Building Research Capability in VET

The importance of VET Practitioner Research Capabilities and Networks – pros and cons in contemporary times

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Our research:
1. What is practitioner research in VET?
2. Why do we need it?
3. What does it take to do it?
4. How can we foster more of it?

Discussion questions:
- What capabilities do VET practitioners need to do research?
- How can we better utilise research communities to develop them?

Objective:
- Discussion paper with recommended actions
Our argument

1. Scholarly practice (practitioner inquiry and research) is critical to VET
2. Scholarly networks are important to developing and sustaining research capacity

If we are to develop the capabilities of graduates and workers to think ‘critically, flexibly and creatively’, then we too must possess these capacities and model them to learners (Reid, 2004)
**Australian Context**

- **Australian VET market 2017 (NCVER):**
  - About 4193 training providers
  - 4.2 million students
  - 41 Public VET Providers (TAFE Institutes):
    - Dual-Sector (TAFE/University)
    - Mixed-sector (VET and HE)
    - VET only
  - 3156 Private Providers:
    - Not for Profit & For Profit
    - Mixed-sector and VET only
  - Plus universities, schools, enterprise providers and community education providers.

- **Regulators:**
  - VET - The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)
  - Higher Education - Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

1. What is VET practitioner research?

- Ranges from reflective practice to pure research
- Involves less traditional approaches and outputs
- Often small scale, localised and applied or ‘action-based’ and rarely ‘pure’ (Jonas, 2012)
- Focused on teaching and industry practices
- An ‘interplay’ between practice-based knowledge derived from experience and research-based knowledge gained from empirical inquiry (Nilsen and Ellstrom, 2012)
Good teaching means that teachers are also learners (Boyer, 1990)
2. Why do we need it?

Scholarly inquiry and research by VET practitioners is linked to:

- The quality of educational outcomes (Boyer, 1990)
- Innovation in teaching and learning practices (Beddie and Simon 2017, Waters 2014)
- The professionalisation of VET
21 C skills, knowledge and capabilities:

- Technology - automation, digitisation and artificial intelligence
- Service orientation and communication skills (CSIRO, 2016)
- STEM and higher technical skills (AiG, 2017)
- Enterprising mindsets, business literacy, critical thinking, innovation (AiG, 2017)
- Career resilience, ethical behaviour, capability to evaluate information in a world of ‘alternative facts’ and to work in a global economy (BCA, 2017).
Ensuring relevant VET qualifications

- New models of VET beyond:
  - Singular, linear models of learning
  - Qualifications based on technical skills and knowledge (BCA, 2017)

- Pathways into higher qualifications:
  - The workforce will need higher qualifications as work is automated
  - High growth occupations require a Diploma or Degree (CSIRO, 2016)
  - 60% of jobs now require at least Certificate III (BCA, 2017)

- Students are looking for return on their investment in education (McCrindle, 2017)
VET Professionals

- Life long professional learning model
- Evidence base for improving pedagogic practice (from a practitioners’ view)
- Enhances capability to:
  - Make sense of complexity
  - Engage in educational debates
  - Connect with change agendas
  - Interlace theory and practice
  - Innovate
- Builds pedagogic capital and reputation
Strengthening VET’s voice

- Bridging the gap between policy and practice
- Shifting thinking about VET practitioners as implementers of policy and curriculum products to how VET’s educative work can be strengthened in a rapidly changing world (Reid, 2004)
- VET’s contribution to social democracy and the national innovation agenda
- Connecting VET practitioners with transformative change agendas:
  - Positioning practitioners and students at the centre of policy agendas
  - A voice in policy development
Discussion

1. What skills, knowledge and capabilities are required by practitioners to undertake inquiry and research in VET?

2. How can these skills and capabilities be fostered and developed?
Our research concludes...

- By encouraging practitioner research and enquiry by investing in building capability
- Recognising that research and enquiry is an integral part of a VET educator’s job and to the quality of teaching and learning
- Promoting the outcomes of practitioner research and enquiry to other educators and the sector more generally
- Enhancing recognition of the VET profession through engagement with those outside the sector, including industry and community
VET Developmental Framework

Research Literacy
- RESEARCH METHOD
  - Inquiry/evaluation
  - Experimentation / product testing
- TEXTUAL RESEARCH
  - Case studies / ethnographic / narrative / phenomenological / grounded theory research
- USING RESEARCH
  - Using evidence-based practice
  - Understanding and using data
  - Applying technology in the workplace
- UNDERSTANDING AND USING DATA
  - Understanding IP
  - Ethics

Communication Skills
- WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATION
  - Teamwork
  - Interviewing
  - Interpreting / analysing
  - Problem solving
  - Reporting and knowledge sharing
  - Negotiating
  - Presenting

Digital Technologies
- DATA
  - Using digital / social media tools for research, dissemination and communities of practice
  - Using software for research (e.g. NVivo) and for data visualisation
  - Using data and technology to inform business practices

Pedagogy
- TEACHING AND LEARNING
  - Assessing impact on learning
  - Improving pedagogical practices
  - Developing student capabilities, in particular creative thinking, problem solving, self-direction
  - Mentoring / working in communities of practice
  - Using applied research as a pedagogy

Management
- LEADERSHIP
  - Leadership skills
  - Planning and organising
  - Project management
  - Presentation skills
  - Developing grant applications
  - Using IP, patents
  - Developing partnerships
  - Working with diversity

Knowledge Brokerage
- INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY LINKS
  - Translating and synthesising research
  - Networking / collaborating
  - Building innovative / entrepreneurial practices
  - Adapting and using skills in other organisations
  - Creating and managing hubs, innovation ecosystems

VET Applied Research

THEORISE & LEARN
- COMMUNICATE & APPLY
- ORGANISE & NETWORK
VET research communities

National Programs
- NCVER Community of Practice
- Reframing the Future

National Networks
- AVETRA (Educator Hub)
- Co-operative Research Centres
- VET Practitioner Research Network (VPRN)

TAFE Centres
- Redspace – TAFE Queensland
- TAFE programs in action research – Queensland and SA
- Homesglen TAFE Centre for Applied Research
International examples

- UK - Scholarly Communities through the Scholarship Project - Association of Colleges [https://www.aoc.co.uk/enhancing-scholarship-in-college-higher-education-the-scholarship-project](https://www.aoc.co.uk/enhancing-scholarship-in-college-higher-education-the-scholarship-project)

- The British Columbia Applied Research and Innovation Network (BCARIN)
  - a collaborative and cross-disciplinary organization of colleges and institutes in BC Canada dedicated to developing a culture of applied research and innovation

- World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics (WFCP):
What makes them successful?

Our research:
- Clear agreed directions/aims
- Incentives to be involved
- A variety of ways to communicate
- Enthusiasm and capabilities
- Mentoring from experts
- Time to participate/reflect
- Support/structures to maintain the community
- Ability to make the research real (applied research)
- Publishing opportunities
- Enduring partnerships
- A research culture - continuous creativity and generation of new ideas

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Discussion - The Plan

1. What would an effective VET Research Network look like?
2. What would make it sustainable?
3. What are the next steps towards establishing these networks?
References


VET Practitioner Research Network, 2017, Driving VET’s Role in the Innovation Agenda. The VPRN Executive Committee response to three recent reports by Francesca Beddie and Linda Simon1 and released by NCVER.

