

Where to from here? Messages back to VET

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Today I will ...

- Provide a brief situation background
- Provide a snippet of the literature
- Briefly mention Bourdieu's field and habitus
- Present some relevant findings re:
 - Skills gap
 - Articulants' experiences of VET and university – the good, the bad, and the ugly

Situation background

- Traditional university pathway = successful Year 12
- Government policies = increase access to university → changes in student pathways into university
- Credit for previous studies → students move from Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector directly into second year
- **Problem** = first year experience of university occurs in second year (for some).

The literature

VET articulants

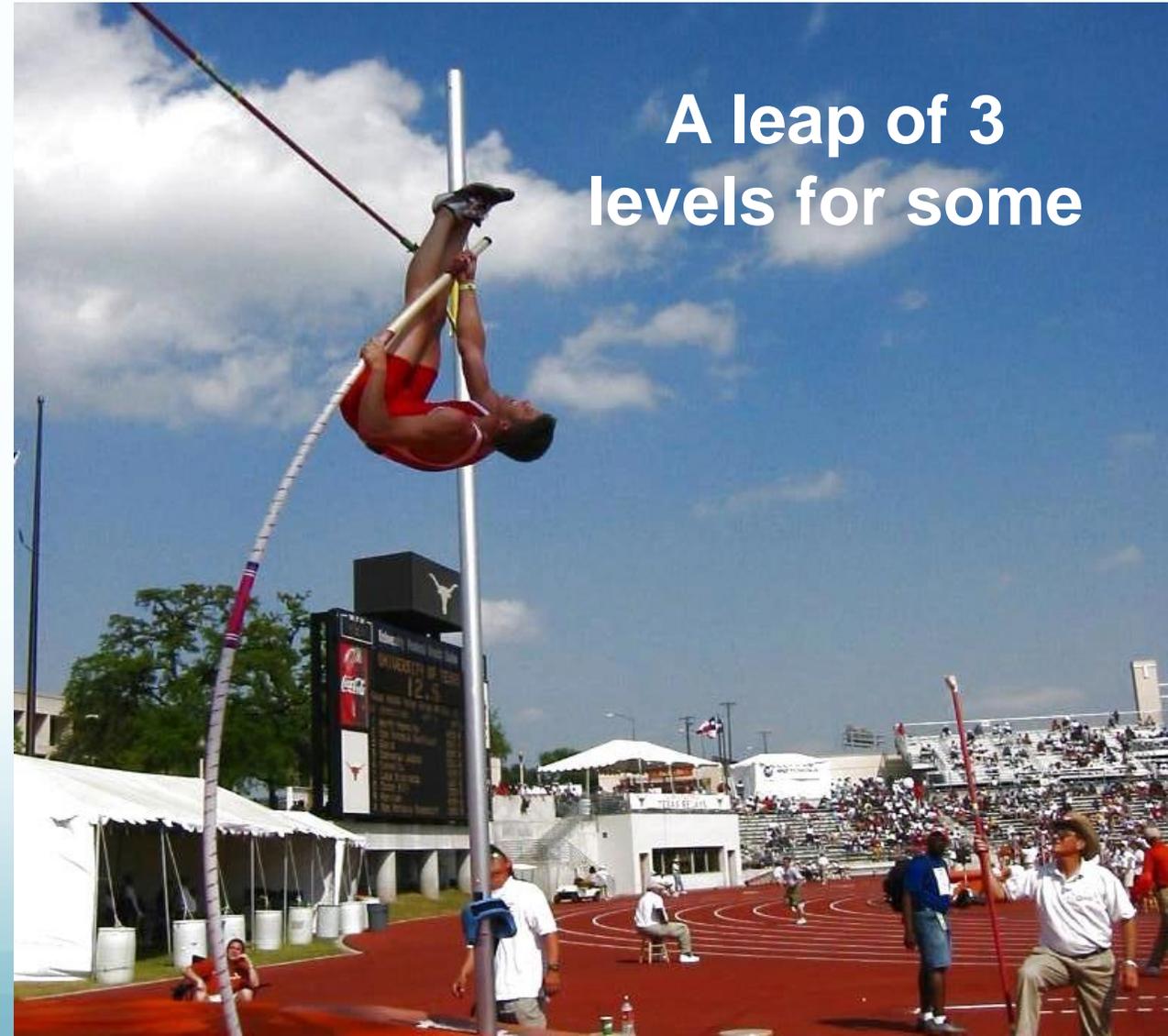
What are some of the issues?

“Many students find the transition difficult due to sectoral differences in teaching and learning, and the failure of teaching staff in both sectors to recognise and accommodate them” (Watson 2006; cf Milne, Keating & Glaisher 2006).

While “diploma level subjects are deemed functionally equivalent to corresponding first year HE subjects, the leap” for TAFE articulants “often remains large” (Veljanovski, Murphy and Bak , 2009, p. 1).

... big leap for some

- Australian Qualifications Framework
- National framework for educational qualifications - school → HE
- Level 4 → Certificate 4 (VET) → Level 7 (u/g degree - 2nd year)



A leap of 3 levels for some

VET articulants ...

- Cannot be simply “dropped into” (Young, 2005, p.6) second year subjects.
- Campbell, Catterall, Yang and Davis (2012) – VET students transferring to HE required more support than those coming from school.
- McNaught (2013, p. 7) found that in 2010 attrition rates for students transferring from VET to University of Notre Dame Australia, were “nearly 60%” in courses whose attrition rate was around 10%”.

Non-traditional educational backgrounds

Students and teachers in VET agree that “students ... were often ‘spoon fed’ with hand outs and notes, and liberal discussion and individual help” (Aitchison et al., 2006, p.4).

O’Shea, Lysaught and Tanner (2012) – students enrol in VET courses because they do not have the academic requirements for a more traditional pathway.

Issues arise because

- ✧ University accepts increased participation by non-traditional students.
- ✧ Little if any transition support assumes students have social and cultural capital to navigate an unfamiliar educational system.
- ✧ While these students believe VET prepared them for HE many find this far from true (Dickson, 2000).
- ✧ Non-traditional students face numerous difficulties when they enter HE (Dickson, 2000; Cram & Watson, 2008; Brunken & Delly, 2011)



This study ...

- **Explored the experiences of students in their displaced first year.**
- **Along the way, the findings revealed some important messages for both VET and HE.**

Setting and sample of this study ...

- A single sector, suburban university in Melbourne
- A small sample of BBus and BNursing (Division 2 conversion) domestic students
- A sample who have enrolled directly into Year 2 of an undergraduate degree.
- Students who by-passed Year 1 of their degree.
- Mixed methods – survey (N=23) and semi-structured interviews (N=12)

So in this study students ...

- are unable to access traditional university supports provided for First Year Students (FYS).
- miss introductory first-year subjects - orient them to their discipline and the university.
- have lecturers who assume they have completed the introductory subjects and have academic skills required to study successfully at second year.

Bourdieu

Bourdieu is used as a framework – in particular field and habitus

- Higher education largely occupied by children of the “dominant classes” (Bourdieu, 1973, p.86).
- 50 + years on, Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (DEEWR, 2008) observed that, “Australia has not provided equal access to all groups from society” (p.27).

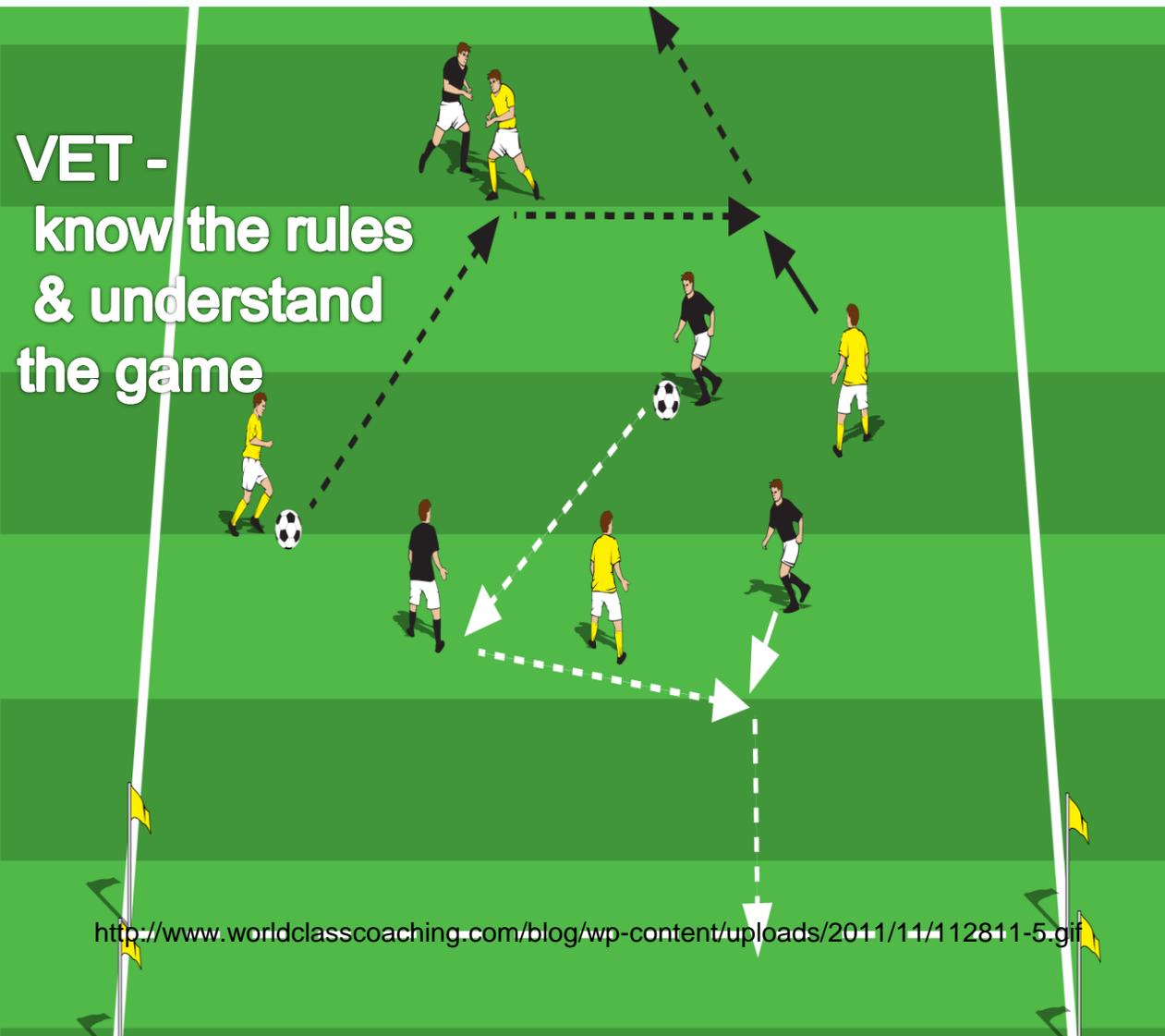
Watson, Hagel and Chester's study (2013, pp.14-15)

University	% VET award enrolled	% of total commencing UG enrolments
Go8 universities	3%	38%
Charles Sturt, RMIT, University of Western Sydney	> 28%	(+ 4 other universities) 24%

A field is a common ground where action occurs. The ground has boundaries with entry being blocked by existing holders of power (Mutch 2006).

Players have positions, roles and status.

Students move from one field (VET) to another (HE)



Rules of the game

- Yr 1 -introduced to rules*
- Yr 2 VET articulants
- no one tells them there are new rules
- Understanding is assumed

*The rules of the game = introduction to:
discipline (*language, ideas, key thinkers*)
and university's academic culture
(*independent study, formal academic writing,
research skills, use of academic texts,
referencing conventions...*)



<http://indiereader.com/2013/08/storytelling/>

First year foundations

- Orientation programs
 - Culture of university
 - Support networks
- Transition pedagogies
 - Scaffolded assessments
 - Academic expectations
 - Academic skills scaffolded



Habitus determines how we play

- a disposition resulting from “ the internalization of objective structures and schemes of action which orient the perception of the situation and the appropriate response” (Bourdieu 1998, p. 25).
- evident in a person’s actions, attitudes and perceptions
- not fixed because it is constantly exposed to influences and experiences that reinforce or modify (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133).

Dysfunctional habitus



<http://blog.instaslim.com/index.php/2012/04/>

- When that original habitus comes into contact with another system (such as HE) - primary habitus may no longer be useful (Reed-Danahay, 2005).
- This can lead to a difficulty in “adjusting to the new established order” because the habitus has become “dysfunctional” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 161).

Direct 2nd year entry

This is how many feel



https://joebricereview.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/confusing_road_signs.jpg?w=300&h=199

This is what confronts them



<http://angelaquarles.com/2013/01/30/writer-wednesday-when-you-hit-that-wall/>

The brick wall ...

Academic skill	Yes % (+ number)	No % (+ number)
... could write essays	74% (17)	26% (6) (4 = Ad Dip)
... could identify and read academic texts	17% (4)	83% (19)
... could locate an academic text	9% (2)	91% (21)
... could reference correctly	13% (3)	87% (20)

Qualitative (interviews)

- All students discussed the **difficulties** they had with **academic writing**
- Most **struggled with research** skills
- Only realised there were problems with their academic skills when their marks were returned (most experienced ↓grades)
- Often had **no idea** what they were doing wrong
- Often had no idea what to do to rectify the situation
- **Differences** between VET and HE were **largely unexpected**

The blind walk ...



<http://andthenwesaved.com/tag/debt-free-for-life>

18/12/2015

Managed alone

- Main strategy used by most interviewees to close skills gap.
- Usually in conjunction with other strategies (such as relying on peers).
- Edward – “very much trial and error ... opening and closing doors to see if he could find the solutions to his problems. He used the metaphor of “someone walking in a dark room with their hands ahead trying to figure out what is in front ... a blind walk.”

Possible causes of blindness ...

- **Nora (Cert 4): “Writing in VET is very different to writing for uni.”**
- **Edward (Ad Dip): “writing skills and academic skills [had] never been taught,” in VET.**
- **Eric (Ad Dip): during his VET studies he was not required to write any essays.**
- **Neil (Ad Dip): experiences of academic writing in VET were limited.**

Not prepared ...

- **Helen (Cert 4): “I don’t think VET prepared me ... I’m talking skills not content.”**
- **Neil (Ad Dip): VET did not prepare him academically because the difference between VET and university in this area is “huge”. VET is “more loose academically,” university “is more structured, a lot more content is delivered, there are more subjects, that are more complex.”**
- **Edward (Ad Dip): VET did not prepare him academically, it did not help, “my critical thinking and my analysis and research skills. It never taught me to research... how to evaluate, or analyse a body of literature.”**

Referencing in VET

- **Nora (Cert 4):** “I used basic APA 6,” - this was rarely checked, so she made little effort to ensure her referencing was accurate.
- **Jenny (Ad Dip):** students would often receive some marks for referencing even if incorrect, so she was surprised in HE where if referencing was not correct then no marks were awarded.
- **Jackie (Dip):** “I’d never [her emphasis] done anything like that [using referencing conventions] at all ... so that was one thing which I struggled with.”
- **Eric (Ad Dip):** “I would just cut and paste from Google.”

Little research in VET

- Edward (Ad Dip): “you had a book to read and that was ... your bible and you were assessed on that book only.” Little need to research beyond this resource.
- Eric (Ad Dip): In VET students were told what to do and what to read whereas at university, “you gotta find, and read the books,” which was challenging.
- Ken (Dip): “Didn’t really have any idea – how to find [academic articles], how to find the correct ones, how to do research ... I struggled with at first.”
- Jackie (Dip): “It was tough. I never knew about library databases or anything like that ... because we never used them [in VET].”

Importance of first year

- **Helen: “you don’t have that experience ... the first years have done that [research, academic writing] and you’ve gone straight into second year and you haven’t done that.”**
- **Lena: “I know with first-year, that’s where they prepare you for a lot of [academic skills], you’re thrown into second year ... you’ve got to land on your feet and run with it.”**

Is the struggle necessary?

- **Edward: “I remember I spent days and days trying to figure out what I had to do” with assessments**
- **Lisa: “Even borrowing a book was a lot more difficult than I thought”.**
- **Teachers assumed they possessed a certain level of skills/knowledge, so for Lisa “it was just one more thing you’d go home and try and work out”.**

Reducing the struggle

Jackie (Dip):

- **Disappointed and alarmed by poor first semester results so she enrolled in first year (for which she had been granted credit).**
- **“To build those academic levels that we were missing from our TAFE course.”**
- **“I’ll get [the academic skills] right for third year when you really need those skills because that’s where they mark you the hardest.”**

Not totally blind ...the importance of content knowledge

Nora (Cert 4):

Her nursing skills and knowledge were substantial because VET was “just solid nursing.”

At uni she was partnered with a student who had completed first year, Nora was “surprised that [I] knew stuff while he had no idea. I was like, ‘What have you been doing for a year? How do you not know how to do that? Isn’t that just common knowledge?’”

Helen (Cert 4):

Shocked by poor Anatomy and Physiology knowledge of one of her uni peers. “How can you not know the chambers of the heart? That should be automatic!”

Lisa (Cert 4) :

Content was one less thing she needed to learn.

What helped Helen (ex-Cert 4)...

- **First year at university was a “big learning curve,” but less stressful because one of her VET teachers had very high academic expectations, “really pushing for evidence base” in the students’ work.**
- **Same teacher told the class, “you’re in a pathway [Certificate 4 in Nursing] and it’s not acceptable to hand in ‘crappy’ referencing.”**
- **Helen “was sort of primed in TAFE” because this teacher would tell them, “we are softer here [at VET]. They will expect a higher standard at uni.”**

What helped Neil and Lena

Neil (Ad Dip):

Advice from a VET teacher who had also followed a similar pathway from VET to HE. “[The VET teacher] knew the system ... so he gave me quite a bit of advice.” But Neil still found his first lectures “intimidating and confronting.”

Lena (Diploma):

Later in her diploma, she had to write essays of 2000 words. This was explained to them as preparing students who were planning to go to university.

“If you want a further education, this is what’s going to be expected of you.” Lena believed these teachers saw the VET course as a “stepping stone,” rather than simply a means to qualify as a Division 2 Nurse. As a result of this preparation, she did not feel quite so lost when she came to university.

What might have helped ...

Neil (Ad Dip):

- In VET, having an understanding of the various academic skills and “what they are and how they work, what they do for you ... would certainly be beneficial. I would actually have benefited greatly from that.”
- Structures should have been in place at university to support VET articulators in their transition, eliminating the need for him “making things up as [I] go, on the go as they arise.”

Jenny (Ad Dip):

- The level at VET “should have been higher,” so the gap between VET and HE was not have been so great.

Conclusion – whose responsibility is it?

- **Varied pathways are important but this is more than providing a place in the field.**
- **Habitus needs to adapt but can only do so successfully if the new game and its rules are explained to them – this does not always happen.**
- **Should not wait until students struggle and/or fail before support is provided.**
- **Transition pedagogies in HE need to extend to second year.**
- **How might VET ease some of the transition issues?**

Thank you

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