplace.

Implementation of the WorldSkills model introduces the means to achieve an external assessment of ability. Culturally – alongside VCE – the application of a high integrity program of external summative assessments to VETiS subjects seems a requirement to install confidence in the abilities of these students.

Current attention on the importance of high-quality, external skills assessment, by the Victorian Skills Commission for instance, suggests that practical external assessment should be implemented for scored-assessed VCE/VET subjects to more accurately gauge student learning. This would provide a stronger indicator than what is possible through written examinations.

One of the most important observations during my research was that the WSSS were deliberately developed using broad learning outcomes. They are occupationally based, allowing them to be used as assessment frameworks across an extensive range of VET systems. Australian Training Packages use level descriptors and outcomes, meaning the adoption of a WorldSkills methodology within Australia would be a relatively smooth transition.

Despite being relative newcomers to the WorldSkills movement, having joined in 2012, Russia has fully embraced the WorldSkills assessment methodology. Russia has utilised the experience and learnings of their involvement with WorldSkills competitions to undertake significant reforms of their VET system over the last five years. They have embedded the WorldSkills standards into their technical colleges and are now conducting Demonstration Exams for the certification of Vocational Qualifications using the WSSS. To date, more than 90,000 students have already undertaken these tests. The same benchmark is also being applied to the training of teachers in various vocational fields. The reforms have seen an increase in the number of Russian school leavers entering VET rise from 19% to 59% over the same period. ■

WFCP 2022 *TVET Excellence for ALL*

DONOSTIA – SAN SEBASTIAN
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Every two years the World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics (WFCP) holds a World Congress that attracts hundreds of VET sector delegates from across the globe. Melbourne hosted the last World Congress in 2018, and the 2020 Congress was rescheduled to June 2022, to be hosted by TKNIKA in San Sebastian, Basque Country/Spain.

TKNIKA has an international reputation for applied research and innovation, so it is not surprising that this theme is prominent in the conference program.

For more information on what heralds being the largest international gathering of VET leaders and practitioners in 2022, visit the conference website www.wfcp2022.eus/en/home.

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Mick Prato's full ISSI Fellowship Report can be read here: www.issinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Prato-Final.pdf

Editors' note: interesting article to have a look at: www.worldskillsuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/rsa_wsuk_russia-case-study-02-12-19.pdf

WFCP

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Basque VET Applied Research Centre

Connection in Aged Care
Elderly – Personal Care Attendants – Family

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Abstract

This paper reflects on a vital aspect of the evaluation on Aged Care training – interpersonal skills. It highlights the requisite of integrating the teaching of workplace communication skills within the scope of the units of competency. Through anecdotal passages of the direct experience of an elderly father and the visits of his daughter to his aged care residence, Personal Care Attendants (PCAs) and their trainers are alerted to the relevance and importance of the practice and knowledge they are required to have of each responsibility covered in the different themes represented. This dialogue will provide valuable role-play text for the use of prospective PCAs in their Aged Care training.

> **NOTE:** The two 'Units' (#6 and #8) are from a forthcoming book featuring nine 'Units'

Introduction

In training to become Personal Care Attendants, trainees are required to demonstrate the standards of skills and knowledge as expressed in the Units of Competency[1] of the Community Services Training Package qualification, Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing). The reflective consideration of this paper looks deeply into the implementation of attributes as required in Units of Competency such as: Support independence and wellbeing; Communicate and work in health or community services; and Meet personal support needs. The reader will be drawn into the relevance and pure necessity of being skilled in the elements of these Units of Competency. The required knowledge, skills and techniques of elements such as promoting independence, supporting social, emotional and psychological wellbeing, effective communication and providing personal support throughout in the paper's focus on the skills beneficial to the care and comfort of the elderly in care. The units reveal brief dialogue, written verbatim, and are followed anecdotally through considered reflection between and beyond the lines of each spoken exchange. These reflective passages are followed by theoretical aspects of care relevant to the theme of each unit. This theory is then developed into examples of the actual practice required and the responsibility of PCAs regarding the theme. These theoretical aspects can be seen to alert PCAs to the relevance and the importance of each theme,

and to offer guidelines on the practice and knowledge they are required to have of each responsibility and each type of behaviour. The theoretical components also reflect on the needs of the elderly regarding the behavioural response and actions of their families while they are in Aged Care.

The people we rely on for the care of our loved ones in Aged Care are the Personal Care Attendants who are responsible for the physical and psychological comfort of the residents, their welfare, happiness, security and safety.

Unit 6: Family Monitoring and Duty of Care

Phone call:

"Hello, hello, hello Anna"

"Yes Dad!"

"It's Dad Anna. I can't...."

"Dad, I'm coming around. I'll be there soon."

On racing through Reception:

"Dad's talking gibberish. Needs help. Stroke."

With the aid of his walker, Dad was making his way along the hallway to the dining room. Obviously confused and unsteady. I led him back to his room. Although he said that his head felt strange, he couldn't detect anything wrong with his speech which was slurred and gibberish. I called the nurse and asked her to ring the doctor. I rang by husband and my brother, both of whom joined me at the home.

It was a late night as the Locum did not arrive until after midnight. In the meantime, Dad had rested, and his speech cleared. He loved it that we were all there with him. Had Dad not phoned me, the staff would have remained oblivious to the fact that behind his closed door, Dad had suffered a mini stroke.

Theory to Practice on Family Monitoring and Duty of Care

Confusion may well become an issue for the elderly. They may fail to recognise the reasons for their confusion. Is it tiredness? Is it indecision? Is it something more dire?

The Personal Care Attendant (PCA), together with Aged Care staff, must support residents through their confusion. They should devise strategies to promote healthy lifestyle practices for the people in their care. Ideally, this action will be taken early on in their care programme, as a preventative measure.

The carer must ensure that the resident has access to a telephone and relevant phone numbers; that the resident

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1   Unit of Competency definition http://himaa2.org.au/education/?q=node/90

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has access to aids such as a walking frame to assist with independent living. Whether working in Home Care or Residential Care, carers should confirm that the resident is able to identify and acknowledge their strengths and self-care capacity. To tell the person these things once is totally inefficient. They must not assume comprehension by the resident. The PCA must use their communication skills of discussion, questioning and repetitive checking and reminders to make sure of the attention and the cognition of the elderly person. In addition, the PCA must discuss these strategies with the resident's family to build trust, total support and understanding.

Following a 'turn' by the resident, both family and carers should talk to the elderly person about what has happened to them. They should talk about the symptoms the resident experienced and advise them to tell staff if they sense a repeat of these sensations. Encourage the resident to express their needs, and not to hide or ignore them.

Unit 8: Respect Dignity Manners

When sitting with Dad after work on his second day at the centre, there was a knock on his door. A young Personal Care Attendant (PCA) opened the door, gave a beaming smile, and said: *"Hello Leonard. Are you ready for dinner darling?"*

Dad would normally cringe at this term of endearment from a stranger, but this time, he was obviously flattered. Being addressed in this way by this beautiful young woman, whose every intention was fitting and respectful, had given Dad a glow. It had also simplified my exit, as Dad was only too keen to be taken off to dinner.

This PCA was dignified and respectful of Dad throughout his time at the centre. It was a mutual respect which developed over time. I connected with this young woman in her respect of Dad's dignity and her politeness towards him.

It was the week before Dad died, when I was sitting with my frail and ailing father, that this PCA told me of Dad's respect towards her and his manners towards her daughter.

"You know Anna, he was so well when he came here.

And do you know that Leonard often spoke with my daughter when she came here after school, and every time we walked past his room to go home, Leonard said: "Goodnight", and called my daughter by her name, every time. He was always so polite."

Theory to Practice on Respect Dignity Manners

Personal Care Attendants communicate with numerous people in the course of their work. They encounter people of all generations, from the elderly in their care, to family members, including the adult children of their residents to grandchildren of varying ages, to siblings, cousins and friends of their residents. They communicate with these individuals through brief encounters, casual conversations, or detailed and specific discussion.

Each resident comes into Aged Care with a wealth of worldly experience paramount in the formation of their value system, their morals and their pattern of behaviour. Many residents who enter Aged Care in a lucid state maintain their values and morals and behave accordingly. The family and friends of each resident know only too well the values and morals held by their loved one and they, in turn, respect and support the behaviour pattern known to be preferred by their loved one and friend.

In caring for their residents, *often* the PCA will quickly ascertain each individual's preferred behaviour patter. This will be apparent in their manner of speech, in their behaviour towards family members and friends, in their response and attitude towards the PCA, and in the respect that is evident towards the family of the PCA. If the resident is polite, pleasant and respectful, then you should respond in kind. If they are rude, impolite and disrespectful, then you must lead by being assertive in a polite, well-behaved manner. Hopefully, in time, they will see through your example, the benefits to be had through pleasant, enjoyable communication. You will gain the respect of your residents by actions such as knocking on their door before entering. You will then build on that respect by ensuring that your manners mirror the positive manners displayed by the residents. Over time, behaviour may change according to the residents' sleep patterns, level of nutrition, or simply as with us all, their mood of that day.

The individual's stage of life does not guarantee good manners, but for most people in your care, these manners are there. Allow them to demonstrate this to you. Give them time. You will be pleasantly surprised. Prior to Aged Care, your residents led active, busy lives. They worked with and dealt with people from all walks of life. Now, in Aged Care, they have had that life stripped away from them. It is a wonderful part of your job as a PCA to help them to regain their self-esteem and confidence. Remember always that these people are gentlemen and gentlewomen in both senses of the word. ∎

References

Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, (2021), Final Report – Executive Summary. Access at https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-executive-summary

Prime Skills – the 5 C's everyone needs

By Simon Bruce

The importance of skills needed for 21st century jobs

The development of new skills, and the enhancement of existing skills, is a fundamental aspect of all levels and stages of formal education. It is also an essential aspect of formal and informal work-place learning activities. The challenge arises that the technological advances within our society and workplaces presents issues relating to what skills are required and when they are required. In part this has seen a rise in the call for more technology-related skills.

This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that there is often a lag in the responsiveness of educational institutions compared to the rate of change of technology.

Figure 1: Rate of Change versus Time to Change

As is shown in the above diagram, as the gap widens the expectation on technology increases (perhaps unrealistically) to help bridge this gap (a gap that technology itself has helped create). Individuals are expected to develop new skills to capitalise on this new technology. Simultaneously, these gaps heighten the need for inter-personal skills to better work with colleagues and to relate to stakeholders. They also intensify the need for skills to help shape public policy and to guide the structure and capability of learning institutions.

In short, technology is bringing new ways of working which in turn require specific (and sometimes, new) skills. However, fundamental skills that have always been deemed necessary are now becoming increasingly important.

This has led to what is referred to as the **skills dilemma**[1], which broadly states that:

1. Jobs are either requiring advanced skills or are deskilling

(due to the rise of bots, automation, AI, and/or the influx of disruptors). Roles are increasingly aligned to either data analysis activities or data entry tasks.

2. There is an ever-increasing focus by business on customer interaction and retention. This leads to a desire to capture richer data to enhance customer share, to gain competitive advantage, and to increase market penetration. More and more organisations of all types and sizes are devoting resources to the analysis of data relating to customer insights (this includes education providers) ultimately to create a more profitable relationship.

3. Ironically, it is often the least paid, least valued, least incentivised, least informed, least skilled employee that holds customer value in their hands. In other words, the frontline between an organisation's product/service isn't the highly skilled data analyst, programmer/coder, engineer or anyone in senior management. Instead, organisations will live and die on how well their customer service staff, their front desk staff, their call centre operators, engage, interact and connect with customers (customers includes students!).[2]

The skills dilemma highlights the fact that increased attention is being devoted to high prwofile skills related to newer technologies to the determent of fundamental or core skills that arguably have always been important but are now becoming crucial.

When commencing my International Specialised Skills Institution Fellowship[3], I realised that I needed a suitable list of these fundamental skills. It quickly became evident that considerable research[4] has been undertaken into skills that will be required for jobs of the future.

This has resulted in numerous terms being used to describe these skills: work-ready skills, 21st Century skills, foundation skills, future skills, career skills, etc. It is noted that the term soft skills remain a key descriptor in many studies. (These studies listed in my ISSI Fellowship report at Endnote 2).

This article isn't seeking to document all of these studies; however, it is appropriate to mention several that are highly relevant.

Firstly, the World Economic Forum (WEF) has produced

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1 Brotherhood of St Laurence, (2018) The Skills Dilemma: skills under-utilisation and low-wage work, NVCER, Adelaide. Available http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/199581

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2 Brotherhood of St Laurence, (2018) The Skills Dilemma: skills under-utilisation and low-wage work, NVCER, Adelaide. Available http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/199581

3 Social Learning and Collaborative Learning Enhancing Learners Prime Skills, International Specialised Skills Institute, applied research Fellowship, 2019 https://www.issinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Bruce-Final.pdf

4 For the full list of studies cited in my ISSI Fellowship research activity refer the final report.

several significant publications in recent years. They created a list of what were deemed the top skills in 2015, and compared this to their predicted skills for 2020 and (recently updated for) 2025.

Table 1: World Economic Forum Top Skills (World Economic Forum – Future of Jobs Report 2020)

Top skills in 2015	Top skills in 2020	Top skills in 2025
1. Complex problem-solving	1. Complex problem-solving	1. Analytical thinking and innovation
2. Coordinating with others	2. Critical thinking	2. Active learning and learning strategies
3. People Management	3. Creativity	3. Complex problem solving
4. Critical thinking	4. People management	4. Critical thinking and analysis
5. Negotiation	5. Coordinating with others	5. Creativity, originality and initiative
6. Quality control	6 Emotional intelligence	6. Leadership and social influence
7. Service orientation	7. Judgements and decision making	7. Technology use, monitoring and programming
8. Judgements and decision making	8. Service orientation	8. Technology design and programming
9. Active listening	9. Negotiation	9. Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility
10. Creativity	10. Cognitive flexibility	10. Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation

WEF highlighted the impact of technological drivers on this shift in skills including: the mobile internet and cloud technology; advances in computer power and big data; and the new energy supplies and their supporting technologies. This led WEF to define what they term 21st Century Skills (21C) that need to be the focus of a student's education. These 21C skills comprise:

- Foundational literacies (how students apply core skills to everyday tasks)

- Competencies (how students approach complex challenges)

- Character qualities (how students approach their changing environment)

Other studies, such as Deliotte Access Economics in partnership with DeakinCo, assessed the importance of soft (or interpersonal/transferable) skills to improve the Australian workforce and businesses. The study produced a list of soft skills for business success.

Table 2: Deloitte Soft Skills for Business Success
(Deloitte, Access Economics – 2017)

Key soft skills prominent for successful professionals	
Communication	Social skills
Organisation	Creativity
Teamwork	Interpersonal communication
Always punctual	Adaptability
Critical thinking	Friendly personality

This study highlighted the importance of transferable skills (those that can be applied in varied contexts), employability skills (those required to gain a job and to then advance a career), and enterprise skills (those required to create solutions to business issues and recognise the opportunities that exist).

Additionally, LinkedIn surveyed their users' profiles who transferred between roles and found that there were key soft skills that were prominent amongst the more successful professionals. This enabled LinkedIn to produce what they deemed as the most in-demand soft skills in 2018 and 2020:

Table 3: LinkedIn Key Soft Skills
(LinkedIn – 2018 and 2020)

2018	2020
Self-management	Creativity
Communication	Persuasion
Teamwork	Collaboration
Problem solving	Adaptability
Digital literacy	Emotional intelligence
Critical thinking	Only top 5 reported
Innovation	Only top 5 reported
Emotional judgement	Only top 5 reported
Global citizenship	Only top 5 reported
Professional ethics	Only top 5 reported
Enterprise skills	Only top 5 reported

On a slightly different front, Hart Research Associates on behalf of The Association of American Colleges and Universities conducted a study that produced a list of learning outcomes rated by employers.

Table 4: Hart Research Associates, Employer-rated Learning Outcomes
(Hart Research Associates – 2015)

Learning outcomes rated by employers	
The ability to effectively communicate orally	**85%**
The ability to work effectively with others in teams	**83%**
The ability to effectively communicate in writing	**82%**
Ethical judgement and decision making	**81%**
Critical thinking and analysis	**81%**
The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings	**80%**
The ability to analyse complex problems	**70%**
The ability to locate, organise and evaluate informations from multiple sources	**68%**
The ability to innovate and be creative	**65%**
Stay current on changing technologies and their applications to the workplace	**60%**
The ability to work with numbers and understand statistics	**56%**
The ability to analyse and solve problems with people from different backgrounds and cultures	**56%**

This study highlights the importance placed on the key skills that enable people to interact with each other, to express themselves articulately and to make sound decisions.

Numerous other studies all concluded that similar skills are required to tackle the 21st Century skills landscape.

Undoubtedly, the rise of big data (both as an analysis activity and as a standard feature of businesses), there will be an increasing need for appropriate "hard" skills. This undeniably has contributed to the push for STEM focused educational opportunities. However, this shouldn't be to the detriment of the key soft skills as clearly highlighted in the above studies.

Importantly, these studies highlight the skills employers are actively seeking when they recruit.

In fact, there is a trend by leading organisations (including Google, Apple and Facebook) not requiring employees to have college degrees. Instead, they are recruiting school leavers who possess the key skills that will create, enable and enhance a productive and harmonious workplace culture.

As these shifting requirements become more widely known amongst students and potential students, they will begin to question the relevance of their studies if they don't include a focus on the attainment of these key soft skills.

Prime Skills: navigating the new employment landscape

Whilst the term soft skills remains prevalent in many studies and reports, and is often used in numerous settings, it is deemed somewhat clumsy and even misrepresentative of what these important skills are. There is also a school of thought that refers to soft skills as permanent skills as they are skills that are always needed no matter what the job, task or activity (and hard skills are temporary skills as they more readily become outdated or, at least, need to be updated as new technology, new roles or new workplace activities dictate).

With this in mind, I propose the concept of **Prime skills** that encapsulates the five key skills as evidenced from the numerous studies. These Prime Skills are **collaboration**, **communication**, **critical thinking**, **creativity** and **centredness**. It is considered that these Prime Skills succinctly cover most soft skills and/or they can be the foundation for the development of other key soft skills. Importantly, when coupled together they have the capability to enhance skills development in many areas covered in all of the above studies. Finally, these Prime Skills can enhance and contribute to the development of technological/digital skills and business skills alike.

Figure 2: Prime Skills – the 5Cs (© Simon Bruce 2019)

This model of Prime Skills takes much of the previous studies and distils the fundamental "soft skills" into a package that can be considered prime to all activities (both work and learning related). The key components of Prime Skills are as follows:

▪ **Collaboration**: embraces negotiation, team work, diversity (both awareness of and working with).

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- **Communication**: embraces LLN (language, literacy, numeracy), presentation skills, verbal and non-verbal communication.

- **Critical Thinking**: embraces decision making, questioning, reasoning, employing different perspectives, open mindedness.

- **Creativity**: embraces innovation, continuous improvement.

- **Centredness**: embraces emotional intelligence, resilience.

These are referred to as Prime Skills as they are analogous to prime numbers (in number theory) and prime paint (in the painting profession).

Prime numbers are the natural numbers greater than one that are not products of two smaller numbers. In other words, they are not formed by multiplying other numbers. A prime number, when multiplied with ether another prime number or with a composite number, is capable of creating another composite number. Composite numbers are just as their name implies, a composition of other numbers. This is a good analogy for Prime Skills, which essentially exist in their own right, but when combined together with one or more Prime Skills, or with a non-prime-skill (e.g. a skill more aligned to the use of technology, etc.), they would create a composite skill.

The analogy to prime paint draws on the fact that they are one of the most powerful tools used by any professional painter. What goes underneath the actual paint is crucial for the overall painting job; it depends entirely on how well the item to be painted is primed. For this reason, prime paint is often seen as an excellent problem-solver that's less like paint and more like glue. It sticks to whatever surface is being prepared and turns it into a smooth, uniform surface that's ready for paint. Relate this process to the concept of skills development. Prime Skills can be seen as the skills that prepare a learner for a task needing to be completed. These Prime Skills act as glue for all other skills to adhere to and make it possible for these skills to be scaffolded.

Importantly, these Prime Skills need to not only focus on what is being taught but how students are being taught. In short, educators need to be expert and proficient in Prime Skills and ensure their learning programs and activities exploit opportunities to firstly develop, then enhance, and finally embed new knowledge and reinforce these five Prime Skills.

My other research activities included conversations with influential international learning and development practitioners. These practitioners[5], who often work with organisations and their newly recruited graduates, validated and endorsed these Prime Skills, as follows:

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5 For the full list of studies cited in my ISSI Fellowship research activity refer the final report.

- Workplaces are tough and getting tougher and everyone, in particular new graduates, need resilience and critical thinking to manage these problems because no one else will.

- As more organisations enable their learners with learning assets that flow via collaborative practices, new entrants need to possess communication, collaboration and critical thinking skills when they enter the organisation.

- When students understand the crucial role Prime Skills have on their career prospects, they will choose their education provider based on how well Prime Skills are integrated into the curriculum.

This last point is crucial, as it will require educators to also be proficient in these Prime Skills and to use them when designing, developing and delivering learning activities. ■

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