What can VET learn from teaching and learning experiences in Alternative Education Centres?
IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

CRITICAL REALIST 6 STAGES OF EXPLANATORY RESEARCH & THREE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION CENTRES
Main Research Question

• What alternative provisions of schooling are working for youth at risk?
  What provisions are working academically?
  What provisions are working socially?”

REPHRASED as TRANSCENDENTAL QUESTION

• What are the necessary academic and social components of successful alternative schooling provision for youth at risk?

• Are these necessary components being implemented in alternative schooling settings?
Critical Realist Transcendental Question:

What are the necessary components of a relational and individual approach with improved outcomes both social and academic for VET students?
CRITICAL REALIST - STAGES IN EXPLANATORY RESEARCH

(Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen and Karlsson, 2002, pp.108-111)

STAGE 1: Description
STAGE 2: Analytical Resolution
STAGE 3: Abduction / Theoretical Redescription
STAGE 4: Retroduction
STAGE 5: Comparison between different Theories and Abstractions
STAGE 6: Concretization and Contextualization

CRITICAL REALIST METHODOLOGY

These stages are not set in hierarchal concrete, but can and were applied somewhat fluidly, albeit in a forward progressing momentum.
Figure 1. Three Aspects of Alternative Schooling with Implications for VET .... Linked to 6 Stages of CR Explanatory Research methodology
Appendix A¹. Doctoral Study Questions & Implications for VET (Livock, 2016)
Appendix A². Doctoral Study Questions & Implications for VET (Livock, 2016)
# LANGUAGE and PEDAGOGICAL COMPOSITE ASSESSMENT MODEL

**Adaptation by Cheryl Livock 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Model:</th>
<th>4 RESOURCES MODEL</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Decoders / functional practices)</td>
<td>(Meaning making / comprehension / associated socio-cultural practices)</td>
<td>(Pragmatic practices / genre formatting / social and cultural discourses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Decoding graphic / pictorial features of a text</td>
<td>i) Patterns of meanings <em>stated</em> / <em>unstated</em> ...</td>
<td>i) Genres’ form / function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Graphophonetic / word level decoding (Winch, 2006, p.51)</td>
<td>- vocabulary words - phrases/ clauses expressions - text <em>main and supporting themes</em></td>
<td>ii) Genres’ socio-cultural expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Punctuation / formatting conventions</td>
<td>ii) Drawing on ... - individual <em>prior knowledge</em> - socio-cultural <em>knowledges</em></td>
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## APPENDIX B1. Social / Critical Model for Literacy Acquisition
### Pedagogical Model: PRODUCTIVE PEDAGOGIES - 4 Dimensions of Practice (Education Queensland, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Intellectual Quality (depth of knowledge)</th>
<th>2. Connectedness (student knowledge to a widening community knowledge)</th>
<th>3. Supportive Classroom Environment (student ownership, behaviours, teacher scaffolding)</th>
<th>4. Recognition of Difference (belonging and cultural/social inclusivity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i) Higher Order Thinking</td>
<td>i) Knowledge Integration</td>
<td>i) Student Control</td>
<td>i) Cultural Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Deep Knowledge</td>
<td>ii) Background Knowledge</td>
<td>ii) Social Support</td>
<td>ii) Inclusivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Deep Understanding</td>
<td>iii) Connectedness to the World</td>
<td>iii) Engagement</td>
<td>iii) Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v) Knowledge as problematic</td>
<td></td>
<td>v) Self-regulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi) Metalanguage</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPENDIX B². Social / Critical Model for Teaching [Literacy]**
Implications for Pedagogy & Andragogy in VET

In VET principles of teaching and learning plus administrative approaches are overall focussed on the “adult learner” in “an adult learning environment”.

KNOWLES’ ASSUMPTIONS re ANDRAGOGY:

[A]s individuals mature:
1) their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality towards being a self-directed human being;
2) they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning;
3) their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and
4) their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness (Knowles, 1980, pp.44-45).
IMPLICATIONS FOR VET

CENTRAL TENETS OF ANDRAGOGY - adults are self directed learners motivated by the immediate needs and responsibilities of their adult world

Whereas the application of children’s learning is for a future time.

Then schools began to use some of Knowles approaches to adult learning

• Knowles acknowledged both andragogy and pedagogy as sets of assumptions that could be used alongside each other (1980).
• Nevertheless proponents of adult education still emphasise assumptions of an independent, self-directed, self-motivated, and employment focus of adult learners.
• As a result not only academic but also administrative EXPECTATIONS/ APPROACHES in VET are orientated to these assumptions about VET learners (Loyens, Magda & Rikers, 2008).

But as initial explanatory analysis above indicated neither a purely school based pedagogy nor a self-directed approach of andragogy was appropriate for at-risk school learners, could this also be the case for VET learners? Do VET learners also need the “different” approach named above?
Online versus Face-to-face delivery?

Is the growing emphasis in VET on technological assisted learning over face-to-face teaching diminishing this crucial area of the affective teacher/student relationship?

Is this technological approach dehumanising VET education?

Are self paced online programs ...

– dismissing the need for students to develop a trusting relationship with their teachers;
– dismissing the need for teachers to develop a responsive and mentoring relationship with their students,
– where teachers know their students individually, as in the apprentice/master model (Brentano, 1870; Brennan, 2003), and
– are able to quickly respond not only to students’ academic needs but also to their social situations.

Teachers in the physical presence of their students can do this more readily by being able to read facial and body language, important for continued affective engagement.

Those involved in online teaching ...

– do acknowledge that “the face-to-face environment can more easily provide socio-emotional support” (Garrison cited in Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012)
– are now grappling with how to effectively inculcate emotional and affective responsive teaching into online delivery.
IMPLICATIONS FOR VET

Relevance of assessing not only students’ individual ACSF LLN Levels but also SOCIO-CRITICAL LEARNING & TEACHING PRACTICES

RESEARCH FINDINGS (Simmons & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2013; Ryan, Mallan, Gwinner & Livock 2015; Livock, 2016)

1) The importance of up-front LLN assessment using the ACSF framework [the updated NRS]
   – acknowledged by academics, and policy makers, and more recently been written into legislation and the standards of the VET regulator ASQA.

2) Inclusion of ACSF level to be written into training packages

3) Dearth of critical literacy being taught and practiced in vocational courses
   – disadvantaging students in employment as well as those transitioning to university.

4) Compounded by competency based approach to teaching focusing on skills
   – can be an obstacle to reflective and critical thinking/learning.

5) Competency based training packages are actually deskilling teachers.
Relevance of assessing not only students’ individual ACSF LLN Levels but also SOCIO-CRITICAL LEARNING & TEACHING PRACTICES

RESEARCH FINDINGS (Simmons & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2013; Ryan, Mallan, Gwinner & Livock 2015; Livock, 2016)

Linking the above to the Productive Pedagogies and 4 Resources models ...

as in the alternative schools, elements of “Intellectual Quality” higher order thinking and knowledge as problematic are also missing in the VET sector.

However, unlike the alternative schools, VET classrooms do not overly emphasis ...

the “Supportive classroom” elements of considerable narrative, substantial conversation, metalanguage, nor the flexibility of those inclusive elements found in “Recognition of Difference”: the very pedagogies needed for continued student engagement.
IMPLICATIONS FOR VET

IMPLICATIONS FOR VET- necessary components of a relational and individual approach with improved outcomes both social and academic

1) Teachers accepting of a “different” at risk student identity

- Alternative school teachers accepting of a “different” at risk student identity not inherently self-directed, the basis of andragogy and adult learning theory.
  - all teachers acknowledged need for variety of pedagogical and andragogical strategies
  - implemented much scaffolded support as in Vygotsky’s pedagogical approach.

- Learners in VET whether mature aged or adolescents often lack motivation and self-direction
  - many VET students often lack needed academic skills,
  - past poor self image as learners,
  - when faced with more than expected academic content disengage from their studies.

- VET few supportive strategies at either:
  - VET teacher training in any depth or
  - applied in VET classrooms (Simons & Smith 2008; Smith, 2013).

- All alternative school staff implemented a responsive and flexible learning environment

- Andragogy played a big part in the teaching focus at the alternative schools:
  - students were self-directed learners in that they gave input to their learning tasks [Knowles’ first assumption of andragogy],
  - teachers treated students more as adults negotiating with them, rather than just telling them as in a pedagogical teacher lead approach.
IMPLICATIONS FOR VET

1) [cont.] Teachers accepting of a “different” at risk student identity

- Andragogy played a big part in the teaching focus at the alternative schools [cont]:
  - using learners’ experiences as a resource [Knowles’ second assumption]
  - students’ own experiences and interests were incorporated into their learning plans [Knowles’ third assumption]
  - learning tasks often had immediacy and practicality of application [Knowles’ fourth assumption]

- In VET the four andragogical assumptions are often alluded to (Simons & Smith, 2008)
- In VET the learner centredness of andragogy is largely lacking (Smith, 2013).

Could this be a cause of approximately 50% of enrolling VET students dropping out of study, as was the case for the at-risk students who had dropped out of mainstream schooling?

2) Teachers connect individually with students to build a one-on-one relationship

- Small class sizes needed for teachers to individually connect with students
- In VET in the marketized environment small class sizes are a distant memory
  - Common at larger providers such as TAFE is the lecture theatre presentation as at university,
  - Common also are large class sizes of 45+ mixed with smaller classes,

A recommendation is to ensure classes are evenly distributed between teachers,
IMPLICATIONS FOR VET

2) [cont.] Teachers connect individually with students to build a one-on-one relationship

• The problem for VET is that in the past decade VET has lost more and more students to universities with decreasing percentage of enrolments.
  – Between 2006 and 2010, university enrolments increased by 17%
  – only a 7% increase for VET (NCVER, 2012).

• VET students expect a more practical hands-on learning experience

• VET students often lack academic learning skills needed especially in Diploma courses (Livock 2016; Smith, 2013).
  – Recommended is to increase the participation in practical components

3 & 4) Need to acknowledge the stress and emotional strain teachers face with reciprocal organisational support

• Especially in the TAFE environment:
  – undergone drastic staff cuts & employment of inexperienced casual teachers
  – RESULT: experienced teachers’ load dramatically increased ...
    not only are responsible for their own enlarged classes but also mentoring inexperienced colleagues (Rice, 2004; Massey & Nivison-Smith, 2013).

• Consequently, needs to be a turn-around where VET teachers receive a higher level of systemic support: from their training organisations, from the VET regulator, and from legislation
### Necessary/Implemented Components of Successful Alternative Schooling Provision for Youth At Risk

#### ACADEMIC COMPONENTS - *Literacy*

- **✓ Functional Literacy Skills** in everyday socio-cultural contexts;
- **✓** Functional skills increased – all students to varying degrees;
- **X** **Critical Skills largely missing** from all students’ repertoires of practice;
- **X** Critical skills not enhanced to the same degree as functional skills.

#### SOCIAL COMPONENTS - *Productive Pedagogies tied to the affective domain of student behaviour*

- **✓ Recognition of Difference** entire suite of teaching practices [exception as described above];
- **✓** Practices from *Connectedness* and *Supportive Classroom Environment* largely utilized;
- **X** *Intellectual Quality* pedagogies largely missing.
RECOMMENDATIONS [1]:
Essential Academic Components of a “Different” Approach for Youth At Risk at Alternative Schooling Settings

- **Socio-cultural literacy practices** should place greater emphasis on all nuances of literacy as a social/cultural practice;
- **Critical literacy** should be …
  - an integral and emphasised part of the curriculum;
  - not just for students with higher levels of literacy but for all students;
- **Build on present practices** evident at all case study sites …
  - “metalanguage” and “constant teacher talk”;
  - built into teacher talk *critical questioning to simulate* critical thought processes.
- **Use of a benchmarking standard** such as the NRS to determine student’s incremental literacy skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS [2]:
Essential Academic Components of a “Different” Approach for Youth At Risk at Alternative Schooling Settings

**INDIVIDUALS:**
Teachers / Parents – needed dispositions/approaches

- Teachers accepting of a “different” at risk student identity …
  - neither “on-task”;
  - nor “self regulatory”;
- Teachers directly trying to build a trusting relationship with students;
- Teachers who are *flexible*, *laid back*;
- Teachers or involved parents afforded agency by sufficient …
  - personal community networks, and
  - individual dispositional characteristics.
Stage 5: Comparing Theories/Abstractions
Stage 6: Concretization & Contextualization

RECOMMENDATIONS [3]:
Essential Academic Components
of a “Different” Approach
for Youth At Risk at Alternative Schooling Settings

SOCIETY: Institutional Structures/Personnel – needed Shift in Educational Philosophy/Alignment

- Willingness of associated educational organizations including teachers ...
  - to align organizational/teacher norms with at risk student identities, and
  - to practice inclusiveness, even in times of crisis;
- Administrative structures need to be “flexible”;
- Administrative structures should be ...
  - aligned to support teachers in implementing “different” approach;
- Institutional structures/personnel need to allow for and encourage ...
  - increased friendly interaction between staff/parents;
  - parent/teacher involvement and active agency;
- Linked educational institutions should encourage and pay for ...
  - professional development in the “different” approach;
  - for all teaching and administrative staff associated with youth at risk programs [including casual staff];
- ADDITIONALLY BOTH TEACHERS AND INSTITUTIONS SHOULD WORK TOGETHER TO DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLING PRACTITIONERS committed to this “different” approach.
Critical realist Bhaskar’s conceptualisation of the **Eudemonistic Society**, where “the free flourishing of each is the condition for the free flourishing of all” (Bhaskar, 1994, p.154).

The doctoral thesis re-theorized Bhaskar’s conditions for flourishing as the **“Get” and “Give” principles**.

- **The “Get” approach** epitomizes Bhaskar’s “Master/Slave Relationship” where dominant social structures exert a $\text{Power}_2$ relationship over individuals, **demanding production/outcomes and constraining individual agency** (Hartwig, 2007d; MacLennan & Thomas, 2003).

- **If the “Give” approach** was implemented ALL students “flourished”. The goal of the “Give” approach is the **enabling of $\text{Power}_1$, transformative agency for all individuals**.

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As a nation we need to reconsider this drive to downsize and casualise the workforce, and the resultant negative implications not only for VET teachers at the coal face, but also for individuals generally, for family, and community well being (Lucas, 2012; Palmer-Brown, 2014).

In the VET sector, over the past five years, when a comparison is made between the increasing marketization of vocational training, and employer satisfaction there has been a marked decrease in employer satisfaction with the standard of training delivered by RTOs (NCVER, 2013; NCVER, 2015; Appendix D).

The outcome to dispense with an individual and relational approach for VET has been a negative.

In the VET environment when the focus is on “getting” the best dollar value for training product produced only a relative few benefit with a negative outcome for the whole community. On the other hand when “giving” is the focus, giving time, money and individual support then all students reach their goals – all flourish: the individuals, their families and their communities [including RTOs].