


Disconnects between research, policy and practice: the challenges of playing in the VET sandpit

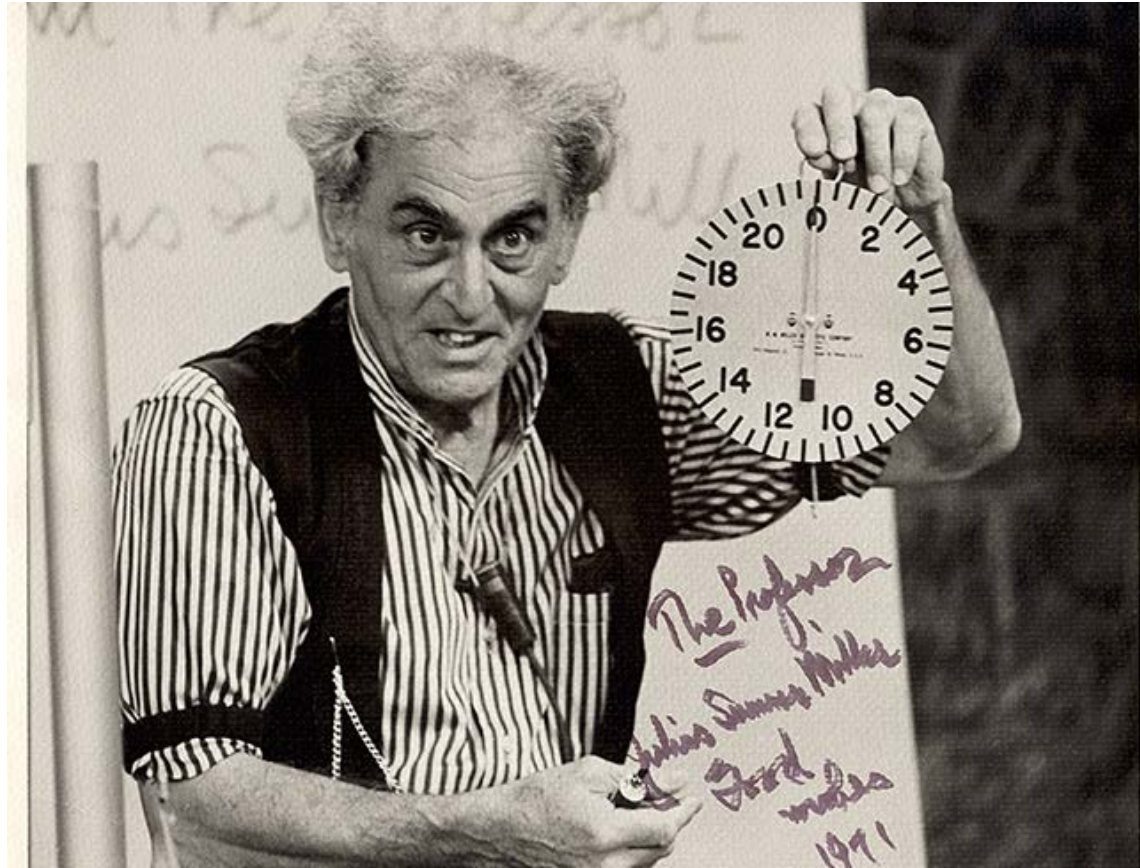
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Not all innovation in public policy succeeds, or follows its intended trajectory, in VET or elsewhere; but in VET there has been a tendency to let the policy flow drain quietly into the sands rather than to learn from a systematic appraisal of experience.

Ryan (2011), *How VET responds: a historical policy perspective*



Why is it so?



Different ways and means

Step	Policy Cycle	Practice Cycle	Research cycle
1	Recognition of a relevant educational problem	Description of a practical problem	Defining a relevant problem
2	Policy formulation and political decision	Practical program formulation	Formulation of research design and hypothesis
3	Policy implementation	Practical implementation	Research implementation
4	Policy evaluation	Practice evaluation	Research evaluation



Disconnects between the 'niches'

- Policy-makers define a problem in terms of its relevance to their political ideology and public opinion
- Practitioners and researchers have no formal authority in policy agenda setting and cannot easily influence policy
- Each field is valued differently by other fields in terms of status
- Practice and research have no formal decision-making power over policy formulation
- Evidence has different meanings in each cycle and reflect the views of the parties concerned

Disconnects between the 'niches'

- The role and value of theory and practice are different in each niche
- Ingrained stereotypes hinder collaboration – researchers are 'thinkers', practitioners are 'doers', policy makers are 'bureaucrats'
- Dynamics and lifespans differ so interconnections are complex and complicated
- Those in each niche have a duty of public accountability, but in different ways



Is VET a 'wicked problem'?

Intractable issues of perennial government concern that 'go beyond the capacity of any one organisation to understand and respond to, and there is often disagreement about the causes of the problems and the best way to tackle them' (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007)

Wicked problems: Four main reasons

- Incomplete or contradictory knowledge
- The number of people and opinions involved
- The large economic burden associated with attempting to solve the problem
- The interconnected nature of these problems with other problems

Connecting research and policy

- Ensuring there is an adequate supply of policy relevant research
- Enhancing the policy comprehension of researchers
- Researchers communicating their work more effectively
- Ensuring the validity of the research undertaken
- Engaging more actively with decision-makers so as to alert them to the existence of policy relevant research

Connecting research and practice

- Improving the practitioner understanding of, and engagement with research
- Ensuring an adequate supply of practice relevant research
- Researchers effectively communicating their work to practitioners
- Greater collaboration between practitioners and researchers in the conduct of research
- Emphasising the relevance and utility of research from both practitioner and researcher perspectives

Connecting practice and policy

- Acknowledging that as practitioners we are operating in an environment where national VET policy results from sometimes contradictory imperatives
- Actively seeking to engage in opportunities to influence agenda setting, policy formulation and, if it exists, policy evaluation
- Understanding the broader policy framework and the extent to which policies reflect the interests of the various stakeholders in the sector
- Collaborating to influence where possible



And so it could be...!

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